

Fragmented Voices: Halide Nusret Zorlutuna and Women's
Agency in the Making of Turkish Republican History
(1919-1960)

Sena Şen Kara



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The intellectual content of this dissertation, which has been written by me and for which I take full responsibility, is my own, original work, and it has not been previously or concurrently submitted elsewhere for any other examination or degree of higher education. The sources of all paraphrased and quoted materials, concepts, and ideas are fully cited, and the admissible contributions and assistance of others with respect to the conception of the work as well as to linguistic expression are explicitly acknowledged herein.

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Abstract

Fragmented Voices: Halide Nusret Zorlutuna and Women's Agency in the Making of Turkish Republican History (1919-1960)

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This study explores the multiple authorial voices of Halide Nusret Zorlutuna (1901-1984) and how literary genres played a role in women's agency and historical visibility. A prolific poet, novelist, columnist, and memoirist, Zorlutuna has been largely excluded from both the Turkish literary canon and women's historiography. Her marginalization illustrates the tendency in national and global historiography to ignore figures who do not entirely align with dominant ideological categories, such as feminism or political activism. By incorporating a variety of sources this study reveals Halide Nusret Zorlutuna as a complex and multifaceted figure. This introduces her nuanced dimensions as a witness to history, which conventional historiographical frameworks tend to overlook.

Focusing on the years between 1919 and 1960, the thesis analyzes Zorlutuna's writings to examine how she constructed her public and private personas in different literary genres. It argues that genre functions not only as a stylistic device but also as a historical tool, with certain genres—such as fiction and diaries—enabling subtle critique by allowing women to navigate and challenge shifting gender norms, political expectations, and social constraints by employing private spaces or narrative techniques. The dialogue between her texts, which reflect multiple personas, highlights the tension between moral conservatism and subtle feminist critique in Zorlutuna's works. Methodologically, this study combines biographical analysis with feminist historiography, contributing to recent efforts to move beyond the boundaries of traditional social history and mainstream feminist historiography. Ultimately, it aims to respond to Turkish and global historiographical debates by highlighting women's agency through the prism of genre, voice and individuality.

96.000 words

Özet

Parçalanmış Sesler: Halide Nusret Zorlutuna ve Türkiye Cumhuriyet Tarihinde Kadın Özneliği (1919-1960)

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Bu çalışma, Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın (1901-1984) çoklu yazınsal seslerini ve kadınların ürettikleri farklı edebi türlerin, onların özerkliği ve tarihsel görünürlüklerinde nasıl bir rol oynadığını incelemektedir. Üretken bir şair, romancı, köşe yazarı ve otobiyografi yazarı olan Zorlutuna, hem Türk edebiyatı kanonu hem de kadın tarihçiliği tarafından büyük ölçüde göz ardı edilmiştir. Bu dışlanma ulusal ve küresel tarih yazımında, feminizm gibi baskın ideolojik kategorilere tam anlamıyla uymayan şahsiyetleri görmezden gelme eğilimini örnekler. Çeşitli metin türlerini bir araya getiren bu tez, Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın birey olarak karmaşık ve çok yönlü kişiliğini ortaya koyarak bir tarih tanığı olarak barındırdığı, geleneksel tarih yazımı çerçevelerince genellikle gözden kaçırılan düşünce ve eğilimleri açığa çıkarılmış olur.

1919 ile 1960 yılları arasında odaklanan tez, Zorlutuna'nın yazılarını çözümleyerek, farklı edebi türlerde kamusal ve özel kimliklerini ayrı ayrı inşa ettiğini tespit etmiştir. Burada edebi türler yalnızca biçimsel unsurlar olarak değil, aynı zamanda tarihsel birer araç olarak işlev görür. Özellikle kurmaca ve günlük gibi türlerin, kadınların özel alanın mahremiyeti veya kurgusal teknikler aracılığıyla, değişen toplumsal cinsiyet normlarını, politik beklentileri ve sosyal kısıtlamaları sorgulamalarına ve bunlara karşı yazılı olarak üstü kapalı eleştirilerine olanak tanıdığı iddia edilmektedir. Böylece, birden fazla kimliği yansıtan yazılarının arasındaki etkileşim, Zorlutuna'nın eserlerinde ahlaki muhafazakarlık ile örtük feminist eleştiri arasındaki gerilimi ortaya koymaktadır. Yöntemsel olarak biyografiyi feminist tarih yazımıyla birleştiren bu tez, edebi tür, söylem ve bireysellik merceğinden kadınların eylemliliğini vurgulayarak geleneksel sosyal tarih ve ana akım feminist tarih yazımının ötesine geçen küresel ve yerel tartışmalara katkı sunar.

96.000 kelime

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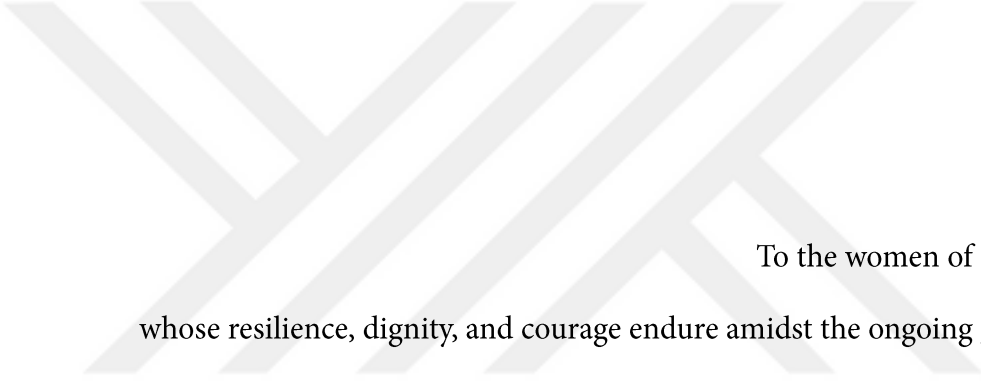
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To the women of Palestine,
whose resilience, dignity, and courage endure amidst the ongoing genocide.



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Introduction

Who is Halide Nusret Zorlutuna? Is she a loyal daughter of the Republic, or is there a silent protest underneath her carefully constructed sentences? A moralist celebrating domestic virtue, or a modern woman whose writing is marked by signs of discontent? Was she simply echoing the ideals of her time, or was she writing to soften their limits? Why is there no complete historical study of her—neither as a memoirist, nor as a woman intellectual, nor as a witness to history? Why is she remembered only in clichés? Was she too conservative for feminist historians? Too female for official nationalist memory? Or simply too complex to be easily remembered?

This thesis begins with these questions—not to resolve them too quickly, but to trace the tensions they reveal. Halide Nusret Zorlutuna (1901-1984) lived and wrote throughout the twentieth century, in some of the most transformative decades of Turkey's history, yet her name rarely appears in historiography and literary or feminist canons. She was a poet, a novelist, an educator, and a public intellectual. But what kind of a woman and what kind of a writer do we encounter

if we read her not only through what she represents but also through her literary choices? What happens if we look at what she leaves between the lines, not just what she says in public?

In asking these questions, this study also asks something larger: How do we write women's history? What voices do we listen to and what kind of texts do we accept as sources? How do we deal with figures who do not fit neatly into our narratives of progress, resistance, or oppression — those who neither fully complied nor clearly resisted?

1.1. Positioning Halide Nusret Zorlutuna in Women's History

Halide Nusret is one of the most prominent women intellectuals of the twentieth-century Turkish literary and intellectual landscape. Growing up in a period of political upheaval, she benefited from an exceptional education, made possible by her family's social standing and her parents' progressive outlook. Her father, Avnullah Kazımi (Mehmet Selim Bey), was a notable political figure, who first opposed the Hamidian regime and then the Committee of Union and Progress. Her mother, Ayşe Nazlı (Zorluhan), played a central role in her education, serving as her first teacher at home, which Halide Nusret recounts in her autobiographical work *Bir Devrin Romanı*. Her literary success was not coincidental: the family nurtured several significant writers across generations, including her sister İsmet Kür, her daughter Emine Işınsu, and her niece Pınar Kür. This remarkable lineage reflects the family's enduring commitment to women's education and intellectual pursuits.

As the initiator of that literary lineage, her background enabled her to emerge as a prominent writer from an early age, and she continued to publish until her death in 1984. She started her professional life as a teacher and worked in education until the later years of her life. At the same time, she remained an active author and poet. Politically, her most consistent stance was nationalism, and it strongly shaped her views on women's issues. For instance, she often described motherhood as the most sacred quality a woman could have—an idea very much aligned with nationalist ideals.

Despite her long career and recognition in her time, Halide Nusret remains on the margins of the literature on Turkish women's history. Her distance from the organized women's movement and her conservative position are well known. She was not a feminist, nor did she take a radical political stance. Instead, she expressed her views within the limits of the political atmosphere of her time.

When I first read about her, I had a rather conventional and cliché image in mind: a nationalist, moralist, and traditionalist woman who did not question patriarchy or other dominant social norms. However, as I began to read her texts more closely—especially her fictional and personal writings—and followed her life as an active figure in the public sphere, a much more complex persona started to emerge. Halide Nusret's way of noticing, reflecting, and responding to women's social conditions and struggles is subtle but powerful. Her writings offer perspectives that are not easily visible with a conventional lens. This thesis, therefore, explores how she created a space for agency and critique around women's issues in early Republican Turkey, while maintaining a public image that remained within traditional boundaries.

The following section details the question of why Halide Nusret Zorlutuna is chosen as the focus of this research. Although she had a long and prolific career—as a poet, novelist, journalist, teacher, and public intellectual, studies on her work remain limited in scope. More importantly, none of the existing studies properly treat her as a historical subject within the women's intellectual history in Turkey. I argue that the current bibliography on Halide Nusret neglects to address broader historiographical questions surrounding gender, modernity and the politics of discourse. While her intellectual production is recognized in literary and commemorative works, it has not yet been analyzed as a site of historical signification in the context of Turkey's transformations during the twentieth century.

This gap is not unique to Halide Nusret, but represents a broader pattern in Turkish historiography that often ignores the lives of women whose lives are not clearly aligned with sharp political identities such as organized feminism. As a result, critical biographies of those figures are rare. Women who are active in

public life but do not easily fit into progressive, oppositional or feminist frameworks tend to fall through the cracks of historical narratives. Halide Nusret is just one example of such a figure.

While there is a growing body of work that discusses her life and texts, these works often take a literary, commemorative, or moralistic tone rather than embracing a historical and analytical one. The only monography on Halide Nusret is Betül Coşkun's Ph.D. thesis,¹ written in 2010 and edited into a book later.² It has a detailed account of Halide Nusret's life and works, which I also benefited from the bibliography. However, it is a literary study, which does not place the writer into a historical framework. Nor does it reflect on her role in women's movement. Four other Ph.D. thesis analyzes Halide Nusret's works directly. Kerime Erdal focuses on her identity as an educator and compares her with Halide Edip.³ Ferda Zambak also analyses Halide Nusret's work with a comparative perspective, making a thematical analysis on the construction of family discourse in women writers' novels.⁴ The closest reading of Halide Nusret's fiction to the approach of this thesis is done by Bilge Ulusman.⁵ Using gyno-criticism as a method, Ulusman develops a unique perspective on the women writers during the late Ottoman and Early republican era, one of which is Halide Nusret. There are also a number of master's theses⁶ as well as several other articles and volumes that directly tackle

¹ Betül Coşkun, "Halide Nusret Zorlutuna -Hayatı-Eserleri-Fikirleri" (PhD, Marmara University, 2010).

² Betül Coşkun, *Ümmül- Muharrirât Halide Nusret Zorlutuna* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2011).

³ Kerime Erdal, "Halide Edib Adivar ve Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Eserlerinde Öğretmen ve Eğitim" (Ph.D., Uludağ Üniversitesi, 2005).

⁴ Ferda Zambak, "Dört Kadın Yazarın Romanlarında 'Makbul Aile' (Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, Muazzez Tahsin Berkand, Kerime Nadir Azrak, Sâmîha Ayverdi)" (Ph.D., Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi, 2014).

⁵ Bilge Ulusman, "Kadın Yazınının İmkânları: Türkçe Edebiyata Jino-Eleştirel Bir Okuma Denemesi (1895-1950)" (Ph.D., Boğaziçi University, 2023).

⁶ Vehbi Harikçi, "Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Din, Toplum ve Eğitim Görüşleri" (Masters, Fırat Üniversitesi, 2017); Sahire Arslan, "Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Otobiyografisinde Bir Devri Gömmek" (Masters, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2009); Sevim Betül Baloğlu, "Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Romanlarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Kimlik" (Masters, Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi, 2024); Mehmet Çete, "Halide Nusret'in Romanlarının Roman Tekniği Bakımından İncelenmesi" (Masters, Fırat Üniversitesi, 1989); Funda Toprak, "Muallim Naci, Ahmet Rasim ve Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Anı Türündeki

Halide Nusret's literary legacy.⁷ While these are valuable in many ways, they still operate within the aforementioned limitations. Besides these academic studies, a memorial volume is published in 2024, for the 40th anniversary of Halide Nusret's death.⁸ It is a collection of articles by various writers, touching upon different aspects of her life and career. These current literatures often treat Halide Nusret as a literary, moral or symbolic figure rather than a subject of intellectual inquiry.

Taken together, these sources constitute a considerable body of work. However, none of them approach Halide Nusret as a historical witness whose writings both reflect and actively shape the discursive construction of Turkish womanhood in the Early Republican era. Nor do they engage with her personal archive in relation to her broader intellectual legacy. This thesis argues that such an approach is necessary—both to reassess Halide Nusret's intellectual contribution, and also to rethink the very foundations of women's history by

Eserleriyle Çocuk Edebiyatımızdaki Yeri ve Başlıca Temaları" (Masters, Selçuk University, 2009); Azize Goncagül, "Üç Kadın Yazarın Romanlarında Kadın Tipi: Halide Nusret Zorlutuna – Şükûfe Nihal Başar – Kerime Nadir Azrak" (Masters, Harran University, 2021); Mürvet Yazıcı, "Halide Nusret Zorlutuna ve İsmet Kür'ün Eserlerinde Eğitim Evreninin Karşılaştırmalı Olarak İncelenmesi" (Masters, Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi, 2015).
⁷ Merve Özbayrak, "Halide Nusret Zorlutuna Ve Şiirlerinde Otobiyografi," *Hars Akademi Uluslararası Hakemli Kültür-Sanat-Mimarlık Dergisi*, no. 5 (Haziran 2020): 28–50; Ferda Zambak, "Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Romanlarında Cumhuriyet Kadını: Tespitler, Öneriler, Eleştiriler," *Yeni Türk Edebiyatı*, no. 5 (Nisan 2012): 125–37; Atabey Kılıç and Nilüfer Yılmaz, "Hâlîde Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Eşi Aziz Bey'e Yazdığı 03/10/1926 Tarihli Mektubun Transkripsiyonu Ve İncelemesi," *Erciyes Akademi* 38, no. 4 (December 30, 2024): 1042–57, <https://doi.org/10.48070/erciyesakademi.1532354>; Edith Gülçin Ambros, "Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Hanım Mektupları ve Kadınların Toplumsal Cinsiyetine Bağlı Stereotipik İletişim Öğeleri," in *Kitaplara Vakfedilen Bir Ömre Tuhfe İsmail E. Erünsal'a Armağan* (İstanbul: Ülke, 2014), 653–80; Bilge Ercilasun, "Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Şiir Dünyası," in *Yeni Türk Edebiyatı Üzerine İncelemeler 1* (Ankara: Akçağ, 1997), 174–84; Fatma Fulya Tepe and Per Bauhn, "The Turkish Angel in the House: A Travelling Concept in the Housewife Poems of Ziya Gökalp and Halide Nusret Zorlutuna," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 24, no. 5 (August 2022); Sezin Seda Altun, "Ümmü L-Muharrirât Halide Nusret Zorlutuna Nın Şiirleri Odağında Kadın Meselesine Bakışı," *KADEM Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi* 8, no. 2 (2022): 287–310, <https://doi.org/10.21798/kadem.2022.119>; Sevgi Uçan Çubukçu, "Ümmü-l Muharrirat Halide Nusret Zorlutuna (1901-1984)," in *40 Kadın 40 Hayat* (İstanbul: İBB Kültür A.Ş. Yayınları, 2022), 379–415.

⁸ Hakan Sarı and Yusuf Koşar, eds., *Halide Nusret Zorlutuna: Anma ve Armağan Kitaplar Dizisi - 18* (İhlamur, 2024).

diversifying the sources of women's history, reconsidering the criteria through which women are included in, or excluded from, the canon of historical significance.

1.2. Rethinking Women's History: Global Perspectives

This thesis is, first and foremost, a contribution to women's history. It seeks to move beyond the boundaries of both traditional social history and mainstream feminist historiography, as well as biography writing. I argue that understanding women's historical experiences requires an alternative approach—one that considers personal voices, literary texts, and everyday narratives that are often overlooked in dominant political or institutional histories. This section situates the thesis within the broader field of women's history, outlining its engagement with both Turkish and global scholarship, and clarifying how it contributes to ongoing historiographical debates.

Joan Wallach Scott's groundbreaking work in gender studies provided the foundation for understanding how gender functions as a critical category of analysis in historiography. Scott argued that gender is not merely a biological distinction, but a social construct that affects power relations within society. She stated that “gender - the multiple and contradictory meanings attributed to sexual difference - is an important analytical tool for understanding historical processes” because it reveals how gendered relations are central to social organization rather than secondary to economic or demographic pressures.⁹

The concept of “her-story”, which emerged as part of the feminist historiographical movement, has attempted to reclaim women's agency in history by focusing on their experiences and contributions. Scott notes that “her-story” was developed to challenge male-dominated historical narratives and offers a new narrative that centers both the ordinary and exceptional experiences of women.¹⁰

⁹ Joan Wallach Scott, “1. Women's History,” in *Gender and the Politics of History* (Columbia University Press, 1988), 25.

¹⁰ Scott, “1. Women's History,” 18.

This approach aimed to capture women's participation in historical developments while reconsidering historical processes through a gender lens.

The influence of social history on the “her-story” is also important because both perspectives have attempted to construct women as historical subjects. However, while social history tended to integrate women into existing historical frameworks, “her-story” emphasized the need for a distinct analytic perspective that recognized gender as a fundamental category of analysis.¹¹ This distinction is crucial for understanding the development of feminist historiography as it highlights the tension between integrative approaches and the attempts to completely redefine historical narratives.

As a result of this shift in perspective, historians have been encouraged to move away from traditional narratives that marginalize women's experiences and focus their attention instead on cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity. For example, anthropological research by Sherry Ortner in 1996 found that in almost all societies studied by ethnographers, women's work was less prestigious than men's work, highlighting how common gender inequality is across cultures.¹² These insights from other disciplines were fundamental to the development of feminist historiography, which emphasizes the importance of analyzing how gender roles have historically positioned women in relation to social power.

Parallel to the rise of gender studies, feminist scholars began to explore how these new theoretical frameworks could be applied to the study of women's biographies. The traditional narrative lines of biography, which usually model men's achievements, were reviewed for their relevance to women's lives. As Susan Ware has pointed out, feminist biography differs from traditional approaches by focusing on gender as the primary force, by recognizing that women's public lives are often made complex by struggles with education, work, and social

¹¹ Scott, “1. Women’s History,” 22.

¹² Jo Burr Margadant, ed., *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France*, Studies on the History of Society and Culture 38 (Univ. of California Press, 2000), 6.

expectations.¹³ This shift represented a departure from the traditional depiction of women as passive subjects, emphasizing their active role in shaping their own lives and thus shaping history.

The concept of success and the questioning of power relations resulted in the dichotomy of public-private becoming one of the main targets of feminist criticism. Traditional biographies have often made a clear distinction between public achievements and private life; feminist scholars argue that this dichotomy oversimplifies and misrepresents women's experiences. Barbara Caine explains that feminist historians and biographers are increasingly focused on understanding how women experienced their domestic and social worlds, how they negotiated social structures, and what strategies they used to follow their interests.¹⁴ This approach not only shed light on the lives of each individual woman, but also gives insights into more general patterns of women's experience in specific social contexts. Caine's analysis emphasizes the importance of studying women not as isolated individuals but within networks of relationships. This focus on social groups gives a better understanding of how women interacted with and influenced the legal, social and familial structures of their time. By placing women within these networks, feminist biographers can better explore the dynamics between personal experiences and broader social forces and can offer a richer and more comprehensive description of women's lives.

The rejection of this dichotomy is related to the relationship between the female subject and the biographer. Judy Long's work on feminist biography emphasizes the critical role of the biographer's position and responsibility in structuring narratives of women's lives. She argues that feminist biographers are prioritizing a dedication to parity, which in turn influences how they address the dilemmas that are inherent in biography.¹⁵ Unlike traditional biographers, who

¹³ Susan Ware, "Writing Women's Lives: One Historian's Perspective," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, no. 3 (2010): 417, <https://doi.org/10.1162/jinh.2010.40.3.413>.

¹⁴ Barbara Caine, "Feminist Biography and Feminist History," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 252, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612029400200049>.

¹⁵ Judy Long, *Telling Women's Lives: Subject, Narrator, Reader, Text*, Feminist Crosscurrents (New York University Press, 1999), 103.

can establish authority over the subject, feminist biographers accept more responsibility and claim fewer rights, encouraging a more equal relationship between the subject and the narrator. This shift allows the voice of the subject to emerge more clearly, as the biographer adopts a respectful, “hands-off” approach that can sometimes be misinterpreted as a “weak” position. Long also emphasizes the need for feminist biographers to understand the complexity of gender dynamics, as they must narrate the lives of their subjects within the limitations of social constructs of achievement and value.¹⁶ By rejecting the dichotomy of public and private spheres, feminist biographers illuminate the multifaceted experiences of women, thereby challenging traditional narratives that often overlook the interconnectedness of personal and societal influences on women's lives.

Feminist biographers have also contributed to the development of new theoretical frameworks for understanding women's lives. Kathleen Barry advocates a feminist-critical approach that redefines biography as a structured socio-political history based on the temporality and subjectivity of a life.¹⁷ This approach challenges the traditional “great man” model of biography, which tends to separate historical forces from everyday lived experiences, and instead seeks to understand how political and social history overlaps with individual life stories. Barry's approach is important in allowing for a more dynamic understanding of how women's lives are shaped by and contribute to historical processes. By emphasizing the dialectical relationship between political structures and everyday life, feminist biography can create new historical syntheses that better reflect the complexity of women's experiences. This perspective offers a contribution to women's history, and also to the understanding of history in general, emphasizing the importance of understanding individual lives within their historical context, rather than merely celebrating them as anomalies.

The integration of gender studies and feminist perspectives into historiography has significantly enriched the understanding of women's lives and contributions. By challenging traditional narratives and offering new theoretical

¹⁶ Long, *Telling Women's Lives*, 105.

¹⁷ Kathleen Barry, “The New Historical Syntheses: Women's Biography,” *Journal of Women's History* 1, no. 3 (1990): 75, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0066>.

frameworks, feminist biographers have redefined the role of biography in historiography, making it a powerful tool for exploring the complexities of gender and power in history. The work of feminist history scholars demonstrates the potentially transformative impact of feminist criticism on the study of women's biographies, leading to more inclusive and diverse historical narratives.

1.3. Revisiting the Silences in Women's History in Turkey

After outlining the general framework of feminist historiography and the role of biography within it, this section turns to the development of women's history in Turkey, where similar debates have shaped the field. This thesis argues that the dominant narrative of women's history—particularly the idea that women's activism and visibility disappeared after 1935—has obscured more subtle, individual, and discursive forms of engagement with the “woman question” in the mid-twentieth century. While Halide Nusret Zorlutuna lived and wrote until the 1980s, this study focuses on the period up to the 1960s to explore how the early concerns of the women's movement continued to resonate in her writings. Through her literary work, autobiographical reflections, and public persona, Halide Nusret offers a window into how gender norms and women's roles were negotiated in what has often been described as a “silent” era for women.

In the historiography of Turkey, women's history began to take shape as a separate field in the 1970s and gained momentum in the 1980s. Influenced by Western feminist frameworks, many early works adopted the “wave” metaphor, which has divided women's movements into periods of visible activism followed by phases of retreat. According to this model, the decades between the first wave of suffragism and the second wave of feminism—typically associated with the 1960s—are seen as a time of silence, when women were relegated to domesticity under Cold War ideologies. This view also shaped early Turkish feminist scholarship, contributing to the idea of a “barren period” after the dissolution of the Turkish Women's Union in 1935. However, recent scholarship has challenged this narrative, suggesting that women's experiences and contributions

persisted in less organized, yet meaningful ways. The next section outlines the key debates within Turkish historiography on women's history, focusing on how these narratives have evolved and where this thesis positions itself in relation to them.

Following the paradigmatic assumptions of modernization theory,¹⁸ which saw its heyday from the World War II to the 1970s, social scientists evaluated Turkish modernization as a successful process, comparing it to other examples in the world. The Kemalist nation-state which was established in 1923 was considered as the peak point of Turkey's modernization process which dated to the early attempts during the Ottoman era. The succession of this transformation was attributed to the "elite-driven and consensus-based" structure.¹⁹ According to this interpretation, Turkey was successful in terms of adopting Western style structure, which was implemented by an elite group in ways autonomous from the society. The agency of the ordinary people was left out, as scholars accepted the top-down reforms as the only agent behind the transformations.²⁰

With the writings of "Marxisant" scholars in the words of Şerif Mardin,²¹ however, the political institutions were discredited, and the economic conditions are emphasized in the studies of modernization history. This group of scholars, who were active during the late 1960s and 1970s, focused on non-elite factors.

¹⁸ See: Knöbl Wolfgang, "Theories That Won't Pass Away: The Never-Ending Story of Modernization Theory," in *Handbook of Historical Sociology*, ed. Gerard Delanty and Engin F Işın (Sage, 2003).

¹⁹ Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (University of Washington Press, 1997).

²⁰ See: Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford University Press, 1968); Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Hurst and Company, 1998); Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing The Middle East* (Free Press, 1964).

²¹ Şerif Mardin, "Projects as Methodology: Some Thoughts on Modern Turkish Social Science," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (University of Washington Press, 1997).

This was the most significant difference between them and the older generation.²² During the 1980s, following the steps of Marxist historians and the later influence of subaltern approaches and gender studies, the discipline of history oriented towards the individuals, questioning the extent of the power exercised by the elites. This approach had impact on the field of Turkish studies as well. A younger generation of scholars began to state their criticism towards the authoritarian characteristics of the Kemalist regime. Following the assumption about the passive position of the society, they criticized the ruling elite for implementing reforms despite the people.²³ However, this approach did not include the ordinary people in their scope of analysis, so it is difficult to say that they followed the global historiographic trends. By the 2000s, new studies attended to this task by questioning the autonomy of the state. Acknowledging the agency of groups such as women, peasants, and workers, they began to challenge the dichotomy of oppression-subordination.²⁴

The women's studies have emerged as a field of study during 1970s in tandem with these developments and grew as an interdisciplinary field around the globe. The historiographic approaches of this period contributed to the evolution of women's studies, such as Subaltern Studies, the goal of which has been to restore

²² Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997).

²³ For a prominent example of this approach: Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek-Parti Yönetimi'nin Kurulması (1923-1931)* (Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1999). Also, for similar reviews of this literature, see Sevgi Adak, "Kemalism in the Periphery: Anti-Veiling Campaigns and State-Society Relations in 1930s Turkey" (PhD, University of Leiden, 2015); Hale Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923-1945* (Syracuse University Press, 2013); Yiğit Akın, "Reconsidering State, Party, and Society in Early Republican Turkey: Politics of Petitioning," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 39 (2007): 435–57.

²⁴ See: Adak, "Kemalism in the Periphery: Anti-Veiling Campaigns and State-Society Relations in 1930s Turkey"; Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923-1945*; Murat Metinsoy, "Everyday Politics of Ordinary People: Public Opinion, Dissent, and Resistance in Early Republican Turkey 1925-1939" (Ph.D., Boğaziçi University, 2010); Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadinsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği* (Metis, 2019); Michael Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity* (University of California Press, 2002).

the history of the subordinated.²⁵ During this phase, the first aim was to establish the field of women's studies and giving voice to the social, political and economic experience of women. This was the initial challenge to social science.²⁶ During 1980s, "gender" emerged as an important concept, which brought a new perspectives to not only women's studies but also studies of colonialism and imperialism.²⁷ In her discourse analysis, Scott defined gender as a 'system of meanings' or a 'symbolic order' which indicates the relation of power.²⁸ Besides the contribution of this concept to the literature around the globe, it allowed the scholars of Turkish studies to question the power relations during the establishment of the republic, and the studies on the history of women were no exception.

The literature on Turkish women movement emphasized two arguments that challenged the scholarship of the modernization theory. First, the Kemalist reforms on women's emancipation were implemented as a part of political agenda. So, they did not liberate women in real terms,²⁹ according to these interpretations. The second significant argument is that the women's movement emerged during the late Ottoman era and the roots of Kemalist reforms about women's emancipation lies there—an argument that also drew from the contemporaneous emphasis on the historical continuities between the empire and the post-Ottoman

²⁵ Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1475–90.

²⁶ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies," in *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*, ed. Deniz A. Kandiyoti (Tauris, 1996).

²⁷ Kathleen Canning, "Gender History, Meanings, Methods and Metanarratives," in *Gender History in Practice, Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, Citizenship* (Cornell University Press, 2006).

²⁸ Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review*, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053–75.

²⁹ Deniz A. Kandiyoti and Deniz Kandiyoti, "Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1987): 2. For the similar argument, see: Ayşe Gül Altınay, ed., *Vatan Millet Kadınlar* (İletişim, 2005); Elif Ekin Akşit, *Kızların Sessizliği: Kız Enstitülerinin Uzun Tarihi* (İletişim, 2015); Yeşim Arat, "The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997); Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*.

state.³⁰ So they objected to the consensus in the society that the Kemalist reforms saved the women, which was implemented by the official discourse of the Kemalist state.³¹

Serpil Çakır was one of the first to initiate the debate on the continuity of the women's movement from the Ottoman Empire to the Republican era,³² which implies a fundamental departure from the official discourse. Her study, based on archival documents, proved the existence of an active movement that addressed social and economic conditions and disparities, as well as issues of women's political rights. Accordingly, the history of women's emancipation in Ottoman empire began with the schools established in the mid-nineteenth century. After almost forty years of struggle over education, marriage and some other "initial" demands, the movement gained a more political agenda with the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.

Another prominent critic of the Kemalist reforms is Şirin Tekeli.³³ She divided the Turkish women movement into two periods. According to her periodization 1910-1920 is the first wave and post 1980 is the second wave. She considered the years between two waves as "çorak yıllar," i.e., the barren years. The reason behind this allegedly passive period was the assumption that the women's movement achieved its goal by the political emancipation. As for the later Kemalist reforms, she placed them under the concept of "state feminism." The actor of the reforms were not the women themselves, but the state. This conceptualization led the literature to question the nature and extent of Kemalist reforms. According to this new approach, which was in line with the other critics of Kemalist initiatives, early Republican state feminism was not 'egalitarian'. It led

³⁰ For a pioneering work which depicts this continuity: Erik Jan Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Rôle of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905-1926* (E.J. Brill, 1984).: *The Rôle of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905-1926*, (Brill, 1984).

³¹ Arat, "The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey." For the pioneering work about the continuity discourse in general see: Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (I.B. Tauris, 2017).

³² Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Metis, 1996).

³³ Şirin Tekeli, "Birinci ve İkinci Dalga Feminist Hareketlerin Karşılaştırmalı İncelemesi Üzerine Bir Deneme," in *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler* (Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998).

ordinary women to the status of 'dependent housewife' especially with the 1926 Civil Code.³⁴

Later, in 2003, Yaprak Zihnioğlu offered a more detailed picture of women's movement in her book *Kadınsız İnkılap*. She connected the late Ottoman movement to the Early Republican period. Extending the date range of the first wave, Zihnioğlu divided it into three phases. The very first appearance of women in press took place in 1868 with a letter published in *Terakki-i Muhadderat*, the first Ottoman magazine dedicated to women's issues. Zihnioğlu sees this period between 1868 and the Constitutional Revolution of 1908 as the first phase. For her, the Second Constitutional period and the years of National Struggle (1908-1922) constituted the second phase, while the last phase lasted until the closure of Turkish Women Union in 1935. The early period was a period of nearly half a century, in which ideological accumulation was created for the liberation of women, and women proved themselves through their struggle for existence in the public arena and in the press.³⁵ The discourse of freedom in the Second Constitutional Era had a major influence on the women's movement. The early phase of women movement has ended and in the next phase, they demanded freedom and political rights, as many groups in the empire did.³⁶ As Zihnioğlu remarked, "women wanted to be fully included in the category of free people, which is a promise of modernity, to be recognized as individuals in the society, to gain a position and share in society, to participate in the political sphere, public life, and to earn their living by working."³⁷

These three pioneering scholars, summarized above, paved the way for the recent literature which carried the discussion further and included many forms of

³⁴ Sirin Tekeli, "The Turkish Women's Movement: A Brief History of Success," *Quaderns de La Mediterrània*, no. 14 (2010): 119–23.

³⁵ Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*, 22.

³⁶ See: Fatma, "Kadın: A Young Turk Magazine in the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1909)" (PhD, Boğaziçi University, 2005); Serpil Atamaz-Hazar, "Reconstructing the History of the Constitutional Era in Ottoman Turkey through Women's Periodicals," *Aspasia* 5, no. 1 (2011): 92–111; Hüsnüye Koç, "The Construction Of The Self In Nigâr Hanım's Diaries: Writing The Female Subject In The Late Ottoman Period" (Masters, Boğaziçi University, 2019).

³⁷ Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*, 56.

women's agency that exceeded the presumed limits of the granting of political rights. As Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou state, in contemporary work on Middle Eastern and late Ottoman intellectual history, the focus has shifted to more complex figures capable of crossing intellectual and cultural boundaries. Scholars in the discipline are more motivated to explore the everyday experience, covering power dynamics among groups and individuals, including the "non-intellectual."³⁸

Besides the contributions of these pioneering works, current phase of women studies in Turkey questions two of their assumptions: the wave narrative and the public-private sphere dichotomy.³⁹ It is assumed by the early works that the first wave of women movement ends with the gaining of suffrage rights and the second wave begins in 1960 for Europe and 1980s for Turkey.⁴⁰ This narrative is being challenged for the assumption that between the first and second wave, there has been a complete silence for women movement. Also, the boundaries of the public-private dichotomy in Habermas's terms are criticized.⁴¹ In that sense, the private is not as private it looks, and the public is not as restricted as it is assumed for women to be. In what follows, I will show how these differing perspectives approached the women's movement in early Republican periods in distinct ways.

During the first phases of the Republican period, the women's activities on an intellectual sphere has undergone a transformation. With the establishment of a republican regime as well as the ensuing post-war conditions, the agenda of writers and activists has changed course. The existing literature, except for several

³⁸ Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou, "Introduction: Historiography of Late Ottoman Women," in *A Social History of Late Ottoman Women* (BRILL, 2013), 7.

³⁹ For more details on these points: Özlem Dilber, "Fashion, Handicraft and Women Between the Wars in Turkey: Modernization, Nationalism and Women's Movement" (Ph.D., Boğaziçi University, 2021).

⁴⁰ Sirin Tekeli, "The Rise and Change of the New Women's Movement Emergence of the Feminist Movement in Turkey," in *The New Women's Movement: Feminism and Political Power in Europe and the USA*, ed. Drude Dahleruo (Sage, 1986), 193.

⁴¹ See: Canning, "Gender History, Meanings, Methods and Metanarratives"; Köksal and Falierou, "Introduction: Historiography of Late Ottoman Women," 7.

studies in the last twenty years, has mostly evaluated the women of this period as passive actors.

As Ayşe Gül Altınay points out, the official history of the Republic kept saying that all kinds of rights were granted by Atatürk. As such, until 1980s, the discourse on women's rights was built around the consensus that Kemalist reforms saved women.⁴² Tekeli states that the elite women of the republic kept repeating the misconception that the equality among sexes was realized by Atatürk. This was due to two reasons: the pressure of the single party regime and the delusion of achieving one's goal.⁴³

Aside from Nezihe Muhittin's experience, which is represented by the very valuable work of Zihnioğlu,⁴⁴ I want to mention some examples of how this oblivion worked. Firstly, Belkıs Şevket's story, analyzed in Serpil Atamaz's⁴⁵ article, shows how the official historiography omitted the women's activities in the Ottoman past. "Belkıs Şevket boarded a plane that was flown by a pilot over Istanbul as a part of a campaign by a women's rights organization, becoming the first Turkish and first recorded Muslim woman to fly in an airplane." This was a specific moment for the history of women, but it was "left out of the historical narrative in Republican Turkey, despite the founders' great emphasis on women issues."⁴⁶ Atamaz interprets the disregard of Belkıs Şevket as a reflection of the desire to distance from the imperial past and reshape (or erase) the collective memory. Sabiha Gökçen and what she represents shows a different side of Republican ideology and its approach to women issue. Atamaz makes a brief comparison about how Sabiha Gökçen was represented in the official historiography as opposed to Belkıs Şevket. She has been represented as "a role

⁴² Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey* (Springer, 2004), 34.

⁴³ Tekeli, "Birinci ve İkinci Dalga Feminist Hareketlerin Karşılaştırmalı İncelemesi Üzerine Bir Deneme," 338.

⁴⁴ Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*.

⁴⁵ Serpil Atamaz, "The Sky Is The Limit: Nationalism, Feminism, Modernity, And Turkish Historiography," *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, no. 20 (2014): 85.

⁴⁶ Atamaz, "The Sky Is The Limit: Nationalism, Feminism, Modernity, And Turkish Historiography," 98.

model for Turkish women by politicians and historians.”⁴⁷ She was the indicator of how the republican period “recreated” the Turkish women. Gökçen certainly contributed to this image in her memoirs. As Altınay states, “in Gökçen’s account, everything she did in her “short life” is related to Atatürk and she owes all her success to him. She contributes to the official historiography by giving the sole agency to Atatürk, erasing the stories and agency of women, including herself, from the history of the period.”⁴⁸ These two examples illustrate the contradictory attitude of the official historiography on women. This was mostly due to the political atmosphere of the period and the preferences of the Kemalist ideology.

Libal attributes the Kemalist approach to the women movement from its corporatist solidarity policy. The Kemalist regime believes that corporatist solidarity is the foundation of a strong society, and within this worldview, divisions based on gender, class, ethnicity or religion are not tolerated by the state.⁴⁹ The intolerant opposition against any kind of civil-society organization was one of the trademarks of the Kemalist ideology. The women organizations were no exception. The granting political rights to women was the part of the ideological agenda of the regime. “The Kemalist leaders granted rights to women in a context where the institutionalization of a secular nation-state was predicated upon a concept of homogeneous national community. [...] The extension of suffrage to women was also instrumental in the construction of Mustafa Kemal’s leadership cult.”⁵⁰ Şirin Tekeli used the term “state feminism” for the Turkish context in 1980s to imply the Kemalist program of monopolizing the women issue.

It should also be noted that the extent of Kemalist approach to women issue is not limited to combining the whole movement within itself, but also defining a new “ideal” woman. On the one hand, women were gaining public

⁴⁷ Atamaz, “The Sky Is The Limit: Nationalism, Feminism, Modernity, And Turkish Historiography,” 86.

⁴⁸ Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey*, 52.

⁴⁹ Kathryn Libal, “Staging Turkish Women’s Emancipation: Istanbul, 1935,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 4, no. 1 (2008): 45.

⁵⁰ Yeşim Arat, “Contestation and Collaboration: Women’s Struggles for Empowerment in Turkey,” in *The Cambridge History of Turkey 4* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 393.

visibility with various professions, as in the example of Sabiha Gökçen. On the other hand, however, women were more and more defined in the domestic roles. Behar and Duben point out the contradictory statements in Kemalist discourse. “Atatürk himself called for women to ‘take their place in the general economic division of labor,’ in a speech delivered in 1923. And this call was repeated, multiplied and taken very seriously, particularly by elite urban men and women in the late twenties and thirties. Yet there was a contradiction in this Kemalist feminism, because, as Mustafa Kemal himself said in the same 1923 speech, a woman’s highest duty is motherhood.”⁵¹ They state that this caused “a kind of schizophrenic existence” for the Kemalist women. The feminist literature criticized the Kemalist reforms for not aiming at women’s liberation but raising the “enlightened mothers of the nation.”⁵² Bora points to the new roles attributed to the women in Kemalist modernizing project: the victims to be saved, seductive women to be punished or daughters to be proud of. The ideal woman was depicted as “daughter” because they were the “creation” of the modern men.⁵³ To raise this daughter, there were some methods and tools that the state utilized. Girl Institutes and the women magazines of the period are most prominent tools to spread the official ideology through women to the children they raise.⁵⁴ Both institutes and the magazines had their roots in the late Ottoman modernization efforts.

Besides these efforts to transform/raise the republican women, the pressure on the women movement, which was also a notion that points to

⁵¹ Cem Behar and Alan Duben, *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family and Fertility, 1880–1940* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 221.

⁵² Ayse Durakbasa and Aynur İlyasoğlu, “Formation of Gender Identities in Republican Turkey and Women’s Narratives as Transmitters of ‘herstory’ of Modernization,” *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 1 (2001): 195.

⁵³ Aksu Bora, “Hatırlananlar ve Unutulanlar: İslam Coğrafyasında Modernleşme ve Kadın Hareketleri,” *Türk Dünyası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, no. 53 (2010): 60.

⁵⁴ For detailed information about the mechanisms implemented for the ideal republican women see: Ekin Akşit, *Kızların Sessizliği: Kız Enstitülerinin Uzun Tarihi*; Ümüt Akagündüz, “1918-1928 Yılları Arasında Yayımlanan Kısa Ömürlü Osmanlıca Kadın Dergileri Hakkında Bir Değerlendirme,” *Kebikeç*, no. 34 (2012): 34; Yael Navaro-Yaşin, “‘Evde Taylorizm’: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin ilk yıllarında evişinin rasyonelleşmesi (1928-40),” *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 84 (Bahar 2000): 84; Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern* (Duke University Press, 2006).

continuity with the late Ottoman Empire, also played a great role during the long period of oblivion. The studies on the Turkish Women Union (TWU hereafter) reflect a clear portrait of how the state pressure was applied to the women who had political demands. On one hand, there are some studies that evaluate the women movement of 1920s as a kind of withdrawal or deceleration. For example, Kılıç claims that until 1927, when TWU voiced the political demands of women in a congress, they were active neither in expanding women's rights, nor criticizing the laws against women to be passed in the parliament. She regards this silence surprising, considering the highly active members of the TWA such as Nezihe Muhittin, Şükufe Nihal. She states that the desire to get along with the new government may have contributed to women's change of attitude after the proclamation of the republic.⁵⁵ As they were insisting on political demands in 1927, they faced with a great pressure from the government.⁵⁶ Zihnioğlu's book, which was published a couple of years later than Kılıç's article, proves opposite to her claim about political silence of TWU group before 1927. Zihnioğlu shows that they were quite active politically, between the 1923 and 1927. She states that the TWU retreated from the political demands, after the resignation of Nezihe Muhiddin in 1927. On the other hand, between the congress in September 1927 and 1935, when the union self-terminated, TWU moved away from women's rights policies and dedicated their activities to charity organizations and the education of the peasant women, following the advice of Atatürk.⁵⁷ In 1935, after the women gained the right to vote and "became equal with men politically," the union is closed with the consent of its members. Tekeli regards this point as the beginning of the silence the women movement would sustain for almost 40 years.⁵⁸ Under the heavy influence of Kemalist modernization paradigm, one could conclude that the agency of women has been overlooked for a long time.

⁵⁵ Zülal Kılıç, "Cumhuriyet Türkiye'si'nde Kadın Hareketine Genel Bir Bakış," in *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler* (Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 348.

⁵⁶ Kılıç, "Cumhuriyet Türkiye'si'nde Kadın Hareketine Genel Bir Bakış," 349.

⁵⁷ Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*, 249.

⁵⁸ Tekeli, "The Turkish Women's Movement: A Brief History of Success," 120.

More recent studies that focus on women's agency in the early Republican era challenge both traditional Kemalist historiography and the feminist narratives that emerged after the 1980s. Women of this period are increasingly portrayed not as passive recipients of reform, but as active participants in shaping their own lives and the society around them—whether through their writings, political activism, or struggles for economic and civil rights. These studies differ in terms of the groups of women they examine and the types of sources they use. In broader terms, the groups that are analyzed can be divided into two: the peasant/worker women and the elite/educated women.

Studies on peasant and worker women focus on their reactions to both economic and social issues. As an example of resistance to economic matters, Metinsoy mentions a protest against the tax regulation which became widespread across Anatolia in 1934. Women got together in front of government offices and in the streets, shouting altogether their discontent about the Wheat Production Tax. Finally, the government had to retreat and amended the law. He gives another example of “women peasants who resented the sugar factory protested with hoes in their hands.”⁵⁹

Sevgi Adak's study shows how women from different social groups responded to the anti-veiling campaigns in various ways. She states that this campaign reveals not only the agency of the peasant or provincial woman, but also that of the women participating in the campaign who were mostly the elite or educated. She specifically emphasized the goal of her work is to emphasize the women agency in the anti-veiling campaigns. Her study reflects the complexity of women reactions to the reforms by focusing on both group of women, who contributed to the campaigns and who were the targets of the campaign. She states “in addition to the patriarchal concerns of the Kemalist male elite and their fear

⁵⁹ Metinsoy, “Everyday Politics of Ordinary People: Public Opinion, Dissent, and Resistance in Early Republican Turkey 1925-1939,” 169. When this study of Metinsoy considered with Tutku Vardarlı's aforementioned article about the tobacco strikes, it becomes clear once again that the studies on the women movement draws a continuity line between the Late Ottoman and Republican eras. These two works complete the continuity discourse from the perspective of class struggle.

of “over-Westernization” of Turkish women, it was women’s insistence on having a say on what they wear that drew the boundaries and limits of the anti-veiling campaigns.”⁶⁰ So, eventually, it is specified that the women were not the passive object of the reforms but the agents who “manipulate, adapt, modify and domesticate them.”⁶¹ Hale Yılmaz’s work is another good example of how the reforms found an echo among women. She states that one of her goal is to bring women into the historical narrative of the Kemalist era, not just as passive objects but as active participants of the change.⁶² She demonstrates how the professional women of the period internalized the Kemalist project of modernization⁶³ as well as how the ordinary women responded the decrees on social issues, such as anti-veiling.⁶⁴

A relatively richer literature focuses on the activities of the elite and educated women. As mentioned above, the social and intellectual activities of women expanded since the mid-nineteenth century. The early republican women inherited from the older generations. Most of the prominent figures were active during the last decade of the empire. The biographies and monographs about these women constitute a major contribution to the field.⁶⁵ They allow us to comprehend the vividness of the intellectual realm for women. Also, they offer a

⁶⁰ Adak, “Kemalism in the Periphery: Anti-Veiling Campaigns and State-Society Relations in 1930s Turkey,” 195.

⁶¹ Adak, “Kemalism in the Periphery: Anti-Veiling Campaigns and State-Society Relations in 1930s Turkey,” 195.

⁶² Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923-1945*.

⁶³ Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923-1945*, 97.

⁶⁴ Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923-1945*, 78.

⁶⁵ See: İpek Çalışlar, *Halide Edib* (Everest, 2010). Hülya Adak, *Halide Edib ve Siyasal Şiddet: Ermeni Kırımı, Diktatörlük ve Şiddetsizlik* (İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2016). Ayse Durakbasa, *Halide Edib Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (İletişim, 2000); Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*; Hülya Argunşah, *Şükûfe Nihal: Bir Cumhuriyet Kadını* (Akçağ, 2002); A. Holly Shissler, “‘If You Ask Me’: Sabiha Sertel’s Advice Column, Gender Equity, and Social Engineering in the Early Turkish Republic,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 3, no. 2 (2007): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.2979/MEW.2007.3.2.1>.

chance to observe the ideological and intellectual dissimilarities among them, which proves the complexity this area involves. The studies on the women magazines are another field of analysis in terms of the activities of the educated women. Akagündüz analyses the women magazines between 1918 and 1928. Accordingly, he concludes that the women movement in this period is inherited from the previous era. However, the image of women struggles with the patriarchal models and the social and political circumstances led the way.⁶⁶ On the other hand, in comparison with the activities during the 1930s, they were supporting of the women's emancipation with a richer range of topics and variety.⁶⁷ Another study confirms Akagündüz about the main themes of 1930s women's magazines. According to Duman, the magazines of 1930s reflect both the nationalist discourse of the republic and the "anti-feminist, traditional male discourse, characterized by negative representation of women, positive representation of men and depiction of women as other-centered and devoted."⁶⁸ In addition to these works which imply a regression in terms of magazines, there are also studies showing the active points of the women's movement of that period, using different sources. Libal focuses on the Twelfth Congress of the International Alliance of Women (IAW) held in Istanbul in 1935. "Drawing upon popular press accounts, official records of the Istanbul Congress, and correspondence between the Women's Union and IAW members" she shows the debate on the question of women's emancipation among urban elites and state officials.⁶⁹ Libal argues that "despite operating in a national environment where feminism remained suspect and the state increasingly limited associational work, the TWU contributed to a fruitful, if nascent, dialogue—both at home and abroad—which challenged the boundaries of gender, nationalism, and state and

⁶⁶ Akagündüz, "1918-1928 Yılları Arasında Yayımlanan Kısa Ömürlü Osmanlıca Kadın Dergileri Hakkında Bir Değerlendirme."

⁶⁷ Akagündüz, "1918-1928 Yılları Arasında Yayımlanan Kısa Ömürlü Osmanlıca Kadın Dergileri Hakkında Bir Değerlendirme," 342.

⁶⁸ Derya Duman, "Gender Politics in Turkey and the Role of Women's Magazines: A Critical Outlook on the Early Republican Era," *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 28, no. 1 (2007): 85–97.

⁶⁹ Libal, "Staging Turkish Women's Emancipation."

imperial power.”⁷⁰ So, this can be taken as a challenge to the literature which condemns the TWU for being less active after the resignation of Nezihe Muhiddin in 1927. Bora also stresses out that it would not be fully correct to fix the image of “the daughters of republic” to being passive receivers. To assume that they only fulfilled the role they were given would be unfair, neglecting their capacity, power, will and choices. Her main argument is about the role of religion in women’s movement. Accordingly, the acceptance or rejection of the religious references by women movement were completely strategic decision, with important political outcomes.⁷¹

While this literature review primarily engaged with the categories of peasant/worker women and elite/educated women, since this distinction is particularly productive for situating the research subject, Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, it is important to acknowledge that the recent scholarship on women’s and gender history in Turkey has gone far beyond these two groups. An early pioneering contribution in this regard is *Bir Adalet Feryadı: Osmanlı’dan Türkiye’ye Beş Ermeni Feminist Yazar* (A Cry for Justice: Five Armenian Feminist Writers from the Ottoman Empire to Turkey), edited by Lerna Ekmekçioğlu and Melissa Bilal (2006).⁷² By introducing the writings of Elbis Gesaratsyan, Sırpuhi Düsap, Zabel Asadur (Sibil), Zabel Yesayan, and Hayganuş Mark, the book highlights the ways in which ethnic belonging, religious affiliation, and cultural background shaped women’s experiences and feminist voices in Ottoman and Republican Turkey. More recently, Serpil Çakır’s *Kadın Tarihi Araştırmaları Türkiye Bibliyografyası* (2021) provides a comprehensive overview of research across different disciplines—history, sociology, anthropology, political science, and literature—illustrating how women’s history in Turkey has expanded to encompass women of various ethnic identities, sexual orientations, and

⁷⁰ Libal, “Staging Turkish Women’s Emancipation,” 34.

⁷¹ Bora, “Hatırlananlar ve Unutulanlar: İslam Coğrafyasında Modernleşme ve Kadın Hareketleri.”

⁷² Lerna Ekmekçioğlu and Melissa Bilal, eds., *Bir Adalet Feryadı: Osmanlı’dan Türkiye’ye Beş Ermeni Feminist Yazar* (Aras, 2006).

ideological backgrounds.⁷³ In a similar vein, Elif Biçer-Deveci and Selin Çağatay's introduction to the special issue of the journal *Diyâr* (2023) explicitly calls for a more inclusive historiography that goes beyond class or educational status and takes into account diverse generations, identities, and ideological trajectories.⁷⁴ The relevant issue involves such attempt to widen the horizon of the field. Thus, while this dissertation narrows its focus to a specific analytical distinction, it does not disregard the broader inclusivity and diversity of the field.

These relatively recent studies indicate a new trend on the historiography of the early republican women. Women in this time are starting to be seen as active participants instead of just passive ones. This change is shown through their writing, political activism, and their fight for economic presence and political rights. Also, these studies draw a picture of women public visibility which is far from being monochrome. Working on the activities of those women allows us to see how diverse and vivid the women public opinion has been in intellectual realm.

1.4. Women's Biographies in Historiography of Turkey: Gaps and Possibilities

Following the broader historiographical shifts discussed above, this section examines the development of historical biography in the Turkish context, with a particular focus on the representation of women. This thesis positions itself as a historical biography, aiming to contribute to the field of women's history by reconstructing the intellectual life of a woman writer whose legacy remains marginal in mainstream historiography. In order to conceptualize this approach, it is necessary to examine the tradition of biography writing in Turkey—particularly the ways in which women's lives have been recorded, represented, or

⁷³ Serpil Çakır, "Kadın Tarihi Araştırmaları Türkiye Bibliyografyası," *İstanbul Üniversitesi Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi / Istanbul University Journal of Women's Studies* 0, no. 22 (2021): 95–132, <https://doi.org/10.26650/iukad.2021.000002>.

⁷⁴ Elife Biçer-Deveci and Selin Çağatay, "Introduction: Reimagining Gender Equality Struggles towards a More Inclusive History," *DIYÂR* 4, no. 1 (2023): 5–19, <https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2023-1-5>.

neglected in biographical narratives. This section outlines the development of biography as a historical method in Turkish scholarship, and traces how women intellectuals have been portrayed (or overlooked) within this tradition.

The study of biographies within Turkish historiography has faced numerous challenges and delays, particularly in adopting modern methodological approaches. This section explores the key issues identified in the literature, tracing the evolution of biographical studies in Turkey and the underlying reasons for its belated progress. İlber Ortaylı, in his 1993 work, addressed the structural issues within Turkish historiography, particularly the scarcity and problematic nature of written sources. He emphasized that these difficulties often necessitate deviations from conventional European methods, compelling historians to forge new paths in source analysis and interpretation.⁷⁵ Ortaylı also criticized the academic neglect of biographical studies focusing on ordinary individuals and marginalized groups, noting that such studies were often dismissed as amateurish. He pointed to the work of R. Ekrem Koçu, whose *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* stands out as a rare exception in this neglected field, documenting the lives of less prominent social groups.⁷⁶ Ortaylı further discussed the cautious approach of contemporary biographers when dealing with recent historical figures, which often resulted in biographies that were either overly factual or excessively exaggerated, making them unreliable. This cautiousness, he argued, reflects a broader issue within Turkish biographical studies: the reluctance to engage deeply with the subjective and individualistic elements of historical narratives.⁷⁷

Building on the structural difficulties noted by Ortaylı, Derin Terzioğlu's article from 2001 critically examines the marginalization of biographical studies

⁷⁵ İlber Ortaylı, "Türk Tarihçiliğinde Biyografi İnşası ve Biyografik Malzeme Sorunsalı," in *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e problemler, araştırmalar, tartışmalar: 1. Uluslararası Tarih Kongresi, 24-26 Mayıs, 1993, Ankara*, ed. Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, Tarih Vakfı yurt yayınları 57, Uluslararası Tarih Kongresi, Beşiktaş, İstanbul (Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1998), 56.

⁷⁶ Ortaylı, "Türk Tarihçiliğinde Biyografi İnşası ve Biyografik Malzeme Sorunsalı," 61.

⁷⁷ Ortaylı, "Türk Tarihçiliğinde Biyografi İnşası ve Biyografik Malzeme Sorunsalı," 62.

in Ottoman historiography and offers some insights into its underlying causes.⁷⁸ Terzioğlu argues that this field is shaped by Orientalist assumptions that position Ottoman history as essentially different and incomparable to Western historical narratives. This view led to the marginalization of individual narratives and biographical studies, which is why Ottoman historians have traditionally ignored biographical sources, assuming that such material was limited or irrelevant. Terzioğlu challenges these assumptions by highlighting the richness of Ottoman literature in first-person narratives, such as *tezkire* (biographical dictionaries) and *menakıbnâme* (hagiographies). She argues that the marginal position of biography in Ottoman historiography is more related to the biases and assumptions of historians than to the actual availability of sources. Drawing attention to the neglected traditions of biography in Ottoman literature, Terzioğlu calls for a re-evaluation of these sources and argues that they offer unutilized potential for enriching the understanding of Ottoman history.

Özgür Türesay, writing in 2009, discusses the broader context of Turkish historiography, in particular the delayed adoption of the biographical turn.⁷⁹ Türesay observes that, with a few exceptions, Turkish historians have largely stayed away from the methodological debates around biography. This disengagement is surprising considering the rapid adoption of other global historiographical trends in Turkey. He attributes this delay to the dominant influence of holistic approaches, such as those propagated by the Annales School, Marxism, and structuralism, which have historically shaped Turkish social sciences. These approaches, which have their roots in the early 20th century, prioritized macro-level analyses over individual life stories, thus marginalizing biographical studies. Türesay also draws attention to the paradox between the growing popularity of biographical books in Turkish bookstores and the academic field's unwillingness to engage with biography as a serious historiographical

⁷⁸ Derin Terzioğlu, "Tarihi İnsanlı Yazmak: Bir Tarih Anlatı Türü Olarak Biyografi ve Osmanlı Tarihyazıcılığı," *Cogito*, no. 29 (2001): 284–96.

⁷⁹ Özgür Türesay, "Tarih Yazımı ve 'Biyografinin Dönüşü,'" in *Halil İnalcık armağanı*, ed. Halil İnalcık et al., Tarih 7, 11, 20, 26 (DoğuBatı, 2009).

method. His analysis underscores the need for Turkish historians to engage more deeply with biographical methodologies to address this delay.

The literature on biographical studies in Turkey reveals a complex interplay of structural challenges, methodological delays, and deep rooted biases that have collectively hindered the development of the field. On the other hand, over the last fifteen years since these significant overviews of biographical studies in Turkey were written, there has been a slight increase in the number of studies in this area. In a 2018 thesis, it is reported that there has been a noticeable rise in the number of biographical theses produced in Turkish universities. The author conducted a search in the YÖK (Council of Higher Education) thesis database, analyzing data from 1986 to 2017 using a statistical approach.⁸⁰ The findings reveal that the number of biography-related theses remained relatively stable until 2003. However, starting in 2004, there was a significant surge in the number of such theses, consistently outnumbering the figures from previous years. When I visited the YÖK database, I noticed that the increase in biographical theses continues to this day. However, biographies of women of the Early Republican period do not follow these general patterns.⁸¹ Despite the growing interest in prominent female figures from the Early Republican era, this trend lacks substantial academic engagement.⁸² Women's testimonies, often derived from personal archives and

⁸⁰ Selim Göbüto, “Lisansüstü Tarih Tezlerinde Biyografi Çalışmaları” (Master's Thesis, Çankırı Karatekin University, 2018), 36.

⁸¹ For the Ottoman period, there is a considerable amount of academic research on women compared to the following period, though many gaps still remain to be filled. E.g.: Ali Akyıldız, *Mümin ve Müsrif Bir Padişah Kızı: Refia Sultan*, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul 1998; Arzu Terzi, *Bezmialem Valide Sultan*, Timaş Yayınları, İstanbul 2018; Betül İpşirli Arıt, *Rabia Gülnuş Emetullah Sultan (1640-1717)*, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul 2014; Lucienne Thys-Şenocak, *Ottoman Women Builders ; The Architectural Patronage of Hadice Sultan*, Ashgate Publishing, 2006; Ferda Mazak, *Ölümünün 100. Yılında Sultan II. Mahmud'un Kızı Adile Sultan Hayatı, Vakıfları ve Hayratı*, Çamlıca Kültür ve Yardım Vakfı, İstanbul 2000; Ahmed Refik Altınay, *Kadınlar Saltanatı: Kösem Sultan*, ed. Ahmet Önal, Yeditepe Yayınları, İstanbul 2015; Özge Çiçek, “A Biography Of An Ottoman Princess: Cemile Sultan (1843-1915)” (İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi University, 2020).

⁸² Over the last few decades, there have been an increasing number of monographs and biographical studies on prominent Turkish women intellectuals; however, it is difficult to categorize most of them under the heading of “historical biography”: Kızıltan, Mübeccel. 1993. *Nisvan-ı İslam: Fatma Aliye Hanım*. İstanbul: Mutlu; Bekiroğlu, Nazan. 1998. *Şair*

ego documents, are still not considered valuable sources for the history of modern Turkey. Some may argue that the scarcity of resources contributes to the neglect of this area by historians. Indeed, the issue of sources has been a significant concern for historians of Middle Eastern women. Judith Tucker suggested in 1983 that the sources of Middle Eastern women history “should be expanded to include material which sheds light on the relatively obscure world of women.”⁸³ However, since then, it has become clear that Middle Eastern women, particularly elite women, have a historical background that far exceeds these limitations. Many of these women left behind written materials that are well-suited to conventional historical methods, just like their male counterparts. In the Turkish context, if the historical testimonies of women continue to be overlooked, it is likely less a matter of source availability and more a reflection of patriarchal bias.

While contributing to this literature with a biographical perspective on Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, the views of İbnülemin Mahmud Kemal—a prolific biographer of the Republican period—provide practical insights. He emphasized that “the greatest merit of humanity is to acknowledge merit,”⁸⁴ suggesting that

Nigâr Hanım. İstanbul: İletişim; Esen, Nüket. 2000. Bir Osmanlı kadın yazarın doğuşu. *Journal of Turkish Studies -Türklük Bilgisi Araştırmaları* 24 (1): 115–120; Zihnioğlu, Yaprak. 2003. Kadınsız inkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği. İstanbul: Metis; Çalışlar, İpek. 2010. Halide Edib: Biyografisine sığmayan kadın. İstanbul: Everest; Kaymaz, Kadriye. 2009. Gölgedeki kalem Emine Semiye: Bir Osmanlı kadın yazarının düşünce dünyası. İstanbul: Küre; Argunşah, Hülya. 2011. Bir cumhuriyet kadını: Şükufe Nihal. İstanbul: Timaş; Gökpinar, Bahar. 2015. Ayşe Leman Karaosmanoğlu: Bir Sefirenin Özel Arşivine Yolculuk. İstanbul: İletişim; Behmoaras, Liz. 2017. Suat Derviş: Efsane bir Kadın ve Dönemi. İstanbul: Doğan Kitap; Çalışlar, İpek. 2019. Latife Hanım. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi; Çatal, Barış (ed.). 2022. Sabiha Sertel: Hayatı ve Entelektüel Mirası. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları; Gökpinar, Bahar. 2015. Ayşe Leman Karaosmanoğlu: Bir Sefirenin Özel Arşivine Yolculuk. İstanbul: İletişim; Aşkın, Nüket. 2024. Makbule Hanım - Sırlarıyla Atatürk'ün Kız Kardeşi: Sırlarıyla Atatürk'ün Kız Kardeşi. İstanbul: Siyah-Beyaz; Inceoğlu, Fatma Samime. 2023. A Lifetime Dedicated to The Republic: Hasene Ilgaz With Her Works, Activities and Thoughts. Masters Thesis. Yeditepe University.

⁸³ Judith E. Tucker, “Problems in the Historiography of Women in the Middle East: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15, no. 3 (1983): 323, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800050959>.

⁸⁴ Cited in: Günil Özlem Ayaydın Cebe, “Biography: Modest Champion of Ottoman-Turkish Literature,” in *Selected Studies on Genre in Middle Eastern Literatures: From Epics to Novels*, ed. Hülya Çelik and Petr Kučera (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023), 280.

proper biographies serve as instruments of progress by recognizing individuals who have contributed to societal advancement. While this perspective aligns with efforts to highlight intellectual or literary legacies, the focus of this thesis diverges from such intentions. This study does not seek to evaluate or celebrate Halide Nusret as a literary or intellectual figure—a task already addressed in numerous studies. Instead, it approaches her personal archive and works as a medium for analyzing the broader sociopolitical and cultural transformations of the early Republican period. On the other hand, İbnülemin's claim that biographies serve the interests of the nation rather than the individual is particularly important for this work. This biography of Halide Nusret aims to uncover experiences and perspectives often marginalized in women's history, offering a valuable resource for understanding the period through an alternative female perspective.

1.5. Sources and Methodology: Analyzing Halide Nusret's Multi-Genre Writings

Studying a figure with a highly active and long writing career like Halide Nusret requires engaging with a wide and varied range of sources. This thesis draws primarily on her own writings, covering the period from the Turkish War of Independence to the 1960s. A broad selection of her published and unpublished works—including fiction, opinion pieces, short stories, novels, poems, interviews, and personal diaries—have been analyzed using methods of close reading and textual analysis. These texts are treated not simply as literary or personal works, but as historical sources that shed light on how Turkish womanhood was shaped, debated, and embodied during a time of rapid social transformation.

The chronological framework of this thesis covers the years between 1919 and 1960. The year 1919 is significant because it marks both the beginning of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the early stages of the Turkish War of Independence. It also coincides with Halide Nusret's entry into adulthood, making it a meaningful starting point for a biographical study. On a global scale, 1919 belongs to the post-World War I context and that of Wilsonian moment, which is equally important for understanding social and political transformations

of the time. Since the main aim of this study is to examine transitional periods and the shifting discourses on women, 1919 provides a strong basis for the analysis.

The year 1960, on the other hand, represents several turning points. In the Turkish context, the military coup d'etat of May 27 brought about a profound transformation of the political sphere. While the previous decades can be regarded as an extension of the early Republican era, 1960 introduced a rupture. This applied to Halide Nusret's personal trajectory as well, since the years following 1960 correspond to a sort of turning point in her life. The 1950s had already been a period in which she consolidated her reputation in literary circles and in social organizations, while the post-1960 years (until her death in 1984) can be considered her mature years. From a global perspective, the 1960s are also significant because feminist agendas began to shift during this period. Some sources identify it as the beginning of so-called "second-wave feminism." Even though the wave metaphor is problematic, this discursive change makes 1960 a reasonable endpoint for the present study. Considering the multiple angles that distinguishes the subsequent years, I have deliberately left this period outside the scope of this study, with the intention of addressing it in future research.

Another limitation of this study concerns the selection of texts. For example, I excluded most of Halide Nusret's poetry, with some exceptions. This is because the majority of her poems focus on themes such as nature or nationalism, which fall outside the scope of this thesis. The few poems that deal directly with the "woman question" are included and analyzed in relevant chapters. In contrast, most of her fictional works are examined, since questions of women and gender are generally present in her narratives. With regard to her essays and opinion pieces, I selected only those that were thematically connected to the central concerns of this study, while leaving the others aside. Overall, this selective approach was necessary because the thesis is thematically oriented rather than designed as a comprehensive account of Halide Nusret's life and entire literary output.

Particular attention is given to her fictional works and her personal diaries, which offer insights into the experience of womanhood in a modernizing, urbanizing society shaped by Republican norms. These two genres hold a unique position in the present study, both because they offer more personal and emotionally deep narratives, and also because they often differ from the ideological tone found in her public writings. Indeed, this thesis identifies a significant discursive shift between Halide Nusret's writings, such as articles, poems, interviews and autobiographies versus her fictional texts as well as notebooks in her personal archive. This section therefore reflects on the methodological issues involved in using these diverse materials as historical sources. It discusses how fictional and private writings—genres traditionally considered outside the boundaries of political or historical relevance—can play a central role in the writing of women's history. By doing so, the thesis contributes to broader discussions about which voices, genres, and experiences are considered valid in the historical record.

While writing historical biographies, the selection and interpretation of sources are important to constructing a narrative that reflects the complexity of the subject's life and times. Biographies, especially the ones within the new biography approach, use a wide range of materials—such as diaries, autobiographies, opinion pieces, newspapers, and literary works—to offer a multifaceted view of the individual. This diversity of sources allows the biographer to explore the personal and subjective dimensions of the subject's life, as well as the broader social, political, and cultural contexts in which they lived. As Simone Lässig notes, biographies are particularly effective in “highlighting the fundamental openness and subjective nature of history,” emphasizing the interaction between individual agency and structural limitations.⁸⁵ Lässig argues that the very process of working on a biography “encourages methodological eclecticism and transcending of intra- and interdisciplinary boundaries,”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Simone Lässig, “Introduction,” in *Biography between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography*, ed. Volker R. Berghahn and Simone Lässig, *Studies in German History*, v. 9 (Berghahn Books, 2008), 20.

⁸⁶ Lässig, “Introduction,” 20.

making biography a dynamic and integrative form of historical scholarship. This theoretical foundation highlights the importance of using diverse sources to capture the complexity and richness of historical lives, especially when dealing with literary figures whose works are themselves a reflection of their personal experiences and the era they inhabited.

Reflecting on the importance of using different sources in historical biography, it is especially important to consider the unique role played by an author's literary works when writing his or her biography. Hayden White draws a connection between literature and history through the concept of "emplotment," emphasizing how historical writing often utilizes literary techniques.⁸⁷ This perspective emphasizes the narrative style of historical texts, but there is another important aspect to consider: the use of an author's literary works as sources for their biography, which directly associated with the interdisciplinary nature of biography writing. Hans Renders and Binne De Haan discuss this interdisciplinarity, noting that different types of biographies, such as those of writers, politicians, or engineers, inherently involve various academic fields.⁸⁸ For instance, a literary biography,⁸⁹ necessitates an analysis of the author's literary works, whether they are fiction or non-fiction. Catherine Aird also emphasizes this connection, stating that "literary biography is by definition the outcome of the study of the life and work of an author and, ipso facto, the study of the interaction between that life and that work."⁹⁰ Aird underlines a common challenge in literary biographies: writers' lives are often quiet and uneventful, making their literary production even more important for understanding their

⁸⁷ Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, paperback ed., 11. [print.], A Johns Hopkins Paperback (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2000), 5–11.

⁸⁸ Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, "Towards Traditions and Nations," in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, Revised and augmented edition, Egodocuments and History Series, volume 7 (Brill, 2014), 16.

⁸⁹ Here, this term means the biography of an author rather than biography written in a literary way.

⁹⁰ Catherine Aird, "Read That Countenance," in *The Literary Biography*, ed. Dale Salwak (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1996), 41, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-24960-2>.

lives. This remark on the lives of authors is far from the case with Halide Nusret. She lived a full and dynamic life, witnessing the profound hardships of the late Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic. However, a biographical study on her life still needs the help of her literary works to be fully understood. Therefore, any biography of Halide Nusret must should not be limited to analyzing her literary texts and should integrate her rich, eventful life experiences. Consequently, this thesis must combine historical and literary academic disciplines, reflecting the necessity of a multidisciplinary approach in creating a comprehensive biography.

In order to explore the complex layers within Halide Nusret's novels, this thesis also draws on literary theory, especially theories of novel. These theoretical approaches help to understand how her fiction does not simply repeat her public discourse, but rather reveals deeper tensions and contradictions in her portrayal of womanhood. The idea of the novel as a space for multiple voices, individual struggle, and mediated desire—as discussed by theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin, Georg Lukács, René Girard, Franco Moretti, Ian Watt, Roland Barthes, and Nancy Armstrong—provides valuable tools for reading Halide Nusret's fiction. Their insights allow us to see how her female characters reflect not only idealized roles, but also inner conflicts, disappointments, and desires that were often left unspoken in her nonfiction writings. Thus, literary theory offers a supporting role in this thesis, helping to interpret fiction as a site of personal negotiation, subtle resistance, and deeper expression.

Following on from the discussion of literary sources in biographies, diaries and memoirs also play an important role in biography writing and gives a different but equally valuable perspective on the lives of historical figures. They are crucial sources that offer intimate insights into the lives and thoughts of individuals who lived through historical events. Julie Rak draws attention to Philippe Lejeune's approach to diary writing, which she sees as overlapping with Michel de Certeau's theorization of the everyday activities of ordinary people.⁹¹

⁹¹ Julie Rak, "Dialogue with the Future: Philippe Lejeune's Method and Theory of Diary," in *On Diary*, by Philippe Lejeune, Biography Monographs (Published for the Biographical Research Center by the University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 18.

According to Lejeune, diarists, like de Certeau's "silent discoverers," create their own logics of expression, constructing hidden spaces within the wider social world. These diaries become "unrecognized producers" of culture as they follow "faulty trajectories" following their own internal logic, often unrecognized by the larger, technocratic structures in which they exist. This view emphasizes the importance of diaries in historiography, as they allow historians to access these "partially unreadable paths" and understand the personal, often hidden narratives that contribute to the broader historical picture. In this way, diaries serve as very important tools for exploring the lived experiences of individuals and offer a unique lens through which to observe history from the bottom up.

Emphasizing the human-centered contributions of the diaries, J. Moran argues that they are important sources for historians because they illuminate and complicate the understanding of our broader social and cultural history and they reveal that daily life is experienced corporeally, as a series of sensual pleasures or discomforts in the present moment.⁹² Diaries can also show how collective experiences intersect with the randomness and singularity of everyday life, revealing the tensions, possibilities, and contingent moments of the past as they were being lived. Moran notes that diaries are mediated by cultural traditions and expectations, yet they remain private and ultimately mysterious, offering a strange and sometimes unknowable insight into their historical context.

Despite ego documents relevance as historical sources, however, their use as such is disputed, especially in terms of their reliability and subjectivity. As Selim Deringil emphasizes, while memoirs are indispensable for understanding the past, they must be approached with caution. Referring to Lejeune's concept, he states, "Memoirs are by their very nature subjective, and demand, in the words of one of major thinkers of the subject, some form of autobiographical pact" between the author and the reader whereby the reader will be free to "look for differences

⁹² J Moran, "Private Lives, Public Histories: The Diary in Twentieth-Century Britain," *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 1 (2015): 44.

(errors, deformations etc.)” with the historical record.”⁹³ It is this subjectivity that makes memoirs both valuable and difficult sources for historians. The diary as a genre shares a similar situation with the memoir in this respect. The personal characteristics and political orientations of the subject can lead to biases, but they also reveal the complex and multifaceted nature of historical events as perceived and experienced by those who lived them.

Given the controversy surrounding them, the diaries are even more critical for women's history. They provide a perspective that is invaluable in historical research but often overlooked due to patriarchal assumptions. Cynthia Gannett highlights how these forms of writing, often dismissed or ignored by male critics, have allowed women to document and validate their experiences on their own terms.⁹⁴ Women's diaries, along with letters, diaries and other non-traditional forms, offer a space where women can write about their lives free from the limitations of being a “writer” in the traditional sense. This freedom has empowered them to express the authenticity of their experiences in ways that are often aligned with, but different from, dominant literary traditions. Gannett's remark applies to the western women's context. In non-Western societies like Turkey, on the other hand, diary writing is not common among ordinary women, so the women whose diaries are found in the archives are mostly women who have already been intellectual figures. Nevertheless, this is common to Western and non-Western women alike, that diaries are a form of escape from patriarchal norms. Halide Nusret's diaries, which will be discussed in this thesis, are a case in point.

Barbara Caine further emphasizes the importance of these diaries for feminist history and biography. By studying women's personal writings, historians can understand how they moved through their domestic and public lives, their feelings about private and family life, and the strategies they used to

⁹³ Selim Deringil, ed., *The Ottoman Twilight in the Arab Lands: Turkish Memoirs and Testimonies of the Great War*, Ottoman and Turkish Studies (Academic Studies Press, 2019), 20.

⁹⁴ Cynthia Gannett, *Gender and the Journal: Diaries and Academic Discourse*, SUNY Series, Literacy, Culture, and Learning (State University of New York Press, 1992), 95.

pursue their interests within the restrictions of their time.⁹⁵ Also, the function of diaries are not limited to uncover individual lives, but when read collectively, they reveal broader patterns and insights into the lives of women from particular social classes or places. They provide a unique and intimate perspective on women's experiences that would not be available otherwise.⁹⁶

Autobiographies, like diaries, have an influential role in historiography by providing authentic and subjective insights into the lives of historical figures. At the same time, both forms of writing share a common concern about their reliability as historical sources. Critics often argue that the subjectivity inherent in autobiography, where the significance of events is shaped by the author's perception and logical integrity is established by the author, makes them more like fiction than objective historical documents.⁹⁷ According to Tekeli, the main characteristic of autobiography is its heavy reliance on subjectivity, which blurs the line between history and literature.⁹⁸ He suggests that it may be more convenient to consider autobiographies as literary texts rather than historical documents. Relying on literary theory, Tekeli argues that autobiographies are reconstructive, synthetic works and can even involve the re-creation of an individual's identity. This process is introspective and often reflects the author's attempt to understand and redefine his or her identity later in life.⁹⁹ Tekeli also underlines the role of self-censorship in the construction of autobiographies. He argues that this self-censorship often carries the values of the society in which the author lives and thus narrativizes the autobiography.¹⁰⁰

While acknowledging that autobiographies, like diaries, are subjective and shaped by the author's viewpoint, Kenneth Barkin challenges these objections, arguing that it is precisely these very characteristics that make autobiographies particularly useful for historians, especially those interested in "history from

⁹⁵ Caine, "Feminist Biography and Feminist History," 251.

⁹⁶ Caine, "Feminist Biography and Feminist History."

⁹⁷ Kenneth D. Barkin, "Autobiography and History," *Societas* 6, no. 2 (n.d.): 85.

⁹⁸ İlhan Tekeli, "Bireyin Yaşamı Nasıl Tarih Oluyor?," in *Birlikte Yazılan ve Öğrenilen Bir Tarihe Doğru* (Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2007), 191.

⁹⁹ Tekeli, "Bireyin Yaşamı Nasıl Tarih Oluyor?," 191.

¹⁰⁰ Tekeli, "Bireyin Yaşamı Nasıl Tarih Oluyor?," 192.

bottom up."¹⁰¹ For Barkin, "autobiography is an untapped mine for researchers interested in the subjective nature of human beings."¹⁰² In defending the use of autobiography as a historical source, Barkin emphasizes the importance of understanding the "mentalité" of a particular period, a concept central to the Annales school of historical thought. Referring to Schopenhauer, he argues that "people's emotions and prejudices should not be left outside the domain of the scientist."¹⁰³ Since this perception calls for democratizing history and emphasizing the sensitivities of the public, the sources of historical research must change. Barkin's defense of autobiography aligns with arguments for the use of diaries as historical sources. Both forms of writing offer a valuable perspective on history that traditional sources often overlook.

Judy Simons' discussion further completes Barkin's argument by emphasizing the constructed nature of autobiographical texts. Building on Sidonie Smith's observations, Simons points out that "the autobiographical text has become a narrative artifice that privileges an entity or identity that does not exist outside language."¹⁰⁴ This idea corresponds to Barkin's perspective that autobiographies offer a different form of truth, one that is constructed and subjective but valuable for historians. Simons emphasizes that the act of writing autobiography involves the expression and negotiation of identity, allowing them to question the boundary between private opinion and its open articulation.¹⁰⁵ This characteristic of women's autobiographies makes them important for the study of women's biographies because, unlike genres such as diaries or opinion pieces, they require the coexistence of private and public identities.

¹⁰¹ Barkin, "Autobiography and History," 86.

¹⁰² Barkin, "Autobiography and History," 87.

¹⁰³ Barkin, "Autobiography and History," 87.

¹⁰⁴ Judy Simons, *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1990), 11, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230376441>.

¹⁰⁵ Simons, *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women*.

1.6. Genre, Gender, and Persona: Public and Private Voices in Halide Nusret's Work

One of the key arguments of this thesis is that Halide Nusret Zorlutuna constructs different personas depending on the genre she writes in. Her engagement with the “woman question” does not follow a singular or fixed line. Instead, there is a noticeable shift between her public-facing non-fiction texts and her more private or fictional writings. While the former tends to reflect a carefully constructed public persona, shaped by the expectations of dominant ideology and the limitations of the public sphere, the latter reveals a more intimate and complex private persona, marked by emotional depth, ambivalence, and subtle critique. In this thesis, I use the terms *public persona* and *private persona* to describe these distinct voices, as each period examined reveals a consistent shift in discourse and rhetorical strategy across different genres.

Carolyn Heilbrun mentions May Sarton's autobiography written in 1968, as a groundbreaking work, for expressing the anger in a woman, which was forbidden to women.¹⁰⁶ Before her, no other women autobiography writer attempted to reflect that forbidden feeling in their works. Halide Nusret was one of those writers that hid her anger from her public accounts, including the autobiography she wrote in 1978. Yet, she reveals the anger, along with frustrations, objection and disappointment with the patriarchal norms in her private writings. In her public accounts—opinion pieces, interviews, and her autobiography, Halide Nusret often presents herself and the Turkish women in general, as moral and national figures. These texts reflect her alignment with ideals such as motherhood, duty, and national service—values that were central to the gender discourse of her time. They build an image of a woman who is respectful of the boundaries set by patriarchy while still advocating for a dignified female presence in society. This public persona is strategic and ideological, especially given the restrictions faced by women intellectuals in the mid-twentieth-century Turkish public sphere.

¹⁰⁶ Carolyn Heilbrun, *Kadının Özyaşamını Yazarken...* (Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1992), 8.

By contrast, her fictional works and private notes open up a different voice. In her short stories, novels, and diaries, she gives room to a womanhood which struggle with social expectations, experience emotional conflicts, or resist idealized roles. These texts do not always offer direct critique, but they reflect a lively tension between internal desires and external norms. Through fictional narration and private diaries, Halide Nusret is able to express concerns and sensitivities that she avoids in her more strategic public writing. In this sense, fiction becomes a space of sensibility, liminality and subjective experience - a space where the boundaries of gender roles can be negotiated, if not completely challenged.

One striking aspect of Halide Nusret's writings—particularly her diaries—is how openly she acknowledges her own success and reputation, in contrast to the more modest tone she adopts in her public accounts. In her analysis of gendered self-representation, Patricia Spacks argues that “The nature of public and private selves, these eighteenth-century texts suggest, is for women, in some ways, the reverse of what it is for men. The face a man turns to the world, much literary evidence indicates, typically embodies his strength.[...] For women, on the other hand, as we have seen, the public self often stresses weakness.”¹⁰⁷ Halide Nusret's modest public persona is partly in line with this observation, but it would be misleading to say that in reality she saw herself as weak or contemptuous of herself. Instead, she chose to express strength, confidence, and authority within alternative frameworks. In her diaries and fictional works, women are often depicted as morally, emotionally, or even intellectually superior to men—offering a richer, more confident version of womanhood than her public discourse might suggest.

This genre-based distinction is not absolute, and there are exceptions where fiction becomes an instrument of public persona, especially in 1930s. However, the crucial role that genre plays in shaping how gendered voice and subjectivity are articulated in Halide Nusret's writings does remain unchanged.

¹⁰⁷ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), 88.

Understanding these shifts allows us to read her not only as a nationalist-conservative figure reproducing dominant gender roles, but also as a writer who subtly reflects the complexities, constraints, and negotiations of being a woman intellectual in Republican Turkey.

1.7. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into three main chapters, following a broadly chronological structure that traces Halide Nusret Zorlutuna's evolving discourse on womanhood from the Armistice period to the post-World War II years. While the structure reflects the global historical shifts and Turkey's political and social landscape, it also responds to the discursive and stylistic changes in Halide Nusret's own writings.

Chapter I examines the period between 1919 and 1927, a globally transformative post-war era that fundamentally reshaped societal gender structures and facilitated unprecedented female participation in the public sphere. In the Turkish context, this period is particularly significant due to the War of Independence and the establishment of the Republic, events that crucially redefined women's roles in society and prompted extensive public discourse on gender issues. After a brief section on the historical background, this chapter approaches Halide Nusret's work thematically, examining her writings in relation to key public debates around religion, legal reform, women's labor, domesticity, and attire. These themes were central to the construction of gender roles in the early Republican era. The analysis highlights how her public discourse interacted with nationalist ideals, while her private diaries and fictional works reflect how women experienced the tensions created by modernization and tradition, as well as the institutional inefficiencies.

Chapter II covers the years 1927 to 1945, a period marked by increasing state control, the silencing of the women's movement, and Halide Nusret's own transition into a more conservative public role. Building on the observations from Chapter I, this section adopts a genre-based approach, distinguishing between Halide Nusret's *public persona* (reflected in opinion pieces and fiction) and her

private voice (revealed in her diary). During this period, her fictional writings align more closely with her public persona, reflecting the ideological pressures of the time. However, she also kept a relatively extensive diary that covers the early years of her motherhood—offering a rare and valuable source for understanding the private experience of a female Republican intellectual. The diary exposes the tensions she faced between intellectual life, wifehood, and motherhood. This framework enables a deeper exploration of how she navigated the dual expectations of the ideal Republican woman and her personal sense of self. A separate section is devoted to the less active decade of 1935–1945, offering a brief explanation for its more limited coverage in this thesis.

Chapter III explores the post–World War II years (1945–1960), a period in which new gender discourses emerged both globally and in Turkey. The chapter begins with a historical overview of this transitional era, highlighting how post-war reforms, Cold War ideologies, and changing social norms shaped the gender agenda. It also examines Halide Nusret’s involvement in women-oriented associations and public institutions during these years. Maintaining the genre-based framework established in the previous chapter, this section analyzes her public writings—particularly on suffrage, women’s employment, and motherhood—alongside her fictional works. While no diaries or personal notes from this period have been located, her fiction provides a rich and revealing inventory of private concerns, emotional undercurrents, and implicit critiques that contrast with her public stance. The aim is to uncover how Halide Nusret’s later works reflect broader changes in Turkish society while simultaneously offering an alternative form of gender criticism through literary expression.

Seen as a whole, these chapters intend to show that Halide Nusret’s writings in different genres and historical periods offer valuable insights into the changing meanings of femininity in modern Turkey, the specific approaches required by women’s history, and the gray areas of existing literature. By situating her intellectual and literary output within both national and global historiographies of women, this thesis contributes to rethinking the sources, methods, and narratives of women’s history.





Halide Nusret and Emancipation of Women in Post-WWI Turkey (1919-1927)

World War I brought about significant changes to gender roles across the globe and the post-war period saw the societal landscape to shift dramatically in the upcoming years. The war had forced women into the workforce to fill the gaps left by men who were away at the front, leading to shared experiences and common challenges across nations. In Turkey, the aftermath of the war also saw the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the newly established Republic, which was a radical political and social transformation. Meanwhile, Western societies began to move away from Victorian norms, signaling large-scale shifts in cultural and social values. These transitions reflected both a response to the conditions of war and a desire to redefine social structures that had already begun in the nineteenth century. The role of women in society was a particularly important component of such debates. Even though the change was up in the air, women in the 1920s were ironically still expected to embrace their old and traditional roles. As Harootunian noted in the case of Japan, while the idea is more widely relevant, modern life had

already opened up possibilities for more autonomous existence, while men continued to imagine change as something only applicable to males.¹⁰⁸

Emerging as a newly recognized writer during this period of transformation, Halide Nusret found herself at the intersection of these changing gender dynamics. As a young writer who produced a diverse genre of writing, she reflected upon the complexities of a society that struggled with the consequences of women's newly found independence during the war. While she engaged with the discourse surrounding women's emancipation, this did not mean that her stance was always straightforward. While she generally embraced traditional norms, there were times when she did not fully meet those norms and even, according to her personal accounts, could not fit into them. This contradictory attitude of Halide Nusret is reflective her period quite well, since women's experiences both in Turkey and globally were often characterized by conflicting expectations and social pressures in the immediate post-war years.

As feminist historians have pointed out, the post-war period was marked by a duality of progress and regression in women's rights. Although women have gained visibility in public life and the political arena, the resurgence of traditional values has often disrupted these advances. Halide Nusret's works in 1920s embodied the zeitgeist, as she captured the complexities of women's experiences without being confined to simplistic labels of "traditional" or "modern." Her literary contributions serve as a lens through which we can explore the broader narrative of women's emancipation in post-war Turkey, revealing the complicated interplay of societal expectations, personal aspirations, and the ongoing struggle for gender equality.

Halide Nusret began her writing career at an early age. Her autobiography opens with her earliest memories of her mother who began to teach her to read when she was only four. There were intellectual and political discussions in their home. She was aware of the publications and intellectual discussions. When she was twelve, her first writing was published in *Kadınlar Dünyası*, one of the most

¹⁰⁸ Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton University Press, 2000), xxiv.

radical women magazines of its time.¹⁰⁹ It was a letter that expressed her gratitude for the publication of the magazine, while also calling on women to unite and progress in the same letter. Thus, she was a part of the intelligentsia from a very early age. This first phase of her life created a base for her later writings and ideological tendencies.

Her experience is far from being stereotypical in many aspects. Sh father's critical attitude towards both regimes led to his imprisonment, a period that overlapped significantly with Halide Nusret's childhood and shaped her early experiences. Because of her father's circumstances, she grew up in a highly political atmosphere and in challenging circumstances. Perhaps because of this experience, the way she expressed her ideological position developed in the opposite direction to her father, who was politically very assertive. She adopted a moderate tone in expressing her political views and carefully avoided direct confrontation with the status quo, which often confined her more challenging and experience-based thoughts to between-the-lines remarks or to the privacy of her personal notebooks. Her father's imprisonment and early death in 1914 also had economic consequences, too. Although she was born into an upper middle-class family, they began to experience financial difficulties from her teenage years on. Class confusion is reflected in her writings and shaping her public and private accounts.

Halide Nusret's early adulthood in the 1920s offers a unique lens into a nation—and a young woman—in transition. The turmoil of war, the fall of an empire and the birth of a republic were not just historical events surrounding her; they were forces that shaped her personal journey as a writer and a woman. Beginning with her childhood experiences, her journey through this rapidly changing environment reveals how individual lives are intricately linked to national transformation. The political, economic and gendered challenges she faced, especially when viewed through a micro-historical perspective, provide critical context for the overall narrative of the Turkish women's history.

¹⁰⁹ Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, 407.

The years 1919 and 1927 are very significant for Turkey and for women like Halide Nusret. These years mark the origin of some of the most important debates about the political and social status of women in Turkey, discussions that have continued ever since and are still relevant today. The War of Independence in 1919 laid the foundations of the new state, and at the same time created an exceptional moment for women to emerge as active participants in national life, opening new spaces for visibility and political engagement. The decade that followed, particularly the early 1920s, stands out in women's history as a period when gender issues became central to state policies—shaped in part by the social and economic conditions after the Wars. The national and economic roles women adopted at the time made them both active participants and symbolic tools of state-building, especially in areas like nationalism, religion, law, work, family life, and clothing—issues that continue to shape discussions about women today. This period was also important in Halide Nusret's life; it was during her young adulthood that she began to take on family responsibilities and enter the workforce. At the same time, as a writer, her literary production grew significantly, as shown in her autobiography, diaries, and other writings. The endpoint of this chapter, 1927, coincides with a transitional moment for the Turkish women's movement, marked by major changes in the structure and direction of the Turkish Women's Union. It also anticipates the increasingly authoritarian character of the early Republic in the years that followed. These two factors created an important divergence in Halide Nusret's public appearance as well and changed her authorial attitude. For this reason, it is possible to consider 1927 as a breaking point for her too. By situating Halide Nusret within this dynamic and contested historical moment, this chapter examines how her blossoming public persona and literary production - across genres - interacted with the shifting boundaries of gender, nation, and political authority, and offers an authentic perspective into the tensions that defined both the early Republic and the women's movement.

2.1. The Post-War World and Women

To historicize Halide Nusret's unique testimony, it is essential to first examine how post-war conditions were experienced globally and locally. World War I dramatically altered gender roles across the world, as the pressures of war forced women and children to look after themselves in the absence of men. This shift created immense pressure on traditional family structures, a rupture that became even more evident after the war with the large number of widows who never remarried.¹¹⁰ Women assumed new responsibilities both in the home and in the workplace, and in many countries they gained the right to vote. These wartime experiences allowed for a sense of confidence and independence among women. However, this newfound independence also posed a threat to the traditional social order, as working, independent women challenged established gender norms.

Harootunian's insights into Japan resonate broadly; he notes that while women's entry into the workforce was significant, it also highlighted the contradictions within societal structures. He emphasizes that urban life for both men and women created "ceaseless social strain and lived contradictions,"¹¹¹ as women increasingly filled roles that had been traditionally male dominated. In many places, including Turkey, there was a strong push to restore pre-war social structures, complicating the movement for women's emancipation. Efforts to counter this perceived threat sometimes took extreme forms, such as labeling women's rights as "sexual Bolshevism," denouncing the equality of the sexes and undermining the institution of marriage, particularly in connection with Bolshevik ideologies.¹¹²

These developments also had clear political consequences, as women gained the right to vote in many European countries in the interwar period. Their newly assigned roles during the wars contributed to a growing sense of confidence and independence, often seen as a central break for the women's movement. These inevitable developments resulted in the development of female activism

¹¹⁰ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (Vintage Books, 2009), 80.

¹¹¹ Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 11.

¹¹² Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, 81.

throughout the globe. The Paris Peace Conference brought together women from around the world to fight for political equality and advance women's rights.¹¹³ As Mona L. Siegel notes, the year 1919, shaped by the peace conference, was a pivotal moment for global feminism, prompting international gatherings that united women around the shared impacts of patriarchy.¹¹⁴ The awareness women gained from the conditions of the war years led to political recognition for women globally, though at varying pace across nations.¹¹⁵

Despite these advancements, however, the post-war period in many parts of Europe saw a return to traditional gender roles, as society pushed to re-establish pre-war norms.¹¹⁶ When the hostilities were over, women were expected to give up their jobs to returning male veterans and return to their "normal" domestic roles. This policy failed to recognize the vital contributions women had made to the war effort and the economic realities many now faced as widows or caregivers for disabled husbands and fathers.

The demobilization of women from the workforce was driven by both economic and psychological factors. It ensured that men had jobs to return to, but also gave them a sense that they were returning to a familiar, unchanged world. Women who remained employed were often criticized for taking jobs that were seen as rightfully belonging to men.¹¹⁷ Traditional values and the "cult of the family" is another reason to keep women away from the work force, along side the population anxiety which had deep roots going back into the late nineteenth century notions of military capabilities. The Great War enhanced the importance of healthy populations as well.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Mona L. Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms: The Global Battle for Women's Rights after the First World War*, Columbia Studies in International and Global History (Columbia University Press, 2020), 7.

¹¹⁴ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 10–11.

¹¹⁵ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 10.

¹¹⁶ Angela Kershaw and Angela Kimyongür, eds., *Women in Europe between the Wars: Politics, Culture and Society* (Ashgate, 2007), 4.

¹¹⁷ Kershaw and Kimyongür, *Women in Europe between the Wars*, 5.

¹¹⁸ Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*. P. 82-83.

All of these articulations highlighted some contradictions in terms of women's social roles. On the one hand, women were forced to work outside of home which persisted well into the post-war years, despite the social dispute. On the other hand, they were also expected to fill the population gap created by the war. The governments pushed women to their maternalistic roles more and more, particularly as the fascist propaganda rises throughout the period. Mazower quotes Mussolini's direction to the head of Fascist women's organization as "Go back home and tell the women I need births, many births."¹¹⁹ It was present in other countries as well. For instance, in 1920, the government of France honored the productive mothers of minimum five children with a medal (Médaille de la famille française) for fulfilling their patriotic duties. Such efforts had mixed results, however, in part because the agenda of women and the governments did not match. The abortion rates remained high despite the legal efforts to prevent it. Women did not want to take the motherhood as the patriotic responsibility or give up their children by sending them to the military. The failure of this policy was also due to inadequate financial investment by governments to increase birth rates.¹²⁰

Japanese trajectory was not that dissimilar to that of Europe during the 1920s, as it also experienced parallel social and governmental efforts aimed at reinforcing traditional roles for women. The post-war period saw new employment practices emerge, which aimed to stabilize labor relations at a time of widespread unrest. This led to a substantial influx of women into informal and service sectors, such as cafes and small shops. The presence of women who were financially independent and socially autonomous gave rise to the figure of the "modern girl," which was perceived as a threat to established patriarchal norms. The modern girl was not merely a cultural construct, but in fact represented deeper social changes that challenged traditional morality and authority.¹²¹ Despite their growing visibility, women faced a concerted effort by mass media and governmental discourse to reassert the importance of their roles as wives and

¹¹⁹ Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*. P. 84.

¹²⁰ Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*.p. 85-87.

¹²¹ Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 13.

mothers, reflecting a fear that these advancements could disrupt societal stability. In this context, the modern girl became emblematic of both progress and anxiety, as her existence highlighted the contradictions inherent in a rapidly modernizing society that sought to maintain its traditional foundations.¹²²

Similar to Fascist states of European and Japanese context, World War I significantly altered the boundaries between the sexes in many other nations,¹²³ which were perceived to be a threat to the traditional fabric of society. The interwar years were accordingly marked by a visible tension which often translated in the controversial policies regarding women. The extent of such a discrepancy was not fully acknowledged until recently. This changed when feminist historians began writing women's history. In doing so, they stopped celebrating the post-war period as a time of women's emancipation, when women actively participated in politics and the workforce. Instead, they started to consider it a period marked by a series of challenges.

The new roles women adopted and the social changes they introduced after the First World War often clashed with deeply rooted cultural and religious norms. For instance, the articulation of the difficulties associated with motherhood has become symbol of the perceived decline of Western civilization. Similarly, their changing appearances, such as bobbed hair and shorter skirts, were seen as symbols of moral decline and un-Christian behavior, rejecting traditional femininity and motherhood. Post-war literature reinforced these criticisms by portraying women's independence as destabilizing. These cultural condemnations, combined with fears of depopulation due to war casualties, led to

¹²² Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 25.

¹²³ For Danish, Swedish, Canadian, French and English context, see Birgitte Soland, *Becoming Modern : Young Women and the Reconstruction of Womanhood in the 1920s* (Princeton University Press, 2000).; Jenny Ingemarsdotter, *The Masculine Modern Woman: Pushing Boundaries in the Swedish Popular Media of the 1920s*, First edition, Routledge Research in Gender and History, volume 34 (Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2019); Jane Nicholas, *The Modern Girl: Feminine Modernities, the Body, and Commodities in the 1920s*, Studies in Gender and History (Univ. of Toronto Press, 2015); Jackie Clarke, *France in the Age of Organization : Factory, Home and Nation from the 1920s to Vichy* (Berghahn Books, 2011); Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (Routledge, 1991).

restrictive policies such as abortion bans and pro-natalist propaganda, ultimately framing feminism and women's liberation as threats to social and religious values.¹²⁴

The gender biases stemming from the nation's mission to repopulate are evident in the attitudes toward women's participation in the workforce. It was believed that their economic achievements were at the expense of men's place in the workforce. These voices started with the end of the war and got louder by the Great Depression of 1929. In reality, women were not replacing men. It was a result of modernizing industry and agriculture. The jobs got simpler by the introduction of new machinery and the women were simply a cheaper labor force compared to men. In addition to that, difficult work conditions, coupled with the continuing burdens of housework, made women's life harder. Because of this, many women were pleased by the fascist call of "return women to their homes."¹²⁵

2.2. Turkey and Turkish Women in the Post-war Years

As the world was struggling with the consequences of the war, Turkey faced similar social and political impacts, such as economic challenges, demographic shifts and transformations in the role of women. Turkey's situation, however, had unique aspects shaped by its own internal dynamics. The post-war period marked a break with the Ottoman past, and the establishment of the Republic led to profound cultural and social changes. These changes are framed as the outcome of a process of secularization and modernization that began in the 19th century, reflecting global trends but differing in their intensity and ideological bases.

Building on the general outline provided earlier on women's issues in the post-war global context, this section will focus on interconnected Turkish-specific themes related to women's issues during this period, as they are present in Halide Nusret's writings. At this stage of her career, Halide Nusret reflected most of

¹²⁴ M. Boxer and J.H. Quataert, "Women in the Era of the Interventionist State, Overview, 1890 to the Present," in *Connecting Spheres, European Women in a Globalizing World, 1500 to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹²⁵ Boxer and Quataert, "Women in the Era of the Interventionist State, Overview, 1890 to the Present." Pp 242-246

popular themes in both her public and private persona with less filtering and restraint compared to her later years. The first theme concerns nationalist and Westernizing ideologies and the symbolic role of women within these narratives, at the very core of tensions between traditional roles and modern expectations. Another important concern is the increasing participation of women in the workforce, which emerged as a practical response to wartime needs and led to debates about motherhood and domestic responsibilities that were crucial also in nationalist discourse. In addition, transformations in women's roles have led to critical debates about their legal rights and social appearance, framed within those ideologies, where women's contributions are celebrated but also constrained by traditional expectations. In this section, I will outline the historical context of Turkish women in the post-war years, highlighting these key themes and the challenges they faced. This background will help frame the analysis of Halide Nusret's writings, which confront the complex interplay between gender, nationalism and social change during this transformative period in Turkey.

2.2.1. Turkish Women as the Symbol of a Westernized Nation

The role and visibility of women in public life had long been a central axis of political discourse in late Ottoman and early Republican Turkey. Far from being an artifact of Republican modernization, debates on women's appearance, education and participation in society were already rooted in the ideological currents of the late empire. With the establishment of the Republic, these debates intensified and became institutionalized in a way that produced more definitive conclusions. The new regime, seeking to present itself as modern, secular, and Western-oriented, while keeping the nationalist nature, placed women at the symbolic center of its mission. As both signs of detachment and instruments of continuity, women's bodies, behaviors and social roles were reformulated to reflect the ideals of the modern nation-state. This part explores the ideological foundations of these symbolic roles, paying particular attention to the ways in which republican reforms both utilized and departed from late Ottoman gender discourses.

Women's visibility and its connotations have a long history going back to the Tanzimat period. During the Second Constitutional era, this issue became more intensely debated. The influence of the relatively liberal environment of this period cannot be denied in this regard. There emerged a considerable number of women organizations most of which acted for philanthropic purposes and women emancipation. The new journals published and/or written by women intellectuals affected this transformation deeply.¹²⁶ Discussions of women's issues on practical and theoretical level were not exempt from the political ideologies of the period. Nationalism, which strengthened during these years, opened a new chapter to this debate, offering a path that is distinct from westernization and Islam. The ideas on national culture, as cultivated by Ziya Gökalp, the ideologue of the CUP, challenged the traditional norms which were intimately linked with Islam. His ideas on the social life of women during the war period were already anticipating the new women of the new Turkey. For Gökalp, the seclusion of women and veiling are the norms of "alien cultures" such as Iran, Byzantium and Arab. Originally, the first era of Islam opened more space for women than the current Muslim societies. For him, the place of women in pre-Islamic Turkic culture was also more liberating and egalitarian. He wrote about this ideological stance in *Yeni Mecmua* in 1917.¹²⁷ In his iconic book, *Türkçülüğün Esasları* they were republished in 1923.¹²⁸ His ideas were compatible with the modern norms in that sense, but his main reference was the Turkish history and culture, which were apparently being discovered at the time.

These debates in society and the ideological level in a sense determined what was to come under the new republic in the 1920s. In this new order, women were assigned the role of being the face of the new Turkey. The public appearance of the women was equated with the appearance of the country before the civilized

¹²⁶ Deniz Kandiyoti, "End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey," in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1991).

¹²⁷ Emine Nurefşan Dinç, "Kadın ve Aile Hukuku ile İlgili Meseleler Bağlamında Gökalp'in Fıkha Bakışı," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 11, no. Volume 11 Issue 7 (2016): 151–151, <https://doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.9524>.

¹²⁸ Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları* (Ötüken Neşriyat, 2024).

world. As Nilüfer Göle states in *Forbidden Modern*, by increasing women's visibility in the public sphere and targeting the segregation between the sexes, the Kemalist project reflected its distance to Islamic regulations in the society, appropriating Western values. Kemalism tried to change the civilization as its primary objective and the relationship and equation among women and men was fundamental in this mission. Kemalism did this both by intervening to the physical appearance of both man and women and by establishing the legal base for it.

The Civil code of 1925 is the legal step towards this goal. Encouraging the western clothing was the visual aspect of it. Göle comments on the price women had to pay on this path of civilization. Accordingly, the “ideal daughters” of the new state had to compromise from their sexual and individual identities. Giving examples from the cartoons of the period, Göle summarizes the social debate around the public appearance of women and patriarchal moral values such as virtue and honor. Women were symbols of the society's morality as well as the contemporary civilization and modernity.¹²⁹ This did not change with the new social ideals of the republic. Due to this complicated double mission, there were no chance for women than desexualizing or even masculinizing. This is visible in the memoirs of women who witnessed the period. In general, femininity is not reflected in them. Feminine inclinations were looked down on if there were any.¹³⁰

2.2.2. *How Women Became the Counterparts of The Economy of Turkey?*

Some of these ideological changes were in fact in response to larger socio-economic transformations affecting women that had been ongoing since the First World War. Women's participation in the labor market was an important factor in this regard, although it was not limited to the war years. Even before that, women played an important part in the economy, working in a variety of jobs that contributed to their households and the economy. Before the war period, since the late nineteenth century women were surely active in some sectors as sources

¹²⁹ Göle, *Forbidden Modern*.

¹³⁰ See Nazan Aksoy, *Kurgulanmış Benlikler: Otobiyografi, Kadın, Cumhuriyet* (İletişim, 2018).

of cheap labor. They were employed mostly in textile and agriculture and limited numbers were hired in the factories founded as the Ottoman economy had been integrated into European capitalism. Although the educational reforms and economic transformations had a positive, albeit limited, impact on women's activity in society, the vast majority worked in a position of segregation from men, that is, from much of the public sphere. The war period created spaces for them to be more publicly visible, although not always in a very pleasant way. As men was in the troops, women had to step in to keep the social order and economy alive. Over the course of the war in Turkey, women from various social classes were forced to take part in new sectors so intensively that in 1916 a society called the Ottoman Women's Islamic Society for Employment (OWEIS) was founded by Naciye Sultan. This society provided jobs for women in many fields, from cashiers to ticket collectors, from postal clerks to garbage collectors. Women were active as entrepreneurs as well. As mentioned by Elif Mahir Metinsoy, there was a woman-led photographer's shop as well as seamstress workshops that hired Turkish women in Istanbul. In 1917, women merchants opened the Goods Bazaar for Ladies Ottoman Incorporated Company (Hanımlara Mahsus Eşya Pazarı Osmanlı Anonim Şirketi) who brought products from Anatolia to Istanbul. Similar bazaars opened in other cities as well. These initiatives were supported by the state institutions, too. In 1917, the School of Commerce offered courses for women who want to be entrepreneurs. Women began to appear in fine arts as well. In 1914, undergraduate education became available for women at the University for Girls (İnas Darülfünunu).¹³¹

In this period, women's increased public visibility was not limited to their participation in the workforce, but also extended to their direct relations with the state. While men had previously established official connections, in their absence women had to provide and manage these themselves, marking a significant shift in their social roles and responsibilities. To collect their pensions and food, complain about official's behavior or apply for aid to support their family, women

¹³¹ Elif Mahir Metinsoy, *Ottoman Women during World War I: Everyday Experiences, Politics, and Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

had to interact with the state, which enhanced their place in the public space.¹³² The petitions they wrote during the war years reveal the individual and collective agency of women. As Yiğit Akın points out, such testimonies allow for a reassessment of the phenomenon of war, which is often portrayed as a masculine endeavor.¹³³

These initiatives are usually regarded as positive steps towards women emancipation by modernist, nationalist, and to some extent, feminist scholars. They had, indeed, strengthened the ties of women with the public areas, and allowed them to be present in realms out of domestic spheres. This period created a solid ground for the debates about women's public presence in the following decades. Feminists supported their arguments by the struggles of women during the war time, even to this date. However, the tragic causes and consequences of the conditions that forced women to work during the war effort should not be overlooked. These conditions particularly shaped the attitudes against women working in the early years of the Republic. While these dissenting voices are often classified ideologically, it should not be forgotten that the conditions accelerating women's entry into the workforce were intertwined with the tragedies of war. The majority of Ottoman women, including a great proportion of the middle-class, were affected by the disastrous consequences of the war, bearing huge material and emotional hardships. They had to work longer and harder conditions, in addition to already existing burdens of domestic chores.¹³⁴ Housing and taking care of children were the hardest burden on women's shoulders. They lost their house due to battles, fires, and immigration. Food shortages sometimes made it impossible to properly feed the children. Under these conditions, replacing men

¹³² Yiğit Akın, *When the War Came Home: The Ottomans' Great War and the Devastation of an Empire* (Stanford University Press, 2018), 158.

¹³³ Akın, *When the War Came Home: The Ottomans' Great War and the Devastation of an Empire*, 162.

¹³⁴ Akın, *When the War Came Home: The Ottomans' Great War and the Devastation of an Empire*, 146.

in the labor force was not a matter of choice or a symbol of freedom for women, but of necessity.¹³⁵

On top of that, the work conditions were compelling due to sexual discrimination and restrictions. During the war period, women became more active in a wide variety of sectors as mentioned above. The conditions for the women who replaced the men were much more difficult than for the previous male employees, both because of the outcomes of war and also gender-based discrimination. One major cause was being labeled as cheap labor. They were getting paid less than their male counterparts. As Metinsoy found, women industrial workers were in fact paid between one-third to one-sixth of male worker's salaries.¹³⁶ Another factor that worsened the life of working women was sexual harassment. The maids in the households, factory workers and even teachers, which was considered as a "safe" job for women even then, was being harassed in the workplace.¹³⁷ And on top of that, women's chastity was being monitored as they were regarded as a threat to the social order of the workplace.¹³⁸ As a result of this rigid and overwhelming environment, the connotation of working for a woman can be expected as a heavy burden, rather than a way of empowerment.

In the 1920s, the women and working life was under influence of the war years. During the first years of the Republic, new sectors were opened to them which were previously closed such as law and medicine. On the other hand, their visibility in those areas was still quite low, even in jobs that are traditionally regarded as feminine such as teaching.¹³⁹ In the magazines and newspapers of the

¹³⁵ Metinsoy, *Ottoman Women during World War I: Everyday Experiences, Politics, and Conflict*, 85–113.

¹³⁶ Metinsoy, *Ottoman Women during World War I: Everyday Experiences, Politics, and Conflict*), 135–36..

¹³⁷ Metinsoy, 139-140.

¹³⁸ Metinsoy, 143.

¹³⁹ "when we look at the number of teachers, a profession that is largely associated with women, only 1,217 (11%) out of a total of 10,238 primary and elementary school teachers in 1923 were women. In 1929, when the data I will analyse below was collected, 4,565 (29%) out of a total of 15,718 teachers at the primary and elementary level, 135 (14.5%) out of 928 teachers at the secondary school level, and 69 (13.5%) out of 510 teachers at

period, the issue of women's employment was quite popular and remained the same later on. So, it was an acknowledged matter by the public. However, it was not welcomed positively by everyone. Opposing voices emerged from many groups and government policies contributed to that at some point.

2.2.3. *The Politics of Re-domestication: Women and Home in the 1920s*

While the war conditions opened new sectors for the women, after the war a conservative tone was emerging, one that increasingly targeted women's participation in labor force. Besides the new emerging of public sphere and work force that was shared by men and women, new policies were implemented to withdraw married women from the workforce in many countries, to prevent the creation of two separate sources of income in the family. As a result, women have begun to be defined within the boundaries of home, children and marriage, more intensely than ever before. In Turkey, in the first years of the Republic, the approach that equated women with the home-making became stronger. As a result of the evolution of the family structure from the extended family to the nuclear family, which is essentially a continuation of the process that started in the nineteenth century, young men are directed to become the heads of the household, while women are given the duty of assistant to the man/head of the family in taking care of the family. Government policies addressed this issue from the first years of the new state. At the First Education Congress in 1921, it was decided to add subjects related to housewifery to the curriculum of girls' schools.¹⁴⁰ As a continuation of this reflex, several years later, in a fourth graders schoolbook, women's roles were defined within the domestic sphere, emphasizing the strict division of labor. Ali Kâmi's *Yurt Bilgisi* (1927-1928) textbook describes domestic life as an organization around hierarchical relationship centered on

the high school level were women (TUIK, 2014). While it is possible to observe that a significant increase took place from 1923 to 1929, the number of female teachers nevertheless remained quite low. There were also no women among the 515 faculty members in higher education yet in 1929." (Gülhan Balsoy, "Women In Working Life" In *The Early Years Of Republican Turkey*", 17 Mar 2024, *Labor History*.

¹⁴⁰ Mine Demir, "Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Kadın Eğitiminde Bıçkı Dikişin Yeri (1908-1952)" (Ph.D., Sakarya University, 2017), 156–57.

rights and responsibilities. In a very traditional manner, women were expected to handle household chores and childcare, while men were portrayed as the providers who returned home to find everything prepared for them. This framework established a clear distinction between the private and public spheres, positioning men as the "head of the household" responsible for earning income, while women were relegated to obedient roles within the family. As a second responsibility for men, they are depicted as the moderator in case of family conflict, which consolidated their dominant position further. Such representations in educational materials reflected the broader societal expectations of women's roles during this period, highlighting a gendered division of labor that limited women's agency and reinforced traditional domesticity.¹⁴¹

At this point, considering the previous sections on the symbolic value attributed to Turkish women and their emergence in the workforce, an ambiguity arises. The republican norms reinforced women a dual burden to be useful both at home and at the public sphere, creating an impossible ideal. However, looking at the policies and popular culture of the period, the former seems to be more favorable. As discussed earlier, the post-1980s feminist historians criticized the Kemalist reforms precisely because of this contradictory situation, on the grounds that they are aimed at raising enlightened mothers of the nation rather than liberating women.¹⁴²

2.2.4. *Political Connotations of Women Fashion*

In early Republican Turkey, women's fashion became more than a matter of personal style—it reflected the political and social changes of the time. Although traces of this could be seen in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, it was the Republican era that brought about a turning point that would influence contemporary debates on women's clothing. While the state promoted a modern,

¹⁴¹ Füsün Üstel, "Makbul vatandaş"ın peşinde: II. Meşrutiyet'ten bugüne Türkiye'de vatandaş eğitimi, 1. baskı, Araştırma-inceleme dizisi 172 (İletişim, 2004), 187.

¹⁴² Ayşe Durakbasa and Aynur İlyasoğlu, "Formation of Gender Identities in Republican Turkey and Women's Narratives as Transmitters of 'herstory' of Modernization," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 1 (2001): 195.

Westernized image of women, public debate about women's public appearance was growing. Especially during and after the War of Independence, as women became more visible in education, work, and public life, their image began to carry deeper meanings. Clothing choices were no longer just personal decisions; they were also seen as symbols of political values, cultural identities, and social positions that exceeded the boundaries of the individual's body. Modernity and women's fashion had already been part of public debate for most of the previous century, but with the establishment of the Republic, these debates took on a new urgency, specificity, and direction. This section provides an overview of how women's clothing became an ideological area of conflict during this period.

The practical realities of this period played a crucial role in shaping women's fashion. The impact of ongoing wars necessitated greater female participation in public life, easing traditional seclusion and relaxing the practice of *tesettür* (veiling). As women entered the workforce and took on new responsibilities outside the home, their clothing became a reflection of their evolving roles and the ideological tensions surrounding modernization. This era marked a convergence of traditional expectations and modern aspirations, leading to a unique blend of influences that defined women's look.

Understanding the political implications of women's dress during this time requires an examination of these contextual factors, emphasizing how practical considerations and social debates contributed to a broader narrative of women's rights and identity in early Republican Turkey. The complexity of this period has been increased by the intersection of Western, traditional, and Islamic values, most of which tend to restrict women rather than liberate them. Despite these challenges, significant improvements in social norms occurred during these years, and social restrictions gradually eased, ultimately reshaping both women's roles and fashion preferences.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ It should be noted that, these developments mentioned in this section are valid for the middle class women mostly. Their influence on lower classes should be investigated in detail, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The female body has been seen as a symbol of morality since pre-modernity. Traditionally, the female body represents the honor of the family in many societies. With the emergence of modern nations, this meaning has expanded to represent the honor and virtue of the nation. The changing social mobility of women expanded these discussions, as the boundaries began to loosen. As Özlem Dilber cites, in 1918 *Türk Kadını* magazine warns women not to embellish excessively because their appearance in public is considered to be “the criterion for their chastity and honor.”¹⁴⁴ Although the main target of the article was the economic outcome of the excessiveness in fashion, its main emphasis happened to be on the aspect of chastity. This, in turn, fueled public debates that were highly political, with conservatives arguing that abandoning traditional dress threatened women's dignity and Islamic norms, even suggesting that the defeat in the Balkan Wars war happened because of uncovered women. Reformist elites, on the other hand, claimed that conservative clothing hindered the progress of Ottoman society.¹⁴⁵

Rather than the symbolic or moral value of female dress as proposed by the male dominated ideologies, feminists targeted the *peçe*, highlighting its practical discomfort, negative impact on women's health, and its role in restricting their participation in the workforce. As women gained new responsibilities outside the home and adopted jobs in various places, *peçe* was regarded as obstructive.¹⁴⁶ However, as Sevgi Adak points out, these debates around women's attire gained new meanings in the Republican period. The practical aspect emphasized by feminists became secondary, and the symbolic emphasis on female dress deepened, making the ideologically oriented male perspective of the war period more dominant.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Dilber, “Fashion, Handicraft and Women Between the Wars in Turkey: Modernization, Nationalism and Women’s Movement,” 107.

¹⁴⁵ Sevgi Adak, *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in Turkey: State, Society, and Gender in the Early Republic* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 21–22.

¹⁴⁶ Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, 253.

¹⁴⁷ Adak, “Kemalism in the Periphery: Anti-Veiling Campaigns and State-Society Relations in 1930s Turkey.”

With the Republic, the attributed missions of the female body extended, and it became the direct symbolic sign of modernization and secularization. The showcase of the transformation from a traditional and religious society to a modern and secular one has been fashion. Although the *peçe* and *çarşaf* were never directly banned,¹⁴⁸ they were removed from the idealized view and nationalized versions of European clothes were featured in the fashion pages. Hairstyles were also included, and short and modern styles were encouraged. The hairstyles and attire of the women around Atatürk set an example in this regard.¹⁴⁹ As the Republic took shape, Mustafa Kemal never directly called for the unveiling of women, but his speeches implied that traditional dress did not align with the modern national character he envisioned. Just like in many other areas throughout the history of modernization, the image of the Republican woman was constructed with caution against the danger of excessive Westernization and distancing from her essence. Women with a modern and Western image are reminded not to forget their traditional morals even in the fashion pages. Mustafa Kemal warned women against over-Europeanisation and encouraged a middle way that preserved modesty without relying on outdated forms of veiling.¹⁵⁰

Mustafa Kemal's advocacy of simplification of the *tesettür* and recommendation of modest appearance reflected broader attempts to modernize without alienating conservative elements of society. Yet, his main concern was less about clothing than gender discrimination and the exclusion of women from public life, which had become the norm in most parts of the country.¹⁵¹ However, the public perception of the president's preferences led many women, especially among the educated elite and female teachers whose dress was regulated by the state, to abandon the *peçe* and *çarşaf* for more modern alternatives. The press

¹⁴⁸ Kandiyoti.

¹⁴⁹ Dikmen Yakali-Çamoğlu And Bora Ataman, "Fashioning The Body Through Women's Magazines: Remaking The 'Modern Turkish Woman' In The Early Republican Period," *Marmara İletişim Dergisi*, no. 18 (January 1, 2011): 47–64.

¹⁵⁰ Adak, *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in Turkey: State, Society, and Gender in the Early Republic*, 26.

¹⁵¹ Adak, *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in Turkey: State, Society, and Gender in the Early Republic*, 27.

further promoted Western fashion trends, reinforcing the new norms of dress as both modern and national symbols.¹⁵²

Although aimed at men, the 1925 hat reform highlighted the link between dress and modernization and inevitably led to public debates about the *tesettür* for women. Though there was no prohibition, at the very least, modern attire for women suggested the removal of the face veil (the *peçe*) and the substitution of the *çarşaf*, a two-piece outer garment that enveloped the entire body, with a *manto* or overcoat.¹⁵³ Mustafa Kemal's speech against the veil during his visit to Kastamonu reinforced the idea that the veil, like the fez, was incompatible with the ideals of the new regime. This was also reflected in public celebrations such as the Republic Day in 1925, when women, especially teachers, were reported to wear modern hats, revealing changing expectations about the appearance of women in the new Republic.¹⁵⁴

Tayyör, the symbolic outfit of the period, deserves special mention here. This garment, which first appeared during the War of Independence and continued to be popular during the Republican era, was an highly appropriate choice for the idealized image of women. Consisting of a two-piece, knee-length skirt and a jacket, it offers a modern look while avoiding extremity, and functions as a counterpart to the men's suit for women who are involved in working life. *Tayyör*'s simple and masculine appearance was complemented by the hairstyles. Short hair was a must for the European look in women's magazines of the period. Short hair was essentially the reflection of post-war transformations on women's fashion. Women who stepped into professional life began to prefer a masculine appearance in working life. The fashion for short hair for women, which was also

¹⁵² Adak, *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in Turkey: State, Society, and Gender in the Early Republic*, 28.

¹⁵³ Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923-1945*, 88.

¹⁵⁴ Adak, *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in Turkey: State, Society, and Gender in the Early Republic*, 29–34.

new to Europe, became a symbol of modernity and Western appearance in Kemalist Turkey.¹⁵⁵

The appearance symbolized by the tayyör also reflects the controversial nature of the debate on women. Nilüfer Göle draws attention to this, noting that in the early years of the Republic, women's clothing style was desexualized and even masculine. She states “the Kemalist woman abandoned her veil and *çarşaf*, yet it was at this time that she also armored herself and remained “untouchable” in public by veiling her sexuality.”¹⁵⁶ This creates a dilemma for the periodical idealization of woman. The same setting that forced women to leave their femininity behind in public also created a different ideal for private life. Women's magazines, in particular, promoted a properly Westernized image of the good housewife—one who remained fully feminine and not masculinized at all. They were not sexualized either, but femininity was highly encouraged; characteristics attributed to women, such as fashion, makeup, housework, and sexual advice, were given center stage.¹⁵⁷ This is the same kind of contradiction one should expect to find in the identities and practices of the women who witnessed this period. Up to this point, this thesis aimed at the contradictory and paradoxical points of women issues in early 1920s Turkey. This sort of paradoxes, I believe, lets us see the historical transformations with their true nature, allowing to interpret them beyond the grand narratives. The next section will focus on Halide Nusret, as a model to illustrate how these changes reflect on an individual, referring to the historical contexts as needed.

¹⁵⁵ Dikmen Yakalı-Çamoğlu and Bora Ataman, "Fashioning the Body Through Women's Magazines".

¹⁵⁶ Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (The University of Michigan Press, 2007). P. 79.

¹⁵⁷ Sena Şen Kara, “Mehmet Rauf’un Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Yayıncılık Faaliyetleri ve ‘Kadınlığın’ Yeniden Üretimi: Süs ve Gelincik Dergileri,” in *Şedit Arzu: İmparatorluk’ Tan Cumhuriyet’e Mehmet Rauf Edebiyatı*, ed. Deniz Aktan Küçük (Everest, 2024).

2.3. Halide Nusret in Post-War Turkey

The 1920s were a transformative decade for both the Republic of Turkey and Halide Nusret Zorlutuna. She was a young woman who had just entered the public intellectual arena and found herself in the center of personal, political, and cultural upheaval. During this period, the increased visibility of women was generally addressed within the state's discourse on modernity and nationalism, but public debates about women, including Halide Nusret's, were far from homogeneous. This section examines how Halide Nusret, a rising literary figure in her twenties at the time, addressed these tensions through her writings. Although she is generally associated with conservative or nationalist thought, her early works in particular reveal a more daring and critical voice, one that questions the restrictions imposed on women and emphasizes the emotional and moral costs of gender-based expectations. At the same time, her personal writings, especially her diary from those years, reflect her struggles, desires, and daily experiences from an intimate perspective. Comparing these two genres with articles published in periodicals reveals the heterogeneity of her writing. These writings help trace the formation of her public and private personas, shaped both by her experiences as a woman and by the socio-economic conditions and cultural capital of her educated, upper-middle-class background.

An initial analysis of Halide Nusret's works in search of ideological consistency revealed that this was a baseless assumption. On the contrary, these works should be viewed as a field of contradiction shaped by genre, audience, and historical context. This section is organized thematically to highlight the multiple ideological positions she adopted as a fiction writer, teacher, and intellectual, and the points at which these came into confrontation with the broader debates of the time. On this basis, it is argued that the early period of Halide Nusret's career provide a valuable alternative to the dominant narratives of the post-war years and the early Republic, which either idealized or marginalized women's voices.

In addition to the information previously provided about Halide Nusret's life, I would like to make a note about the socio-economic situation during those years, as this directly influenced her stance on women's issues. World War I deeply

affected Halide Nusret's family, as it did many middle-class families of that period. The conditions of war, the loss of male members of the household and the accompanying economic privation led to a decline in the social status of many families of this class.¹⁵⁸ As İrfan Orga's memoir illustrate, class privileges were eroded by the loss of breadwinners alongside various factors such as famine and fires.¹⁵⁹ Halide Nusret experienced a similar trajectory as the death of her father coincided with the outbreak of the war. Both hers and her sister İsmet Kür's autobiographies narrate how this chapter of their lives was shaped by financial difficulties.¹⁶⁰ In the early years, coinciding with late Hamidian and Second Constitutional era, they used to live in mansions in upper-class neighborhoods of Istanbul. During the war years, the era of mansions ends, and the family faces financial issues which was mostly because their father Avnullah Kazımı died in 1914. This tragedy found a household consisting of a woman and two daughters, in the middle of the war. In this way, they began to experience conditions that challenged traditional gender roles and class distinctions. During this period, the war economy melted the fortunes of many families, forcing them to part with their possessions in order to feed their households. Halide Nusret recounts how they were forced to sell their valuables, including precious family heirlooms, for next to nothing.¹⁶¹ These conditions influenced her professional life during her early adulthood and played a significant role in shaping her attitude toward women's public roles.

Her ideological orientation further shapes her stance on women's issues. Although often categorized in the literature as a typical nationalist writer, her position uniquely blends nationalism with Kemalist, feminist and religious ideals in nuanced ways. This heterogeneous position is strongly felt in Halide Nusret's writings. By examining both her publications and her personal archive, it becomes

¹⁵⁸ Akin, *When the War Came Home: The Ottomans' Great War and the Devastation of an Empire*, 146.

¹⁵⁹ İrfan Orga, *Bir Türk Ailesinin Öyküsü* (Everest, 2023).

¹⁶⁰ İsmet Kür, *Yarısı Roman* (Everest, 2011); Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, *Bir Devrin Romanı* (Panama, 2021).

¹⁶¹ Zorlutuna, *Bir Devrin Romanı*, 125.

clear that she embodied many contradictions as an individual, re-revealing the necessity of approaching women's history with a multidimensional perspective that embraces the complexities of individual figures.

2.3.1. Halide Nusret's Nationalism and Religiosity

Halide Nusret's intellectual and literary outlook was based on two main ideological foundations: nationalism and religiosity. Especially in the early 1920s, these two frameworks often complemented each other in shaping her moral and social ideals, with nationalism serving as the basis for religiosity. This section precedes the discussion on gender because both nationalism and religiosity deeply informed Halide Nusret's understanding of womanhood. Her views on women's roles—as mothers, educators, moral guides, and citizens—cannot be fully understood without first examining the ideological foundations that shaped her thinking. Yet, her combination of female experience with this highly patriarchal ideology is unique, especially when compared to the male-oriented literature on this topic.

This section will begin with a theoretical discussion of the intersections of gender, nationalism, and religion, drawing on feminist and postcolonial academic studies that examine how women are positioned in nation-building projects. This context will help to place Halide Nusret's writings within global discussions about the gendered construction of national identity and moral order. Following this, this section will provide a brief overview of how Halide Nusret expressed nationalism in her works, with a brief reference to her personal history. It will explore the moral duty on woman as she adopted in her public voice. Then, as a counterpart to these moralistic tendencies, it will approach religious understanding not only as a personal domain but also as a framework for social morality and collective responsibility. Together, these elements provide the necessary context for understanding how she positioned women in the national-religious project of the Republic of Turkey and for seeing the contradictions created by this rigid worldview in different types of texts that will be examined later.

Yuval-Davis and Anthias locates five ways in which women participate in national processes: as the biological reproducers of the members, as reproducers of the boundaries between ethnic/national groups, as participating the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and transmitters of the culture, as signifiers of ethnic/national differences and as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles. They conclude that the division of labor between the male and female counterparts of the nation created a set of new and modern inequalities among them.¹⁶² As stated by Sancar, nationalist ideals determine the role of women in the nation in a heterosexual manner. They are defined by giving birth and encouraged to contribute to the nation in terms of biological construction of society. Accordingly, the caregiver and educator roles of the children are assigned to women.¹⁶³ This view puts women into a passive position. As Mosse states, nationalism defines men as the “protector,” and women (and children, as an integral part of the former) are “protected.” It is the chastity and honor of the women which is protected in a general sense. As an additional task, women were obliged to be faithful to their moral duty.¹⁶⁴ These myths that fix the position of women to the vulnerable half decreases their agency and puts them in a passive position. Another consequence is that women as the symbol of the nation becomes an asexual being.¹⁶⁵

Nationalist trends which had been gaining strength in the second half of the nineteenth century became particularly visible after the emergence of Turkism as the main ideology of the state during the Young Turk era. This shift also influenced the construction of the ideal Turkish woman, which Sancar describes as “a nurturer and educator of the nation's children, an active participant willing to fight when needed, a symbol of puritanical feminine sexual morality, and someone who sacrifices for her country and family while embodying obedience

¹⁶² Nira Yuval-Davis et al., eds., *Woman-Nation-State* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19865-8>. p. 7.

¹⁶³ Serpil Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti: erkekler devlet, kadınlar aile kurar*, 1. baskı, Araştırma-inceleme dizisi 302 (İstanbul: İletişim, 2012), p. 57

¹⁶⁴ Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti*. P. 56.

¹⁶⁵ Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti*. P. 63.

and silence without contradiction."¹⁶⁶ In this respect, the family is a concept that is utilized as a tool to protect the nation. As women were defined at home, serving the family, their roles also secured by this protection. Joane Nagel explains how family metaphor works for nationalist as follows: "'The nation is a family where men and women play their 'natural' roles, with a male head of the household. While women are subjected to domination in nationalist movements and politics, they occupy a central symbolic place as the mothers of the nation."¹⁶⁷ The women of the Turkish nation defined in a similar way, equalized with the domestic sphere. As Şirin Tekeli put it, one side of the "schizophrenic existence" of the republican women was created by this ideology, which was fortified by the post-war conditions.¹⁶⁸

The influence of nationalist discourse on women, as summarized above, is clearly evident in Halide Nusret's perspective. Among the many social issues she addressed throughout her writing career, nationalism stands out as the most enduring theme. It consistently emerges, either explicitly or implicitly, in the various genres Halide Nusret wrote in, functioning as a repetitive subtext that shapes both the content and tone of her work. She was influenced by the ideas of nationalist intellectuals such as Namık Kemal, Mehmet Akif and Ziya Gökalp from the early years of her life. In her autobiography, she mentions the reading rituals in their home. Her parents, especially her mother was mentioned as "bookworm" by her. In Her early ages, she made Halide Nusret memorize couplets from Namık Kemal and Ziya Paşa.¹⁶⁹ If her early education was one significant factor that shaped her nationalist stance in the post-war years, another was the occupation of Istanbul by Allied forces and the Greek-Turkish War of 1919-1922. In her autobiography, she deals extensively with the ideological, economic and social devastation of war years, but does not give enough space for

¹⁶⁶ Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti*. P. 194.

¹⁶⁷ Joane. Nagel, "'Erkeklik ve Milliyetçilik: Ulusun İnşasında Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Cinsellik," in *Vatan, Millet, Kadınlar* (İletişim, 2000), 84.

¹⁶⁸ Şirin Tekeli, "'Türkiye'de Feminist İdeolojinin Anlamı ve Sınırları Üzerine' ('On the Meaning and Limitations of Feminist Ideology in Turkey')," *Yapıt Dergisi*, no. 9 (March 1985): 54.

¹⁶⁹ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, *Bir Devrin Romanı*, Ankara: Panama, 2021, p. 23.

a gendered perspective. This gap is addressed through her writings from that period, which will be analyzed next. They reveal her views on the central role of women in the nation's revival. Her perspective was inspired by the sense of national duty expressed by the authors she read in her youth and by the women's movement that developed during the war years.

The nationalist themes are especially dominant in her writings during the Armistice years. That experience shaped her tone in the first years of the republic. In “Yeşil Türbesi ve Camii,” she remembers the Greek occupation with grief.¹⁷⁰ She imagines the white turban of the caretaker of the *türbe* (shrine) taken off by the Greek bayonet; the colorful glasses of the Yeşil Türbe shattered by the Greek bombs. This nightmare-like image ends with the words of her aunt, telling “see, ours (soldiers) appeared on top of that hill firstly!”¹⁷¹ The stress on the word of “ours” calms her grief like a breeze. She looks around, pleased by the scene of the city full of “our people.” This tone is visible in her other articles from the same year. In “Bursa Yollarında,” which was published in *Süs* magazine, she mentions how she marveled at the beauty of Bursa when they entered the city.¹⁷² She sees a soldier, watching the city, who looks like the living monument of the Turk. She states, “when the Turkish land is this beautiful and the Turk is this strong, I think, is it possible for these places to belong to others (the enemy)?”¹⁷³ These texts reflect how her perception of the nation is shaped by the occupation years, which she experienced in Istanbul. In her autobiography, she remembers those days, by stressing her admiration of the nation with phrases like, “the pure blood of the Turk,”¹⁷⁴ or “the noble existence of the Turk.”¹⁷⁵ She states similar position in an interview in 1983, titled, “Halide Nusret Zorlutuna Milli Mücadele Yılları

¹⁷⁰ “Halide Nusret, “‘Yeşil’ Türbesi ve Camii,” *Milli Mecmua*, no. 3 (December 1923): 42–43.

¹⁷¹ “Bak, Nusret, bizimkiler ilk defa işte bu dağın üstünde göründülerdi!” Halide Nusret, “‘Yeşil’ Türbesi ve Camii,” 43.

¹⁷² Halide Nusret, “Bursa Yollarında,” *Süs*, August 18, 1923.

¹⁷³ “-Türk ili bu kadar güzelken ve Türk bu kadar kuvvetli iken, diye düşünüyorum, kâbil mi bu yerler ağyârın olsun?...” “Bursa Yollarında,” 3.

¹⁷⁴ Zorlutuna, *Bir Devrin Romanı*, 133.

¹⁷⁵ Zorlutuna, *Bir Devrin Romanı*, 163.

İstanbul'unu Anlatıyor.”¹⁷⁶ Apparently, her nationalist discourse did not change until her later ages, as the articles from 1920s resembles her later statements. Her attitude involves a level of discontent against the non-Turk elements in the country, which is even more evident in the autobiography. While telling about the Independence War, she adopts a discriminating tone about the minorities: “The minorities, who were furious and were attacking all around them in a vicious manner, were also silent. A sense of bewilderment and cowardice had settled over them. Just seeing them in this state was a happiness for us, a unique victory.”¹⁷⁷ Her discontent towards minorities is also felt in her early writings, albeit not to this extent.

During these years, when she was developing her nationalist stance, Halide Nusret's public writings reflected a tone that positioned women within a distinct gendered framework. Drawing on similar themes related to the aftermath of the occupation period, she responded in another article to Celal Sahir's praise of Russian women by condemning them for the moral corruption of the city. This response was marked by a noticeably misogynistic tone. For her, the young Turkish boys were seduced by the Russians; as such, the last pieces of the Turkish fortune were sacrificed to passion of Russians, along with the morality of our sons.¹⁷⁸ She places the moral responsibility of the nation on the shoulders of women, whether local or foreigner. This is a typical patriarchal, nationalist tone, making the women responsible for the moral acts, while refraining from condemning the Turkish boys for their lack of self-control. Thus, her attitude is compatible with the nationalist definition of gender roles at large.

Another example demonstrating that Halide Nusret's public stance was generally consistent with the nationalist definition of gender roles is her descriptions of Muslim womanhood. Although in the examples she gives about the moral decline, the subjects are mostly the Turkish men, in her articles, such as “Sukût ve Esbâbı,” she discussed the moral decline of female generation, as a

¹⁷⁶ Nezih Demirtepe, “Halide Nusret Zorlutuna Milli Mücadele Yılları İstanbul'unu Anlatıyor,” *Türk Edebiyatı*, no. 115 (May 1983).

¹⁷⁷ Zorlutuna, *Bir Devrin Romanı*, 201.

¹⁷⁸ Halide Nusret, “Bedbaht İstid'a,” *Süs*, no. 14 (Eylül 1923).

catastrophe.¹⁷⁹ Following the nationalist ideals, she regards modesty and good moral education of woman as the pillar of the revival of the nation. This reveals the patriarchal nature of the nationalist ideals, leaving women alone in the moral mission. Her article “Müslüman Kadını Nasıl Olmalı?” highlights the unmoral acts of women, which happens to be their clothing: “At a time when our homeland is being torn apart by the most terrible disasters, it is impossible not to protest on behalf of womankind when we see some of our women wearing revealing clothing!”¹⁸⁰ The article concludes with a call that reminds them of their sacred duty: “Come on, my dear (Muslim) sisters, wake up from the slumber of ignorance into which you have fallen. Thirteen centuries (referring to Prophet Muhammed’s time) of hope for sovereignty await your pure and passionate souls!”¹⁸¹ As seen, Islam is an integral part of the Turkish nation for Halide Nusret. Especially in the early phases of the decade her references to Islam in a nationalistic manner is more visible.

To give an example of her perception of religion, her article titled “Dedikodumun Dedikodusu” is a good source, since she directly confronts her religious side.¹⁸² The first part of the article is about her witnessing two of her readers discussing her religiosity by gossiping about her outfit, which was a popular topic of that time. Here, I want to mention the last part of the article to give an outline of her relationship with religion. She tells an anecdote with a high school student, who complains about her religion teacher. When she objected about a religious story that when one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammed praying, he did not feel the pain of a big nail on his feet. The teacher gets very angry at her, begins to shout, telling they all became unbelievers, i.e.,

¹⁷⁹ Halide Nusret, “Sukût ve Esbâbı,” *Genç Kadın*, March 13, 1335.

¹⁸⁰ “Ana yurdun en feci felaketlerle kıvranıp parçalandığı şu zamanda bir kısım hanımlarımızın hicâb-âver kıyafetlerini görüp de kadınlık namına isyan etmemek mümkün değil!...” Halide Nusret, “Müslüman Kadını Nasıl Olmalı?,” *Sebilürreşad*, Haziran 1335, 63.

¹⁸¹ “Haydi aziz hemşireler, daldığınız gaflet uykusundan artık uyanın on üç asırlık saltanat ümidini sizin temiz, sizin ateşli ruhlarınızdan bekler!” Halide Nusret, “Müslüman Kadını Nasıl Olmalı?”

¹⁸² Halide Nusret, “Dedikodumun Dedikodusu,” *Süs*, no. 32 (Kanunusani 1340): 3–4.

kafir. Halide Nusret calmly explains the punchline of the story, telling about divine love. The girl is convinced and says that she would accept it if the teacher told it like this. This anecdote summarized Halide Nusret's religiosity. She concludes the article with this to express the difference between religiousness and bigotry. By stressing love, she also signals her tendency to *tasavvuf* (mysticism). Another important aspect of this anecdote is that she does not back down against accusations of bigotry. The way she expresses her religiosity is not hesitant and that is the most precise positioning Halide Nusret expresses.

The way Halide Nusret connected religious elements to national culture does not feature in her writings after 1924. She tries not to be provocative and remains silent about this issue for a long time. A major factor behind this silence is the new chapter in the history of Republic which is marked by the abolishment of Khalifate (1924), Şeyh Said rebellion and *Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu* (the Maintenance of Order Law). These interconnected events ultimately brought an end to both political pluralism and the free press.¹⁸³ The Republican reforms continued to build upon this momentum, leading to the enactment of the Hat Law and the Law for Closing the Tekkes and Zaviyes in 1925. These measures were perceived by many as an attack on religion, and public dissent was met with the strict measures of the *İstiklal Mahkemeleri* (the Tribunals of Independence).¹⁸⁴ This course of events fastened the secularist agenda and foreshadowed the authoritarian regime that was to strengthen in the 1930s. The public discussions about certain subjects were limited, and religion was one of the major ones. As expected from Halide Nusret, a non-revolutionary soul who desire to offend no one with her opinions, as she already stated in one of her articles in 1923, remained consistent with this stance during *Takrir-i Sükûn* period and the

¹⁸³ Hamit Bozarslan, "Kurds and the Turkish State," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, ed. Kate Fleet et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 341.

¹⁸⁴ Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek-Parti Yönetimi'nin Kurulması (1923-1931)*, 158.

following years until the late 1940s, and did not make religious references as she did in the aforementioned articles, as a result of this period.¹⁸⁵

This section outlined Halide Nusret's nationalist views, which are closely linked to religious ideals. Her portrayal of nation and homeland reflects a patriarchal framework that leaves no room for critical thinking about women's roles or the restrictions they face. At the same time, the transformations in the way these ideas are expressed reveal how she negotiated broader ideological shifts in the national discourse. In the following sections, nationalism will continue to appear as subtle content across other thematic contexts. Having examined an area where her public and private personas largely coincide, I will now turn to her views on the legal status of women—a subject on which she adopted a distinctly bolder and more direct tone.

2.3.2. Legal Discussion on Women and Halide Nusret

As the Turkish Republic underwent a process of secularization, Halide Nusret's primary tension with the emerging order stemmed from questions of Westernization and modernity. Yet, her views on women's roles were above simplistic categorization. While she did not adopt a feminist framework, she advocated for women's participation in society and acknowledged their agency. Her interest in women's rights, particularly in the context of marriage and civil law, reflects a multi-dimensional attitude which is shaped by the legal reforms of the period. Halide Nusret's writings on this issue do not conform to expected religious conservative patterns, but rather reveal an area of negotiation, tension, and complexity.

Before detailing her opinion pieces, it is important to note that despite what she herself described as a “non-revolutionary soul,” Halide Nusret was not disconnected from the Turkish women's movement. Her relationship with the women's movement during these years remained somewhere between reluctance and willingness. She has been involved with the Women's Union since its

¹⁸⁵ Halide Nusret, “‘Yeşil’ Türbesi ve Camii.” “Ben büyük inkılâpçı, mücadeleci ruhlardan değilim; halkın hissiyatını incitecek şeylerden daima sakındım. Kendi isteklerimle, kendi fikirlerimle kimseyi gücendirmek sinirlendirmek istemem.”

establishment. In 1923, during the union's first year—when it was still structured as a political party under the name *Kadınlar Halk Fırkası* (Women's People's Party)—she was an active participant and even served as the moderator of the party's first meeting, while their political structure was not hindered and was still a political party.¹⁸⁶ Despite this central role in the party, Halide Nusret's name is not mentioned among the activities of the group, including Yaprak Zihnioğlu's seminal book about the union.¹⁸⁷ After all, this first meeting itself was not considered a success, as reflected in Osman Cemal's satirical commentary in *Akbaba* magazine. Yet, this oblivion about Halide Nusret during the first years of the union should be explained by her irregular participation in the following years—likely due to her teaching post in Edirne—and by her ideological distance from the Union's legal and political agenda at the time.¹⁸⁸ The Union's activist and confrontational tone may also have discouraged her from deeper involvement. Her name reappears in relation to the Union only in August 1928, when the organization adopted a more conciliatory stance toward the regime. Although her involvement in the official women's movement was decreasing, her writings from this period—especially those responding to legal reforms—and the significant attention she gave to this topic in her fiction demonstrate her ongoing interest in the role of women in society.

In response to the agenda of the new Republic, she wrote two opinion pieces directly about the legal status of women. They consist of two main points; the debates surrounding the *Hukuk-u Aile* (Family Law) and the reactions of the Turkish Women's Union to these legal discussions. Before analyzing these writings in detail, this section provides the necessary historical context regarding the political and social conditions of Turkish women during this transformative moment.

¹⁸⁶ Osman Cemal, "Kadınlara Dair: Kadınlar Halk Fırkasında İlk İçtima," *Akbaba*, Haziran 1339.

¹⁸⁷ Zihnioğlu, *Kadinsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*.

¹⁸⁸ Halide Nusret mentions in her autobiography that she got back for the 1926-27 school year. Zorlutuna, *Bir Devrin Romanı*, 331.

The years 1923–1924 marked a particularly intense period of legal and political debate about women’s rights. Yaprak Zihnioğlu mentions them in her monograph about Nezihe Muhiddin, as she was one of the main actors. During the last half of 1923, the new government decided to rearrange the 1917 Family Law. The Women’s Union mobilized for making it in favor of women. Their main request was elimination of *talak* (divorce, on man’s hand) and *taaddüd-i zevcat* (polygamy). In January 1924, the union made a call for the women of Istanbul for a huge meeting in Turkish Hearths, to which around 300 women participated. Nezihe Muhiddin gave a speech about the harms of those two notions, degrading the position of women in the society. She adds, no women can fulfil her duties as a housewife under these circumstances. She concluded her speech reminding the democratic nature of republic: “It is our right to expect from our secular Republic, which does not separate women from the community of the nation, that the rights of men and women will be respected equally in marriage, divorce and property inheritance.”¹⁸⁹ This meeting draw a great attention and discussed by the prominent publications during the following days. *Süs* magazine published an entire issue dedicated to that meeting, which included one of Halide Nusret’s writings. With the influence of the debates created by the Women’s Union’s meeting, the new Family Law of 1926 included some changes in favor of women. They gained the right to divorce while polygamy was banned. However, it was still not equal, on the grounds that it legalized the hierarchical order in the family, establishing men’s position as the superior counterpart.

Just before the union’s call, Halide Nusret wrote an article in late 1923 titled “Kadınlara Hak-ı Talak” (The Right to Divorce for Women), demonstrating her engagement with the ongoing legal discussions.”¹⁹⁰ In this piece, she initially appears to oppose the right to divorce, arguing that granting women equal divorce rights could lead to a 60 percent increase in divorce rates. She attributes this potential increase to the anger that builds up in women in response to men’s

¹⁸⁹ Nezihe Muhiddin, “Türk Ocağında İlk Kadın İctimaında Nezihe Muhiddin Hanımefendi Tarafından İrad Edilen Hitabe,” *Süs*, no. 33 (Kanunusani 1340).

¹⁹⁰ Halide Nusret, “Kadında Hak-ı Talak”, *Süs*, nr: 30, 3 Kanunisanı 1339 (1923)

negative attitudes. She suggests that while men consider their own lives legitimate despite their miserable, evil, and disgusting ideas, poor women remain oppressed. Halide Nusret emphasizes the tendency of men towards infidelity, asserting that no woman would tolerate such betrayal and remain in the marriage. Consequently, she believes that this would inevitably lead to higher divorce rates. As an example of a peculiar attitude, she states, "He doesn't let go even when he has the chance, which means that he is still more attached to her than to other women."¹⁹¹ She sees this as a consolation and prefers it to divorce, taking an extremely conservative stance. Despite this unusual perspective, she criticizes the law that grants men the right to divorce against women's will. She believes it is horrible for women to depend on the words that come out of men's mouths, as this has disastrous social consequences. Her suggestion is to make divorce conditional on mutual agreement, like marriage. Thus, despite her conservative and non-feminist attitude, she proposes an equal position for men and women. Similar to her reflections on other controversial issues, Halide Nusret's position on this topic is neither radical nor revolutionary for her time. Instead, she defends women's rights within a safer framework. In the last paragraph of the same article, she addresses the issue of polygamy, stating how cruel to even mention it. While Halide Nusret opposes men's right to practice polygamy, her reference point is the new Republic's reputation in foreign policy; "This is ridiculous, ugly, and intolerable. It is so terrible that it will even affect our foreign policy, making us appear barbaric and savage in the eyes of civilized nations. No man with even a little bit of common sense would approve of such a thing anymore."¹⁹² Although she could have elaborated on how polygamy affects women's lives, as she did with the issue of divorce, she chooses to provide a more acceptable justification for the state, recognizing that foreign reputation was one of the primary concerns of the

¹⁹¹ "Bırakmak elinde iken bırakmıyor, demek ki yine, başka kadınlardan ziyade ona merbut ." Halide Nusret, "Kadında Hak-ı Talak," *Sûs*, no. 30 (Kanunîsani 1339).

¹⁹² "Bu gülünç, çirkin ve gayr-i kabil-i tahammül bir şeydir. Hatta bizim siyaset-i hariciyemize dahi tesir edecek, bizi medeni memleketler nazarında barbar ve vahşi bir millet gösterecek kadar berbat bir şeydir. Buna bir parça düşünme kabiliyeti olan hiçbir erkek artık cevaz vermez." Halide Nusret, "Kadında Hak-ı Talak."

new republic. Perhaps as a sign that the women of the period were well aware of the regime's agenda—later criticized by post-1980s feminist historians—Halide Nusret sought solutions for women within a patriarchal framework, seemingly conscious that the primary goal of the Kemalist elites was to gain diplomatic recognition through advancing women's rights.

Halide Nusret's opinions in this article reveal a political stance that is neither stereotypical nor entirely consistent. Rather, she often shifts between conflicting positions. In "Kadınlara Hakk-ı Talak," she approaches the issue from multiple angles. While her initial perspective aligns with a traditionalist framework that prioritizes the protection of the family, she gradually shifts her emphasis toward protecting women against the potential harms of divorce by giving them equal authority over divorce. Ultimately, she appears to align herself with the emerging official discourse of the early Republic. Thus, the article presents a synthesis of feminist ideals and traditional gender norms—a combination that leads to a certain degree of inner conflict.

Halide Nusret wrote another article in the special issue of *Süs*, responding to the Women's Union's meeting held at the Turkish Hearths.¹⁹³ She notes that her impressions are based on what she heard from friends who had attended the meeting and on the sarcastic commentary she read in *Vatan* newspaper.¹⁹⁴ She adds she was not able to attend it because the next day she would be on her way

¹⁹³ Halide Nusret, "Türk Ocağında İctima," *Süs*, no. 33 (Kanunusani 1340): 13.

¹⁹⁴ "Hanımların Türk Ocağındaki İctimai," *Vatan*, Kanunusani 1340. In the newspaper, the Turkish Hearths meeting is given on the front page. As Halide Nusret stated, it was written in a highly ridiculing style. For example, the article mentions that the prosecutor of the Independence Courts, Vasıf Bey, was consulted during the discussions as follows: "But it was decided to appeal to the opinion of Vasıf Bey, the prosecutor of the Independence Courts, who was stuck in a corner, as a proof that women could not be without men." Moreover, Nezihe Muhiddin's opening speech, which laid out the main outlines of the meeting, is only mentioned as a detail. This rather long article, perhaps as a journalistic maneuver, confines itself to mentioning the speculative discussions of the meeting. The column is dominated by discussions that project the situation of women as their responsibility, while more pressing issues such as divorce and polygamy are pushed to the background.

to Edirne, where she begun to work as a teacher.¹⁹⁵ Rather than directly engaging with the legal dimensions of the discussions, she focuses on the polemics during the meeting. While doing that, she initially frames marriage as a partnership grounded in legal equality, she ultimately discourages direct confrontation with men, instead emphasizing emotional persuasion as a more effective strategy.

She opens the article by expressing her anger at a woman who criticized others for seeking equality in marriage, quoting her dismissive remark: “two acrobats can't play on the same rope.” Halide Nusrets writes, “If life is a stage and we are its actors, the husband and wife should always appear on this stage, hand in hand and together. Family is a partnership. Partnership in life, partnership in feelings, partnership in wisdom, always partnership.”¹⁹⁶ She emphasizes the importance of equality between men and women within the family, reflecting her general stance on women’s legal rights—namely, that women should have equal status before the law. However, her tone in this part of the article is careful and diplomatic, resembling the speech of a politician who avoids taking a firm stance that might alienate either side. Rather than directly supporting the feminist demands raised in the Women's Union meeting or fully embracing the traditional discourse, she appears to balance both.

Yet, in the second half of the article, she shifts toward a more conservative view, advising women to influence men not through open confrontation, but through emotional manipulation, stating: ‘we must gradually, step by step, without letting them feel it, take them where we want them to go!’¹⁹⁷ She believes that women can sweet-talk men into compliance and that equality can only be achieved in this way. In doing so, she undermines female agency and places the emotional responsibility for maintaining harmony in the household on women. Her non-revolutionary attitude appears again here, as she assumes that men will

¹⁹⁵ Her diary corrects this, because the first pages she wrote in Edirne are dated 19 January 1924, two days after the meeting.

¹⁹⁶ Halide Nusret, “Türk Ocağında İctima.” “Eğer hayat bir sahne ise ve biz onun oyuncularısak zevç ve zevce bu sahne üstünde daima elele ve baş başa görünmelidir. Aile bir iştiraktır. Hayatta iştirak, hissiyatta iştirak, hikmette iştirak, hep iştirak.”

¹⁹⁷ “onları yavaş yavaş, adım adım, kendilerine hissettirmeden, istediğimiz yola çekip almalıyız!”

eventually realize the harm this system causes women, and that the regret they feel for the rest of their lives will be enough punishment for them.¹⁹⁸ Thus, without taking a rigid stance or directly opposing either view, she approaches the subject in a balanced manner. As in her previous writing, she adopts an approach that embodies both feminist thinking and traditional roles. Perhaps the reason her name rarely appears in the history of women's rights is because of this ambiguous and somewhat unconvincing stance.

In comparison to these two articles, where she adopts a diplomatic and somewhat romantic position, Halide Nusret's fictional works from the same year reflect a different perspective. Because of the restrained stance she takes in her public writings, it is necessary to look beyond these texts to fully appreciate her significance in the history of women. Unlike her public persona, which tends to avoid direct confrontation with society, her fictional works from this period display a much sharper and more questioning attitude, making her an especially interesting figure. The stories titled "Öldüren Kadınlar Serisi" (Killer Women Series) which she wrote in 1923, are particularly worth examining in this context. These plots include a female murderer and a male victim. However these stories are not typical murder tales; the women who commit the murders are not stigmatized like characters in detective fiction. Instead, the aim is to develop empathy with them, allowing us to hear their voices directly. By establishing a position that is largely overlooked by the literary canon of her time, she highlights female subjectivity. Although the murderers are women, all the instigators are male characters, reflecting the patriarchal system that legitimizes men's dominance over women. The trapped women find freedom by killing men. In contrast to her articles where she speaks of an ideal world where women were respected, her stories portray the harsh reality of women's lack of agency in relationships during that period. Thus, she expresses her central concern more directly through her fictional work.

¹⁹⁸ "Ve erkekler hakkımızı vaktiyle gasp ettikleri için, kalplerinin en gizli yerinde daima bir nedamet yarası taşıyacaklar. Bu onlara kafi bir ceza değil mi?"

"Sahibini Öldüren Kadın" (The Woman Who Killed Her Owner) reflects the complex issues surrounding women's freedom and autonomy in early twentieth-century Turkey. The very title of the story immediately brings the question of freedom to the forefront, as the protagonist is referred to as the "owner" of her lover, rather than his wife or partner.¹⁹⁹ This choice of words suggests that the act of killing her "owner" is a result of her quest for liberation. The narrator begins describing the main protagonist, Nermin, a beautiful 24 years old woman shaking with the innocence of a child. After her parents' death, she came across with İbrahim Bey, whom she begins to live with. Though a wealthy man, he was too stingy that their relationship turned into a economic torture for Nermin.

Throughout the narrative, readers witness this misery experienced by this young, beautiful woman who finds herself in a man's life due to her lack of social support and economic resources, consequently, bound by his rules. The author's decision to present this story in a courtroom setting allows for a discussion of the legal aspects of the protagonist's actions. The fact that the woman has nowhere else to go and sees no other choice but to kill her "owner" to escape his stinginess is not independent of the period's debates on women's legal and economic rights. The Civil Code of 1926, which granted women more rights within the family institution, was a significant milestone in this regard, and the discussions surrounding it had been ongoing since the late Ottoman period. Nermin, the protagonist, commits the murder because of the economic violence she has endured. This tragedy highlights the bad conditions of women who are lack of social support are entirely dependent on men (either a father or a partner) financially.

The story refers to the man as a "*sahip*" (owner), and there is no indication of a legal marriage. What is particularly noteworthy is that this non-traditional relationship is not discussed in moral terms, as one might expect from a traditionally-minded writer like Halide Nusret. On the contrary, the story

¹⁹⁹ Halide Nusret, "Öldüren Kadınlar Serisi: 1- Sahibini Öldüren Kadın" (Hikâye)," *Türkiye Edebiyat Mecmuası* 1, no. 2 (1339): 16–18.

portrays Nermin with purity and innocence, offering no criticism of her character. It even invites empathy for her when she says, “I did not feel pain or remorse, Your Honour. I was such a pure, careful, and virtuous girl that I did not feel the horror and terror of this sudden disgrace.”²⁰⁰ These words are spoken by a character who is positively portrayed, reflecting the author's criticism of a system that reduces women to the status of property by taking away their right to make decisions about their own lives. This shift in tone demonstrates how Halide Nusret—who often places the moral burden on women in her nonfiction—adopts a more sympathetic and woman-centered discourse in her fiction.

“Eşini Öldüren Kadın”²⁰¹ (The Woman Who Killed Her Husband) has a similar plot with the former. A female character's quest for freedom is depicted through her act of murdering her husband. The narrative, conveyed through a letter she writes to a friend, details how Ruhsar kills her husband, who subjects her to both psychological and physical violence driven by jealousy. Initially, the couple experiences a heavenly relationship, but Fuat's jealousy gradually transforms their life into a living hell. Upon witnessing Ruhsar gazing longingly at a photograph of her brother, Fuat becomes intensely jealous and speaks of the indivisibility of love. He restricts her interactions with friends and family, even going so far as to be jealous of her cat, her lute, and her novels. Ruhsar, who cannot read the works whose authors are alive because of Fuat's jealousy, turns to classical divan poetry, whose authors have passed away long ago. This has a symbolic message towards modern-traditional dichotomy, regarding the literary discussions of that era. Divan literature symbolizes tradition, and often subjected to criticism for belonging to the past. So, this also implies how her husband kept her away from modern life. On a symbolic level, it shows how legal bindings keep women trapped in the past. It thus points to the deficiencies of modern nation-building in relation to women.

²⁰⁰ “İçimde acı ve nedâmet hissetmiyordum, Hakim Bey, ben o kadar temiz, o kadar itinalı ve faziletkâr yetişmiş bir kız, bu ani alçalışın fecaat ve dehşetini duymuyordum.” Halide Nusret, “Öldüren Kadınlar Serisi: 1- Sahibini Öldüren Kadın” (Hikâye).”

²⁰¹ Halide Nusret, “Öldüren Kadınlar Serisi 4 Eşini Öldüren Kadın,” *Türkiye Edebiyat Mecmuası* 1, no. 4 (1340).

Fuat's imprisonment of Ruhsar at home becomes more and more intense. Eventually, he becomes envious of the divan poet Nedim as well, leading Ruhsar—who has lost all agency—to tear up the book. At this point, Ruhsar's patience reaches its breaking point. One night, when Fuat discovers a letter she wrote to her brother and, in a crisis of jealousy, throws it to her face. Ruhsar seizes his gun in a moment of crisis and kills him. The subtext of this story bears resemblance to "Sahibini Öldüren Kadın" (The Woman Who Killed Her Owner); in this case, jealousy replaces economic violence as perhaps an even more potent form of oppression. Fuat's attempts to restrict Ruhsar's social interactions escalate to the point where he exerts complete control over her daily life, even going so far as to physically harm her by pulling her hair. Like Nermin in the previous story, this narrative features a woman who loses her agency under male guardianship and ultimately commits murder in defiance of her nature. A common characteristic of these two episodes in the *Öldüren Kadınlar* (Killing Women) series is that none of the women are depicted within traditional female roles; concepts such as motherhood, partnership, or morality are not central. Instead, the focus is on problematizing their positions within their relationships and with their partners.

The central issue across these stories is the inability to establish equal relationships and the persistent male dominance over women. Halide Nusret does not express this critique as openly in her opinion pieces; her writings on women's rights to divorce or their role within marriage are more cautious and distant. Instead, rather than advocating transformative change, they often encourage patience and strategic flexibility. By contrast, her fictional narratives do not pursue such a dialogical approach. Rather than including the male viewpoint, the stories center female agency and subjectivity. Although the women portrayed are patient and willing to wait for their circumstances to improve, this patience does not lead to positive results. Rather than showing remorse or sensitivity, the male characters reinforce a pattern that contrasts with the hopeful tone of the *Süs* articles. This contradiction highlights that the real problem lies not in women's choices, but in the destructive actions of men who avoid responsibility and in the systemic conditions that disempower women.

2.3.3. *Halide Nusret's Reflections on Women's Role in the Workforce*

The early Republican period, characterized by post-war reconstruction and the transition from empire to nation state, brought new visibility to women's participation in public life, particularly in the workforce. While the political framework for women's rights was still fluid, women's presence in the economic sphere was expanding on a much more concrete and imperative basis. In addition to all the necessities, of course, this issue was not without its share of moral and ideological debates. Halide Nusret, a writer sensitive to the social conditions of women, was at the ideological and practical center of this changing landscape through her articles, stories and private accounts. At this early stage in her career - when state feminism had not yet emerged and the women's movement was relatively independent - her approach seemed rather authentic and influenced more by personal and moral frameworks than by moral discourse or government ideology. However, this independence was not always aligned with progressive feminist views, too. On the contrary, in dealing with the issue of women's work outside the home, she adopted a cautious and often traditional tone. Yet, this traditional tone in Halide Nusret's articles stemmed from her lived experiences, rather than on a purely ideological basis. Because of this, there is relatively more overlap between her public and private accounts on this issue.

In 1923, she wrote an article specifically addressing the issue of women in the workforce. Her conflicting position emerges in this article particularly. She tells about a signboard of “Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyet-i İslamiyesi,” (Society for the Employment of Muslim Women).²⁰² In Turkish, linguistically “çalıştırma” can both mean “make somebody work” (infinitive) and “do not make somebody work” (imperative). Halide Nusret states her wish that the title of this society meant the latter, operating against women's employment. She continues to depict her vision of a society so prosperous that women would not have to work and could live happily at home with their children, engaged in the fine arts. For her, employment is an unwanted necessity for women. If women choose to work when it is not necessary, she considers this to be irrational. She expresses a traditional,

²⁰² Halide Nusret, “Kadınları Çalıştırma!...,” *Süs*, no. 28 (Kanunuevvel 1923).

conservative view that male and female roles are distinct and separate. Working in rough, materialistic conditions like men is not desirable for women. She writes: “A lady who wants to be a clerk in a company or an accountant in a business, instead of lovingly raising and educating her child and decorating her hair and rooms, and busying herself with music and poetry, painting, sewing and embroidery,” deserves to be hospitalized.²⁰³ This ideal reflects the widely accepted image of women during the post-war period, shaped by changing gender roles. The topic gained popularity at the time, as men were returning to their jobs and public roles after the war, similar to trends in other parts of the world. Halide Nusret also mentions her discussions with friends about this issue. According to her, some women said they did not want to be dependent on men or feel grateful to them for providing financially. Halide Nusret disagrees, arguing that it is a man’s responsibility to support the household and that women do not owe them thanks. She presents this as a simple division of labor. Up to this point, her argument aims to protect women within a conservative and traditional framework. However, in the second half of the article, she admits that this ideal does not match the reality women face. She writes:

“Unfortunately, life is like this now! The dream is finally a dream, and it is only beautiful. The whole of Turkey - What a disaster, what a poison! - is full of widows and orphans, and more than half of our women must work to live. The woman became a soldier, a clerk, an accountant, a merchant, and even a garbage collector. I think how vain and miserable are the heads that do not bow down with respect and blessing before this honorable obligation to work!”²⁰⁴

²⁰³ “Çocuğunu seve öpe büyütmekten ve terbiye etmek-ten arta kalan saatlerde saçlarını ve odalarını süslemek, musîkî ve şiirle, resimle, dikiş ve nakışla meşgul olmak varken kalkıp da falan dairede kâtip yahut da bilmem hangi ticarethanede muhasip olmak isteyen bir hanım elbette bu muameleye layıktır!...” Halide Nusret, “Kadınları Çalıştırma!..”

²⁰⁴ “Mamafih şimdi hayat maalesef bu! Hayal nihayet hayaldir ve yalnız güzeldir. Bunun bütün Türkiye -ne felaket ne zehir!- dullar ve yetimlerle dopdolu ve kadınlarımızın yaradan ziyadesi, ya- şamak için çalışmak mecburiyetinde. Kadın asker, kâtip, muhasip, tacir, hatta çöpçü oldu. Bu mecburiyeti sa’y-ı namuskârâne önünde hürmet ve takdîsle gelmeyen başlar, düşünüyorum ki ne kadar boş ve bedbaht!” Halide Nusret, “Kadınları Çalıştırma!..,” 4.

Halide Nusret's ideal of womanhood differs significantly from classical feminist expectations. However, her understanding of women's realities was shaped by her personal experiences, which provided a different perspective from the predominantly male viewpoints of her time as well. At the end of the article, she relates an anecdote about a young male artist who sarcastically mocked working women. For her, it is particularly surprising to encounter such discourtesy from such a young and seemingly cultured person. For him, women are merely decorative elements in life, pleasing to the eye but lacking in essential value. In response to this attitude, Nusret expresses her desire for the strong, female-led societies: "That day, for the first time in my life, I wished that all the women in the world would work like men, that there would be great women's governments, and that these little gentlemen - with lace aprons tied in front of them - would be employed in sweeping and washing dishes."²⁰⁵ This tension with that artist revealed a side of her that she allows only in her fiction to emerge. This unique moment of frustration reveals a side of her personality that she typically expresses only in her fictional works. It shows the tension between her public support for traditional gender roles and her personal experiences as a working intellectual woman, reflecting the complexity of her position within gender debates.

While her normative and conservative stance on women's issues is more prominent in her public persona, her private diaries and fictional works more closely reflect the reality of her experiences. Her first diary, available in the archive, has two parts that convey some parts of her life in 1920 and 1924.²⁰⁶ Although brief and not very detailed, the diary offers insight into her inner thoughts about her professional career as a woman. It reflects her strong dedication to her work. In the 1920 section, she writes about her time working in

²⁰⁵ "Ömrümde ilk defa o gün, dünyadaki bütün kadınların erkekler gibi çalışmasını, muazzam kadın hükümetleri teşkil edilmesini ve bu biçim küçük beyleri de -önlere dantelalı birer önlük bağlayarak- ortalık süpürmek, bulaşık yıkamak gibi vazifelerde istihdam etmeyi arzu ettim." Halide Nusret, "Kadınları Çalıştırma!...", 4.

²⁰⁶ Zorlutuna Halide Nusret, "Günlük," Diary, İstanbul, 1924 1920, 10011-3-143, Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı.

the Postal Service, with one of the most detailed memories focused on her experiences in the office. The second section of the notebook, from 1924, begins with her new career as a teacher in Edirne. It is likely not a coincidence that these career changes prompted her to start keeping personal notebooks. Throughout the notebook, there is no depiction of home or any domestic aspects of her life. Her memoirs mainly focus on her inner thoughts, economic difficulties, and her work. While she idealizes housewives in her projected self, she neither experiences this lifestyle nor expresses any desire to do so.

To provide general context for the first part of the notebook, it is worth noting Halide Nusret's living conditions and narrative tone. At the time of her 1920 diary, she was residing with her mother and sister in their own house in Vefa which seems to be a shared flat. With tenants from different classes in the rooms, Halide Nusret writes that this environment is well-suited for observing and analyzing human souls. Living with other people seems like an opportunity for her literary self. On the other hand, she complains that she cannot find any time to analyze them because she is wandering deep inside her own soul.²⁰⁷ This tension—between outward observation and inward reflection—recurs throughout her writing career. Her melancholic disposition surfaces across a wide range of topics, from politics and women's rights to religion. It is thus unsurprising that she opens her diary with a reflection on the internal conflict between her two selves.

After this brief introductory section, she begins a new subsection titled "Pazar Günü Dairede" (Sunday in the Office), dated the same day. Before becoming a teacher, she worked briefly at the National Post and Telegraph Directorate, and this part of the diary corresponds to that period of her life. She mentions that Refik Halid, a prominent writer of the time, helped her secure the job. She also states that she was the only woman working there. This section portrays her outside the domestic sphere, where she appears less sentimental and

²⁰⁷ "Burası ruhların tahlili için o kadar müsaid ki... Çeşit çeşit, biçim biçim insanlar! Vakit bulup kendi ruhumdan çıkabilsem de azıcık onları teşrih etsem ne iyi olacak. Fakat mümkün mü?... ruhumun karmakarışık yollarında dolaşmaktan başka bir şeye vakit yok ki..." Halide Nusret, "Günlük," 1924 1920, 24 Teşrin-i Evvel Pazar Gecesi.

melancholic. Still, she is not happy as she says; “My life here is also strange. There is no reason to be dissatisfied and no reason to be satisfied. But it's better than nothing, no doubt. A change, though; then some financial help. I haven't received a salary for a month and a half, but anyway...”²⁰⁸ The only complaint of hers is that she did not get any payment for a while, but still, she was content with having a job.

In the same section she says that they moved to Vefa, one of the oldest and poorest neighborhoods in İstanbul, from Göztepe, a relatively higher one in terms of socioeconomic standards. She makes comments on her new life, comparing the two towns and the people of Vefa and herself. She is on the edge of arrogance, pointing out how different they are from her. As she states, they are simple and primitive souls, but she has no difficulty about getting down to their level. For her, they are happy and content souls that have everything she does not have. She experiences a kind of intellectual breakdown at the end of this section and envies their simplicity: “What will happen to being tired with vague, ambiguous and complex things?... Is there no one left but me to investigate the secret of creation? Am I the only one who can heal the eternal wounds of humanity?”²⁰⁹ It is not a surprise that she romanticizes them and never mentions the socioeconomic differences and the realities of those people. This attitude is visible throughout the diaries.

The second, and the longer part of the first diary begins with her first day in Edirne as a teacher, in 19th Kanunusani 1924. She writes a small entry stating: “I am satisfied... Thank God, I am even happy... I found the school far beyond my expectations.”²¹⁰ This feeling of satisfaction and contentment prevails throughout

²⁰⁸ “Buradaki hayatım da bir acayip. Memnun olmamak için bir sebep yok, memnun olmak için de bir sebep yok. Mafahi şüphesiz hiç yoktan iyi. Yine oldukça bir değişiklik; sonra maddi bir yardım. bir buçuk aydır bir para da maaş alamadım ya, neyse...” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1924 1920, 24 Teşrin-i Evvel Pazar Gecesi.

²⁰⁹ “Ne olacak müphem, muğlak, karışık şeylerle yorulmak?... Sırr-ı hilkati araştırmak için benden başka kimse kalmadı mı? Beşerin ezelden gelip ebede giden yaralarını saracak bir ben miyim?...” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1924 1920, 22 Teşrin-i Evvel Cuma Gecesi.

²¹⁰ “Memnunum... Allah'ın çok şükür, hatta mesudum... mektebi ümidimin kat kat kat fevkinde buldum.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1924 1920, 19 Kânunusani 1924.

this second part of the notebook, which covers a nine-month period, including the first semester and the summer. For the most part, she emphasizes the happiness around her, highlighting her good relationships with the people around her, the conditions at school and how much she misses her mother and sister. She describes her life in Istanbul as pure agony, which probably contributes to her satisfaction with her new life. One reason for this feeling may be that Istanbul is a painful reminder of the war and the subsequent Armistice years. Those years brought great devastation to her and her family, as well as the society at large. Her family lost everything they had, including their wealth and class privileges. Another possible reason is the distress she experienced in her personal life. In her autobiography, she briefly mentions a broken engagement due to her mother's objections.²¹¹ Although she refers to it as a youthful romance, her sister, İsmet Kür, reveals that she never forgot that man throughout her life.²¹² This lingering resentment toward Istanbul likely strengthened her sense of relief and happiness in Edirne, where she could distance herself from the painful memories associated with home.

As a young woman, who is away from the comfort of home, struggling with the new city, harsh winter weather and the perks of new job, she is almost always finds a way to amuse herself with her job, which makes her feel fulfilled. One evening, during a gathering for *Regaip Kandil*²¹³ with her fellow teachers, she notices a young girl who reminds her of her sister İsmet and bursts into tears. However, later that evening, when her students come to kiss the teachers' hands as a sign of respect, the gesture lifts her spirits: "After dinner, all our girls came in droves and kissed our hands one by one. Being a teacher is very enjoyable in certain ways."²¹⁴

²¹¹ Zorlutuna, *Bir Devrin Romanı*, 157–61.

²¹² Kür, *Yarısı Roman*, 289.

²¹³ Regaip Kandili is an Islamic holy night observed on the first Thursday of the month of Rajab in the Islamic calendar.

²¹⁴ "Yemekten sonra bütün kızlarımız sürülerle gelip birer birer ellerimizi öptüler. Muallime olmak bir cihetten pek zevkli şey." Halide Nusret, "Günlük," 1924 1920, 10 Şubat 924 Pazar gecesi.

The only negativity she particularly emphasizes in these entries is her financial difficulties: “I’m happy with my life. Thank God My happiness continues. But I’m short of money. I couldn’t even go to the movies because of that today.”²¹⁵ Compared to other challenges, such as longing for her family, poverty is an unbearable burden for her, one for which she can find no solace. One night, when a close friend reads a letter describing her poverty, she is visibly upset and cannot remain calm: “Yesterday, for the second time since I arrived here, I cried deeply. Zehra accidentally opened a letter I had written to Fahriye in distress, where I spoke about my financial struggles and other concerns. This upset me terribly, and I cried and cried, which in turn offended her. Now, it seems we are not on good terms.”²¹⁶ The class transformation she experienced a few years ago seems to have left an important and possibly traumatic trace on her. More profoundly than any other experience, it has shaped her vision. Rather than idealizing women’s labor, she frames it as a necessity—something that may be required due to economic pressures. At the same time, her personal attitude is more sophisticated: although she acknowledges the structural difficulties women face, she emphasizes the sense of fulfillment she finds in her own work. Her statement that she is happiest when she is dedicated to her professional duties reveals the tension between material conditions and personal fulfillment. This tension is the foundation of much of her writing on gender roles.

Comparing her self-portrait in the diary with the idealized female figures in her earlier works reveals a clear contradiction. There is no sign of domestic life in her reality, highlighting the tension between the dominant female ideals of her time, which she partly accepted, and the life she chose for herself. She never mentions having a husband or resolving her economic problems through marriage, which does not appear as an option in her memoirs. Instead, she

²¹⁵ “Hayatımdan memnunum. Çok şükür. Saadetim devam ediyor. Yalnız parasızım. Bugün o yüzden sinemaya bile gidemedim.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1924 1920, 29 Kânunusani 1924 Salı gecesi.

²¹⁶ “Dün buraya geleli ikinci defa olarak adam akıllı ağladım. Fahriyeye yazdığım ter içinde parasızlığımdan filan bahsettiğim bir mektubu Zehra yanlışlıkla açmış. Sinirime dokundu, ağladım ağladım. Onun da gücüne gitti. Şimdi dargın gibiyiz.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1924 1920, 2 Şubat 1924 Cumartesi.

became a teacher at a young age and often expresses her passion for the profession. Teaching was considered an appropriate occupation for women during that period and aligned with societal expectations. However, she initially took the job out of economic necessity and also worked in other roles, such as office work. Whenever she discusses how she started teaching, she stresses that financial need was her main motivation. Although she idealizes a family structure centered on a male breadwinner, she never actively pursues this solution for herself. Moreover, in her diaries and autobiography, she states that she is not particularly interested in housework

Thus, Halide Nusret's idealized public-private balance for women does not exactly coincide with her own life. It seems meaningful to explain her views on women's work through her class position. It is true that she ideally supports the traditional roles assigned to women, but the tragic background of women leaving home in the post-war years and Halide Nusret's personal connection to this background also affected her stance. In this sense, she is already in a liminal position. Although she does not idealize working life for women, Halide is aware of the conditions of her period. Her attitude about work-home notions in idealized women roles should be considered given the conditions of the post-war world and her personal experience.

Although she appears to belong to the same class as other intellectual women of her time, she experienced financial difficulties and found herself in the position of breadwinner for a fatherless household. This may also have influenced her non-alignment with the conventional feminist thought of the period.²¹⁷ According to her, working outside the home is necessary but not ideal. Here, her personal story and ideals coincide. In this sense, I want to point out Halide Nusret's unique position in the period's debates and how her class ambiguity differentiates her in this regard.

²¹⁷ For example, Sabiha Sertel's idealization of working women contributing to society from a socialist perspective was a topic of debate during that period. Sertel never embraced being at home or domestic roles. Her autobiography shows that she still held this view in the 1960s. Sabiha Sertel, *Roman Gibi* (Can Yayınları, 2015).

Working becomes compulsory under wartime conditions, influenced by backgrounds like widowhood and orphanhood. Viewing women's roles solely from the perspective of economic independence is insufficient. In Halide's context, she lost her father to pneumonia at the beginning of the war and was left to support her family of three women. Due to her father's political past and years in prison, they received a very small allowance. Additionally, under wartime conditions, they had to sell what they had for next to nothing. Halide started teaching under these circumstances. Her trajectory, demonstrated by her autobiography and her early diaries, are reflected on her fictional works, more than it does in her opinion pieces.

An indicator of Halide Nusret's empathy for working women is the main character of the novel *Sisli Geceler*²¹⁸ (1922), Zehra. She is the ideal character of the novel, which has some autobiographical aspects. She lost her parents at an early age and had to work as a secretary in the hospital, like Halide Nusret's job at the postal service. At the end of the novel, she happens to be a teacher, working for national enlightenment, as the writer herself. However, her stance on the working of women is apparent in the plot. When her future husband, Fikret was to talk about his marriage plans with her, he is worried that his mother would not accept her as daughter in law because Zehra was working. His mother hated working women so much that she regards all of them as flighty and banal. At the end, it turned out his mother did not care about this fact at all. This detail is mentioned in the early chapters of the novel and does not come up again in the plot. The only purpose of this section is to point out the reputation of working women in the society. As Halide Nusret was also a working woman, this was not a criticism but a warning. If there is a message about women's working in these pieces, it would be a subtle criticism against the lack of social security for the women and children.²¹⁹ So, while Halide Nusret advocates the traditional roles

²¹⁸ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, *Sisli Geceler* (Panama, 2019).

²¹⁹ While she is aware of the circumstances the worker women live, she does not question the life housewives forced into. This is the distinction between her and the feminist and socialist women of her period.

for the sexes, her attitude is fortified by the economic and social conditions of the period.

In conclusion, the influence of the state and patriarchal norms that confine women to the domestic sphere certainly shaped Halide Nusret's hesitations about women's work outside the home, but it is insufficient to explain her stance by these factors alone. Her personal experiences, shaped not by restrictions but by a degree of flexibility and empathy, played an important role in shaping her views. Moreover, while wartime initiatives are often viewed positively by modernist, nationalist, and feminist scholars for supporting women's emancipation, the harsh conditions women faced during this time had a major influence over the public's attitudes against women's work in the early Republic. Tragic circumstances, such as losing homes, food shortages, and taking on male roles in the workforce under severe conditions and gender-based discrimination, made working a heavy burden rather than empowerment. These experiences influenced Halide Nusret's views on women's employment, showing the complexity behind her stance. Paying attention to the mismatch between her idealized public image and her more ambivalent private thoughts not only provides a deeper understanding of her individual position, but also illuminates the broader gender and class realities of the time - realities that have not been sufficiently explored in the literature.

2.3.4. Halide Nusret's Approach to Women's Domestic Roles

The tension between modern ideals and the domestic expectations of women formed a central debate during the early Republican period. While Republican modernity encouraged women's public participation, it simultaneously idealized domestic roles as essential to the moral and cultural strength of the nation. Halide Nusret, confronting this dilemma, often celebrated traditional roles such as homemaking and motherhood in her public writings. She defined child-rearing as a sacred national duty and often considered it superior to professional work. In the previous section, these themes were discussed alongside women's participation in the workforce through both public and private writings,

including her articles, diaries, and fiction. By narrowing the focus to her fictional depictions of domestic life, this chapter examines how her novels reflect not only the moral idealization of domestic life, but also its emotional and psychological burdens. While Halide Nusret's public persona privileges traditional gender roles - even from an empathetic perspective - her fictional works reveal a more unsafe and complex picture of domestic life. From this perspective, the contradictions between Halide Nusret's ideological stance and the realities she observed (or experienced) become more apparent.

Halide Nusret agrees with the role of women with a perspective of a nationalist as discussed before. According to this discourse issues of honor, virtue and chastity are the burden of women, as safety and livelihood of her is husband's job. In that sense, women are to be protected by men, which is quite typical in nationalist discourse.²²⁰ It is a peculiarity about Halide Nusret's nationalist stance that she does not regard men as the protector of the family, a position that surfaces in her ego-documents and fictions alike. Her personal life contradicts that kind of pre-determined family structure, which was shaped not only by their living conditions but also by her own preferences. As this section will reveal, also her fictional works in 1920s depicts more resistant characters to patriarchal norms. They either suffer from the over-protective male characters, or object to the system for not being credited as agents of their own lives.

Serpil Sancar states that women did not have a significant presence in the modern institutions of the newly built Republic and draws attention to the gendered and passive roles they occupied in modern nation-building. Their contribution occurred under the rule of men. Accordingly, women gained a degree of subjectivity in this process by "building the house/nest of the modern Turkish family, which will be one of the most important strategic areas of managing the modern Turkish state and society."²²¹ The mainstream literature of the period is also shaped by this perception. The ideal woman of these novels is a tamed and docile type who does not go beyond the boundaries set by patriarchy

²²⁰ Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti*.

²²¹ Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti*, 308.

and tradition. This female image almost always coexists with its opposite. Tülin Ural talks about how the dandy type of the Tanzimat period, which was almost always male, was portrayed as a woman in the novels of the early Republican period. Besides the fact that they neglect their “female duties” and can easily lose and “waste” their honor, one of the important points that distinguishes this new type of snob from their male counterparts in the Tanzimat Era is that they are not grotesque like them, but “downright evil.”²²² Thus, the image of a woman who is profane, manipulates men, is fond of jewelry and clothes, and most importantly, cheats, is frequently found in the texts. The “wrongly Westernized,” degenerate women type whose dangers are pointed out in the works of writers such as Peyami Safa and Yakup Kadri are examples of this.²²³ Women are dangerous unless they are tamed and guided to approach modern life from the right side. This type of woman, defined as a parasite with her wastefulness and fondness for things, is also described as immoral due to her lust. As a result of this understanding that women represent their “home” in every sense, women's chastity is equated with the honor of society. Therefore, the suppression and domestication of female sexuality is determined as the first goal in fending off this threat.²²⁴

Halide Nusret's novels are against this attitude that dominates the literature of the period. In these novels, women are depicted as characters who have been the victims of accusations of unchastity and over-protection. Although there are some instances the patriarchal discourse is visible in them, her fictions of this period involve a level of objection and reaction against the potential harms of it. In those works it is possible to detect how she differs from this passive position of women. In her short story, “Hintlinin Aşkı”²²⁵ which was published in

²²² Tülin Ural, “Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Romanında Feminist Söz,” in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasal Düşünce: Feminizm* (İletişim, 2020).

²²³ Bkz. Berna Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış 1: Ahmet Mithat’tan A.H. Tanpınar’a* (İletişim, 2009).; Deniz Kandiyoti, “Cariyeler, Fethan Kadınlar ve Yoldaşlar: Türk Romanında Kadın İmgeleri,” in *Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar: Kimlikler ve Toplumsal Dönüşümler*, trans. Sirin Tekeli (Metis Yayınları, 2019).

²²⁴ Şen Kara, “Mehmet Rauf’un Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Yayıncılık Faaliyetleri ve ‘Kadınlığın’ Yeniden Üretimi: Süs ve Gelincik Dergileri.”

²²⁵ Halide Nusret, “Hintlinin Aşkı,” *Milli Mecmua*, no. 11 (March 1924).

Milli Mecmua on 1924, it is possible to trace how she gives agency to the female protagonist within a conservative/nationalistic framework. The story takes place during the Armistice years. One of the notables of the society, Halim Bey and his family relocates to a village in the Asian side of Istanbul. He has a daughter, Mübine, who is introduced as a well-educated character with knowledge of English and who plays violin. One day Halim Bey comes home with an Indian soldier of the Allies, Han Bahadır. He is a nice, handsome young man who became a family friend in a short time. His regular visits are enjoyed by the family, especially Mübine. Han Bahadır is such a kind soul that Mübine forgets that he is a part of enemy army. They built a nice friendship which turned into romantic feelings over time. When it is time for him to leave, he proposes her, telling he could stay. Mümine tells him to ask her father, before her answer. This was just to gain some time because she is not sure. After some thinking, she decides it is not possible since he is an enemy soldier. She says that his lineage is unknown. Her parents get quite happy with her decision, even though they did not reveal their feeling about the proposal before asking her. This story is on one hand a classical story of self-sacrificing, patriotic Turkish women. Even though her lover looks like a perfect man in terms of look and manners, she rejects him with patriotic feelings. Her statement reveals the patriarchal anxiety of spoiling the breed, which is a danger almost always for the women's marriages. So, the story has deep patriarchal and nationalistic roots. On the other hand, it does not suppress the voice of the woman, making her the only actor of this decision. Mübine is depicted as an intelligent, confident and strong women, who is not saved or forced for a certain fate, which is not very common in this genre. The young woman is not put in a fragile position by the writer, as opposed to most of her male contemporaries. The author gives the obvious message avoiding dominance over the character.

Halide Nusret opposes the protection discourse in her novels with a more complex structure. Her male characters from the early 1920s, are usually far from being idealized. Although in the popular culture and Halide Nusret's own articles women are the object of criticism about the moral decay in the society, her novels depict ideal women against weak men. In *Küller* (1921) she tells the story of over

jealous man and the domestic violence, manipulation and murder he commits against her wife.²²⁶ Ali Namık and Suzan used to be happily married, until he kills her over hysterical thoughts. The novel begins with the letter of Ali Namık's niece Naime. She is curious about her uncle's life and the death of his late wife. The letters are dated 1916, while the novel was published in 1921. In Namık letters, we go back to Hamidian era.²²⁷ Namık's letters turns into a confession pieces, as he tells how he deliberately killed Suzan. Namık's love for Suzan was so unhealthy that he resorted to psychological violence against her. At some point Suzan decides to conceal herself from all men but Namık, which was quite conservative for the narrated time of 1908. The confinement of women to the private sphere and their loyalty to the boundaries of the patriarchal tradition is essentially a situation that Halide Nusret does not critique in her public persona. Thus, the critical subtext in this novel reveals the author's dilemma, between the genres.

At the climax of the story, Suzan senses his plan to kill her but does not resist. She does not replace the poison in the injector, but takes out the bullets from the gun, which was for Namık's suicide. So, this unselfish woman sacrifices herself for the wellbeing of her husband and children, since Namık's jealousy would not rest until she dies. Although Suzan appears to be an idealized wife and mother, this story is not focused on constructing the ideal woman, but rather a warning against domestic violence and the dangers of male hysteria within the family. So, what is idealized by Halide Nusret in her opinion pieces and message-bearing poems, questioned in her fiction, targeting the male citizens of the nation.

²²⁶ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, *Küller* (Panama, 2019).

²²⁷ While depicting the era, Halide Nusret places her criticism against despotism. This is meaningful, since she was the daughter of Avnullah Kazımi, who stayed in prison throughout her childhood due to opposition to Hamidian regime. On the other hand, she uses her not-so-ideal protagonist to express her political background, which makes the character more complex than a classical villain. As a matter of fact, as Namık is the narrator of the story, we learn about the events from his point of view. So the novel establishes the characters far from being stereotypical, but quite complex. In the novels of the same years, written by male writers, this kind of complex character structure is not common. Prominent novelists of the period such as Peyami Safa or Yakup Kadri writes about the ideal men against corrupted or weak women. Their female characters does not show this kind of complex personality.

Commenting on the message of this novel, Bilge Ulusman notes that “the ideal wife is here; but where is the ideal husband? The 'romantic love' constructed by late Ottoman women's writing, freeing it from arranged marriages and polygamy, is once again turned into a disaster by patriarchy.”²²⁸ Halide Nusret chooses Namık, an enlightened man and opposer of autocracy, as the perpetrator of domestic violence and criminal of the plot. This twist reveals that the promises of modernity and nationalism, often embodied by male actors, failed to transform private life and gender relations. By exposing the incompatibility between the ideals of the nation and the lived experiences of women, her works of fiction complicate the image of woman presented in her public writings and invite a more critical reading of domestic life as a site of both personal and political struggle.

The tragic end of the main character, Suzan is also a response to male novelists' hysteria about female chastity. She is killed by her husband Ali Namık because of obsessive jealousy. For Namık, Suzan, who is the love of his life, depicted as “a poisonous, beautiful woman who, like a chameleon snake, changes to a different color every day.”²²⁹ Suzan, who is aware of her husband's morbid jealousy, is the epitome of patience and dignity. Thus, this novel raises a voice against the dominant discourse of the literary canon which forces femininity between the boundaries of domesticity and unchastity by the male state and male novelist. The fictional works of female authors that challenges the patriarchal bias in the Early Republican era, is usually included in the "sentimental novel" category in literary history.²³⁰ Thus, male hysteria, a product of patriarchy, becomes the norm within the canon, and the response of female writers to it is devalued. Halide Nusret is an interesting figure with her dual attitude in this environment. She does not take a direct stance against the perception of women of her time, in her non-fictional publications. The author, who sometimes states that she is not

²²⁸ Ulusman, “Kadın Yazınının İmkânları: Türkçe Edebiyata Jino-Eleştirel Bir Okuma Denemesi (1895-1950).” p. 228.

²²⁹ “Bukalemun bir yılan gibi her gün başka bir renge giren bu zehirli, güzel kadının...”Zorlutuna, *Küller*, 51.

²³⁰ Halide Nusret is not the only example of this genre. For more detail about the female reaction to the male canon, see: Ulusman, “Kadın Yazınının İmkânları: Türkçe Edebiyata Jino-Eleştirel Bir Okuma Denemesi (1895-1950).”

reactionary or radical, conveys this reaction to the reader indirectly through her fictional works.

Halide Nusret wrote another novel called *Sisli Geceler* in 1922, one year later than *Küller*, touching upon similar themes. In this novel, similar to the other, she questions the patriarchal structure of the family, the chastity of women and the adequacy of male citizens. It tells the story of an extended family of Kenan, who lives with his wife's mother and siblings, along with his own sister, Mine. The story opens with a happy family scene. As the narrative proceeds, we witness how this happy portrait begins to shatter. The main reason behind it is the engagement arranged for Mine and Nüzhet, Kenan's brother-in-law when they were small children. Nüzhet knew about it all along and developed feelings for her. Mine, on the other hand, is unaware of it and has secret feelings for Fikret, Nüzhet's brother. This love triangle, created by the patriarchal norms, demolishes the family in the end. In the hands of another author, Mine might have been cast as a villain or a stereotypical shrew. However, Halide Nusret offers a more refined portrayal by adding emotional depth and moral complexity to the character of Mine. Instead of being stigmatized for her desires or decisions, Mine is presented as a character shaped and limited by her environment. The narrative allows readers to see the very subtle emotional manipulation and family pressure she was subjected to, giving a more empathetic and critical perspective on her position in the domestic tragedy.

In contrast to the empathetic approach to the female characters, the male characters in this novel, as in *Küller*, are weak and non-idealized. At the end of the story, Mine's feelings were exposed by the psychological pressure of Fikret, who also loved her since childhood. Fikret was quite decent man at the beginning. He is a doctor with a good character. He falls in love with Zehra and they get married in a short time. They go to Anatolia during the War of Independence to help those suffering. He is a true patriot in that sense, which Halide Nusret values in her writings. However, eventually his secret feelings for Mine are revealed. This results in Mine's implicit suicide. Zehra, on the other hand, can never fully forgive Fikret. Ulusman comments that Fikret was the male perpetrator of these

incidents.²³¹ Zehra is the ideal character, by following all the rules regarding morals and chastity. Mine questions all those rules imposed to women as; “Conscience, honor, virtue... What empty concepts, my God, these are just empty words...”²³² Still, she does not act against them. It was Fikret who breaks them by coming to Mine’s room for his sexual desire. Although Mine dies because of this incident, it was Fikret who was accused of dishonor. Zehra forgives her husband and have other children later, but she states in the last scene that she never forgets what happened. She is idealized one again with her nobility and she becomes the only idealized character of the story. Fikret is left with his heart-searching and remorse. So, once again, Halide Nusret’s fictional work draws a different picture than her opinion pieces that imposes the burden of family honor to women. Fikret is not the only male character that acts dishonorably. Ömer Naim, Fikret’s cousin loves Zehra and tells her that in a quite hysterical manner. Zehra brings him to his senses with her good temper. As she forgives her husband, she forgives Naim, too, and heals both with her compassionate but reasonable approach.

Both Halide Nusret’s life writings (including her autobiography and diaries) and fictional works reflect the theme of female independence, which is particularly articulated thriving in the absence of a male hero. Though it is not defined as a deficiency, this absence is evident in her own experiences, which mirror the narratives she created in her novels and short stories. She lost her father when she was just 13 years old, and after graduating, she had to work various jobs to support herself and her family. For a significant period, she, her mother, and her sister lived as a nuclear family in a female-driven household. However, this was not the typical family structure that she and other nationalists idealized. Although they faced many financial difficulties, bringing a man into their household to share the burden was never an option for her. For Halide Nusret, marriage was a matter of love rather than a national duty. In neither of her diaries from 1920 or 1924 does she express melancholy over matters of the heart or a desire to get happily married. This perspective reflects a sharp contrast to her

²³¹ Ulusman, “Kadın Yazınının İmkânları: Türkçe Edebiyata Jino-Eleştirel Bir Okuma Denemesi (1895-1950),” 333.

²³² Zorlutuna, *Sisli Geceler*. P. 161

ideals for the women of the nation. Recalling Mosse's argument that nationalism often portrays women as less agentic and more vulnerable beings,²³³ Halide Nusret does not depict herself or her female characters in accordance with this nationalist imagination.

Regarding her autobiography, it is worth noting that, in terms of genre, the theme of domesticity presents an exception to the typical formulation of public and private personas. Hülya Adak highlights the sharp distinction between public and private identities in women's biographies from early Republican memoirs, and Halide Nusret's autobiography is no exception.²³⁴ It typically reflects her idealized self, adhering to social norms rather than challenging them, and it often refrains from revealing her private self—similar to her opinion pieces from that period. While the autobiography does mention certain private aspects of her life, it ultimately maintains a focus on the idealized persona she presents. Yet, marriage and domestic life are among the few topics where her stance aligns with the genres in which she manifests her private persona, such as her fictional works.

In *Bir Devrin Romanı*, she usually idealizes her youth, being far from being radical in any topic. However, her self-portrayal as a strong, independent woman providing for both her family and the nation through teaching stands in contrast to the period's ideals, which promoted traditional values that positioned women as less active agents and more subordinate within a male-headed family structure. While she complains about their financial difficulties, she does not attribute them to the absence of a man, which differs from her stance in a 1923 article where she idealizes a male-supported family model.²³⁵ In fact, she signals the opposite. She remembers the days when she was appointed as a teacher to Edirne as: "According to my thinking at the time, there was no need to get married and have children after becoming a teacher. A "man of the house" and a few

²³³ Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti*, 56,63.

²³⁴ Hülya Adak, "Suffragettes of the Empire Daughters of the Republic: Women Auto/Biographers Narrate National History (1918-1935)," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 36 (2007): 28.

²³⁵ Halide Nusret, "Kadınları Çalıştırma!.."

children. No, this would divide one's heart and one's work.”²³⁶ Clearly, she does not hide the fact that she was not idealizing marriage and housewifery for herself, while writing her autobiography in 1978. She expresses her belief that she was born to teach. Her nationalist side emerges in this part, believing it is the best way for her to serve the country. Yet, this stance, which she openly adopts for herself, does not emerge as a clear call to influence the women of the nation in her writings. Instead, it remains subtly embedded within the underlying themes of her fictional works.

2.3.5. *Halide Nusret's Reflections on Women's Attire*

Women's clothing has long been central to discussions about their presence in the public sphere—a subject with both global and local dimensions. The post-war years witnessed a peak in these debates, as the war significantly influenced women's appearance, mostly for practical reasons. In Turkey, as elsewhere, these changes coincided with shifting cultural and moral frameworks, intensifying concerns about women's attire. During this period, Halide Nusret generally regarded the clothing of Turkish women as a national symbol of moral integrity. However, her way of expressing this issue evolved over the course of the decade.

Following the establishment of the Republic, various regulations were introduced regarding national dress. The political meanings attributed to women's clothing changed rapidly: while veiling and the *çarşaf* carried positive connotations during the war, as the symbol of sacrificing Turkish women, they later became to be viewed as symbols of backwardness. Halide Nusret engaged with this issue more directly in the immediate post-war years. As the political context changed, however, she largely stopped addressing this issue in her writings until the 1930s which will be discussed in the next chapter. This shortage of material on the subject also applies genre-wise. This subject does not appear in her personal writings and works of fiction, which makes it stand out among

²³⁶ “O zamanki düşünceme göre, insan öğretmen olduktan sonra evlenip çokluk çocuğa karışmasına da hiç lüzum yoktu. Evde bir "evin erkeği," birkaç da çocuk. Hayır, bunlar insanın kalbini de, çalışmalarını da bölerdi.” Zorlutuna, *Bir Devrin Romanı*. P. 214.

other themes in her works. Therefore, this section will focus primarily on her opinion pieces and autobiography.

In 1919 Halide Nusret wrote an article titled “Tesettür Meselesi,”²³⁷ which is a response to the discussions around hijab and its compatibility with modern society. She wrote this article at time when a new symbolic value attributed to women’s clothing, particularly black *çarşaf*. This over-garment in black that covers women’s entire body, which was rarely seen in Istanbul in the late Ottoman period, reappeared as a symbol during the national struggle, and women wore it in protest against the occupation of Izmir by the Greeks in 1919. Even Nezihe Muhiddin, one of the leading figures of the Turkish Women's Union, defended the *çarşaf* and described it as a national form of dress that did not hinder the progress of women. However, as Adak notes, Muhiddin's stance was probably strategic and aimed to focus on the Union's primary goal of securing political rights for women.²³⁸

Although not directly referencing to black *çarşaf*, as a final thought of “Tesettür Meselesi” Halide Nusret associates women’s attire to the national identity. She begins by admitting that this issue looks like a worn-out one, but she thinks it is still unsolved. Halide Nusret, as a young woman at that time, resents that there are many people who are opposing to *tesettür* (hijab), many of whom are young people. Their main argument is that *tesettür* prevents progress. Halide Nusret opposes that strongly, stressing out her religious self; “I will say 'No!' to this with all the fire of my Islamic soul and sincerity, no, no, no!...”²³⁹ This response is not limited to *tesettür* but for a wider discussions around the duality of modernity and religion. She states that *tesettür* does not prevent progress, on the contrary, it prevents decay and downfall. She does not elaborate what this means, but it is evident from the following parts of the article that she thinks *tesettür* as a part of

²³⁷ Halide Nusret, “Tesettür Meselesi,” *Genç Kadın*, no. 8 (10 Nisan 1335).

²³⁸ Adak, *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in Turkey: State, Society, and Gender in the Early Republic*, 25.

²³⁹ “Ben buna İslam ruhumun bütün ateşi ve samimiyetle ‘Hayır!’ diyeceğim, hayır, hayır, hayır!...” “Tesettür Meselesi.”

national culture, as well as religion. So, *tesettür* has moral and national value for her; getting rid of *çarşaf* is equal to suicide of the society. Although it is one of the obligatory Islamic rituals, she thinks it might be unnecessary in a society with a fully developed understanding of womanhood. For her, *tesettür* is necessary in society due to the lack of moral perfection. So, her standing in this issue has some practical foundation as well. In her reasoning, *tesettür* has a moral duty and it does not prevent women from progress. She states that it does not mean lazing behind the window trellises (*kafes ardında tembellik etmek*); Muslim women can be as strong as men in terms of science and scholarship, with their hijab. In the following paragraph, Halide Nusret takes a classic conservative stance and condemns the opposer of *tesettür* that they hide behind the idea of progress, but they are actually pursuing harmful and mischievous freedom.

Her main concern about this issue is revealed in the last part of the article. She tells an anecdote to show how “young and unaware children” are affected negatively by those arguments. When she was in İnas Sultanisi (Girls High school) some foreign guests comes to visit the school. Halide Nusret notices that there are only three of more than 600 students had hijab. When she objected, girls shrugged with sarcasm. When the guests arrived, Halide Nusret feels embarrassed. She feels like the guests mocks the current situation of Turkish and Muslim women. For her, this was a sign of losing religious and national values. This is the corruption of Turkish womanhood, as well as the religious aspects of the society. For Halide Nusret, religion is a vital component of the nation.

Halide Nusret's ‘*Tesettür Meselesi*’, Halide Nusret's only written work devoted to the issue of veiling, discusses the issue in the context of national values and women's responsibilities. One of the reasons for its discussion is the conditions of the War of Independence period. As in the case of Nezihe Muhiddin, this article can be read as a part of the sensitivity mentioned earlier. In 1919, veiling became a true national symbol, influenced by the spirit of the War of Independence. The discourse that identified the female body with the homeland transformed the female body into a symbol of the protection of the liberated nation. However, as Sevgi Adak points out, this situation did not last

long. Including the circles of the women's movement, there was a gradual shift away from traditional dress until the 1925 Hat Law.²⁴⁰

It is not as easy to follow Halide Nusret's attitude during this transformation as it is with other issues; she did not publish opinion pieces on this subject in the following years, and rarely touched upon it in her diaries or works of fiction. However, she mentions how these controversial debates reflected to her in an article from 1924. In "Dedikodumun Dedikodusu"²⁴¹, she discusses *taassup* (bigotry) and religion, depicting other people's opinions of her. In the tramway, she overhears two girls discussing her column in *Süs* magazine. They talk about a gossip that Halide Nusret is not what she looks like in her writings. Referring to one of her articles about the tramway curtains, they think she appears like bigoted, but in real life, she is not. They say, she shows off by appearing so. The subject of gossip extends to Halide Nusret's headscarf. They think her picture without a headscarf is not published because of her hypocrisy.

After this scene, Halide Nusret questions herself, "Am I bigoted?" At this point, she not only questions her appearance for her readers, but also the common stereotypes of her period. She asks if fondness for traditional elements like "*peçe*, *kafes*, minaret and fountains" is bigotry. Halide Nusret is known for her traditional and nostalgic aspirations. What is peculiar here is that she regards *peçe* and *kafes* as a part of her ideal nostalgic world. She does not prefer to live according to what those imply for a woman. This is one of her dilemmas. In the next paragraph, she complains about not being understood. She says, no one knows her as she is, with her typical melodramatic style. Her contradictory positioning contributes to this drama. In the article titled "Perdeler"²⁴², which is mentioned by those two girls, she has a sarcastic tone, yet it is not very clear where she stands. When she is asked, she says she is not a supporter of removing the tramway curtains, since she is an illogical person who loves unreasonable things

²⁴⁰ Adak, *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in Turkey: State, Society, and Gender in the Early Republic*, 25.

²⁴¹ "Dedikodumun Dedikodusu", *Süs*, nr: 32, 19 Kanunisani, 1340 (1924).

²⁴² Halide Nusret, "Perdeler", *Süs*, nr: 29, 29 Kanunuevvel 1339 (1923)

like curtains, *peçe* and *kafes*. Her companion reacts as “Siz tam Türksünüz, tam Şarklısınız” (You are a true Turk, a true Oriental), on which Halide responds, “Tamamıyla” (completely). In the next part, on the other hand, she looks like a supporter of the new order in the tramway when she explains to the ticket collector that he cannot tell women where to stand in the vehicle. At the end of the article, she admits her avoidance from hurting the feelings of her elderly readers who support the curtains in the tramway. So there is an ambiguity in the article. It appears that this article is a good example that summarizes the complexity that emerges in Halide Nusret's intellectual personality.

Thus, the conflict in Halide Nusret's private and public identities emerges in relation to her views on clothing. Another noteworthy point in this discussion is how Halide Nusret differentiated herself from the evolving stance of the Women's Movement. Yaprak Zihnioğlu states that Nezihe Muhiddin still considered the veil as a national garment in 1923.²⁴³ However, she also suggests that this viewpoint was a political maneuver so as not to overshadow the union's mission of building women's legal rights. Sevgi Adak shows how the Turkish Women's Union, founded in 1924, combined issues of women's emancipation and modern dress.²⁴⁴ In Halide Nusret's case, there is no such political background. In her writings from 1924, she addresses the topic of veiling from a personal viewpoint, indicating that her stance had become outdated within the context of contemporary discourse. Yet, there are no positive statements of hers+, about the image of the modern-national woman idealized by the republican regime. In fact, I did not come across any of her writings in which she directly addressed this issue.

After the implementation of Hat Reform in 1925, she does not write about this issue in any publications, as she did in this article from 1923. The only relevant material that can fill this gap is her autobiography written in her later years and an interview published with a photograph of her wearing a headscarf. In her autobiography she tells the story of the day she tried the hat for the first time, and

²⁴³ Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*, 113.

²⁴⁴ Adak, *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in Turkey: State, Society, and Gender in the Early Republic*, 41–42.

how she struggled with it. She does not mention it as a stylish and modern accessory, rather she admits she finds traditional clothing more elegant and practical as follows:

"While we were there (referring to the trip to Bulgaria), the 'Hat Law' was passed in the country. We did not neglect to buy a hat each, but unfortunately, none of us could find a hat that suited our faces. When we put the hat on our heads, we looked like monkeys! Moreover, my hair was a bit long and very thick. It was quite easy to gather them into a light silk headscarf or a veil cape; it also looked elegant. But it was neither easy nor beautiful to gather and tuck all that into a stiff hat."²⁴⁵

This is the only section in her autobiography where she expresses resentment towards the republican reforms. She remained silent on this issue for a long time. Looking at her later years, it is evident that she was not a typical Kemalist woman who embraced Westernized attire. In a photograph taken during an interview in 1983, she appears wearing a white scarf and presents a traditional, religious look.²⁴⁶ This choice, along with her memoir from 1975, conveys her hesitation about adopting Western clothing for the nation. From these instances in her later life, it can be concluded that although she did not confront the Kemalist state directly, she was not aligned with their views on veiling (tesettür) until the final years of her life.

The debate on women's dress has been one of the longest and most controversial issues in Turkish history. As Halide Edip pointed out, Hat Law was one of the most strongly opposed reforms of the Kemalist era.²⁴⁷ Halide Edip, known for her combative personality, harshly criticized this law in her book

²⁴⁵"Biz orada iken, memlekette "Şapka Kanunu" çıkmıştı. Birer şapka almayı ihmal etmedik, fakat, ne yazık, suratımıza yakışan şapka bulamadık hiçbirimiz. Şapkayı başımıza geçirince maymuna dönüyorduk! Üstelik benim saçlarım da biraz uzun ve pek çoktu. Bir çarşaf pelerini veya hafif ipek bir başörtü içine toplamak pek kolaydı onları; zarif de oluyordu ama o kadar şeyi derleyip toplayıp taş gibi bir şapkanın içine tıkmak hiç de kolay ve güzel olmuyordu. Tabii serde acemilik de vardı." Zorlutuna, *Bir Devrin Romanı*. P. 309.

²⁴⁶ Demirtepe, "Halide Nusret Zorlutuna Milli Mücadele Yılları İstanbul"unu Anlatıyor."

²⁴⁷ Halide Edip, *Turkey Faces West: [A Turkish View of Recent Changes and Their Origin]* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1930), 224.

published by Yale University Press, arguing that the law was a product of dictatorship and primarily benefited European hat manufacturers at the expense of the Turkish people.²⁴⁸ It is difficult to determine whether Halide Nusret shared Halide Edip's views, since she only briefly mentions the discussions on dress reform in her writings. Considering her tendency to avoid conflict, especially in the early years of her writing career, it is understandable that she refrained from discussing this topic extensively.

Although the issue of women's dress and veiling did not escalate into violent conflicts in Turkey as it did in Uzbekistan,²⁴⁹ the Hat Law became one of the most controversial decisions regarding men's appearance in the 1920s, with severe consequences. Halide Nusret's long avoidance of commenting on the issue of women's veiling, which was indirectly related to this law, can be understood in this context. Ultimately, Halide Nusret's silence reflects the broader tensions surrounding women's roles and identities at a time of significant social change in Turkey.

This chapter examined the political, cultural and social transformations that defined the post-World War I period in the World and Turkey, focusing on the discursive and material restructuring of women's roles in the newly established nation-state. The reception of women as symbolic carriers of national identity, their position in the economy and domestic politics revealed that these years were characterized by both the promise of emancipation and at the same time the reinforcement of patriarchal norms. In this complex setting, Halide Nusret's writings provide a valuable lens for exploring the tensions these forces created at the individual level. As a young but widely recognized writer, Halide Nusret engaged with the key debates of the period across multiple genres. A

²⁴⁸ Halide Edip, *Turkey Faces West : [A Turkish View of Recent Changes and Their Origin]*, 224–26.

²⁴⁹ Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2006). “In a six-month period in 1927 and 1928, at least 235 Uzbek women were murdered for unveiling. During the three main years of the Hujum campaign, from 1927 to 1929, some 2,000 were murdered in connection with unveiling.” (p. 186)

central analytical insight developed throughout this chapter is the genre-based divergence between her public and private personas. Her articles and opinion pieces - published in public and often ideologically charged platforms - take a more moralistic and didactic tone. Although moments of empathy surface, here she appears as a guardian of traditions and emphasizes national values, domestic virtues and the female duty. In contrast, her private writings - such as her diaries - and fictional works offer more nuanced and, at times, conflicted voice, which is shaped by her personal experiences and social insights. This divergence between her discourses lays the foundation for the following chapters, which will continue to explore how Halide Nusret subsequently defined her position between ideological commitment and her lived experiences, and how this tension shaped her narrative on femininity, morality, and modernity, against the changing faces of the Republic.



Writing The Ideal Woman: Genre and Persona in Halide Nusret's Writings Between 1927-1945

This chapter focuses on the period between 1927 and 1945, an important turning point in the history of Turkish women, when state control intensified and the organized women's movement was silenced. While feminist historiography has traditionally characterized these years as part of a period of barren and stagnant peace that followed the dynamism of the early Republican women's movement, more recent research has questioned this narrative and instead pointed to the complex and often subtle ways in which women engaged in social change during these transitional times. Contributing to later scholarship and building on the methodological framework introduced in Chapter I, this chapter analyzes this period through the writings of Halide Nusret Zorlutuna. It follows the genre-based approach developed in the previous chapter, revealing that unlike her earlier preference of genre, in these years her fictional writings aligned with her public persona, reflecting the ideological demands of the single-party regime. At the same time, her diary, written extensively between 1929-31, the first years of her motherhood, reveals the tensions she experienced between her roles as writer, mother and intellectual. This diary is a rare and invaluable source for examining the private experiences of a Republican woman trying to balance the conflicting

demands of domestic and public life. While the main focus will be on 1927-1935, this chapter also includes a separate section that addresses her relatively quiet decade between 1935 and 1945, explaining its limited treatment in this study while offering brief contextual notes on her output during this period.

Periodization of this chapter is difficult due to the overlapping and fluid nature of political and cultural changes. While the 1920s and 1930s provide a useful framework, the boundaries are blurred - developments in the late 1920s often foreshadow themes of the 1930s. While the previous chapter focused on the immediate aftermath of the First World War, this chapter focuses on the growing authoritarianism of the 1930s, the global economic crisis and the international rise of fascism. All of these have affected women's roles and rights in all over the world. The years 1927 and 1935 were deliberately chosen as temporal markers in this study not only because of their local political significance, such as the consolidation of single-party rule and the institutionalization of state feminism, but also because of their global significance. The discursive distinction in Halide Nusret's writings from this period reflect this transition which shapes the chapter's structure and helps trace her evolving narrative on femininity and modernity.

This section also examines the relatively quiet decade in Halide Nusret's life from 1935 to 1945. This period does not directly contribute to the analytical focus of the thesis, as she was less active as a writer, pursuing her role as a teacher across Anatolia. She wrote significantly less about social issues, among which women's issues are even rare. Apart from a number of poems about the cities she has lived and some articles, one notebook from her persona archive is analyzed, most sections of which are identical to the 1929 notebook. These sources rarely addresses the themes of this thesis. However the integration of this period provides a more complete picture of Halide Nusret's trajectory both as a writer and as a historical figure.

While Chapter 1 approaches Halide Nusret's writings thematically, focusing on the key debates of the early Republican period (1919-1927), this chapter, along with the next one, adopt a genre-based structure. This shift is based on an important observation made in Chapter 1: Halide Nusret's engagement with

gender issues varies significantly between genres. Her fiction and private writings often diverge from the ideological tone of her public essays. Therefore, Chapters 2 and 3 analyze her work from the lens of the public/private distinction, paying attention to how genre influenced her position as a woman writer negotiating her own way through changing gender norms in Republican Turkey. By highlighting how Halide Nusret carefully reconstructed her private and social identities in relation to Republican reforms and state feminism, this chapter contributes to ongoing discussions about the Kemalist Turkey in the 1930s.

3.1. Women at the Crossroads of Global Depression and Dictatorship

In the previous chapter, the economic and social framework, state policies and the discourse that sought to bring women back to the domestic sphere after the First World War were discussed extensively. These attempts largely continued uninterrupted well into the post-1927 period. However, this was also when new global developments affected Turkey both directly and indirectly. The Great Depression of 1929 which rocked the world, followed by the increasing centralization and authoritarianism of state structures, were among the most important of these developments. In tracing them, this section examines economic conditions, followed by the transformation of state policies toward women, the intensification of ideological state apparatuses such as media, literature, and education as well as the interconnected trajectory of women's movements worldwide.

Trying to capture the essence of the decades before WWII, it is important to take the economic and political crisis these years involved. Although the mid-1920s are considered by some to be a period of "prosperity, stabilization, and success,"²⁵⁰ there were many of its aspects that also suggested otherwise. As Mazower pointed out, the existing system was fundamentally inadequate to the realities of the post-war period, as it depended mostly on international capital

²⁵⁰ Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, 112.

flows that were ultimately unstable.²⁵¹ Eric Hobsbawm argued that liberalism experienced a global decline during these years, even in non-fascist states.²⁵² The growing authoritarianism is reflected in limitations on democracy and freedoms, along with the economic policies, because of the belief that capitalism could no longer sustain earlier liberties. They failed by the end of 1920s due to several reasons such as the weakness and the lack of legitimacy of the democracies most of which were newly established, deep divisions of race, class and religion, and the rigid “nightwatchman state” approach which centralized authority. Even more essentially, liberal democracies also relied on wealth and prosperity for the continued appeal of their political ideologies, which made them vulnerable as well.²⁵³

The 1930s was a particularly compelling era for women, marked by increasingly ambiguous roles, even more so than in previous years. States responded to political and economic crises by seeking to consolidate central authority, and women’s issues were central to such initiatives. Even though the discourse of women’s empowerment gained importance in the post-WWI period, by the late 1920s this discourse became the focus of increasingly intense criticism. In other words, “new woman” of the post-war years who prioritized career, education and birth control over traditional motherhood and marriage²⁵⁴ was falling from grace through the end of the decade. The discourse surrounding women's roles underwent such rapid changes that it created a rollercoaster effect, so to speak. On the one hand, they developed a growing practice of participating in the workforce, which gained momentum during World War I and continued to increase into the 1930s. Despite the unemployment crisis caused by the 1929 Great Depression, women's participation in the workforce did not decrease in many countries. Laura Hapke states that by the 1930s, women's presence in the

²⁵¹ Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century*, 113.

²⁵² Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 2011), 136.

²⁵³ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 138–41.

²⁵⁴ Wendy Kline, ed., *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (University of California Press, 2001), 126.

workforce had more than doubled compared to their initial entry into the market in the 1890s.²⁵⁵ On the other hand, women's traditional roles were increasingly reinforced as a result of the challenges of the social and economic crisis. It was not surprising that one of the main arguments behind women being re-called back home was that they were taking "men's job."²⁵⁶ Hapke observes that in the U.S., women faced a dual burden as workers and mothers while also "carrying the baggage of lingering Victorianism concerning their physical and moral fitness for work" facing the arguments suggesting that women and work were inherently contradictory.²⁵⁷

Gendered biases were not the only factors reinforcing women's domestic responsibilities. Economic crises led to many men losing their jobs, leaving them feeling powerless and inadequate as providers. This emotional burden fell heavily on women, who, as part of their traditional roles, were expected to offer emotional support. As men became more vulnerable under the stress of unemployment, women were expected to offer greater emotional reassurance, further entrenching their domestic roles.²⁵⁸ The men of the house became more and more desperate, as they were "cut adrift from their usual routine, lost much of their sense of time and dawdled helplessly and dully about the streets."²⁵⁹ In response, women worked for uplifting their husbands' moods, while intensifying their efforts to make ends meet. This situation further reinforced women's domestic responsibilities. As Susan Ware concluded, "no housewife lost her job in the Depression,"²⁶⁰ highlighting the sustained and maximized domestic burden placed on women during this period.

²⁵⁵ Laura Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s*. (University of Georgia Press, 1997), xvi.

²⁵⁶ Ruth Milkman, "Women's Work and Economic Crisis: Some Lessons of the Great Depression," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 8, no. 1 (1976): 80, <https://doi.org/10.1177/048661347600800107>.

²⁵⁷ Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s*, xvi.

²⁵⁸ Milkman, "Women's Work and Economic Crisis," 83.

²⁵⁹ Ware, "Writing Women's Lives," 1.

²⁶⁰ Ware, "Writing Women's Lives," 2.

The authoritarian responses of states to these developments varied from one country to another. However, the rise of centralization and the suppression of alternative voices were common trends almost everywhere. Like the rise of fascism and authoritarianism in Europe, American policies concerning women shifted toward "positive eugenics," which emerged as a response to criticism of "negative eugenics" and sterilization policies. This new phase emphasized the importance of motherhood and family in state policies.²⁶¹ This was partly influenced by the economic and social upheaval of the Great Depression. In the years following 1929, marriage rates fell, the number of single women led households rose, and the birth rates declined. Eugenicists acknowledged the effect of the Depression on family structure but framed them as symptoms of deeper cultural fragility rather than direct consequences of economic crisis. Their focus was on the fragility of the family structure. This perspective viewed the independence of the 1920s as the root cause of family instability in the late 1920s. By moving away from traditional family roles, women were seen as jeopardizing social stability.²⁶² This backlash not only targeted women's independence, but also broader ideals of individualism. They promoted the state intervention to the private lives for the sake of protection of the social institutions, often at the expense of personal liberty.²⁶³ This shift in the eugenics that prioritized environment against heredity disproportionately targeted women as the primary architects of a child's environment.²⁶⁴ These arguments undermined discourses of women's individuality and empowerment, portraying them as incompatible with collective responsibility and social stability.

Although the trajectory of the women's issue in the Soviet Union was different, state intervention was similar to elsewhere in the world, and even despite the liberal approach they adopted, intervention in the private sphere had started much earlier. During the 1920s and well into the 1930s, the Soviet ideology rejected traditional definitions of family. As Wendy Goldman explains, "the

²⁶¹ Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 95.

²⁶² Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 97.

²⁶³ Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 98.

²⁶⁴ Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 130.

Bolsheviks believed that capitalism had created a new contradiction, felt most painfully by women, between the demands of work and the needs of family.²⁶⁵ To resolve this conflict, efforts were made to transfer domestic tasks to the public sphere through communal dining rooms, laundries, and childcare centers, thereby alleviating the domestic burden on women.

At a time when feminist movements were beginning to question the institution of the family worldwide, the Soviet Union's attempt to abolish family, contrary to expectations, brought different problems for women. For example, the freedom to divorce was observed to favor men at the expense of women. Indeed, the sexual freedom favored by the Soviets was a disaster for women and children in the absence of appropriate financial guarantees.²⁶⁶ In the early 1930s, these tensions reached the climax of an intense social struggle that had been going on since 1918.²⁶⁷ As a result, signs of a retreat from radical family policies began to emerge in the mid-1920s with the legislation of the Family Code (1926). By the 1930s, under Stalin's leadership, the state moved towards a pro-natalist agenda in line with global trends. The Stalin administration reintroduced traditional attitudes, culminating in another Family Code in 1936, which banned abortion and encouraged childbearing, while rewarding women who had many children. Repression became a characteristic feature of this period, as the authorities began to approve stricter measures, deciding that "it makes sense to apply more repressive measures."²⁶⁸

The situation of Soviet women during this period reflected a complexity similar to that experienced in other countries, including Turkey. Under Stalin, social demands on women were shaped by the regime's industrialization policies, which had profound effects on employment, urbanization, class stratification, consumption and childcare. These changes required women to undertake specific

²⁶⁵ Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917 - 1936*, Reprinted, Cambridge Russian, Soviet, and Post-Soviet Studies 90 (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 2.

²⁶⁶ Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 252.

²⁶⁷ Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 12.

²⁶⁸ Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 293.

economic and social roles, some of which were completely new and brought with them high social expectations. At the same time, traditional norms and behaviors not only returned, but were often reinforced and extended to new contexts. This combination of new obligations and traditional values created a distinctive social order that had blended elements of continuity and transformation, defining the complex realities of women's lives in the Stalinist period.²⁶⁹

The trajectory of women in many parts of the world during the 1930s therefore followed similar paths, positioning them in a liminal space between emerging modern roles and traditional domestic duties. State policies were a means to convey these messages, however their power was limited when confronted with the complexities of everyday life. Mass media played a significant role in spreading these messages, with magazines, newspapers, and even works of fiction utilized as apparatuses to promote evolving idealizations of the female image. This use of the media to shape public perceptions was not new to the 1930s; since the rise of print culture, the ability of such media to influence public discourse had been recognized. However, earlier periods had often regarded these forms of communication with suspicion, seeing them as potential threats to the prevailing order. In contrast, as liberalism weakened and authoritarianism rose in the 1930s, publishing and cultural production increasingly became extensions of state control, serving to reinforce rather than challenge state-imposed ideologies. This shift is evident in numerous studies examining the dynamics of the period across different countries.

Japan reflected the global ideological currents of the time, as seen in the rise of authoritarianism and the state's increasing use of cultural production to shape public life. The observation made in 1930 by Aono Suekichi accurately captured the essence of these tendencies in Japan: a fetishism of power, a strong state, corporatism, authoritarianism, technocracy, and militarism, all of which were compatible with imperialist ambitions.²⁷⁰ These characteristics aligned Japan with the broader global experiences of the 1930s, a period marked by the decline

²⁶⁹ Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change*, 1. paperback print (Univ. of Calif. Pr, 1979), 95–97.

²⁷⁰ Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, xiii.

of liberalism and the rise of fascist-like cultural and intellectual impulses across various nations.

Print media played a crucial role in propagating state-approved messages as well. *King* magazine published in Japan, for example, promoted an idealised vision of domestic life, focusing on sanitized depictions of street life, beauty advice and practical tips for simple and healthy homes.²⁷¹ This messaging aligned with a broader global trend observed in nations like Russia, America, England, and Turkey, where the family unit was glorified, and consumption was encouraged. However, as Harootunian points out, these same magazines paradoxically introduced new consumption possibilities that could erode social solidarity while simultaneously promoting an ideology of the 'recovered family'.²⁷² One striking example of this duality is found in the women's magazine *Shufu no tomo*. In 1931, the magazine addressed modern sexuality with surprising openness, acknowledging the disharmony in marriages caused by dissatisfactory sex lives and its potential harm to nature. Yet, while recognizing women's new awareness of their sexual and personal needs, the magazine counseled them to suppress these needs for the sake of preserving family harmony and upholding a patriarchal order centered on men's preferences.²⁷³ This approach reflected a global pattern in which women were both encouraged to embrace modernity and liberation while being gaslighted into accepting traditional roles. These contradictions highlight how mass media became an apparatus to enforce the state's ideological goals, emphasizing the balance between modern aspirations and conservative family ideals.

Similar to Japan, in Stalinist Soviet Russia, beginning in the late 1920s, women's magazines became powerful state apparatuses to convey ideological messages that aligned with the country's shifting priorities. As Lynne Attwood points out, by the 1930s, under Stalin's leadership, the Soviet Union embraced a dual vision for women, blending rationalism and romanticism. Women were expected to be both exemplary workers and devoted caregivers and possessing

²⁷¹ Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 27.

²⁷² Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 27.

²⁷³ Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 29.

"natural" traits suited to domesticity and childcare.²⁷⁴ This paradox reflected the state's new economic and demographic goals, where women's roles in the workforce were emphasized alongside their traditional responsibilities in the home. In this context, women's magazines became tools to promote Socialist Realism, an approach that sought to shape individuals into ideal citizens. From the First Five-Year Plan of late 1920s onward, magazines became increasingly didactic, presenting state-sanctioned views without allowing for alternative narratives. Women were left with no other models of identity, reinforcing the state's perception on defining who they could be and what they could aspire to.²⁷⁵

On the one hand, women were encouraged to work outside the home to contribute to society, gain financial independence, and develop a sense of self-worth. Magazines like *Rabotnitsa* promoted this vision while advocating for improved domestic services to balance work and home life, reinforcing the idea that participation in labor was essential for personal and social advancement.²⁷⁶ However, these magazines also conveyed contradicting messages. While *Krest'yanka* magazine depicted rural women as active participants in agricultural production and community leadership, it simultaneously emphasized their exclusive responsibility for the home. Women were encouraged to stand up to oppressive husbands but were also idealized for their forgiving "kind womanly hearts," perpetuating a romanticized and rationalized vision of female domesticity.²⁷⁷ By the late 1930s, traditional female skills were emphasized more strongly, with magazines regularly offering recipes, knitting tips, and dress patterns. These qualities aimed to stress domesticity, with the implication that women should balance their work responsibilities with maintaining their families' welfare, essentially sewing and cooking their way to socialist ideals.²⁷⁸ This dual message of empowerment and subordination reflected the example of Japan,

²⁷⁴ Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1999), 4.

²⁷⁵ Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman*, 18.

²⁷⁶ Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman*, 91.

²⁷⁷ Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman*, 96.

²⁷⁸ Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman*, 129.

where the mass media similarly attempted to balance modern ambitions with traditional family values, all of which were under state control.

The ideological agenda of publications targeting female readers was evident in Britain during the 1930s, paralleling the cases of Japan and Soviet Russia. The British lifestyle magazine *Woman's Own* epitomized the relationship between media and the domestication of women during this period. First published in 1932, the magazine became a pioneer in its style of advocating domesticity, creating a wave that influenced other magazines throughout the decade.²⁷⁹ This effort was encapsulated in what Martin Pugh describes as a “cult of domesticity,”²⁸⁰ with the magazine dedicating its pages to persuading women that their true essence lay within the domestic sphere.

Woman's Own was fixed on marriage, emphasizing the importance of finding and keeping a husband. Nearly every topic was tied to this goal, advising on how to be a successful wife dominating the magazine's content. While cosmetic and fashion sections encouraged women to maintain their beauty, numerous articles warned against the risks of divorce.²⁸¹ The legislative changes of the 1920s and 1930s, which made it easier for women to divorce under certain conditions, increased the magazine's efforts to dissuade women from taking such steps. Paid employment, too, was framed within this domestic ideal, with young women encouraged to pursue professions like nursing, private secretarial work, or library assistance—roles assumed useful to securing husbands and fulfilling their duties as devoted wives.²⁸²

Another defining feature of *Woman's Own* was its ability to blend modern advancements with traditional domesticity, reflecting the interwar world trends. Jill Greenfield and Cris Reid emphasizes the magazine's commercial success in terms of leading female audience toward consumerism. This was achieved by introducing the modern means of housework to women, blending technological

²⁷⁹ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914–1999* (Macmillan Education UK, 2000), 211, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21850-9>.

²⁸⁰ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914–1999*, 209.

²⁸¹ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914–1999*, 214.

²⁸² Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914–1999*, 212.

advancements with traditional responsibilities.²⁸³ *Woman's Own* differed from the earlier women magazines by exposing a “pseudo-scientific approach to domesticity and the assumption that women needed constant coaching and guidance.”²⁸⁴ This claim to scientific authority was a powerful tool in persuading readers of the magazine's messages during an era of mass production and industrial achievements. The magazine used this influence to establish standards for acceptable feminine behavior, frequently warning of the consequences of departing from these norms. *Woman's Own* managed to combine modernity with a deeply conservative vision of women's roles, reinforcing the ideological agenda of domesticity while serving the commercial and cultural demands of the 1930s.²⁸⁵

While state and media were directing women to retreat from their growing visibility and presence in the public sphere and advocated a return to the domestic quarters, women's movement was also shifting their momentum as well. The late 1920s witnessed women organizations either becoming more engaged with the governments, adopting their discourse, or shifting their agendas about the women empowerment away from the earlier goals. I want to give examples from British and Middle Eastern women movements to describe how the zeitgeist of this era influenced various contexts in a similar way. Although the framework of the struggle, the position of its subjects and the addressee may look different, the patriarchal discourse, affected from the world concerning circumstances resulted with the same outcomes for the women question.

By the late 1920s, the British women's movement had reached a crossroads, facing both external challenges and internal dilemmas. From 1918 to 1928, women in Britain achieved significant reforms, such as the right to vote and access to improved labor conditions. However, these victories led to a perception that the struggle for women's rights was complete, making it increasingly difficult

²⁸³ Jill Greenfield and Chris Reid, “Women's Magazines and the Commercial Orchestration of Femininity in the 1930s: Evidence from *Woman's Own*,” *Media History* 4, no. 2 (1998): 161–74.

²⁸⁴ Greenfield and Reid, “Women's Magazines and the Commercial Orchestration of Femininity in the 1930s: Evidence from *Woman's Own*,” 164.

²⁸⁵ Greenfield and Reid, “Women's Magazines and the Commercial Orchestration of Femininity in the 1930s: Evidence from *Woman's Own*,” 164.

to mobilize for further campaigns. Some scholars argue that the movement's momentum faltered under the combined pressures of the Great Depression, shifting social norms, and the illusion of equality created by earlier legislative victories.²⁸⁶ The economic depression deepened social intolerance for female aspirations outside the domestic sphere. As women's magazines and state policies reinforced the "cult of domesticity," feminists, to some extent, have been victims of their own success, because the rights they have gained have narrowed the scope of their movement. The dilemma of "given rights" paralleled the Turkish case, where the Turkish Women's Union questioned its necessity after women gained the right to vote. In Britain, feminists struggled to sustain their earlier momentum to mobilize women for further campaigns while struggling with a society increasingly hostile to female activism and aspirations outside the home.²⁸⁷

In the Middle East, women's movements similarly faced a period of reorientation through the 1930s, adapting their goals and strategies to shifting political and social realities. In Syria and Lebanon, the Women's Union organized major conferences in 1928 and 1930, marking a turning point in the course of the movement. While earlier activism had prioritized suffrage and political rights, by the 1930s, women's leaders embraced an ideology of "patriotic motherhood," which promoted domestic responsibilities and charity work as national service.²⁸⁸ While it offered a unifying framework for women's activism, emphasizing issues such as education, marriage reform, and the protection of women's home industries as ways to improve women's contributions to the nation, this approach also represented a retreat from the more radical political goals of the 1920s, such as the right to vote or the removal of the veil.²⁸⁹ Similar to Beirut and Damascus conferences, The Second *Eastern Women's Congress* in Tehran witnessed this discourse shift. At Tehran congress, Nour Hamada, a prominent figure in Arab

²⁸⁶ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914–1999*, 236.

²⁸⁷ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914–1999*, 236.

²⁸⁸ Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republic Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 142.

²⁸⁹ Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republic Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, 144.

women movement, advised women “to work for chastity, purity, piety, honor, and above all, education.”²⁹⁰ As Hamada claimed, “nothing more than ignorance impedes the progress and happiness of man and woman. When woman knows how to raise her children, she can demand her rights from men and take them in hand.”²⁹¹

According to Elizabeth Thompson, this shift mirrored maternalistic politics emerging in other parts of the world, such as India, Egypt and Europe, and reflected domestic political calculations. Women’s leaders, reacting to setbacks in achieving suffrage and the patriarchal insistence on male political representation, sought to assert citizenship through their roles in social and civic life,²⁹² which in fact opposite of British case, where gaining political rights also consolidated domestic roles. The move to prioritize socially acceptable reforms over polemical political rights was a pragmatic response to the diminished expectations of the time, as well as an effort to “unite women around issues that concerned them most,” and “to give the women’s movement’s clout, just as the nationalist, labor, and Islamic populist movements were organizing mass bases.”²⁹³

Despite differences in context, both the British and Middle Eastern women's movements of the 1930s faced similar challenges. In both cases, economic hardship, patriarchal resistance and society's emphasis on domesticity forced women to adopt new tactics and change their agendas. Yet these movements have also found innovative ways to maintain their relevance, demonstrating the persistence of feminist activism in an era of shattering expectations.

²⁹⁰ Charlotte Weber, “Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Eastern Women’s Congresses of 1930 and 1932,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 89.

²⁹¹ Weber, “Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Eastern Women’s Congresses of 1930 and 1932,” 89.

²⁹² Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republic Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, 143.

²⁹³ Thompson, *Colonial Citizens : Republic Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, 145.

3.2. Turkey and the Turkish Women's Movement towards the 1930s

Turkey's political and social trajectory in the 1930s reflected its unique position in a growingly polarized world. As a result of its economic and political positioning, Turkey had maintained a delicate balance between interacting with global ideological currents, while making its own way.²⁹⁴ This nuanced stance has influenced the trajectory of the women's issue, which has also been shaped by trends in the global context. Despite some differences, Turkey's Western-oriented policies have encouraged a competitive and imitative approach to women's political rights. Beginning with municipal elections in 1930 and concluding with full electoral rights in 1935, women's suffrage mimicked global trends and underscored Turkey's desire to align with modernizing nations.

This period also marked a critical transformation within the Turkish women's movement itself. The changes in the structure and agenda of the Turkish Women's Union after 1927 reflect a shift towards adopting the state discourse, which weakened the demands for women's rights. This setback, which coincided with the attainment of political rights, may seem contradictory from a contemporary perspective, but it parallels developments in Britain, fascist Europe and the Middle East, where women's movements adopted more modest tones in their demands. In the existing literature on women's history, this tendency has been attributed to the authoritarianist inclination of Turkey and Kemalism's aim to absorb alternative discourses, including feminism, within its own framework. While this observation is correct, these dynamics cannot be addressed in isolation from the global context in which similar patterns emerged in different political regimes. This chapter examines the intersection of these local and global forces that shaped the Turkish women's movement from 1927 to 1935.

In the years leading up to and after the Great Depression, Turkey's reaction to the increasing authoritarian tendencies throughout the world was not identical to them. Initially, efforts were made to search for alternative solutions. To ease the discontent of the public against the economic difficulties, in 1930 Mustafa Kemal

²⁹⁴ Mehmet Ö. Alkan, "Cumhuriyet'in Siyasal Dönemeçleri," in *Cumhuriyet: Bir Asırlık Muhasebe*, ed. Mehmet Ö. Alkan (İletişim, 2023).

paved the way for foundation of an opposition party.²⁹⁵ Free Republican Party (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*, FRP) received an unexpected support from the people. New party was founded by the initiatives of the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası*) but choose to criticize the economic policies of RPP. On top of that, the anti-regime groups also gathered around the opposition party.²⁹⁶ This experiment ended with the closing of the FRP. Some pre-existing fears inherited from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic, against the 'separatist' goals of regime enemies, strengthened with this experience.²⁹⁷ This led to the fastening of the centralization steps, with Third Republican People's Party Congress of 1931. The rhetoric of 'unifying the forces' is utilized to control any non-state institution. Asım Karaömerlioğlu demonstrated how this process was extended to the Turkish Hearts (*Türk Ocakları*) which was replaced by the People's Houses.²⁹⁸ The establishment of this new institution sought to "create a mass society which in turn would serve to create the true nation." Mobilizing the intelligentsia was one of the means to fulfill this goal.²⁹⁹ This is particularly important for this thesis, since Halide Nusret was one of those intellectuals, who was active in both the Turkish Hearts and the People's Houses. In fact, she was one of the founders of Istanbul's People's House, having participated in the election of the administrative committee of this important branch.³⁰⁰

One establishment affected by the intensification of state power, like the Turkish Hearts, was the women's movement. The involvement of the state in the women's movement goes back to earlier years, though, most notably to 1927. The face of Turkish women's movement during the mid-1920s was Nezihe Muhiddin and Turkish Women Union (TWU), which asked for political rights from the very

²⁹⁵ Andrew Mango, "Atatürk," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, ed. Kate Fleet et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 168.

²⁹⁶ Touraj Atabaki, *The State and the Subaltern: Modernization, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 147.

²⁹⁷ M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu, "The People's Houses and the Cult of the Peasant in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 4 (1998): 68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263209808701244>.

²⁹⁸ Karaömerlioğlu, "The People's Houses and the Cult of the Peasant in Turkey," 68.

²⁹⁹ Karaömerlioğlu, "The People's Houses and the Cult of the Peasant in Turkey," 69.

³⁰⁰ "Halk Evlerinde Faaliyet Hararetle İlerliyor: Dün Dil, Edebiyat, Tarih Şubesinin İdare Heyeti Seçildi," *Vakit Gazetesi*, Şubat 1932.

beginning of its existence. In fact, the group founded a political party during the proclamation of the republic in 1923, yet it continued as a union later. The demand for political rights has been the major agenda of the union for the next four years. In 1927, the union faced an internal conflict about suffrage. During the March 1927 Congress, Nezihe Muhiddin insisted on the political rights, while some of the group objected, claiming that union, and also women of the country was not ready for this.³⁰¹ This opposition resulted with the elimination of Nezihe Muhiddin from the union and establishment of a new administration. Yaprak Zihnioğlu states that this incident was a result of the government's discontent about the suffragist inclinations within the union. For her, the objectors of Nezihe Muhiddin and the government cooperated for this elimination,³⁰² which was a step towards establishment of the state feminism that would integrate the women's movement within the limits of state power. State's intervention in this incident is obvious, considering the legal pressures the union faced.³⁰³ Zülal Kılıç locates that the state's support in this incident apparent, pointing out that Nakiye Hanım became one of the first women members of the parliament in 1935. She was a leading opposer of union's political demands, too, arguing that the government would grant them the right only when the time is right.³⁰⁴ After 1927, TWU became more and more de-politicized and was shut down in 1935,³⁰⁵ a fate similar to that of its other counterparts around the world.

Halide Nusret was in contact with the union from its very beginning. Back in 1923 when it first emerged as a political platform called Kadınlar Halk Fırkası (Women's People's Party), she became an active participant in the meetings for about a year. In fact, she was the moderator of the first meeting of this activist

³⁰¹ Zihnioğlu, *Kadinsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*, 198–200.

³⁰² Zihnioğlu, *Kadinsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*, 244.

³⁰³ Zihnioğlu, *Kadinsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*, 243.

³⁰⁴ Kılıç, "Cumhuriyet Türkiye'si'nde Kadın Hareketine Genel Bir Bakış," 349.

³⁰⁵ Nicole A. N. M. Van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," *European Review* 13, no. 3 (2005): 465, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798705000578>.

women's movement.³⁰⁶ Despite her central role, it is rare to see Halide Nusret acknowledged as someone important in the the activities of the group. Even, Yaprak Zihnioğlu's outstanding book about the union fails to mention her. Perhaps this was in part because this first meeting was not much of a success, given Osman Cemal's article in *Akbaba*. Yet, this oblivion about Halide Nusret during the first years of the union must be mainly because she did not continue participating in the meetings regularly, as she was working as a teacher Edirne during those years.³⁰⁷ Also she was not on the same page with the union during this period in terms of legal claims. In her article, "Türk Ocağında İctima," which is discussed in the previous chapter, she demonstrated her non-revolutionary tendency by suggesting that being patient was key for women to achieve their goals.³⁰⁸ So, the activist approach of the union can be another reason why she refrained from participating in it actively. Her name appeared in the news about the Union from August 1928, though, when she began to participate in its meetings, having become a member of the organization which was then under the leadership of Latife Bekir.³⁰⁹ This new phase resulted in an increasing alignment of the discourse of the Union with the government. Just like her increasing presence in the People's Houses, Halide Nusret's involvement in TWU from this point on reflected her broader alignment with the official discourse, paralleling the changes to her literary voice, which will be discussed later.

One booklet published by TWU in 1933 illustrates the extent to which the union had become more in line with official discourse in these years.³¹⁰ This booklet was published to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Republic and to promote its reforms. It is in the form of a journal, consisting of opinion pieces

³⁰⁶ "Kadınlara Dair: Kadınlar Halk Fırkasında İlk İctima."

³⁰⁷ Halide Nusret mentions in her autobiography that she got back for the 1926-27 school year. Zorlutuna, *Bir Devrin Romanı*, 331.

³⁰⁸ Halide Nusret, "Türk Ocağında İctima."

³⁰⁹ "Kadın Birliği'nde Yeni Heyet-i İdare İntihab Edildi," *Cumhuriyet*, Ağustos 1928; "Kadın Birliği'nde Dünkü Umumi Kongre," *İkdam*, Ağustos 1928.

³¹⁰ *Türk Kadın Birliği, Kadın Sesi, Cumhuriyet`in 10`uncu Yıldönümünü Kutlar (1923 - 1933)* (Ahmet İhsan Matbaası, 1933), Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı (40653_1_3).

written by members of the union, including Halide Nusret. There is a sentence that says “Türk Kadın Birliği, Kadın Sesi, Cumhuriyetin 10uncu Yıl Dönümünü Kutlular.” The name of the union has the biggest font size, followed by “Kadın Sesi,” which gives the impression of having a regular publication with that title. In the middle of the page there is the date of the issue, which might reinforce this anticipation by design of the page; but it is also the date of 10th anniversary of the republic, so it can be a reference to that either. At the bottom of the page, there is the flag of Republican People’s Party with the six arrows, which became the symbol of the party during the same year.

The articles were written by the members of the union. The first article of the booklet is already telling, in the sense that while it summarized the activities of the union, it did not mention the political demands of the organization. More interestingly, these demands are not included in the goals of the union from the very beginning. It says, the union was founded in 1923, but in reality it was established as a political party in 1923, and turned into a union in 1924. This deliberate omission was related to the authoritarian nature of the regime which required its primacy to be recognized in all matters. Almost all of them reflects their thankfulness to Mustafa Kemal for what he granted to Turkish women. Turkish women are referred as the helpers of the reform, but the language used here does not give them any agency. İffet Halim’s article “Onuncu Senenin Kadını” (in English please) reinforces how the union adopted this discourse. For her, women should be included in many areas of the nation building and Kemalist reforms. However, her priority should be the sense of mission and the ideals of advancement for the nation. For İffet Halim, suffrage is just a detail, along with issues of class and religion. Such positions aligns precisely well with the state-sanctioned discourse in Turkey of 1930s, illustrating how the state’s authoritarianism forced a broader ideological divergence. Aliye Halit’s text vary with the others by emphasizing equality among men and women. Her statement gives women agency more than the others’. However, she also thanks Gazi (Mustafa Kemal) for saving the Turkish women from captivity, degrading the agency of them. TWU’s approach to women’s issues and the state of women

movement during this era aligns with their counterparts in the world. One of the articles, “On Senenin İlim ve San’at Kadını,” written to mention the professions women could work thanks to the republic, refers to them as the Turkish mothers, emphasizing the pro-natalist nature of the era.

Beginning with her article in TWU’s booklet, the following section will analyze Halide Nusret’s writings during this era, which coincided with the changing face of the state as well as Turkish women’s movement. Halide Nusret was not exempt from these changes, as she actively participated in governmental organizations and aligned herself with the official discourse. Her public and private persona differed more dramatically from the previous years. The next section will be organized genre-wise, rather than chronologically, in order to give a perspective on her positions across various types of texts.

3.3. Aligning with the Authority: Women’s Roles in Halide Nusret’s Public Writings

From 1927 to 1935, Halide Nusret did not write opinion pieces in periodicals as much as the previous years of her writing career. The only one I could locate that is directly about women’s issues is in the aforementioned booklet by TKB, titled “Kadın: İnkılaptan Evvel ve Sonra.”³¹¹ In accordance with the objective of the booklet, this article honors republican reforms concerning women and Mustafa Kemal’s efforts to establish them. This text represents the embrace of Kemalist ideology in a highly schematic way. Adopting a comparative discourse, the main emphasis is on the social and legal rights granted to Turkish women, which were absent in the previous era.

She begins by framing women emancipation as the one of the most outstanding reforms of the Turkish republic. After this introduction, the first half of the article describes the conditions of women in both the pre-Ottoman and Ottoman times. She depicts the pre-Ottoman, and by extension pre-Islamic era, as a sort of feminist utopia. She stated that Turks gave an honorable place to

³¹¹ Halide Nusret, “Kadın: İnkılaptan Evvel ve Sonra,” in *Türk Kadın Birliği, Kadın Sesi, Cumhuriyet`in 10`uncu Yıldönümünü Kutlar (1923 - 1933)* (Ahmet İhsan Matbaası, 1933).

women in society and domestic life alike. Woman was not a slave to man, claiming she was in the following period, on the contrary she was equal with men. Polygamy was not a norm, either; men married only with one woman. They participated in social life as actively as men, riding horses and using weapons. Also, the wives of *hakans* had an equal position with their husband, appearing in official meetings and signing the decrees.

“In the centuries that followed,” according to Halide Nusret, “this order was deteriorated, as wars, invasions, raids, sultanate and palaces broke this beautiful order of the Turks.”³¹² She asserts that this corruption took place during the Ottoman rule, particularly in its later centuries, marking a shift in her perspective. In her earlier writings, discussed in the previous chapter, certain social elements of the Ottoman era—such as the *peçe* (face veil), *kafes* (lattice), and tramway curtains—were depicted with nostalgic fondness, reflecting an idealized view of the past. These elements, symbols of women's seclusion, had been debated in the context of modernization for several decades, even before her time. In 1923–24, she expressed hesitation about their abolition, revealing a sense of fondness for them. However, by 1933, she viewed Ottoman social practices concerning women as *zillet* (misery), reflecting a significant shift in her attitude. For her, these practices reduced women to the status of captive beings or commodities.³¹³ Her transition from longing for the *kafes* and *peçe* to the description of Turkish women “crawling miserable and humiliated behind a lattice,”³¹⁴ and employing the metaphor of a bird in a cage,³¹⁵ reflects her growing objection to the Ottoman era, which ultimately shifts an alignment with the Kemalist discourse. While the ideological foundation of the new republic highlighted a rupture from this recent Ottoman past, it sought to trace national

³¹² “Fakat zaman geçtikçe bu türe bozuldu. Harpler, istilalar, akınlar, saltanatlar ve saraylar, Türkün bu güzel türesini bozdu.” Halide Nusret, “Kadın: İnkıaptan Evvel ve Sonra,” 6.

³¹³ “Osman oğulları saltanatının bilhassa son asırlarında kadın, hakiki bir esir, anınıp satılır bir mal, kümese hepsedilir bir mahluk menzilesine indirilmiştir.” Halide Nusret, “Kadın: İnkıaptan Evvel ve Sonra,” 6.

³¹⁴ Halide Nusret, “Kadın: İnkıaptan Evvel ve Sonra,” 6.

³¹⁵ “Kanatları kesilerek kafese kapatılmış bir kuş aczi ve çaresizliğiyle kadınlık, asırlarca bu zillete katlandı.” Halide Nusret, “Kadın: İnkıaptan Evvel ve Sonra,” 7.

history back to earlier periods, such as pre-Islamic times, or even, in later years, to the Sumerians. Halide Nusret wrote this article within this context, reflecting the political alignment of the Union during those years. This demonstrates her engagement with the political and cultural conjuncture of the era.

Her examples about the life of women in the previous era are -not surprisingly- about their disturbances in domestic realm. She begins by targeting polygamy and divorce rights. She states that in Ottoman times men were able to marry up to four women, an arrangement that made domestic life a torture to all involved. If the husband wished, he could divorce his wife with two words, making the woman a stranger to her home which she built herself. For Halide Nusret, this also caused women to neglect her duties as a mother, since her rivalry with other women took much of her time. Contrary to the social visibility issue, discussed before, her stance about these practices about marital rights shows consistency with her stance during the previous years. She almost always defended equality in marriage. Reminding her articles from 1923 and 1924, she was aware of the hidden dangers of the Family Law in the previous order.³¹⁶ She reflected her fears about the status of married women before their husbands in those articles. However, she was not this strict about the depictions of it. Also, she had a more cooperative and patient manner, advising women to wait for the day men would understand their fault and respect them again, an attitude that presents the issue as the responsibility of individuals, and refrains from making a legal demand from the state. In 1933, however, she began to directly target the previous legal system, arguing that “those who have read the description of marriage in the old law know that the woman was considered only as a (property).”³¹⁷ In the next half of the article, she focuses on describing the new order centered around Mustafa Kemal’s leadership. She argued that “As Mustafa Kemal (...) took the Turkish nation from death and brought it back to life, (...) he also rescued Turkish women from their oppression and captivity and restored them to their

³¹⁶ Halide Nusret, “Kadında Hak-ı Talak”; Halide Nusret, “Türk Ocağında İctima.”

³¹⁷ “Eski hukukta nikahın tarifini okuyanlar bilirler ki kadın sadece bir (mal) telakki ediliyordu.” Halide Nusret, “Kadın: İnkılaptan Evvel ve Sonra,” 6.

rights, freedom and honour.”³¹⁸ This serves as a typical example that disregarded the struggles of women before the Kemalist regime, a perspective that has faced significant criticism since the 1980s. As mentioned above, ten years earlier, Halide Nusret expressed hope in her writings that men would come to understand women's situation, and these statements can be seen as a reflection of her belief that this hope had been realized. Halide Nusret's non-revolutionary spirit seems to have found what it was looking for.

She concluded the article by highlighting the educational and career opportunities women gained thanks to the republican reforms. This emphasis is related to the dual nature of the republican reforms, which defined women both as professionals, and as traditional home makers. Her appreciation of reforms concerning women's contribution to working life is related to her alignment with the Kemalist discourse during this period of her intellectual career. It was a time when women's public roles were symbols of modernity, a trend also seen in other countries during that era. Another factor relates to her personal life. She became a mother in the final months of 1929. Her diary, which will be analyzed in the following sections, reveals how she struggled with balancing her domestic roles and her career, and how focusing on her career gave her much-needed mental relief. Aside from her political inclinations, her personal experiences therefore must have influenced her views on women working. That being said, she also continued to promote more traditional roles and values for women in her other works at the same time. In her poem trilogy titled “Şehirde Türk Kadını”³¹⁹ (1928) and her interview conducted by A.Sırrı in 1929,³²⁰ she expressed her concerns about the hardships of working life for women and wished for all women to have a life where they would not have to work. So, this is yet another example of her ideals clashing with the complex discourses of her time and the realities of life.

³¹⁸ “Mustafa Kemal (...) Türk milletini nasıl ölümden alıp hayata döndürdüyse; (...) Türk kadını da öylece zillet ve esaretten kurtararak haklarına, hürriyetine, şerefine kavuştu.” Halide Nusret, “Kadın: İnkılapta Evvel ve Sonra,” 7.

³¹⁹ Halide Nusret, “Şehirde Türk Kadını,” *Hayat Dergisi*, Ağustos 1928.

³²⁰ A. Sırrı, “İş Hayatında Kadın: Çalışmaya Mecbur Olmak, Halide Nusret,” *Vakit Gazetesi*, Nisan 1929.

In 1928, she wrote three poems under the same titled “Şehirde Türk Kadını,”³²¹ in which she depicted three roles of urban women; ‘Housewife’ (Ev Kadını), ‘Working Woman’ (İş Kadını) and ‘Intellectual Woman’ (Fikir Kadını). With the categorization of women, compatible with the popular debates of that time, she expresses her point of view on each occupation women could find themselves in. In “Ev Kadını,” she allows the intended audience into the house, almost as a guest. The first thing they are presented with is a clean, white room with the fragrance of soap, in which your heart feels at ease. Next, it draws the attention of the audience to the details, the feminine taste that decorated the house with hard work. The delicate (or fragile) young mistress of the house appears in the next lines, with her voice entering the hearts as a graceful river. Her eyes are dreamy, soft and deep. She is depicted as the master of the house, touching every corner of it with her skillful hands. I use the term master intentionally because there is no other adult mentioned in the poem. She is like an autonomous center of the family, without a husband. The sacredness of the home and the family arises from this female figure. The house is her temple, the love of family is religion. The centrality of her is stressed by the lines that depict her always surrounded by babies, some crawling and others jumping around her. As compensation for this sublime position, she dedicates her life to her children and to her home. Her divinity is emphasized with the lines that say she has the beauty of the three-nights moon. On the other hand, the poet subtly implies how tiresome her life is by mentioning her languid (*süzgün*) face. Finally, the last lines invite the readers to bow their heads with respect in front of this woman. Halide Nusret idealizes the “house women” in this poem by praising her and sanctifying her position, while acknowledging the challenges inherent in her responsibilities.

Halide Nusret's poems reflect a nuanced response to the male intellectuals of her time, particularly Ziya Gökalp who had significantly influenced her ideological framework. In 1918, Gökalp himself penned a poem with the same title (‘Housewife’ (Ev Kadını), addressing similar themes regarding the sanctity of

³²¹ Halide Nusret, “Şehirde Türk Kadını,” *Hayat Dergisi*, no. 92 (Ağustos 1928): 8.

the home and the woman's role as a homemaker.³²² In his work, the housewife is depicted as the "angel of the house" who is tasked to serve her husband and children, but always remaining in a subordinate position. This portrayal implies a sense of inferiority, as she is compared to houris in paradise, whose primary function is to bring happiness to the home.³²³

In contrast, Halide Nusret repositions this narrative from a female perspective, placing women at the center of the household and referring to them as its rightful owners. Notably, her poem does not mention a husband; instead, children are depicted as being around her rather than waiting to be served at the table. While Gökâlp's poem glorifies the home with imagery of an emerald dome illuminated by countless candles, Halide Nusret celebrates the woman who has built that home through her own labor. This distinction is significant and points to an ongoing debate regarding woman's agency in domestic roles. Yet, Halide Nusret does not adopt an overtly feminist or conservative stance, and her idealization of women aligns with the status quo of her time. This subtle dissimilarity arises from her unique female perspective and serves as a quiet challenge to Gökâlp's male perspective, but not the traditionalist narrative.

Her stance about the role of women is even more apparent in the other poem of her trilogy, "İş Kadını" that describes the conditions of work for women, which was published along with 'Ev Kadını' under the head title of "Şehirde Türk Kadını" (in English).³²⁴ Although this trilogy seems to be a comparison of the types of women, it has a deeper layer of meanings, which partially come across in 'İş Kadını'. They are not about the choices of women, but the life conditions they are forced into. The working woman she depicts is an epitome of misery. She seems to be a widow who works to feed her children. There are no other adults in this poem, either, just like the other poems featured in the collection. She works

³²² Ziya Gökalp, "Ev Kadını," in *Ziya Gökalp Külliyyatı 1: Şiirler ve Halk Masalları* (Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1977), 108.

³²³ For another comparative perspective about these poems, see: Fatma Fulya Tepe and Per Buhn, *The Turkish Angel in the House: A Travelling Concept in the Housewife Poems of Ziya Gökalp and Halide Nusret Zorlutuna*, 2022.

³²⁴ "Şehirde Türk Kadını."

to the death; her hands get wounded by the torment of her working condition. This shows that she is in the working class, so it does not have an autobiographical aspect in it. The narrator does not criticize or look down on her, but rather sympathizes with this miserable mother. This poem does not have a didactic tone, either. It does not manipulate the reader towards despising women's work. By combining her thoughts from the 1933 article with this poem, Halide Nusret constructs a perspective in which professional women are encouraged to contribute to the nation, but work is portrayed as a burden for the lower socioeconomic classes and ideally reserved for men. Her tone does not directly criticize women in this position; instead, she condemns a society that forces them to bear such hardships. However, it will be revealed while discussing her diary that, this equation did not apply to her as a professional writer and a teacher who suffered by this burden as much as the character in "İş Kadını."

During an interview in 1929, Halide Nusret repeated her opinions on the significance of women's domestic roles. It was a part of a survey titled "İş Hayatında Kadın" (Women in Working Life) published in the *Vakit* newspaper. The survey aimed to "explore what work meant for the first generation of female professionals and workers, the conditions within which they worked, and the way they coped with the double burden of work and household responsibilities."³²⁵ Halide Nusret's section is published in 23rd April 1929.³²⁶ The journalist Ahmet Sırrı asks if she agrees with the -apparently common- advice that women should go back home after the recovery of national economy. Her answer is yes. For her, women's return home would not decrease her value. Much to the contrary, women's job in the house is superior to men's duties, since it is the woman who makes the home. She once again underlines the sacred nature of this occupation. The law of nature divides the roles of men and women and obeying to that is something to be proud for Halide Nusret. Although she regards the role of women equal or more valuable than that of men, she still adopts a traditional stance on this issue, promoting patriarchal values.

³²⁵ Gülhan Balsoy, "'Women in Working Life' in the Early Years of Republican Turkey," *Labor History*, March 17, 2024, 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2024.2328332>.

³²⁶ Sırrı, "İş Hayatında Kadın: Çalışmaya Mecbur Olmak, Halide Nusret." Çalışmaya?

This position Halide Nusret adopts can be considered appropriate to the dynamics of the period. It was conducted in 1929, when the Great Depression was around the corner. The trend of calling women back home was becoming more widespread throughout the world, and the Kemalist elites shared this trend, which is evident in the policies as well as the press publishing of the period. So, neither Halide Nusret's traditional mentality nor her emphasis on the national importance professional career of women contradicts with the Kemalist ideals. This reveals the inner conflicts of the government's women policies, too. As the modernization movement continues through 1930s in symbolic level, the economic conditions of the world (1929 depression, upcoming war, fascism etc.) altered the women policies in a more traditional way throughout the world.

Although there was a growing inconsistency on the messages conveyed about the roles of women during these years, the traditional image of women as home maker was becoming even more prevalent, influencing Halide Nusret as well. Her alignment with the official discourse extended to her fictional works, marking a shift from the earlier period when her novels manifested a more individual framework. Her only novel from this period is *Gül'ün Babası Kim?* which was published in 1933. This novel is interpreted as a biographical novel by some researchers.³²⁷ This is an accurate assessment considering some resemblance between her life and the plot. The location of the story is Edirne, in which Halide Nusret had lived for a couple of years as a teacher. The novel takes place around a school in Edirne. The schoolteachers are not the main characters, but they represent the enlightened community in the city. It also has some parallel paths with her diary from the early 1930s, too. Despite its resemblances to her personal life, however, the novel should be analyzed as a reflection of her public persona, as it aligns with the official discourse of its period, distinguishing it from her earlier fictions of the 1920s. In her earlier works, Halide Nusret portrayed female characters as victims of patriarchy, unable to find safety within their homes—spaces promoted as ultimate shelters for women by the state, media, and Halide Nusret herself. However, in *Gül'ün Babası Kim?*, the main character becomes a

³²⁷ Coşkun, "Halide Nusret Zorlutuna -Hayatı-Eserleri-Fikirleri."

victim of her own actions, portrayed as unchaste outside the supposed safety of her home. The moral framework of this novel is built around patriarchal norms that place women in a suspect position rather than keeping male characters or the wider system responsible, as it did in the earlier fictions.

Before going into the details of this genre-based persona shift, I will first give an overview of the plot. The first part takes place in Istanbul and tells the story of Meclâ. She is the second daughter of a wealthy family who was educated in foreign schools from her early ages, contrary to her sister who took traditional education in Turkish schools. This part informs the reader about the effect of foreign education on young girls' mind, comparing Meclâ and her sister Nezihe. Nezihe is bound to traditional family values and chooses that over love, marrying the man her family wanted. Meclâ does not understand her choice, choosing love over everything. For Meclâ, family or traditional moral values does not mean anything. In a quite preachy way, Meclâ's attitude is summarized in those words: "In this world, these words are outdated! Respect, obedience, compassion, whatever... These are empty words!" [...] "I believe in people's freedom, Zizi! Do you understand?... Freedom!... Do you know what that means?... Oh!... Total and absolute freedom! Long live the great freedom!..."³²⁸ Freedom, a term that usually has positive connotation is used in a negative manner, as this perspective would cause many problems for Meclâ in the next sections of the novel. She fights for her love, challenging her family and society, and does not listen to warnings of another women, Leman who suffered from the same man, Talat. Her letter to Leman is filled with stressing her fondness for freedom over everything.

The first part concludes with Meclâ's letter. In the next one, there is a nice depiction of a village in Edirne. A young woman named Havva is looking at the scene, until she is called by a "dry and mean and cheap-sounding woman." The identity of these people remains a mystery until the end of this part. All we know is that Havva was a pregnant widow who is a distant relative to those villagers,

³²⁸ "Bu dünyada bu lafların modası çoktan geçti! Hürmet, itaat, merhamet, bilmem ne... Bunlar boş laflar!" [...] "Ben insanların Hürriyetine inanırım, Zizi! Anladın mı?... Hürriyet!.. Bu ne demektir, bilir misin?... Oh!.. Bilakayt ve şart hürriyet! Yaşasın büyük hürriyet!.." Zorlutuna Halide Nusret, *Gül'ün Babası Kim?* (Panama, 2019), 21.

Hasan Efendi and Pembe Hanım. Hasan Efendi is working in the school as a janitor, who is a decent, educated man. His wife, Pembe Hanım is a greedy, selfish and ignorant woman, who tolerates Havva only for the money her family sends. After a period of total depression and suicidal thoughts, Havva gets used to her new life, starts arranging her room, beginning with her books. After this, she meets the teachers at the school and becomes friends with them. She gets back to life with their company.

Third part is consisting of the diary of Havva who happens to be Meclâ. Reading from the perspective of the protagonist, the story's true nature was revealed. Talat left Meclâ as he found out she was pregnant. When her parents learned about the pregnancy, her father disowned her, sending her to Hasan Efendi's house. Meclâ starts to write her diary after giving birth to her daughter, Gül. This diary talks about her experience of pregnancy, labor, post-partum and motherhood in detail. Being a mother completely changes her previous perspective about almost everything. This experience, alongside her friendship with the schoolteachers, makes her a totally different person. But still, giving birth to a fatherless child makes her suffer, especially in a small city like Edirne. As a single mother, she was treated as an immoral and frivolous woman, which is a typical pattern for widows. She becomes more depressed as people keep asking about her father. As a part of her character development through motherhood, this does not cause pessimism like suicidal thoughts. On the contrary, she becomes productive by writing poems about her situation. She sends them to a publisher through the end of this part.

Next part starts with a winter scene, where Meclâ looks through her small window, feeling happy with her sleeping daughter. She says, "Life is not as scary as I thought!"³²⁹ This foreshadows the brighter days ahead of her. The publisher that she sent her poems to, comes to the village to find her. This man, İbrahim Mümtaz who gets stuck in the snow is saved by Meclâ. He stays with them without knowing who she is. They become closer during this short period of time. İbrahim Mümtaz is the opposite of the other men Meclâ knows, including her father, Talat

³²⁹ "Hayat zannettiğim kadar korkunç değil!" Halide Nusret, *Gül'ün Babası Kim?*, 153.

and the men in the village. He is the typical hero that comes to save the princess. In the fifth and final part, İbrahim Mümtaz finds out who she is. He comes back to the village several months later for Gül's birthday. He proposes to Meclâ. At the end, they move to Ankara, where Meclâ becomes a "decent" woman who writes her poems at home, taking care of her home and family. Mümtaz supports her writing career, encouraging her to focus on her writing rather than housework, offering getting help from nannies and cleaners. However, Meclâ prefers taking care of her child on her own. At the end, the self-centered, freedom-oriented girl becomes domesticized through many moral messages. *Gül'ün Babası Kim?* is a novel of its time from many aspects. First, the location preferences with their symbolic meanings reflects the republican perception of cities in relation to break of Ottoman period to the republican era. The new republic promotes Ankara as a place of a fresh start.³³⁰ Edirne, on the other hand, has a significance for Halide Nusret, as she worked as a teacher for several years, signaling a passage from youth to adulthood. The plot has a similar pattern. The novel starts with depicting a couple walking in the streets of Istanbul. They are declaring their love to each other in English, German, French and Turkish. Although this scene looks like a romantic one, these European languages symbolize the foreign influence in the culture, foreshadowing the result of this corruption in the following parts. The narrator's attitude towards Istanbul shows this as well. A scene, otherwise a nice and cozy moments, with a couple holding hands in a cold night, is depicted as "The country is not breathing!.... All the houses have closed their glowing eyes, and all the chimneys are holding their breath... Istanbul is asleep. Istanbul is dead!"³³¹ Meclâ is born in İstanbul, and grew up in a "degenerated" environment, influenced by foreign values. Her older sister Nezihe gets a traditional education, and their parents decide to send Meclâ to foreign schools, a theme that ... reminds of the modernization perception of

³³⁰ See: Çağlar Keyder, *Istanbul: Between the Global and Local* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

³³¹ "Memleket nefes almıyor!... Bütün evler, ışıldayan gözlerini yummuşlar ve bütün bacalar nefeslerini tutmuşlar... İstanbul uyuyor. İstanbul ölü!.." Halide Nusret, *Gül'ün Babası Kim?*, 11-12.

the Ottoman elites. Meclâ (and Nezihe to a certain extent) represents the Turkish nation. As non-national elements appear in the country, it results in moral decay. Her time in Edirne is the era of punishment and maturing. On some level, this can be interpreted as a symbol of the war period, when the nation pays a great cost and emerged with a different mindset and growing nationalist tendencies. In Meclâ's story, nationalist tendencies emerged as the maternal and domestic instincts. Just as the revival place of the new republic, Meclâ and Mümtaz choose Ankara for their new life where she becomes a devoted wife and mother.

Another moment that connects this novel to the Kemalist ideology is when a peasant wants to make Meclâ his mistress. This example promotes the civil code, for advancing women's rights within marriage and reinforcing monogamy as the cornerstone of the new social structure. Tütüncü Murat, a wealthy older man, makes an implicitly inappropriate offer, saying that he wants to meet with her only once. At first, Meclâ thinks he wants to marry her, and refuses immediately. The lady who carries the message says: "Not to get married... But... What are you going to do when you get married? Isn't it a shame for your dear heart?... This youth will never come back; enjoy yourself!"³³² In this instance, Meclâ is tested with her earlier statements about marriage. She learns a lesson but this is not the only punchline. In the following pages, Murat decides to marry Meclâ to make her second wife. Pembe Hanım delivers this message from Murat as: "Tomorrow, if we say tomorrow, he will have an religious nikah. Then, when he divorces his wife, he will have a municipal marriage. Anyway, Allah's command is not to have a municipal marriage... Our Sharia has ordered the religious nikah..."³³³ This scene has two levels of message that emphasize the republican reforms as a balance between the Eastern and Western mentality, assumed by the ideologues of the period. On one level, it criticizes how Meclâ's previous mentality,

³³² "Evlenmek için değil... Ama... Evlenip ne yapacaksın be kızanım? Evlenenlerin başı göğü mi ermiş. Yazık değil mi tatlı canına?... Bu gençlik bir daha ele geçmez, keyfine bak keyfine!..."Halide Nusret, *Gül'ün Babası Kim?*, 123.

³³³ "Hemen yarın dersek yarın, imam nikahı kıydıracak. Sonra karısını boşayınca da belediye nikahı yaptıracak. Zaten Allah'ın emri belediye nikahı değil ki... Şariatımız imam nikahını emir etmiş..."Halide Nusret, *Gül'ün Babası Kim?*, 129.

which is the result of western education, are unsafe for women and children. On another, it demonstrates a corrupted order that belong to the pre-republican civil order. The balance of East and West is a rhetoric discourse that goes on since the late nineteenth Century. Republican reforms adopt it, too, especially in terms of women issues. So, this scene promotes the reforms in two aspects. Meclâ is a true Republican girl, especially in the later parts of the novel. Aside from the moral decay she experiences at her school, Meclâ's freedom, athleticism and education are emphasized as positive characteristics. In this respect, the novel is compatible with Kemalist ideals. These points represent a change from Halide Nusret's previous works, which dealt with social issues but maintained a certain distance from the discourse of the ruling ideology.

This broad national allegory in *Gül'ün Babası Kim?* is centered around a female protagonist whose moral and familial evolution is portrayed. For this reason, it also invites discussion in the context of women's issues. By using Meclâ as a vehicle to convey moral and nationalist narratives, the author reproduces the discourse of responsibility attributed to women as carriers of cultural and ethical values. Her dilemma is mainly about personal freedom and sacrifice for others. In the first section, Meclâ asks for freedom and questions any moral or institutional bound that prevent her from her desires. Her relationship with Talat is a way to express her stance, rather than a deep feeling of love. In the letter she wrote to Leman, Talat's ex-lover and mother of his child, she expresses her feelings toward freedom itself rather than to Talat. Her stance deconstructs parenthood and marriage as institutions, and deemphasizes the moral responsibilities that traditionally come with them. About having a child, she states: "And what is the strong bond that you think connects Talat to you...? A child! An armful of flesh and bones! Is that so? Such things do not happen in this century, Ms. Leman."³³⁴ This is a strong statement in times of rising maternal messages in the general discourse. Halide Nusret built Meclâ's ideas quite rigid to create the contrast both with her sister Nezihe who was the ideal type of the novel, and with her later

³³⁴ "Hem, Talat'ı size bağladığınızı sannettiğiniz kuvvetli bağ nedir?... Bir çocuk! Yani bir kucak et ve kemik! Öyle mi? Bu asırda böyle şey olmaz, Leman Hanım." Halide Nusret, *Gül'ün Babası Kim?*, 34.

character that is “ideologically more acceptable.” In her journey, Meclâ’s first break point is giving birth to her daughter. She learns self-sacrifice by motherhood, which was a missing feature in her earlier life. The narrative style of the novel attributes this deficiency to her corrupted education. Besides motherhood, her time in Edirne completes her character and concludes her education from many aspects. Her social environment demonstrated various aspects of life, taking her out of her shell of the privileged past life. Both ordinary people like the villagers and Pembe Hanım, and the schoolteachers contributed to her development. Most traumatic encounter was the one with the villager women and children. As they kept prying into her past, accusing her of immodesty, she realized the importance of the institutions she once despised. When the children asked, “Who is Gül’s father?” she became depressed, realizing the substantiality of marriage and parenthood.

Being in the position of Leman, whom Talat also abandoned with a child, Meclâ learns a lesson. In the end, turning into a devoted mother saved and rewarded her with a happy home and a husband. Leman, on the other hand, got punished for chasing after indulgence, luxury and wealth. Through the end of the novel, there is a section titled “A Newspaper Report.”³³⁵ It reports that Leman killed Talat and committed suicide afterwards. The news gives details of her past life, too. She was the mistress of a wealthy man. After she becomes mentally ill, she falls into the streets, with venereal disease. Meanwhile, her daughter was no longer to be seen. This tragic end leads her to punishing Talat and herself at the end. Leman’s story has a moral outcome when compared to Meclâ. Both broke the moral codes, but one of them kept sinking into them and could not survive at the end. In contrast, Meclâ did her penance in Edirne, allowed herself to grow into the social codes, and was rewarded for her patience.

This novel represents a shift from Halide Nusret’s more progressive works of the 1920s and is more in line with the gender norms reinforced by the political atmosphere of the early 1930s. It praises housewifery, motherhood and intellectual production, within the limits of domestic space. Meclâ’s story convey

³³⁵ “Bir Gazete Havadisi,” Halide Nusret, *Gül’ün Babası Kim?*, 194.

the image of “ideal Republican woman” who is educated but also centered her life around the domestic boundaries. This is the same type of woman that is promoted by her works from the late 1920s, like “Şehirde Türk Kadını.”³³⁶ Although this trilogy of poems has an empathetic voice as discussed, their main concern is canonizing the discourse of domestic roles. In the previous chapter about her earlier works, it is indicated that although she did not adopt a progressive rhetoric, she was more cautious about the authentic experience of women. Her fictional works were considered to be successful to express this stance. *Küller*³³⁷, *Sisli Geceler*³³⁸ and *Öldüren Kadınlar*³³⁹ trilogy, narrates how women were the victims of the social and legal order, and also how men’s emotional weaknesses caused the tragedies. In *Gül’ün Babası Kim?*, on the other hand, woman is blamed and pay the price, with downfall. The novel narrates a caricatured villain, Talat, and a stereotypical hero, Mümtaz, both of whom heavily influence the female protagonist, Meclâ, alongside her parents. Meclâ’s experiences are shaped more by external forces than her own free will: corrupted by non-national education, deceived by Talat, sent to Edirne by her parents, and finally saved by Mümtaz. Her only act of agency is anonymously sending her poems to a publisher, highlighting her limited autonomy even in creative expression. Eventually, this story differs from the earlier works, where women take the control of their life either by hard work or murder. As an influence of the political climate of the era, as well as her personal trajectory, Halide Nusret’s fictional works seem to be more under influence of the period’s general discourse, which has been the case throughout the world as well.

This shift also meant approaching the literary canon of her time. Her previous works discussed by their divergence from the established canon of Turkish literature for offering nuanced views on women's roles. New tone in her

³³⁶ Halide Nusret, “Şehirde Türk Kadını.”

³³⁷ Zorlutuna, *Küller*.

³³⁸ Zorlutuna, *Sisli Geceler*.

³³⁹ Halide Nusret, “Öldüren Kadınlar Serisi: 1- Sahibini Öldüren Kadın” (Hikâye); Halide Nusret, “Öldüren Kadın Serisi: 3- Nişanlısını Öldüren Ka-Dın’ (Hikâye),” *Türkiye Edebiyat Mecmuası* 1, no. 3 (1339): 9–11; Halide Nusret, “Öldüren Kadınlar Serisi 4 Eşini Öldüren Kadın.”

fiction brings Halide's works closer to the moral and nationalist priorities of the Turkish literary canon of the period. Betül Coşkun states that Meclâ is similar to Seniha of *Kıralık Konak* (1922), which holds the typical canonical features. “Meclâ is a type that we often encounter in post-Constitutionalist novels, which Yakup Kadri describes as the “end of the century” girl in *Kıralık Konak*, a type brought about by the erroneous Westernization.”³⁴⁰ While this point is well made, in terms of the criticism of degeneration and the transformation of the female character, it is more similar to Peyami Safa’s *Fatih-Harbiye*³⁴¹ (1931). The female protagonist of it aspires to the life in Harbiye, the western-influenced district of the city, looks down on Fatih, the symbol of the traditional life. After a while, she come across with the story of a girl who suffered from these kinds of aspirations (similar to Meclâ and Leman’s encounter), she learns her lesson. The role of male characters is almost the same, too, with a villain lover, traditional hero and a father. It is possible that Halide Nusret, recognizing the changing political and cultural conjuncture, changed her literary style and themes in her desire to be included in the canon that valued works that reinforced the ideological framework of the Republic. Even so, she did not pursue this and did not write any other novels for almost a decade until the 1940s.

Aksu Bora draws a clear distinction between 1914 and 1940, through quotes from each year. One is from *Kadınlar Dünyası* magazine, where the writer regards herself as a part of a broader women’s group, speaking on their behalf and advocating for their collective rights. The later is from Feliha Sedat Oksal’s book, *Genç Kız Yetişirken*, which prioritizes the advantages of the society in general. This voice, Bora states, is no longer identified as a political subject, speaking on behalf of women, but an “enlightened gaze,” which preaches about rights and wrongs, usefulness and parasitism. As women distanced themselves from other women and the discourse of “womenhood” through the course of this period, this shift highlights the increasing dominance of the male voice in the public

³⁴⁰ Coşkun, “Halide Nusret Zorlutuna -Hayatı-Eserleri-Fikirleri,” 202.

³⁴¹ Peyami Safa, *Fatih-Harbiye* (Ötüken Neşriyat, 2022).

discourse.³⁴² When Halide Nusret's works are interpreted through this perspective, as highlighted by Bora, the public-private dichotomy and the shift between them become more comprehensible. Following the trend that escalates through the late 1930s, Halide Nusret's rhetoric in her fictions also adjusted to male dominated discourse, both in terms of literary canon and political stance.

In this section, Halide Nusret's only novel of the relevant period is analyzed, focusing primarily on its comparison with her previous works and its approach to the female experience. However, despite the remarkable similarities in the plots, the most striking contrast is between this novel and the diary she wrote during this period. Halide Nusret wrote this novel a few years after giving birth to her son. So, while narrating Meclâ's processes of labor and motherhood, she clearly benefitted from her own experience. Although her depiction of motherhood resembles that of Meclâ, its influence on her is quite the opposite. While the novel depicts liberation of the female protagonist by adapting to traditional social roles and thus becoming fully compatible with republican ideals, the diary describes Halide Nusret's struggle with domestic expectations and her struggle to overcome them. In the next section, this diary is examined as a striking reflection of women's authentic life experiences and personal struggles, serving as the only space where Halide Nusret could articulate her private persona.

3.4. Motherhood, Marriage, and the Self: A Thematic Reading of Halide Nusret's Diary

The diary Halide Nusret kept during this period is significantly longer and more revealing than the one from 1924. It offers not only a more detailed account of her daily life but also a deeper glimpse into her emotional and psychological world.³⁴³ However, instead of seeing this diary as simply a window into her private life, I see it as a narrative space where personal experiences confront larger social issues. Therefore, I analyze the diary in order to make a reciprocal reading of her texts

³⁴² Aksu Bora, "ORTADOĞU'DA KADIN HAREKETLERİ: FARKLI YOLLAR, FARKLI STRATEJİLER," *İ.Ü. Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, no. 39 (Ekim 2008): 64.

³⁴³ Zorlutuna Halide Nusret, "Günlük," *Diary*, İstanbul, 1929, 10011-3-142, Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı.

reflecting her public persona, focusing on the perspectives and narratives it reveals rather than the factual accuracy of its content. While in the previous chapter a clearer distinction between her public and private personas could be made, this chapter shows that between 1927 and 1935 her diary became the only textual space where we can find traces of her private realm. Unlike in the early 1920s, when her fictional writings provide hints of her private thoughts, in this later period such reflections are almost entirely limited to her diary. This makes the diary a unique source for understanding the dynamics between her personal life and the changing sociopolitical environment.³⁴⁴

While dealing with a diary, one of the first things to question is the motivation of the writer. From many aspects, Halide Nusret's second diary looks like a "truly private diary," where the writer takes records for only herself. Like her first, this notebook appears as a record for her future self. In the opening entry, she expresses her desire to document a milestone event of the birth of her son. She then wonders how she might feel when she reads these recordings 30 or 40 years later.³⁴⁵ Later in the notebook, diary keeping seems to create a space that she needed to express herself freely, out of any judgements of the community. At some point, she states, "If I don't moan around, these complaints that overflow from my heart from time to time, I think I will crack. To whom can I say these things? Even to the closest friend, one cannot show this wound of self-respect."³⁴⁶ Even if Halide Nusret frames her diary as such, I agree with Lynn Z. Bloom that it would not be accurate to consider a writer's diary as a genre of only private records.³⁴⁷ According to Bloom, "for a professional writer there are no private writings" as "a professional writer is never off duty."³⁴⁸ As a prominent writer of her time, Halide

³⁴⁴ Lynn Z. Bloom, "I Write for Myself and Strangers': Private Diaries as Public Documents," in *Composition Studies As A Creative Art* (University Press of Colorado, Utah State University Press., 1998).

³⁴⁵ Halide Nusret, "Günlük," 1929, at 10/01/1930.

³⁴⁶ "Yüreğimden taşan bu iniltileri, bu şikayetleri eğer ara sıra yazmazsam çatlarım sanıyorum. Bunlar kime söylenir? En yakın dosta bile insan bu izzet-i nefis yarasını gösteremez." Halide Nusret, "Günlük," 1929, at 21/6/1930.

³⁴⁷ Bloom, "I Write for Myself and Strangers': Private Diaries as Public Documents," 172.

³⁴⁸ Bloom, "I Write for Myself and Strangers': Private Diaries as Public Documents," 172–73.

Nusret kept her diary with an artistic style. She adopted a similar voice to the one found in her fictional works. Especially her depictions of the sentimental moments, narrates Halide as a novel character, speaking with a similar tone.

While categorizing the diaries, Bloom notes that the “truly private diaries” differ from the public ones in their purpose, scope, and style: “Written with neither art nor artifice, they are so terse they seem coded; no reader outside the author's immediate society or household could understand them without extratextual information.”³⁴⁹ Halide Nusret does identify some places or people from time to time. For example, when she is telling the story of naming their baby, she mentions Mehmet Emin (Yurdakul) as “Turkish Poet Mehmet Emin Bey.”³⁵⁰ These are not kind of detail she might need to remember later, but still not enough to categorize this text as a public diary. Halide Nusret's diary does not contain many philosophical or intellectual reflections, either, which is also identified as one of the main features of public diaries.³⁵¹ Although her diary sometimes features a poem etc., we do not hear Halide's intellectual voice much. The parts where she goes deeper are the parts where she reveals her inner voice. Almost like the pages of an emotional novel, there is a very elaborate expression of sentimentality. She uses these in her novel later on. As will be discussed later, the portrayal of motherhood in *Gül'ün Babası Kim?* is parallel to her personal experience in the novel. In other words, she is both preparing for autobiography and practicing the style of the novel. That does not mean, however, that Halide Nusret's approach to diary is similar to Virginia Woolf who used her diaries as a sketch book for her novels. Woolf's notes and diaries that cover the majority of her life reveal the intention of either creating her literary style, or a template to build her characters.³⁵² On the contrary, for Halide Nusret, diary is not a means for literature, but literature becomes a tool to write about her inner world. She is not free from literary concerns, but it is not more than an authorial habit.

³⁴⁹ Bloom, “‘I Write for Myself and Strangers’: Private Diaries as Public Documents,” 173.

³⁵⁰ “Türk şairi Mehmet Emin Bey,” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 10/01/1930.

³⁵¹ Bloom, “‘I Write for Myself and Strangers’: Private Diaries as Public Documents,” 176.

³⁵² M. Ahmet Düzdağ, “Virginia Woolf'un Günlüğü: Kurgu Mu Gerçek Mi?,” *Hece*, nos. 222-223-224 (Haziran-Temmuz-Ağustos 2015): 283.

However, the main purpose for Halide Nusret to keep her diary was not any of the above. She did it first and foremost as a way of outpouring her depression. This desire comes from motherhood and is related to the increasing tension with the public self. More than anything, diary keeping was a shelter for her, when her ideals and the reality of life conflicted increasingly.

The opening entry of the diary is a prologue of her new life as a mother.³⁵³ She writes this section 43 days after her son's birth, on January 10, 1930. It appears that this new chapter of her life made her decide to record it. In accordance with this intention, the diary reflects the identity crisis of hers which hardened by the new title that came with the child. The prologue is structured more like an essay reflecting on her experience of birth and postpartum than a typical diary entry. It covers the recurring themes present throughout the entire notebook: labor and birth, shifting dynamics in her relationships with her husband and mother, childcare, and finally, the anxieties of parenthood and the questioning of fatherhood. In addition, two other important themes emerge later: one emphasizes economic challenges and the necessity of working, and Halide's intellectual journey during her travel to Ankara. Both themes highlight her experiences outside the domestic sphere. While the former is related to being a working woman, the latter represents a direct break from the borders of the household and displays a new aspect of her personality. These themes are invaluable for understanding how Halide reflected her out-of-home identities in her diary.

The first theme she includes in her diary is labor and birth, which are one of the features that make this diary unique. She tells about the physical and psychological side of motherhood, which is rarely exposed at that period due to cultural constraints and private domesticity surrounding childbirth. Moreover, what Halide Nusret wrote in this private realm, about the female body and reproductive health was not even in the main agenda of the world feminists; and would not be discussed well into the 1960s. Although the details are not relevant for the purpose of this thesis, I will give an outline of these parts to assert how the

³⁵³ Halide Nusret, "Günlük," 1929, at 10/01/1930.

private agendas of women were ahead of political realm and even the public ideals of those women themselves.

She starts by giving details of her health during pregnancy. Then she gives a comprehensive description of the labor period, what she ate and drank, the midwife as well as the people who were with her while giving birth. She talks about the tension between her mother and her husband during this period. She mentions how this exhausted her throughout her pregnancy and labor. One unique aspect of her expression is how she mentions fear as an integral part of pregnancy. She is scared of physical examination of the midwife and naturally, giving birth: “After drinking her coffee and smoking a cigarette, she (midwife) asked for permission for an ‘examination.’ I desperately gritted my teeth, but it was causing me so much pain and breaking my strength. ‘If I feel so much pain in this, how am I going to give birth to this huge child?...’ I was losing my mind. I had already been trembling with this fear for nine months...”³⁵⁴ These lines express a very human reflex of fear, which is rarely mentioned in a context when motherhood was projected as a sacred and heavenly title. However, she still tries to fit into the idealized image by trying to keep calm and hide her pain by not screaming during delivery: “I used to condemn those who screamed during childbirth, saying it was nothing but nastiness, and I was determined not to scream myself; I was keeping my word.”³⁵⁵ Yet, she could not keep it long. As the pain became unbearable, she understands that this attitude was far from the reality: “I couldn't keep my nice silence anymore. When the pain came, I screamed at the top of my lungs. Outside in the darkness, the wind was screaming and shouting and whipping the windows. What a terrible night it was!... However, I

³⁵⁴ “Kahvesini, sigarasını içtikten sonra “muayene” için müsaade istedi. Naçar dişimi sıktım. Fakat bu iş, bana çok acı veriyor ve kuvve-i maneviyemi kırıyordu. “bunda bu kadar can acısı duyarsam, koskocaman çocuğu nasıl dünyaya getireceğim?...” diye aklım yerinden oynuyordu. Zaten dokuz ay bu korku ile titremiş durmuştum...” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 10/01/1930.

³⁵⁵ “Doğururken bağırانları ayıplar, bunun şirretlikten başka bir şey olmadığını söylerdim ve kendim bağırmamaya azmetmiştim; sözümde duruyordum.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 10/01/1930.

was worried that my voice would be heard by the neighbors in the stormy night.”³⁵⁶ The subject of birth and motherhood was treated with a focus on duties and in a somewhat romanticized way, back in that period (and perhaps still is), due to the reasons discussed above. Halide Nusret's published writings in these years are in this line, they construct a much more idealistic motherhood. Here, however, there is a gaze that clearly fears and does not romanticize it at all. It is interesting in this sense that she writes these lines 43 days after birth because she still does not romanticize. She wants to portray it in all its reality. In the daily discussions of that period, even in women's magazines, there is no such coverage of the realities of childbirth. This is another point where the private persona diverges. Although she will later show the emotional and romantic side of motherhood in her relationship with her son, she will keep displaying the true picture of motherhood with these sorts of remarks.

This diary entry also informed how Halide Nusret narrated Meclâ's childbirth in *Gül'ün Babası Kim?* The novel depicts the time Meclâ became a mother in diary form. The style is like that of author's diary: “I died a thousand times and was revived a thousand times, especially in the last two days and two nights, until I reached the moment of this relief! Thousands of times I went in and out of hell, from hell to gayya, from gayya to hell...”³⁵⁷ Yet, the novel does not go into details, as in the diary. It mentions the delivery process just as a small disturbing moment, that the mother quickly recovers from. Whereas Halide Nusret's own experience shows the real complexity behind it. An even more striking dissimilarity between these two genres is about the moments following the birth of the child. Meclâ immediately worries about having a fatherless child. Her only concern about her daughter is raising her without a proper family, and

³⁵⁶ “Artık o güzel sükunetimi muhafaza edemiyordum. Ağrı gelince avaz avaz haykırıyordum. Dışarıda karanlığın içinde de rüzgar avaz avaz haykırıyor, bağılıyor, pencereleri kırbaçlıyordu. Ne fena bir geceydi!... mamafih ben, fırtınalı gece içinde sesimin konu komşuya gideceğini düşünerek mahzun oluyordum.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 10/01/1930.

³⁵⁷ “Bu halas, dakikasına erişinceye kadar, bilhassa son iki gün ve iki gece, bin defa öldüm, bin defa dirildim! Binlerce defa cehennemden gayyaya, gayyadan cehenneme girdim çıktım...” Halide Nusret, *Gül'ün Babası Kim?*, 101.

her dream is seeing Gül establishing her own family one day. The novel describes the whole issue around a quite structural scheme. It narrates the story as having a family is the only solution to every problem Meclâ had. Indeed, the novel's happy ending comes with Meclâ's marriage with a decent man. Halide Nusret's diary, on the other hand, reflects how having a traditionally decent family was not the ultimate solution. Although she was quite a devoted mother and would build quite strong maternal bonds with her son later, her first feelings and thoughts after having him were not about it for several pages. She states how relieved she was when she found out it was a boy:

"Throughout my pregnancy, I always wanted and expected a boy. Bringing a human being into the world is basically a crime, especially a "woman". To bring a machine of suffering, a creature made for suffering! This is the greatest of crimes, I was saying. Even the happiest woman will at least suffer the torture of pregnancy and childbirth, won't she?... Poor women!... poor mothers!..."³⁵⁸

Halide Nusret felt the challenges of being a woman even more than before, with her motherhood experience. She wanted to have a boy, yet this is not because of patriarchal pressure and stereotypical gender norms she adopted, but because of her empathy towards the struggles of her fellow women. For her, women are subjected to the agonies of this world more than anyone, so bringing another woman into this world means handing them down to another soul. Reacting to gender roles and the inequality among sexes is something Halide Nusret does not mention in her publications, especially during this period of "state feminism." It is via her diary that she describes her objection even if she knew it would not be transmitted to any recipient.

The distress she felt after the birth of her son was not just about physical pain and fear. Her relationship with her husband and her mother was certainly

³⁵⁸ "Gebe bulunduğum müddetçe hep erkek çocuk istemiş, erkek çocuk beklemiştim. Dünyaya insan getirmek esasen bir cinayet, hele bir "kadın". Bir ıstırap makinesi... ıstırap çekmeye mahsus bir mahluk getirmek! Cinayetlerin en büyüğü bu, diyordum. En mesut kadına bile, hiç olmazsa gebelik ve doğum eziyetlerini çekecek değil mi?... zavallı kadınlar!... zavallı anneler!..." Halide Nusret, "Günlük," 1929, at 10/01/1930.

another source of stress for her. Contrary to Meclâ in *Gül'ün Babası Kim?*, Halide Nusret's son is born in an ideal environment with a decent family. However, unlike the message conveyed through her novel, this ideal did not bring the coziness of traditional relationships. In the prologue of the diary, Halide Nusret's next concern after her son's and her health was her husband's reaction to the situation: "I saw my husband for the first time with such excitement, I think there were even tears in his eyes. He was so worried while I was in pain! So, he loves me!"³⁵⁹ Following this excitement of family bliss, she admits not being aware of her husband's compassionate and loving heart. Yet, she continues, "But this happiness did not last long..."³⁶⁰ This expression is primarily about her mentality during postpartum. However, this new stage in their life would affect their relationship deeply, and it is not only about her current state. Following this page in the notebook, she will keep writing about the disappointment she felt about her husband.

Throughout the diary, Halide Nusret's reflection of their relationship with her husband contains a tension between compassion and harshness. She will keep searching for compassion in his attitude, but that desire would rarely be fulfilled. The first issue she wrote about is sharing the room while taking care of the baby. Aziz Vecihi Bey wants to stay in separate rooms, so the baby and mother could stay together. Halide Nusret, on the other hand, wants the baby to sleep with her mother, Ayşe Nazlı Hanım, while she stays with her husband. When Aziz Vecihi Bey objected to this, Halide Nusret feels frustrated and rejected:

"For some reason, whether it was because he didn't marry until he was forty and stuck with me, or whether it was because he didn't love me, he enjoyed sleeping alone. And on this occasion (with the arrival of the baby) he wanted to sleep alone in the room, to be comfortable, to be with me for an hour

³⁵⁹ Kocamı ilk defa çok heyecanlı gördüm, galiba gözünde yaş da vardı. Ben ağrı çekerken ne kadar telaş etmişti! Demek beni seviyordu! Halide Nusret, "Günlük," 1929, at 10/01/1930.

³⁶⁰ "Fakat bu saadet çok devam etmedi..."

whenever he felt like it! This was something that broke my dignity, that made me feel disgraced, demolished, discouraged, and we had a fight.”³⁶¹

Providing the private details of this aspect of marriage, which is not possible to observe in other realms, makes this text unique. This instance shows how the baby transformed their relationship, elaborating the emotional distances and conflicts that came with it. She tries to understand the coldness of her husband and doubts about his love. Beyond the romantic relationship between them, Halide Nusret’s testimony reveals some aspects of parenthood that are not discussed by any kind of text at that period. There is a romanticized notion of fatherhood that shatters for Halide Nusret after facing reality. Reflecting her frustration she writes: “The father of my child!... what a sweet delight it gave to my heart to think of this; I was attached to the father of my child with a new, pure and beautiful feeling; a feeling so beautiful and high that even “love” would look pale and insignificant compared to it. He damaged this sublime feeling with his harsh hands...”³⁶² The first days of her motherhood is particularly hard in terms of its impact on her marriage, but this tension between her husband will continue until the last pages of this notebook.

His authoritarian and cold attitude which might be something cultivated as he was an officer by profession is something Halide Nusret could not tolerate, at least within the one and a half years this diary covers. A few months later, in October 1930, she describes how she began to oppose him, a departure from the first few months of the childbirth. She goes to the preventorium without asking him. He then confronted her: “whom did you ask before going?” She responds, “I asked myself!” As the tension rises, Aziz Vecihi Bey threatens her: “Go there again

³⁶¹ “Zaten kırk yaşına kadar bana kaldığı için mi, yoksa beni sevmediği için mi, nedense yalnız yatmaktan hoşlanıyordu. Ve bu vesile ile yalnız yatıp rahatına bakmak, canı istediği zaman bir saat benimle beraber bulunmak istiyordu! Bu, izzet-i nefsi kıran, inkisara, infiale, yeise düşüren bir şey oldu ve kavga ettik.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 10/01/1930.

³⁶² “Yavrumun babası!... bunu düşünmek kalbime ne tatlı bir heyecan veriyordu; çocuğumun babasına yeni, temiz ve güzel bir hisle bağlandım; öyle güzel ve yüksek bir his ki, “aşk” bile onun yanında sönük, silik kalırdı. O, bu ulvi hissi de hoyrat ellerle zedeledi...” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 10/01/1930.

and you will see!...”³⁶³ Halide Nusret laughs as a response. Although this looks like an insignificant moment between a couple, by including it into the diary, Halide Nusret tries to self-prove, protecting her ego. She reacts to this situation in the later section even more intensely. About an issue concerning her health, her husband’s attitude looks despising to her. She writes about her reaction as follows: “I want to break things, knock things over. I’ve thrown myself several times from the cot to the opposite couch and to the floor. [...] My throat and chest are on fire. This man has finished me morally and physically...”³⁶⁴ Her temper rises day by day, which is also a result of her ego as an intellectual, which will be discussed later. It is remarkable that while she was obedient against the authority in her public self (against the social and official discourse), she could act more daring against the authority in her private sphere, the husband. This is another indication that she builds this private realm in her diary to act against the limitations of her public persona.

The diary prioritizes her relationship with her husband over her role as a mother. Maybe it is so, because her son is a source of relief himself, and the diary is primarily a means to express her sorrow. Yet, the new responsibilities and domestic burdens that comes with the baby is another predominant theme throughout the text. Due to financial difficulties, they have had to reduce their spending on housework support. On top of this, her mother’s illness which took a while to heal, added to Halide Nusret’s errands at home. One entry shows how she reflects her feelings:

“This week, I went to the hospital, took care of my child, did household chores, and hosted Eid guests. I worked day and night without stopping or resting... I wonder who is aware of this.... Anyway, I didn't do it for anyone to know! I felt like it; in fact, not only my conscience, but also my heart and my

³⁶³ “Bir daha oraya g din de, ben de g reyim!...” Halide Nusret, “G nl k,” 1929, at 16/10/1930 Ak şamı.

³⁶⁴ “Bir  eyler kırmak, devirmek istiyorum. Kendimi birkaç defa karyoladan kar ıki kanepeye ve yere fırlattım. Ben de  abuk  lmek i in ona yardım ediyorum. Bo azım ve g  s m ate  i inde. Bu adam beni manen ve maddeten bitirdi...” Halide Nusret, “G nl k,” 1929, at 7/01/1931.

senses were urging me to sacrifice; I would run all over the place with a smiling face, without complaint or grumbling.”³⁶⁵

During this time, as she took time off work, she experienced the burden of housewifery quite intensely. Despite her complaints for lack of appreciation, she tries to keep up with the unselfish wife image which she has promoted in many of her works. These lines, which she wrote on May 31, 1930, are her way of struggling to convince herself about the legitimacy of that family order, but it would not take long until she openly reacts against this burden. About a month later, on June 6, she reached a breaking point when her husband compared her to other women regarding household chores. She could no longer suppress her ego: “In a Turkey of fourteen million people, there are not even fourteen of Halide Nusret.”³⁶⁶ She could no longer restrict herself to the margins of the home. The moment she realized that the intellectual Halide was within these boundaries, she was extremely frustrated. The frustration is manifested through her resentment against her husband: “He reduces my virtues to daily chores of washing clothes and cooking a bowl of food. He prefers the work that any simple woman can do to my art, my reputation, my elegance and decency, my spiritual dignity, and my social position.”³⁶⁷ In fact, she is just sick of the chores her public persona praises as the sacred duty of women. In her poem “Ev Kadını,” she has depicted this devoted character whose house is spotless and who takes care of children happily.³⁶⁸ Halide Nusret regards herself and women of word like her as exceptions of this figure. Accordingly, she wrote in the first line of the next poem of the trilogy

³⁶⁵ “Bu hafta, hem hastaneye, hem çocuğuma hem ev işlerine baktım, hem de bayram misafir ağırladım. Geceli gündüzlü durmadan, dinlenmeden çalıştım... Acaba kim bildi?... Neyse, zaten ben de bilsinler diye yapmadımdı ya! İçimden geldi; hatta yalnız vicdanım değil, kalbim de, hislerim de, beni fedakarlığa sevk ediyorlardı; yüksünmeden, şikayet etmeden, güler yüzle dört tarafa koşturur[um].” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 31/05/1930.

³⁶⁶ “On dört milyon nüfuslu Türkiye’de on dört tane bile Halide Nusret yok.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at Pazar 29/6/1930.

³⁶⁷ “Benim meziyetlerimi çamaşır yıkamaya, mutfakta bir sahan yemek pişirmeye değişiyor. Her basit kadının yapabileceği işleri benim sanatıma, şöhretime, zerafet ve terbiyeme, ruhi asaletime, içtimai mevkime tercih ediyor.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at Pazar 29/6/1930.

³⁶⁸ Halide Nusret, “Şehirde Türk Kadını.”

“Fikir Kadını” that “no other type (of woman) can ever fill her place.”³⁶⁹ These lines, which are the output of her public persona, divides the types of women with strict lines. However, in her private sphere she comes across the fluidity of those boundaries.

Even motherhood itself does not meet the idealizations of Halide Nusret. As much as she is happy with her son, she is always worried about his wellbeing, and is so to a state of obsession. When her son gets sick, her worries become so exaggerated that they turn into anxieties about the future: “I wonder if I will be able to keep this diamond child.... With these thoughts, I have been devastated in a constant agony and panic...”³⁷⁰ Motherhood as a phenomenon does not resemble to that of her fictional characters or her public rhetoric. Even love is experienced as a kind of torment. While dutiful womanhood takes up much more space in her public persona, her diary reflects the heaviness of it. In this diary, she mentions almost every feature of her gender as misery. Even her love towards her son is built on anxieties. At some point, she thinks she might die and leaving her child to be raised by a stepmother: “The father is already ignorant of his child; he will never care for him after I die; what will my baby do in the hands of a stepmother? I was crying and crying and crying.”³⁷¹ Another important emphasis in these lines is her distrust for her husband as a parent. These feelings might also be about her postpartum but questioning fatherhood is important in this sense. This is a notion that Halide Nusret never problematizes in her works during this period. The stereotypical man, who provides for his family, coming home to find peace is the ideal type in those, but his emotional responsibilities are never mentioned, which is in line with the general discourse of the era. The diary, on the other hand, often underlines the emotional absence of the father. After she gets back to work as a teacher, she talks about how hard it was for her to be away from her child. This

³⁶⁹ Halide Nusret, “Şehirde Türk Kadını.”

³⁷⁰ “Bu pırlanta çocuk bana kalır mı acaba?... Bu düşüncelerle mütemadi bir eza ve çarpıntı içinde harap olur duruyordum... Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 10/01/1930.

³⁷¹ “Babasının gözü zaten şimdiden çocuğunu görmüyor; ben öldükten sonra öldürsen hiç aldırış etmez, biririciğim üvey ana elinde ne yapar? diye ağlıyor, ağlıyor, ağlıyordum.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 10/01/1930.

was another tiresome side of parenthood for her: “At night I slept on top of my child, although my mother took more care of the child, but every time he woke up, I woke up with panic! And my husband was sleeping quietly and comfortably in his room...”³⁷² In writing these lines, it is as if the burden of parenthood is on her shoulders alone.

Halide Nusret experience these as a working woman, which complicates her case even more. She had to go back to work after a forty-day-long maternity leave. She mentions how hard it was feeding her son between classes: “I had classes four days a week. At six and eight in the morning, I was breastfeeding and going to class, and when I got out of the second class, I would rush home and breastfeed again. Then I would rush back to the school and go to the third class.”³⁷³ Comparing her ideas about working woman in one of her trilogy poems, “İş Kadını,”³⁷⁴ this experience of hers is more consistence with her public persona. Recalling that poem, it was about a woman who had to work to feed her children. Hardships and sorrow are the main themes that depict this figure. Similarly, the diary reflects how Halide Nusret was in an economically and physically difficult position. She states: “It was the harshest days of winter. I did not have an umbrella to open over my head, I did not have a pair of boots or rubber shoes to put on my feet. The rain was pouring down in buckets over my head and the muddy water was soaking into my shoes.”³⁷⁵ In terms of socioeconomic classification, it is not possible to regard Halide Nusret in a stereotypical middle class if one considers her family and education. She spent her prime years as a writer in economic difficulties, including these first years of her marriage. This is another reason why her public persona is consistent about working women. Contrary to other roles as

³⁷² “Geceleri de çocuğumun üstünde yatıyordum. Gerçi çocuğa daha ziyade annem bakıyordu; fakat onun her uyanışında ben de çarpıntı ile uyanıyordum! Ve kocam, odasında deliksiz, rahat uyuyordu...” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 10/01/1930.

³⁷³ “Haftada dört gün dersim vardı. Sabahleyin altıda ve sekizde meme verip gidiyor, ikinci dersten çıkınca koşa koşa eve gelip bir meme daha veriyordum. Yine koşa koşa mektebe dönüp üçüncü derse gidiyordum.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 31/05/1930.

³⁷⁴ Halide Nusret, “Şehirde Türk Kadını.”

³⁷⁵ “Kışın en şiddetli günleriydi. Başıma açacak şemsiyem, ayağıma giyecek şoşonum, lastiğim de yoktu. Tepemden yağmur şariltılarla boşalıyor, çamurlu sular iskarpinlerimin içine doluyordu.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 31/05/1930.

intellectual and a wife, this identity of hers is experienced similarly through these transitory years.

Halide Nusret as a working and intellectual woman wants her husband to be more involved when it comes to financial decisions in the household. When her husband ignores her thoughts, this creates another tension: “I was thinking that this way we would save money; now we are borrowing money every month, then we would be able to pay back some of our debts, and I was trying to explain this to my husband with the sincerity of my heart; but he was not listening, he did not understand, he did not want to understand! [...] I become the target of his behavior, which causes me so much pain and agony... Is this what I was born, raised and educated for?”³⁷⁶ Her desire to be an agent in terms of other aspects of their life is a recurring theme in the diary. Her husband adopts a quite traditional tone, stating that it was unnecessary for her to work, given her health and household chores.³⁷⁷ There were at times when he directly interfered with her career by talking to the authorities in her department.³⁷⁸ Demolishing the domestic ideals of hers, she complains about her salary, which is almost equal to what he earns, does not bring her reputation within their relationship:

“I work like a beast. I bring as much money into this house as he brings in, and I spend every last inch of what I earn on the house; I have no clothes to put on my back and go out in public... I even skip formal meetings in order to please him; I am becoming more and more insignificant (unreadable word); no one in the world is as foolish as I am. With my youth, my money, my manners, my dignity, my education and my fame, I am enslaved to him.”³⁷⁹

³⁷⁶ “Hem bu suretle iktisat ederiz; şimdi her ay borçlanıyoruz, o zaman borçlarımıza da birkaç para yatırırız, diye düşünüyordum ve bunu kemal-i samimiyetle kocama anlatmaya çalışıyordum; fakat dinlemiyor, anlamıyor, anlamak da istemiyordu! [...] Bana o derece inkisar ve ıstırap veren muamelelerine hedef oluyorum ki... Ben bunun için mi doğdum, yetiştim, tahsil ettim?” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 31/05/1930.

³⁷⁷ Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 10/01/1930.

³⁷⁸ Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 4/9/1930 Çarşamba gecesi.

³⁷⁹ “Hayvan gibi çalışıyorum. Onun getirdiği paraya yakın ben de bu eve para getiriyorum vekazandığımı son santimine/sentine kadar eve harcıyorum; arkama giyinip insan içine çıkacak esvabım yok... Onu memnun etmek için mesleki içtimalardan bile kaçıyorum; gitgide silik bir (okunmayan kelşme) başlıyorum; dünyada kimse benim kadar budala

This kind of balance where a wife works does not exist in any of her literary output. She lives in a completely different reality. At some point, she signals that working has a deeper meaning to her, as it is something beyond money. When her husband does not respect her decisions concerning her job, she complains: “My husband does not understand: ‘what is teaching literature? What is honor? What is fame? You tell me about money!’...”³⁸⁰ Her various identities are knotting each other, not only for her but also for her husband’s perception. The diary reflects this tension with all the contradictions and inner conflicts.

Within this setting, lack of attention, financial difficulties and the pressure of new roles make Halide Nusret consider of running away. She struggles to fit into the borders of the house. Only her love towards her son keeps her from doing it: “Ergün, the sunshine, the hope, the pleasure, the bliss of my life... My Ergün! If I had not been so desperately attached to him, I would have left not only my husband but also my mother, and just run away. I wasted my youth foolishly all in vain; I did not really enjoy life when I had the chance... I never did...”³⁸¹ She has a retrospective gaze to her life, remembering her youth regretfully. She searches for the solution out of that house, which is not an exception. The diary features these kinds of statements from time to time.³⁸² Between her roles as “housewife” and “women of words,” she was experiencing an identity crisis. In her novel, Meclâ’s happy ending was a combination of her intellectual identity with domestic occupations. In contrast, when Halide Nusret had to combine them in her own life, it created captivated feelings for her. Later that year, when she goes away from her family for the first time after her son’s birth, it becomes clear that her outcry

değildir. Gençliğim, param, terbiyem, asaletim, tahsilim ve şöhretimle ona adeta esir oldum. Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 21/06/1930.

³⁸⁰ “Kocam bunu anlamıyor: ‘Edebiyat hocalığı neymiş? Şeref neymiş? Şöhret neymiş? Sen paradan haber ver!’...” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 4/9/1930 Çarşamba gecesi.

³⁸¹ “Ömrümün günü güneşi, ümidi, zevki, saadeti... Ergün’üm! Ona bu kadar çaresiz surette bağlı bulunmasam, sade kocama değil, anamı da bırakıp kaçacağım. Gençliğimi, aptalcasına, boş yere tükettim, yaşamak hakkımken yaşamadım... hiç yaşamadım...” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 11/6/1930.

³⁸² See: Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 31/05/1930.

for liberty was not just a momentary sensation, and she preferred her undomestic self over the other, as reflected by her psychological condition.

In August 1930, Halide Nusret was invited to attend the Congress of Literature Teachers by the Ministry of Education. This was a national congress concerning mainly the language reform, which was one of the main agendas of the Kemalist regime. By inviting the teachers of Turkish literature to Ankara, the ministry aimed to discuss the necessities of the reform as well as to introduce them to each other.³⁸³ Halide Nusret gets upset when she found out it was compulsory to attend the congress, worrying about leaving her child behind. Yet, this trip would change her mood completely. To illustrate the contrast in her mood, I want to quote from the last lines she wrote in Istanbul: “And I hate all human beings; I hate my husband, I hate my mother...”³⁸⁴ Obviously, these were the manifestation of an intensely depressed mood, as she was about to miss them greatly in the next few days. Even so, they create a strong contrast with the last lines of the next diary entry. On 31st July 1930, she gets on the train, giving the details of the road and thinking about her son often. At night, she looks around, depicts the scene from the train window, and says: “How beautiful the world is, O Allah!... But my Ergün is more beautiful. And, O Allah, how great you are, how great you are!”³⁸⁵ As she steps out of the house and from all the pressures it bears, she becomes more optimistic, without any concern except her son, Ergün. After the first day when she had felt sick, she started to get used to being away. Being recognized as an intellectual boosts her ego:

“Nonetheless, I became a little more comfortable here. Everyone knows me by name and is pleased to know me personally and [unreadable word]. There is also the whispers of Halide Nusret going on. I am a human being, after all, and I am delighted with that. When I think of Ergün at times, everything

³⁸³ “Edebiyat Muallimleri Kongresi Açıldı – Kongrenin Görüşeceği Mevzular Genişledi,” *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, Ağustos 1930, 3267th ed.

³⁸⁴ “Ben de bütün insanlardan nefret ediyorum; kocamdan da, anamdan da nefret ediyorum...” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 8/7/1930.

³⁸⁵ “Dünya ne güzel, ya Rabbi!... Ama Ergün’üm daha güzel. Ve Ey Ya Rabbim, sen ne büyüsun ne büyüsun!...” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at Perşembe 31/7/1930.

else fades away... I wonder how he is doing... I think the atmosphere here would be good for me if I did not think about home.”³⁸⁶

The spirit of these lines captures the rest of the diary, too. More than the weather of Ankara that she implies, to be recognized, respected and getting compliments makes her feel better. She refers to the compliments she gets over and over, gaining her self-confidence again. When she receives letters from home, they lower her mood a little, but she no longer dwells on her depression as much as before. As the time goes, she becomes more and more satisfied with her fame and getting praised by her intellectual side. The entry on August 15 begins with these lines: “The night of victory!... I drank to the victory, the victory of art, the victory of my art like a wine tonight; I am proud!”³⁸⁷ She writes this about the night where they had a poetry contest with other prominent poets like Halit Fahri, Faruk Nafiz, Celal Sahir and Şükûfe Nihal. She gets the loudest applause, as implied, getting praise and compliments from the educators in the congress. This short section is the most uplifting part of the diary and captures the joy of a woman who finds fulfilment and self-realization where she truly belongs.

In addition to attending the congress, Halide Nusret and her friends go for rides in Ankara, where she feels like someone completely different. Not just as an intellectual, but as a woman, she re-recognizes herself. One of her closest friend, Şükûfe Nihal is with her in Ankara. Şükûfe Nihal and Faruk Nafiz’s relationship is one of the popular gossips of the time. The rumor that they were together while she was still married was sort of verified by the diary, as Halide Nusret states after spending time together that “I forgive Nihal, but I do not want to act like her. May Allah forbid.”³⁸⁸ She tries to herself in Şükûfe Nihal’s shoes and this idea looks

³⁸⁶ “Mamafih, buraya biraz daha alıştım. Herkes beni ismen tanıyor ve şahsen tanımakla memnun ve [okunamayan kelime] oluyor. Ortada bir de Halide Nusret fısıltısı gidiyor. Ben de insanım ve bundan memnun oluyorum. Ara sıra Ergün gözümün önüne gelince her şey siliniyor... Acaba o ne alemde?... evi düşünmesem buranın havası bana yarayacak galiba.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at Pazar Sabahı 3/8/1930.

³⁸⁷ “Zafer gecesi!... Zaferi, sanatın, sanatımın zaferini, bu gece bir şarap gibi içtim ve mağrurum!” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at Cuma Gecesi 14-15/8/1930.

³⁸⁸ “Nihal’i affediyorum fakat onun gibi hareket etmek istemem. Allah esirgesin.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at Pazartesi 11/8/1930.

quite wrong but not impossible. She is aware of her charm as a woman, but her son and her faith to her husband keeps her from any other excitement. She avoids betraying his fidelity even by thinking about it. However, in the end, she states: “If I am fooled, it is a shame... However, I am a woman of art. Artists do not age.”³⁸⁹ Halide Nusret shows another identity of hers, namely her feminine side. Infidelity of a woman was not even a question in her fictional works or other genres. It is notable that she discusses these issues in a quite daring voice without emphasizing gendered morals like female chastity.

The last section of the diary that covers her stay in Ankara describes Halide Nusret's return to Istanbul in a way that crystallizes her total transformation. This relatively long section consists of two parts. Firstly, she describes her reunion with her family and notes her disappointment at not receiving the admiration she had expected from her husband: “After twenty days of being surrounded by so much attention, respect, appreciation and admiration, the indifference I encountered in my home chilled me to the bone... But I was patient... Patience!....”³⁹⁰ In the second part, where she describes her last days in Ankara, she talks about the compliments her poems received and underlines an internal conflict by comparing the appreciation she received there with her husband's indifference. About the compliment of a journalist in Ankara, she complains: “If only my husband had understood in four years the sensitivity that the child sensed in a three or four minute interview, so that he would not hurt me so much!...”³⁹¹ Upon her return home, the duality between her domestic roles and her intellectual aspirations becomes apparent, as she yearns to fulfil both but finds it difficult to fit entirely within the confines of the domestic sphere. Halide Nusret's days in Istanbul after the congress continue much as it did before. She becomes

³⁸⁹ “Eğer aldaniyorsam fena... Mamafih, ben sanatkar bir kadınıam. Sanatkarların yaşı olmaz.” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at Pazartesi 11/8/1930.

³⁹⁰ “Yirmi gün, etrafımda o kadar alaka, hürmet, takdir, hayranlık gördükten sonra evimde karşılaştığım bu kayıtsızlık, beni iliklerime kadar üşüttü... Fakat sabrettim... Sabır!...” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 25/8/1930.

³⁹¹ “Çocukcağzın üç dört dakikalık bir mülakatta seziverdiği hassasiyeti ne olurdu kocam dört senede anlamış olaydı da beni ikide bir kırıp yaralamayaydı!...” Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, at 25/8/1930.

heavily sick and must stay in the preventorium and the depressed statements continue. Therefore, the Ankara section functions as a window into her alternate self, revealing her inner dilemmas that go beyond the public-private personas that she constructs.

3.5. A Quiet Decade: Halide Nusret Between 1935 and 1945

This section focuses on Halide Nusret's literary production between 1935 and 1945—a decade in which her public presence and literary output were more limited compared to earlier and later periods. Several factors contributed to this slowdown. During these years, she lived in various Anatolian cities, often distant from the cultural and political centers like Istanbul and Ankara, due to her teaching assignments and her husband's military postings. Although she continued to write poems—many of them patriotic and inspired by the cities she lived in—her publications from this period rarely addressed the themes central to this thesis, particularly women's issues and gender discourse. She also published some pieces in various periodicals, but similar to the provincial poems, they serve too little for the thematic alignment of this thesis.

This period also coincides with the early years of what later came to be described as the “barren years” of the Turkish women's movement. The increasingly authoritarian political atmosphere in Turkey, along with the global effects of World War II, pushed women's issues to the margins of public and political debate. As in many other countries, discussions around gender and feminist concerns lost visibility as emphasis has shifted to national and international crises. In this context, the women's movement in Turkey continued only in limited philanthropic and charity-based activities, with minimal political engagement. Halide Nusret's own involvement during this time also followed this pattern, and while these years are part of her life story, they offer less material for the central concerns of this thesis.

Still, a few traces from this period are worth mentioning, including a handwritten notebook I obtained from the family archive. This notebook is a personalized version of her 1929 diary, seemingly prepared for her son, offering a glimpse into her reflective writing during these quieter years. While this period does not form a main analytical focus of the thesis, acknowledging it allows for a more complete picture of Halide Nusret's trajectory as both a writer and a historical figure.

As noted earlier, by the mid-1930s, the women's movement had lost much of its earlier momentum. Economic crisis, rising authoritarianism, and changing social attitudes pushed feminist activism to the margins. While women remained in the workforce, their independence was increasingly framed as a threat to social stability, and state policies around the world reinforced traditional gender roles. Many feminist organizations either aligned with government agendas or moved away from their previous demands for equality. Even in places like the Soviet Union, where gender reforms had once been radical, the 1930s saw a retreat towards more traditional expectations. This period of decline in feminist activism continued into the war years, further limiting the movement's impact.

In the Turkish context, the closure of the Turkish Women's Union in 1935 followed a similar trajectory to its counterparts around the world. The granting of suffrage was deemed sufficient by the TWU, which reflected a broader global pattern where women's organizations, facing growing political pressures, either declared victory or faded into inactivity. Parliamentary representation was undoubtedly a success for the movement, but the broader goal of gender equality in the public and private domain remained unresolved. After the union's closure, the movement fell silent for a time, shaped by both internal and external forces. The economic strains of the Great Depression and the upheavals of the war years affected Turkey as much as the rest of the world. Additionally, the growing authoritarianism and centralist policies of the Kemalist regime further limited feminist activism. In this climate, many of the movement's members, as well as the public at large, increasingly accepted that securing political rights was a satisfying achievement given the circumstances.

Despite this retreat from outright feminist activism, women continued to organize in accordance with traditional gender norms, particularly in the field of philanthropy. Historically, charity work has been one of the oldest means of women's public visibility and, unlike many other forms of women's movement activity, it remained within socially acceptable boundaries from the late Ottoman period to the Republic. As mentioned when discussing the new order in the TKB, especially after 1927, many figures from the Turkish women's movement continued their public roles through ideological boundaries and organizations that were considered legitimate within the patriarchal order. Besides the union, *Türkiye Yardım Sevenler Derneği* (The Turkish Philanthropic Society) founded in 1928, which coincided with this transformation process, was one of the significant organizations fulfilling this role.³⁹²

Halide Nusret was among the members of this association in the later years and served in its committees that focused on publication activities. The organization's founding mission was closely aligned with her long-standing public persona in terms of themes that have been consistent throughout her career, particularly the national duty of women in times of crisis and her emphasis on motherhood. Established in 1928 under the name *Himâye-i Etfâl Kadın Yardım Cem'iyeti* (Women's Aid Society for the Protection of Children), the society's initial focus was on supporting women and children, reflecting the pro-natalist agenda of the period that aimed to strengthen the family unit.³⁹³ It aimed to provide childcare, facilitate mothers' employment, ensure safe childbirth for poor women and it advocated for legal protections for mothers. It also worked to discourage abortion, promote maternal education and strengthen traditional family structures by preparing young girls for motherhood. Through these efforts, it prioritized the well-being of women, but framed it as part of national consolidation. In 1938, the society rebranded as *Türkiye Yardım Sevenler Derneği*

³⁹² For a more detailed account on this society, see; Özlem Dilber, "Kadın Hareketi Tarihinde Savaş Sonrası Dönem ve Yardım Sevenler Derneği (1945-1960)," *Toplumsal Tarih Akademi*, no. 3 (Aralık 2023): 28-51.

³⁹³ *Himâye-i Etfâl Kadın Yardım Cem'iyeti Nizâmnâmesi* (1928), <https://tysdarsivi.hacettepe.edu.tr/document/1#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0>.

and, following new legislation, gained the status of a public-benefit association in 1940. As stated in its 1942 statute, its core mission remained unchanged, continuing to emphasize maternal support, child welfare and the broader promotion of family structures.³⁹⁴

Halide Nusret's name appears for the first time in connection with the association in newspaper reports dated 1941.³⁹⁵ In these newspaper reports, Halide Nusret's name is mentioned as a member of the publications committee along with other women writers such as Şükûfe Nihal and Halide Edip. Although her direct contributions are not explicitly mentioned in the written record, her involvement in this organization is noteworthy in and of itself. The parallel between the association's policy and Halide Nusret's stance on women's issues during these years was consistent with her public stance on women's roles, though she did not express it in theoretical terms. Her numerous poems were her only literary output during these years and, in keeping with the association's vision of women's contributions to the nation, she often emphasized themes of national duty and service. Given the relative rarity of personal materials available from this period, it is not as easy to trace her activities as in earlier periods, but her participation in TYSD shows that she continued to engage with women's issues while remaining within socially approved frameworks.

Another institution in which Halide Nusret was active during these years was Halk Evleri (People's Houses), an establishment where she was one of the founding members. Her involvement in these state-sponsored cultural centers reflects the continued alignment of her public persona with government policies. Although she was in the group from the beginning, her active involvement is not apparent in the first years. In 1935, she began publishing her poems and some autobiographical pieces in *Yeni Türk Mecmuası*, the official publication of

³⁹⁴ *Yardım Sevenler Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi* (Alaeddin Kırıl Basımevi, 1942), <https://tysdarsivi.hacettepe.edu.tr/document/1326#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0>.

³⁹⁵ "İstanbul Kadını Memleket Müdafaasında: Milli Şefimizin Refikaları Bayan İnönünün Direktiflerle Dün Şehrimizde Bir Toplantı Yapıldı," *Vatan*, Nisan 1941; "Yurd Hizmetinde Türk Kadınının Vazifeleri: İstanbul Kadınları Dün Heyecanlı Bir Toplantı Yaptılar," *Vakit Gazetesi*, Nisan 1941.

Eminönü Halkevi.³⁹⁶ Her name appears in the journal for the first time in February 1935, when she was living in Kırklareli.³⁹⁷ She wrote 16 pieces for the journal until 1941. Six of them are autobiographical pieces, where she narrates stories of her students, which was published as book under the title of *Benim Küçük Dostlarım* (My Little Friends) later in 1948. The rest of them are poems, which have patriotic, educational and sentimental themes. Her pieces align with the main purpose of the journal which is educating the nation by the intellectuals, as stated in the first issue.³⁹⁸ However, none of them touches upon the topic of women's issues. In the first years after women gained the right to vote and the Turkish Women's Union was closed, *Yeni Türk* was the periodical where Halide Nusret published most actively. This absence should be related with the belief that the women's issue was dissolved with the gaining of political rights. In the early 1940s, she wrote in another official organ of People's Houses, *Ülkü*. She wrote four poems for *Ülkü* in 1941, none of which is related to topic of gender. Two of them has patriotic themes, praising the heroic figures or the homeland. Although not similar in number, *Ülkü* poems, written in a later period, have a less educational tone compared to those in *Yeni Türk*.

Between 1939-1941 her name is mentioned in newspaper columns in relation to People's Houses in İstanbul. She gave lectures mainly about literary topics. The first two lectures were titled "Karacaoğlan," a famous Turkish folk poet, and "Halk Edebiyatı" (folk literature). Given there is no written record of the speeches, it is only possible to interpret the context of the conference by the short clippings from *Cumhuriyet* and *İkdam* newspapers.³⁹⁹ These topics were aligned

³⁹⁶ Mahmut H. Şakiroğlu, "Yeni Türk," in *Dünden bugüne İstanbul ansiklopedisi*, VII (Kültür Bakanlığı ; Tarih Vakfı, 1993).

³⁹⁷ In the memoir she wrote for her son, which is in the family archive, she states that they lived in İstanbul for three years after he was born, it means between 1930-1933. The first entry in the notebook is dated 1 January 1935 and stated that they were living in Kırklareli at the time.

³⁹⁸ *Yeni Türk Mecmuası*, "Bu Mecmua Niçin Çıkıyor?," *Yeni Türk*, no. 1 (Ekim 1932): 1-5.

³⁹⁹ ; "12 Mayıs 1939 Cuma akşamı saat 8,30da Evimiz salonunda Bayan Halide Nusret tarafından (Karacaoğlan) mevzulu bir konferans verilecektir." "Konferanslar: Kadıköy Halkevinde Konferans," *İkdam*, February 16, 1939; "Kadıköy Halkevinden," *Cumhuriyet*,

with the People's Houses' peasantist ideology.⁴⁰⁰ Another significant topic she lectured about was the role of Turkish women in times of war. In 1941, she gave a lecture in Şişli Halkevi, titled "Cephe Gerisinde Türk Kadını" (The Turkish Woman Behind the Frontlines).⁴⁰¹ It is mentioned that she was representing *Yardım Sevenler Cemiyeti* (The Turkish Philanthropic Society). As a prominent association of Turkish women, this lecture title also represents the influence of war years on women's movement. While the text of the speech is not available, it can be interpreted via the statute of 1942, where the association entitled itself for the service behind the frontlines.⁴⁰²

Besides the organs of the People's Houses, Halide Nusret published her poems in other journals, too, during this period, including *Aydabir*, *Yücel*, *Kopuz*, *Yedigün*, *Çınaraltı*, *Uludağ*, and *Damla*. The main themes in her poetry at the time encompass patriotism, nostalgia, Sufism, and personal emotions, along with several ones she wrote for her own children. Apart from the image of the mother as a caring figure in the poems, there is no direct reference to women or women's issues.⁴⁰³ As an expression of her public persona, in reference to the previous era, these poems were written mainly to praise the nation through the land. The subtle emphasis on the territorial integrity of the country is due both to the world war that was ongoing in those years and the fact that it was a period when she was in other parts of the country. In addition to the silence in women's movement at the time, these major factors contributed to the scarcity of related themes in her poetry.

Although the main genre she produced during this period was poetry, she also wrote in other genres, but to a much lesser extent. Memoirs she wrote for

February 16, 1939. "17/2/939 Cuma akşamı saat 20.30da salonumuzda Bayan Halide Nusret tarafından (Halk Edebiyatı) mevzulu konferans..."

⁴⁰⁰ Karaömerlioğlu, "The People's Houses and the Cult of the Peasant in Turkey."

⁴⁰¹ "Konferans: Şişli Halkevinden," *Vakit Gazetesi*, May 23, 1941. "26 Mayıs Pazartesi günü 17'de evimiz salonunda Yardım Sevenler Cemiyeti İstanbul merkezi adına Bn. Halide Nusrat Zorlutuna tarafından (Cephe Gerisinde Türk Kadını) mevzuunda bir konferans verilecek..."

⁴⁰² *Yardım Sevenler Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi*, 2.

⁴⁰³ E.g.: Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Yıllar," *Çınaraltı*, no. 24 (17 İkincikanun 1942).

Yeni Türk are significant at this point, as ego documents that can offer insight into her private persona. In those five articles she tells about either a student who impressed her with some aspects, or a scene from the classroom. One piece is titled “Benim Küçük Dostlarımdan: Önsöz” (From My Little Friends: Preface), which has descriptive features about the column. The first two were published in 1935-1936, and other two, including the preface, were published in 1940, indicating her intention of collecting them into a book, which she managed to do in 1948. The themes she emphasized in these recollections differ from social issues such as orphanhood,⁴⁰⁴ poverty,⁴⁰⁵ to more political ones like the nationalist doctrine of the ruling party.⁴⁰⁶ Others are about the fulfilling⁴⁰⁷ or sad⁴⁰⁸ aspects of teaching. However, giving no insights into her public or private engagement with the question of women, they instead positioned herself as a mere observer of her students. The only reference that makes a subtle connection to gender is an isolated statement linking teaching to motherhood in the “Preface.”⁴⁰⁹ At first, these memoirs seemed promising as a source for understanding Halide Nusret’s private persona. However, her lack of personal reflection and the absence of gender-related topics make it even more difficult to access her private life or explore women’s issues through these writings.

During these years of relative unproductivity in terms of the thesis’ context, the only source available to look into the private persona of Halide Nusret is a notebook I came across in the family archive. This notebook is titled “Biricik Oğlumun Defteri” (The notebook of my dear son), a record on her son Ergün Zorlutuna’s childhood. It is a rather short one, consisting of 17 pages. The first entry is dated 1st January 1935 written in Kırklareli. After the first one, she does

⁴⁰⁴ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Zeyno,” *Yeni Türk*, no. 32 (1935): 2005–6; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Nadide,” *Yeni Türk*, no. 37 (1936): 36–37.

⁴⁰⁵ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Benim Küçük Dostlarımdan Selim,” *Yeni Türk*, no. 30 (1935): 1876.

⁴⁰⁶ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, *Ulusçu Gençlik*, no. 35 (1935): 2223–25.

⁴⁰⁷ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Benim Küçük Dostlarımdan: Küçük Ali,” *Yeni Türk*, no. 87 (1940): 147–48.

⁴⁰⁸ Zorlutuna, “Nadide.”

⁴⁰⁹ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Benim Küçük Dostlarımdan: Ön Söz,” *Yeni Türk*, no. 86 (1940): 59.

not write for two years. The next entry is from 1937 written in Kars. In justifying the keeping of these notebooks, she notes in the first page that: “since the day my child was born, I would like to record his spiritual and physical growth and flourishing day by day in a notebook.”⁴¹⁰ The notebook gives little insight into her life at the time. It consists of Ergün’s development as a child.

The first page begins by mentioning the current state of the family, by stating where everyone is and where they live at the time. Before writing about Ergün, she expresses her state of mind; “I’m not miserable, no. Am I happy?... Thank God, there is no reason not to be happy. But the daily sorrows are so many...”⁴¹¹ But she chooses not to give detail, since it is written for her son, and she does not want to spoil his childhood memories with her sadness. That is the only line that mentions her current self in this notebook. Yet, she gives reference to the second notebook from 1930-31, and remember those days with sorrow. This proves the reliability of the second notebook, showing that they were not written under the influence of the post-partum or any other medical condition that she had, but she was truly feeling depressed in her private realm.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of personal writings from this period, her private views remain elusive. The limited available sources—mainly her work in TYSD and her poetry—offer only glimpses into her ideological stance. In this sense, the 1935-1945 period can be understood within the broader narrative of the “barren years” for feminist activism, which suggested that “in Turkey, women stepped back, partly because of the pressure from the one-party authoritarian regime – even though it was not as harsh as German fascism – and partly because of the belief that the struggle was over. This belief, also seen in democratic Western societies, was based on the idea that civil and political rights meant full success.”⁴¹² When making this point, Şirin Tekeli gives a timeline of the women’s movement

⁴¹⁰ “Çocuğum doğduğu günden beri , onun ruhi ve bedeni neşvünemasını, açılıp serpilmesini günü gününe bir deftere kaydetmek isterim.” Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Biricik Oğlumun Defteri,” unpublished manuscript, Zorlutuna Family Archive, January 1, 1935, 3.

⁴¹¹ “Bedbaht değilim, hayır. Mesut muyum?... Allah’a şükür, mesut olmamak için sebep yok. Fakat gündelik üzüntüler öyle çok ki!...” Zorlutuna, “Biricik Oğlumun Defteri,” 3.

⁴¹² Tekeli, “Birinci ve İkinci Dalga Feminist Hareketlerin Karşılaştırmalı İncelemesi Üzerine Bir Deneme,” 338.

in the same article. In this timeline, there is almost no important activity between 1935 and the mid-1970s, which reinforces the “barren years” narrative by showing that these years were a period of silence. However, at least in Halide Nusret’s case, this period was not as prolonged as suggested. The publication of *Kadın Gazetesi* in 1945 marked the beginning of a new phase of activity—though not in an explicitly feminist framework, it nonetheless signaled a return to a more visible role in women’s activism, reclaiming the political rights which were seen at stake.

Thus, while 1935-1945 can be considered a dormant period for feminist activism in Turkey, in Halide Nusret’s case, both external and personal factors contributed to this outcome. The broader sociopolitical climate, combined with Halide Nusret’s postings across Anatolia, kept her away from intellectual circles. This convergence of external limitations and personal circumstances resulted in a temporary retreat from vocal engagement with women’s issues. However, this hiatus did not last indefinitely. As will be discussed in the next chapter, by the mid-1940s, new spaces for women’s participation in public life were once again on the horizon, and Halide Nusret remained part of that evolving landscape.

Conclusion

Halide Nusret’s public persona in the 1930s constructs a womanhood discourse which is even more strict and conservative than her previous era in the early 1920s. In this earlier period, while her public discourse was embracing the patriarchal norms to a certain extent, it revealed a more empathetic stance against women’s experiences. Her private persona, as reflected in her fictions and her early diary, on the other hand, overthrew the sexist framework of the post-war years. In the late 1920s when the world was on the cusp of change, just as was the case in Turkey and in her private life, her stance became more conjectural, including her fictions. Only her diary reflects an alternative self, portraying her as someone who suffers from the sexist stereotypes of the era. She tells the story of Halide, who does her best to fulfill her duties as a mother and a wife but cannot fit into the limits of domestic life. Although these roles are projected as a great source of satisfaction for women in her publications, her personal experience reflects another reality. Thus, despite her efforts to conform to the ideal female stereotype,

the diary reveals an attitude that, consciously or unconsciously, casts doubt on the possibility of fully achieving this ideal. The impossibility is not restricted to the burden of domestic roles or financial difficulties, but it was also related to suppressing her professional identity as a teacher and a writer. Her experience at the Ankara congress reflects how this suppression affected her state of mind along with her conflicting feelings about leaving her child behind while enjoying her time there. In this context, she struggles with guilt as she confronts her authentic self. The woman who finds fulfillment beyond the domestic sphere contradicts the ideals she embraces. Thus, she feels remorse from time to time in the diary. This feeling is the result of both her conflicting ideals, but also the rhetoric of this transitional period, which intensifies the identity crisis of women.

Following this phase, the period between 1935 and 1945 marks a quieter chapter in Halide Nusret's life. During these years, her public visibility declined. Although she continued to write poetry—mainly patriotic verses inspired by the cities she lived in— and some other pieces, her work from this period shows almost no engagement with women's issues. This decade also aligns with what has been called the “barren years” of the Turkish women's movement, when increasing authoritarianism and the global effects of World War II pushed feminist concerns to the margins. Although these years offer less material for the main themes of this thesis, briefly acknowledging them helps complete the picture of her intellectual and personal trajectory.

The paradoxes and silences in Halide Nusret's life and work during this broader period—marked by growing state control, restricted freedom of expression, and a weakening of the women's movement—are particularly significant. As public voices were increasingly silenced, private writings gained new importance in understanding women's lives and identities. Halide Nusret offers a valuable example of this shift. Her personal archive—diaries, poems, stories, and essays—provides a layered narrative of how a woman writer experienced, reflected on, and sometimes questioned the ideals imposed by her time. In this way, she enables us to explore not only her own complexities but also the transformation of Turkish womanhood in a critical historical moment.



Halide Nusret Zorlutuna and the Politics of Persona: Rethinking Women's Activism in Post-World War II Turkey (1945–1960)

The post-World War II period brought about a global restructuring and mobilization of the women's movement's agenda. Conventional feminist historiography has generally characterized this period as the continuation of the time of stagnation—both globally and in Turkey. This narrative tends to minimize or even ignore the political significance of women's cultural, civic and associational activities during this period. This interpretive stance reflects the tendency in post-1980s feminist historiography to view the 1950s as a dormant phase between the “first” and “second” waves of feminism and therefore remains largely invisible in traditional narratives.

This periodization, rooted in the narratives of feminist “waves,” has recently being criticized due to its tendency to marginalize women's activism that had fallen outside the boundaries of organized or explicitly feminist movements. Scholars have increasingly highlighted the contributions of women who, despite rejecting or avoiding the feminist label, continued to engage with women's issues through various forms of public and private activism. By focusing on Halide Nusret Zorlutuna's post-WWII writings, this chapter contributes to this framework by exploring how female intellectuals engaged with national debates

on gender through literature and public discourse, even though they distanced themselves from explicit feminist identities. Following the trend in the recent historical research this chapter draws attention to women's activism operating outside explicit feminist labels and often intertwined with associations, literature, education and philanthropy. It is essential to see the post-war years not as a gap in the women's movement, but as a space for negotiation between competing forces: tradition and modernity, nationalism and consumerism, domesticity and public life. Recognizing these tensions allows us to move beyond simple narratives of absence or decline.

This chapter first explores how global women's history scholarship has re-evaluated the post-war decades by situating them within the broader context of Cold War liberalization, shifting gender roles, and critical perspectives on the "waves" model of feminist historiography. Turning to the Turkish context, it examines the political and legal transformations from the mid-1940s onward—including reforms in press and association laws—and analyzes how these changes influenced the development of women's organizations and publications. The chapter also engages with the narrative of stagnation often attributed to women's activism in 1950s Turkey by post-1980 feminist historiography. It highlights how this discourse has recently been challenged by a growing body of scholarship that calls for a more nuanced understanding of women's agency during this period.

The temporal focus is the post-WWII period up until 1960. The year 1960 marks a significant turning point in Turkey's political trajectory, after the coup d'etat of May 27, which falls outside the scope of this thesis. While providing the historical background of this period, the emphasis on women's associations and publications is especially significant for this study, as Halide Nusret became considerably more active in these fields compared to earlier phases of her career. Within this context, I examine where Halide Nusret Zorlutuna's literary legacy stands in relation to these debates, and how her constructions of public and private persona reflect the shifting gender discourse of the time. I argue that her institutional engagements and frequent appearances in newspapers and magazines in this period reflect a deliberate construction of a public persona. By

analyzing these texts, I aim to situate her stance within both the evolving women's movement and dominant public discourse. In contrast, I read her fictions from this era as expressions of a private persona. Her post-WWII novels—produced in a relatively more open intellectual atmosphere, even if only briefly—returns to the more introspective and critical tones of her earlier fiction, offering insight into an alternative narrative. Therefore, in this chapter, I treat these later novels as extensions of her private persona and explore them alongside her public-facing texts to capture the complexity of her gendered positioning in this transformative period.

4.1. Gender and Historical Change After WWII

The period following the Second World War marks a unique chapter in global history, especially for advanced capitalist countries. As Eric Hobsbawm emphasized, the 1950s brought widespread recognition that everyday life had improved significantly compared to the interwar years. Later called the “thirty glorious years” or the “Golden Age,” this was when the developed world experienced extraordinary economic growth and industrial expansion.⁴¹³ He also emphasizes the globality of the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s, noting that they represented a unique period of prosperity.⁴¹⁴ While the main beneficiaries of this transformation were the industrialized capitalist nations, Hobsbawm acknowledges that “the Golden Age was a worldwide phenomenon, even if general prosperity was never within sight of the majority of the world's population.”⁴¹⁵ Thus, the transformative effects of this period went beyond the capitalist center and had a far-reaching impact on developing countries such as Turkey.

This global boom, though centered in the West, had far-reaching effects on developing economies, where liberal economic policies and integration into global capitalist networks began to reshape national development agendas and

⁴¹³ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 257–58.

⁴¹⁴ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 304.

⁴¹⁵ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 259.

social structures. It led to increased industrialization and urbanization, alongside emerging ideals of modernity that significantly influenced domestic life and gender roles. The fluctuations created by the rise in consumption transported through transnational media, trade and ideology were deeply felt in societies like Turkey that positioned themselves in the orbit of Western modernity.

Mark Mazower's analysis complements this narrative by focusing on how the post-war recovery was transformed into a growing consumer culture. Following the war, the public grew impatient with imposed austerity measures such as rationing, and by the early 1950s this discontent gave way to a renewed faith in the market economy and a thriving shopping culture.⁴¹⁶ Women were at the center of this emerging culture. In the 1950s, advertisers increasingly targeted women as the “engine” of modern life, and marketing campaigns focused directly on the domestic sphere and the image of the housewife.

This consumption-oriented definition of femininity was deeply tied to changing understandings of class and social mobility. In contrast to older forms of marketing that relied on class-based snobbery, new advertising techniques invited people—especially women—to see consumption as a path to upward mobility. The global reach of these trends was reinforced by the international expansion of American advertising companies, which flourished between the 1940s and 1960, propagating a new, status-conscious consumer culture.⁴¹⁷ With the rise of television and commercial advertising in the mid-1950s, the home itself became the symbolic center of this new vision of prosperity. Household expenses prioritized the acquisition of modern appliances such as refrigerators and washing machines, which reflected not only material desires but also the ideal of a rational, comfortable and modern home life.⁴¹⁸ The idealization of domesticity and its use as a propaganda tool was not limited to consumer goods but extended to architecture, as Beatriz Colomina suggests. She explains that post-war architecture was not just a bright contrast to the darkness of war, but “the aggressively happy architecture that came out of the war, a war that anyway was

⁴¹⁶ Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, 349.

⁴¹⁷ Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, 350.

⁴¹⁸ Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, 351.

ongoing as the Cold War.” According to her, “the new form of domesticity turned out to be a powerful weapon,” with “expertly designed images of domestic bliss launched to the entire world as part of a carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign.”⁴¹⁹

To explore in a more detailed way how family policies and gender roles were reshaped in the post-war period, it is important to consider how national governments, especially the United States, responded to the changing social order. The focus here will be more on the American context, because of its central role in shaping the Cold War world. American cultural and political models - particularly domesticity, consumerism and gender norms - significantly influenced other countries, including Turkey, in their post-1945 processes of reconstruction and modernization.

Post-war America, which Lizabeth Cohen calls the “Consumers' Republic”, saw the concept of consumption as the basis of citizenship and economic growth. During this period, welfare and social participation were largely defined through consumer behavior.⁴²⁰ Yet this vision of citizenship identity was deeply gendered. Although women were at the center of the consumer economy, their participation was limited to the private sphere. As Cohen explains, federal policies like the GI Bill and revised tax laws disproportionately benefited men by giving them access to capital, property, and professional training - tools that made them the ideal consumer citizens of the post-war era. Women, meanwhile, were pushed aside financially and socially, often reduced to the roles of homemaker and caregiver.⁴²¹ To illustrate, the structure of the joint tax return showed how fiscal policy reinforced traditional gender roles. It discouraged women's economic independence by providing significant tax benefits to households where the wife did not work. Referring to the work of Alice Kessler-Harris, Cohen describes this model as a model of

⁴¹⁹ Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (MIT press, 2007), 12.

⁴²⁰ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic : The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, 2003), 7.

⁴²¹ Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic : The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, 136–37.

“normative masculinity” because it prioritizes male economic agency, while legally and symbolically diminishes the value of women's work outside the home.⁴²²

The alignment of family life with national interests had also a cultural impact. Elaine Tyler May observes that the Cold War period witnessed a revival of domestic ideals - marriage, motherhood and suburban family life - as both a personal aspiration and a patriotic duty. In a world destabilized by war and ideological conflicts, home began to symbolize security, stability and moral order.⁴²³ Demographic trends of the period, such as the baby boom and declining divorce rates, indicate the powerful influence of these ideals on American daily life. Yet this shelter was not without its own paradoxes: while it promised security, it also forced women into a restricted existence, limiting their identities and ambitions to the boundaries of the home.⁴²⁴

Such framing of gender roles was supported by the media, which glorified the housewife and pathologized alternative identities. Verta Taylor and Joanne Meyerowitz point to the concept of the “feminine mystique” that dominates public discourse, where magazines, advertisements and educational content encourage women to find fulfillment only through sexual passivity, motherhood and commitment to the nuclear family. This cultural narrative depoliticized women's roles in the public sphere, leaving little room for political activism or professional ambition.⁴²⁵

This practice was not unique to the United States. In post-war Germany, for example, the reconstruction process included the “political reconstruction of

⁴²² Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic : The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, 145.

⁴²³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound : American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 2008), 1,13.

⁴²⁴ May, *Homeward Bound : American Families in the Cold War Era*, 3,6.

⁴²⁵ Verta Taylor, “Social Movement Continuity: The Women’s Movement in Abeyance,” *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 5 (1989): 764, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2117752>; Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958,” *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 4 (1993): 1455.

the family.⁴²⁶ As post-war states tried to achieve social recovery, the status of women and the role of the family became central points of national policy. Like the US, West Germany utilized conservative traditions and legal codes. Political responses to the “women's question” in the late 1940s and 1950s transformed the struggle for women's rights back to its nineteenth-century aims by reconstructing patriarchal structures such as the family wage and restricting legal rights within marriage.⁴²⁷

Efforts to encourage large families through pronatalist policies, including family allowances, were often portrayed as necessary for national recovery - recalling long-standing fears of population decline and benefiting from old ideals that attributed responsibility for demographic survival to women.⁴²⁸ These responses, as in the US, reinforced a return to traditional gender norms and attempted to control wartime shifts in family and gender roles within the framework of patriarchal ideals. These trends were to shape domestic policies and more generally international development paradigms, with lasting effects on countries like Turkey, where Western-influenced modernization policies and Cold War alliances helped to promote similar norms around femininity, domesticity and family.

The post-WWII era is significant for women's history because of the profound changes in governmental policies and how they affected the daily lives of women, and also, its central importance in feminist historiography. Since 1960s, until recently, the field of women's history saw this period of redefining gender roles and changing face of women activism—spanning from the late 1940s into the early 1960s—as the silent era of women's movement. In women's historiography, especially in the Western world, the years between the “first wave” of suffragist movements and the “second wave,” considered to have begun in the 1960s, have been assumed to be a period of retreat in which women were silenced by Cold War ideologies and confined to domestic life. However, more revisionist

⁴²⁶ Robert G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (University of California Press, 1993), 2.

⁴²⁷ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 4.

⁴²⁸ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 5.

scholarship has recently challenged this view, reinterpreting the period as one of significant, albeit often overlooked, forms of women's activism. Historians have increasingly problematized the “wave” metaphor because of its tendency to simplify and linearize women's history. As Caitríona Beaumont notes, dominant narratives overemphasize suffrage and post-1960s feminism, suggesting that the movement “lost momentum” in the 1930s and remained inactive until the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement.⁴²⁹ Yet, as she demonstrates, many women's organizations remained active in the 1950s and beyond, pursuing civil rights, advocating for legal reforms, and promoting public participation among housewives and mothers, despite not being explicitly identified as feminist.⁴³⁰ This growing volume of literature calls for a revisiting of the wave narrative itself. Scholars such as Sevgi Adak and Selin Çağatay have shown that the wave metaphor that emerged in North American feminist discourse generalizes a particular model of activism, masking the diversity of women's activism across time and geographies. They argue that the metaphor “homogenizes different brands of women's activism” and imposes an idealized, singular form of feminism that peaks and declines at fixed periods.⁴³¹ This has veiled the complexity of the continuities, adaptations and local strategies adopted by women in different historical contexts.

Arguing that this period should be reconsidered not as a gap between feminist waves but as an important episode in women's ongoing political and social engagement, Kathleen A. Laughlin and Jacqueline L. Castledine's edited collection is a direct intervention into what they call the “tyranny of the wave metaphor” and presents case studies documenting women's activism in liberal,

⁴²⁹ Caitríona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928-1964* (Manchester University Press, 2013), 1.

⁴³⁰ Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928-1964*, 3.

⁴³¹ Sevgi Adak and Selin Çağatay, “Revisiting Feminist Historiography on Women's Activism in Turkey: Beyond the Grand Narrative of Waves,” *Women's History Review*, April 10, 2023, 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2023.2198107>.

conservative, and marginalized communities from 1945 to 1985.⁴³² While these women may not have used the term ‘feminist’, they developed gender-conscious political strategies in response to the pressures of their time. Laughlin argues that rather than seeing women's activism during this period as a stagnation because it moved away from feminist definitions, we should see it as a context in which new forms of collective action and gender solidarity emerged—particularly through civic associations, professional networks and national women's organizations.⁴³³

This critique is particularly relevant when we consider the lived experiences of women in the post-war decades. This was a time when ideologies of domesticity dominated globally. As shown, the anxieties of the Cold War fueled the cultural escalation of the patriarchal, nuclear family as the ideal social unit and intended to confine women to the private sphere. Yet, as discussed in this chapter and demonstrated by these scholars, this ideological framework did not silence women's political consciousness or public activity. On the contrary, it has shaped the ways in which women have expressed their autonomy, built solidarities, and engaged with national and global currents—sometimes within the boundaries of traditional feminism, sometimes beyond.⁴³⁴

4.2. Gender and Politics in Post-WWII Turkey

The years following World War II were an important turning point in the political and social life of Turkey, even though it did not participate in the global war. The transition to multi-party democracy in 1946 followed by the electoral victory of the Democratic Party (DP) in 1950 paved the way for a new era in the country. The DP government initiated a broad liberalization process that contrasted sharply with the single-party rule of the Republican People's Party (RPP). Key reforms included loosening restrictions on the press, permitting greater autonomy for civil organizations, and relaxing censorship. This sense of

⁴³² Kathleen A. Laughlin and Jacqueline L. Castledine, eds., *Breaking the Wave: Women, Their Organizations, and Feminism, 1945-1985*, New Directions in American History (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 3.

⁴³³ Laughlin and Castledine, *Breaking the Wave*, 4.

⁴³⁴ BU KONUDAKİ İSMİ GEÇMEYEN DİĞER ÇALIŞMALARI SEE: ŞEKLİNDE BURAYA EKLE.

transformation was not just political or economic, but social and cultural as well. As Elisabeth Özdalga writes, the Democrat Party period (1950–60) "was marked by a much more dynamic atmosphere than had existed in the interwar period. A new liberalism and open-mindedness was seen in all spheres of life: political and economic as well as social and religious."⁴³⁵ This broader climate of change opened up new spaces of participation, expression, and identity formation—especially for women, the press, and civic organizations.

The liberalization of the press, especially between 1950 and 1953, opened up new possibilities for critical journalism. The DP created a relative sense of freedom in July 1950 by enacting a new press law that abolished the requirement to obtain beforehand permission to publish, removed ambiguous legal provisions that allowed for the arbitrary prosecution of journalists, and redefined the obligations of publishers.⁴³⁶ With this boom that began in the early 1950s, even during the period of authoritarian repression that was to begin in the second half of the decade, the circulation of newspapers such as *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet* and *Yeni Sabah* increased, and even the opposition political magazine *Akis* reached over 100,000 weekly readers.⁴³⁷ Gavin Brockett discusses this change in Turkish cultural life in relation to national identity, stating that "in this decade, a countrywide or 'national' print culture emerged for the first time in Turkey."⁴³⁸ Brockett explains that by the time of Atatürk's death in 1938, although the idea of the Turkish nation was supported by strong national elements like territory or myths, there was no shared legal system or mass public culture. He argues that

⁴³⁵ Elisabeth Özdalga, "Transformation of Sufi-Based Communities in Modern Turkey: The Nakşibendis, the Nurettins, and the Gülen Community," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity*, ed. Celia Kerslake et al. (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 77, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277397>.

⁴³⁶ Funda Şenol-Cantek, "Ellili Yıllar Türkiye'sinde Basın," in *Türkiye'nin 1950'li Yılları*, ed. Mete Kaan Kaynar (İletişim, 2019), 423.

⁴³⁷ Şahin Alpay, "Two Faces of the Press in Turkey: The Role of the Media in Turkey's Modernisation and Democracy," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity*, ed. Celia Kerslake et al. (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 373, <http://link.springer.com/10.1057/9780230277397>.

⁴³⁸ Gavin D. Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk: Provincial Newspapers and the Negotiation of a Muslim National Identity* (University of Texas Press, 2011), 1.

between 1945 and 1954, the rise of a national print culture—shaped by voices from across the country, not just the elite—helped form a broader sense of national identity.⁴³⁹

Parallel to these press reforms, the legal environment for associations and civic initiatives also expanded. As discussed in the previous chapters, civil society was also under severe pressure during the single-party era after *Takrir-i Sükun*. In the post-war period, the repeal of laws restricting associations with regional or class interests allowed civil society organizations to proliferate.⁴⁴⁰ Hakan Koçak notes that the 1946 amendment to the Law on Associations led to a notable increase in class-based unions and parties, which rapidly gained significant support and began to operate effectively—revealing a growing awareness of the political power of the working class.⁴⁴¹ Anıl Varel also emphasizes that this liberalization sparked intense activity among leftist circles, with new socialist parties emerging one after another after the legal ban on class-based organizations was lifted in June 1946.⁴⁴² Women's associations took advantage of this atmosphere to revive old networks and establish new ones.⁴⁴³

This liberal turn also had international dimensions. As Erik J. Zürcher points out, Turkey's integration into Western alliances, including its accession to NATO in 1952, reflected both its strategic value in the Cold War and its commitment to Western democratic ideals.⁴⁴⁴ This process also contributed to the

⁴³⁹ Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk: Provincial Newspapers and the Negotiation of a Muslim National Identity*, 4.

⁴⁴⁰ “Meclis 12 Haziranda Feshediliyor: Yeni Tasarılar Meclisin Feshinden Evvel Kanunlaşacak,” *Cumhuriyet*, May 25, 1946. “Cemiyetler Kanununda değişiklik yapan vasıf esası üzerine cemiyetler kurulabilmesini mümkün kılacak olan tasarı da bugünlerde komisyondan çıkacaktır.” (The bill amending the Law on Associations, which will make it possible to establish associations on the basis of social characteristics, will also be passed by the commission in the coming days.)

⁴⁴¹ M. Hakan Koçak, “Ellili Yıllarda Emek Rejimi ve Emek Hareketi,” in *Türkiye'nin 1950'li Yılları*, ed. Mete Kaan Kaynar (İletişim, 2019), 70.

⁴⁴² Anıl Varel, “Ellili Yıllarda Muhalefet:Hükümete Yönelik Temel Eleştiriler ve DP Karşısında CHP'nin İdeolojik Konumlanması,” in *Türkiye'nin 1950'li Yılları*, ed. Mete Kaan Kaynar (İletişim, 2019), 205.

⁴⁴³ See: Dilber, “Kadın Hareketi Tarihinde Savaş Sonrası Dönem ve Yardım Sevenler Derneği (1945-1960).”

⁴⁴⁴ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 210–11.

growing influence of American cultural and economic models in everyday life. By the 1950s, a prominently American-oriented lifestyle began to take root among the Turkish urban bourgeoisie: consumerism flourished, American cars and fashions were adopted, and the ideal of suburban domesticity gained popularity.⁴⁴⁵ The DP's promise to make Turkey a "small America" resonated strongly during these years, symbolizing the ambition for modernity, prosperity and democratic identity.⁴⁴⁶

Çağlar Keyder points out that the 1950 elections marked a turning point in Turkish political history. Until then, politics had largely been the domain of elites; the DP transformed this structure by formulating a populist discourse centered on "going to the people" (*millete gitmek*). This rhetoric undermined the legitimacy of parliamentary representation by claiming that only the DP could truly express the national will.⁴⁴⁷ This new populism coincided with post-war optimism, supported by rising agricultural incomes and expectations of American aid, and rapid developmentalist modernization.⁴⁴⁸

As Keyder has noted, this liberalization was not without contradictions. By the mid-1950s, the same government that had promoted openness began restricting press freedoms and tightening control over dissent. Economic stagnation and rising inflation only deepened the authoritarian drift.⁴⁴⁹ Despite this shift, the early post-war years remain pivotal for understanding Turkey's path toward modernization and democratization—particularly in how they reconfigured the relationship between the state, society, and individuals, including women.

To fully grasp the cultural and ideological atmosphere of post-war Turkey, particularly gender roles and women's participation, it is essential to examine how the image of the female citizen was redefined in the context of liberal reforms and

⁴⁴⁵ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 231.

⁴⁴⁶ Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (Routledge, 2003), 109.

⁴⁴⁷ Çağlar Keyder, *Türkiye'de devlet ve sınıflar: = State and class in Turkey: a study in capitalist development*, 17. baskı, İletişim yayınları Araştırma - inceleme dizisi, 77 14 (İletişim, 2011), 147.

⁴⁴⁸ Keyder, *Türkiye'de devlet ve sınıflar*, 149–50.

⁴⁴⁹ Keyder, *Türkiye'de devlet ve sınıflar*, 160.

conservative modernity. As Füsün Üstel has shown in her analysis of Turkish textbooks on citizenship used in primary education in the early multiparty period, the democratic values promoted in these texts are still deeply structured by patriarchal norms. While the shift from a paternalistic to a legalistic understanding of the state was emphasized this shift was not equally distributed across gender.⁴⁵⁰ Traditional hierarchies were preserved under the name of “democracy in the family”. The family is presented as a democratic unit, but one in which the father retains his legal and traditional authority as the head of the household and the mother is portrayed as a non-professional housewife whose duty is to serve her children.⁴⁵¹ This apparent contradiction reveals how the discourse of democracy is used to legitimize gendered hierarchies and conservative family structures.

Serpil Sancar's work offers a comprehensive portrait of how these ideals were translated and circulated through the mainstream media in the 1950s. Her work, based on a comprehensive analysis of daily newspapers such as *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Cumhuriyet* and *Zafer* from 1945 to 1965, shows how dominant representations of women coincided with the conservative modernization project. In particular, Sancar describes the discursive construction of the modern Turkish woman that emerged from the intersection of state ideology, consumer culture and emerging middle-class aspirations.⁴⁵² In these depictions, women were often emphasized in relation to beauty, fashion, home decoration or family values. While these images signaled participation in a modern, urban, and consumer-oriented lifestyle, they also confined women to a narrow set of acceptable roles—wives, mothers, and symbols of modern domesticity.

Sancar also draws attention to the gendered aesthetics embedded in these representations. The ideal woman is depicted with what she defines as the “aestheticized feminine,” with traits such as grace, charm, elegance and emotional warmth that are regulated according to the male gaze.⁴⁵³ These images were often

⁴⁵⁰ Üstel, “*Makbul vatandaş*”ın peşinde, 265–66.

⁴⁵¹ Üstel, “*Makbul vatandaş*”ın peşinde, 269.

⁴⁵² Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti*, 234.

⁴⁵³ Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti*, 240.

linked to marriage: actresses, beauty queens and even female professionals were discussed in relation to their marital status rather than their careers or individual achievements.⁴⁵⁴ In this symbolic universe, women's primary function was to inspire, stabilize and beautify the domestic and national order, rather than to disrupt or participate in shaping it.

Despite the richness of Sancar's archival work, she reproduces a version of the “narrative of stagnation” by arguing that the women's movement had very little coverage during this period. She argues that until the 1960s, women were largely depoliticized, reduced to private roles and lacked meaningful public participation. While she acknowledges the work of organizations such as the Turkish Women's Union or the existence of women-centered publications, she portrays them as marginal or ineffective. “The women in political parties—both in the CHP and the DP,” she writes, “did not have an agenda focused on women's rights. They displayed loyalty to male leaders, party ideology, and political patronage, rather than pursuing a distinct politics centered on gender.”⁴⁵⁵ While she acknowledges that some women's associations have repeatedly raised issues such as prostitution, education and representation, she sees these as isolated actions within a general depoliticized atmosphere. Sancar is not alone in this interpretation. Yeşim Arat similarly claims that “until 1980, women's associations were mostly philanthropic or professional associations” and “existed without any voice, let alone any clout.”⁴⁵⁶

Sancar offers one of the most detailed accounts of how the discourse of femininity was constructed in Cold War Turkey - how the family became the site of national remodeling and how women were positioned as its emotional and aesthetic foundations. However, the ambivalence and contradictions, Sancar

⁴⁵⁴ Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti*, 242.

⁴⁵⁵ “Siyasal partilerdeki kadınların -gerek CHP’de gerekse DP’de- “kadın hakları” odaklı bir siyaset yapma amacı ve niyeti olmadığını görüyoruz. Siyasi partilerdeki kadınların -ve TBMM’de yer alan kadın milletvekillerinin çoğunluğu- “erkek lidere hayranlık, parti ideolojisine sadakat, kendini atayan politikacı- ya itaat” dışında “kadın odaklı” bir siyaset yapmaya uygun bir ortamı ve niyeti yok.” Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti*, 291.

⁴⁵⁶ Yeşim Arat, “Toward a Democratic Society,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 17, nos. 2–3 (1994): 243, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(94\)90030-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(94)90030-2).

captures in women's media representations may not point to a lack of political agency, but rather to a transformation in its forms and expressions. These complexities are central to understanding women's history in post-war Turkey and should be prioritized rather than marginalized.

To see the general pattern of women's activities in the post-war decades, it is necessary to follow the growth in women's associations and periodical publishing. These developments are integral to broader liberalization reforms in law and administration. As explored in earlier parts of this chapter, reforms to the Press Law and the Law of Associations (*Cemiyetler Kanunu*) during the second half of the 1940s created new institutional spaces for political and civil expression. These legal transformations, including the removal of prohibitions on associations based on gender or class, enabled women to organize autonomously or semi-autonomously across the political spectrum.⁴⁵⁷ In this more permissive legal environment, women formed a range of organizations—from philanthropic and professional societies to those that featured more overt political aims, actively engaging in public discourse through a growing number of publications and civic initiatives.

This increase in activity calls into question the long-standing notion that the 1940s and 1950s were a period of “stagnation” for the women's movement. On the contrary, as Ezgi Sarıtaş and Yelda Şahin Akıllı note, a closer look at this period “challenges the notion of a ‘barren years’ between two waves of feminism” and instead reveals a women's movement that, while not radical in form, acted for the “women's cause” by negotiating with official discourses and expanding women's public roles.⁴⁵⁸ These negotiations were shaped by the political context of Cold War and post-war liberalism, but women were not simply absorbing the values of these systems, but also creating their own spaces to express their gendered agency.

⁴⁵⁷ Zerrin Ediz, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Türkiye’deki Kadın Örgütlenmeleri: Kadın Hakları Açısından Bir İnceleme (1923-1993)” (İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1994), 40.

⁴⁵⁸ Ezgi Sarıtaş and Yelda Şahin Akıllı, “Rethinking the ‘Barren’ Decades of Women’s Movement in Turkey: Collective Memory and Intergenerational Conflicts,” *DIYÂR* 4, no. 1 (2023): 47, <https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2023-1-46>.

The 1946 amendment to the Law on Associations, which removed the term “gender-based” from the list of prohibited types of association, may seem like a relatively technical change, but it had far reaching consequences: it allowed women to resume organizing on their own terms. By 1948, Zerrin Ediz notes, a new phase in women's mobilization had begun with the re-establishment of existing groups and the creation of new ones.⁴⁵⁹ The revival of the Yardım Sevenler Derneği (The Turkish Philanthropic Society) in 1928, Türk Kadınlar Birliği (Turkish Women's Union) in 1949, Türk Üniversiteli Kadınlar Derneği (Turkish Association of University Women) in 1949, Kadının Sosyal Hayatını Tetkik Kurumu (Institution for the Study of Women's Social Life) in 1953, Türk Anneler Derneği (Turkish Mothers Association) in 1953, Kadın Haklarını Koruma Derneği (Association for the Protection of Women's Rights) in 1954, and Kadınlar Dayanışma Derneği (Women's Solidarity Association) in 1959 were all part of this renewed momentum.⁴⁶⁰ These organizations were not homogeneous. Nor did they operate under a single ideological umbrella. Many retained a Kemalist perspective, expressing gratitude for Atatürk's reforms and remaining within the boundaries of republican nationalism, while at the same time developing international networks and new political vocabularies. For example, Abdullah Aydın and Murat Yıldız highlight how Turkish women lawyers organized the 1952 Istanbul conference of the International Federation of Women Lawyers and participated in transnational debates on legal equality and gender justice.⁴⁶¹ Thus, they sought new solutions by going beyond national discourses and borders.

Meanwhile, publications such as *Kadın Gazetesi* and *Demokrat Kadın* became important platforms where women's rights, national morality and democratic responsibility were discussed. These publications, produced by women for women, were not just lifestyle magazines. They were also instruments

⁴⁵⁹ Ediz, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Türkiye’deki Kadın Örgütlenmeleri: Kadın Hakları Açısından Bir İnceleme (1923-1993),” 41.

⁴⁶⁰ Özlem Dilber, “1950’lerde Kadın Hareketi ve Siyasi Parti Kurma Girişimi,” *KOÇ-KAM*, January 15, 2024, <https://kockam.ku.edu.tr/en/1950lerde-kadin-hareketi-ve-siyasi-parti-kurma-girisimi/>.

⁴⁶¹ Dr Abdullah Aydın and Murat Yıldız, “1950-1960 Döneminde Türkiye’de Kadın Hareketlerinin Niteliği Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme,” *Yasama Dergisi*, no. 33 (2016): 56.

for shaping political subjectivities. *Kadın Gazetesi*, founded by İffet Halim Oruz in 1947, explicitly saw itself as an advocate against the undermining of Atatürk's gender reforms in the midst of debates on democracy. *Demokrat Kadın*, published by the women's branch of the DP, also emphasized Kemalism, but in a less grateful manner, calling on women to participate in political life not simply as voters but more specifically as moral and emotional agents of political change.⁴⁶²

Such efforts reveal a critical tension: while these women often affirmed traditional roles such as motherhood or domesticity, they simultaneously demanded political voice and public influence. In this way, they were not simply surrendering to post-war patriarchal and capitalist norms, but creating forms of agency within these norms. As Özlem Dilber's analysis of the Yardım Sevenler Derneği (The Turkish Philanthropic Society) demonstrates, despite the impression that the association was driven by feminine or maternalistic activities, women in the association continued to exercise power through social solidarity and civil solidarity practices. The YSD not only survived the transition to multi-party politics, but also expanded significantly to become the largest women's organization of the 1950s. Dilber argues that this history "shows that women remained active in organized life in the post-war period" and that the history of the women's movement should be rewritten to include organizations like the YSD.⁴⁶³

Ezgi Sarıtaş and Yelda Şahin echo this point by noting that the gradual democratization of the early 1950s provided fertile ground for a reawakening of women's collective life. In their study revealing the broad scope of women's organizing in the 1950s, they write that in both primary and secondary sources, they came across many women-involved organizations.⁴⁶⁴ From the late 1940s onward, they write, "the women's movement was revitalized" and included a wide

⁴⁶² Şenol-Cantek, "Ellili Yıllar Türkiye'sinde Basın," 441.

⁴⁶³ Dilber, "Kadın Hareketi Tarihinde Savaş Sonrası Dönem ve Yardım Sevenler Derneği (1945-1960)," 48.

⁴⁶⁴ Ezgi Sarıtaş and Yelda Şahin, "Ellili Yıllarda Kadın Hareketi," in *Türkiye'nin 1950'li Yılları* (İletişim, 2020), 663.

range of organizations, including professional associations, philanthropic groups, and those campaigning for political representation.⁴⁶⁵

Importantly, this revitalization was not merely a revival of old forms. It also entailed a transformation of political practices and vocabulary. Women like İffet Halim Oruz argued for new types of organizations that could meet the needs of a changing political and social landscape. As she put it in the first editorial of *Kadın Gazetesi*, in 1947, Turkey needed a women's organization "not to go back to suffragism," but rather to engage in democratic and educational efforts to uplift women in Turkey and across the Middle East.⁴⁶⁶ Her position illustrates the complex position of many women activists of the period: loyal to Kemalist ideals, wary of Western feminist labels, but still committed to gender-based advocacy.

Taken together, these examples show that the post-war decades were not just a period of transition between feminist "waves" but a vibrant and contested period of women's activism. Women navigated the changing political landscape by blending loyalty to the state with demands for representation, visibility, and equality. Their activism avoided the confrontational rhetoric often associated with Western feminism, but it was not without ambition or strategic depth. Rather, they sought to balance local roles with public activism, reformist aims with patriotic rhetoric, and continuity with innovation.

These insights into the gendered dynamics of post-war civic life call for a closer look at how individual women writers and public figures engaged with the complexities of their time. Rather than passively reproducing dominant patriarchal expectations, many women sought to redefine or subtly negotiate their roles within the frameworks available to them. In the next section, I turn to the writings of Halide Nusret Zorlutuna as a case study that reflects and challenges many of the themes discussed above. Active in several women's organizations—whether as a founder, member, or supporter—and a frequent contributor to *Kadın Gazetesi*, Halide Nusret occupied a visible position in the cultural landscape of this specific period. Moreover, she wrote extensively in popular periodicals not

⁴⁶⁵ Sarıtaş and Şahin, "Ellili Yıllarda Kadın Hareketi," 632.

⁴⁶⁶ Ediz, "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Türkiye'deki Kadın Örgütlenmeleri: Kadın Hakları Açısından Bir İnceleme (1923-1993)," 42.

specifically devoted to women, where she continued to address women's concerns within broader national and moral discourses. She represents a unique position in a generation of conservative but engaged female intellectuals who neither retreated into the private sphere, nor fully assimilated to patriarchal norms. Through close textual readings of her fiction, opinion pieces and interviews, I will examine how she negotiated her public and private personas and how her work complicated binary models of activism and passivity during this critical period.

4.3. Gender Discourses in Halide Nusret's Post-war Public Writings

After nearly a decade spent in various Anatolian cities, Halide Nusret and her husband relocated to Ankara, which would become their final place of residence. As mentioned earlier, the period she spent in Anatolia was the longest break from publishing in her career. However, her move to Ankara in the mid-1940s corresponded to the post-WWII structural shifts in Turkish society, much like elsewhere, while helped her writing activity regain momentum and expand, alongside an increased involvement in civic life. Her return to her former activity as a writer signalled in 1943 when her novel *Beyaz Selvi* was published in *Çınaraltı* magazine, and published as a book in 1945. The most significant turning points was the launch of *Kadın Gazetesi* in 1947, where she became a regular contributor, appearing in most issues. During this new phase in her life, she appeared in several key periodicals of the era, including *Yeni İstanbul*, *Yeni Okul*, *Aydabir*, *Hakimiyet Gazetesi*, *Sebilürreşat*, *Türk Dili*, *İslam Mecmuası*, *Türk Yurdu*, in addition to her work with *Kadın Gazetesi*.

Her writings in this period cover a wide range of subjects, including philanthropy,⁴⁶⁷ child literature,⁴⁶⁸ education,⁴⁶⁹ martyrs and veterans,⁴⁷⁰ language reforms,⁴⁷¹ health,⁴⁷² city government⁴⁷³ and religion.⁴⁷⁴ Halide Nusret was also deeply engaged with women's organizations, most notably *Türk Kadınlar Birliği*, where she served on the board multiple times.⁴⁷⁵ She remained affiliated with *Yardım Sevenler Derneği*, as evident in her references to the organization in her articles.⁴⁷⁶ In 1959, she founded *Anneler Birliği* (now *Türk Anneler Derneği*).⁴⁷⁷

She was also politically more active during this multiparty period of Turkish politics. The return of *Türk Kadınlar Birliği* during the multiparty period was a direct response to the changing political climate, which was increasingly dismissive of women's political agency. Initially, the Union distanced itself from overt political activism, as declared by *Kadın Gazetesi*. In the issue of the newspaper announcing the return of the Women's Union, the article titled Turkish Women's Union opens by quoting the following statement of İffet Halim

⁴⁶⁷ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Yoksul Çocuklar," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 251 (December 1951): 1,7; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Atatürk ve Yardımsevenler," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 301 (December 1952): 1,6.

⁴⁶⁸ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Kuşlar Da Hürriyeti Severler," *Hakimiyet Gazetesi*, March 13, 1955.

⁴⁶⁹ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Lisede Tahsil Süresi," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 133 (September 1949): 1,8.

⁴⁷⁰ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Gazileri Ziyaret," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 208 (February 1951): 1,7.

⁴⁷¹ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Olağanüstü Kurultay ve Dil Meselesi," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 211 (March 1951): 1–2.

⁴⁷² Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Sağlık Bakanına Açık Mektup," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 197 (December 1950): 1,4.

⁴⁷³ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Sayın Belediye Başkanı Benderlioğlu'na Açık Mektup," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 193 (November 1950): 1,7.

⁴⁷⁴ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Din Meselesi," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 63 (May 1948): 1,5; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Yine Din Meselesi," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 126 (July 1949): 1,3; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Din Dersleri," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 195 (November 1950): 1,7.

⁴⁷⁵ Müge Dişbudak, "Türk Kadınlar Birliği" (Masters, Dokuz Eylül University, 2008), 84, 86, 87; "Son Dakika: Türk Kadınlar Birliği Genel Merkez Kongresi Sona Erdi," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 344 (Ekim 1953): 1.

⁴⁷⁶ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Yardımsevenler," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 157 (February 1950): 1,2; Zorlutuna, "Atatürk ve Yardımsevenler"; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Yardımsevenler," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 314 (March 1953): 2.

⁴⁷⁷ Adile Ayda, *Böyle İdiler Yaşarken* (Ayyıldız Matbaası, 1984), 235–36.

Oruz, the lead author and owner of the newspaper, from 1947: “There is a need for a women’s organization in the country not to go back and engage in suffragism, but rather, so to speak, to act as missionaries to cultivate our womanhood and that of the remaining women of the Middle East.”⁴⁷⁸ Despite this cautious tone, several members, including Halide Nusret, eventually ran for office, reflecting a shift in the Union’s stance.⁴⁷⁹ This socially, intellectually, and politically vibrant phase in her life reveals the tensions and contradictions experienced by post-war women—a dynamic that her writings both document and embody.

Tracing Halide Nusret's intellectual and personal positioning during this period, I analyze thirty-three articles directly dealing with the themes of women and domestic life among over a hundred texts she published in periodicals of the period. In addition to this selection of both opinion pieces and short stories, two novels and various interviews from the same period were also examined. The texts are categorized depending on how they reflect the construction of her public and private persona - a distinction that is central throughout the thesis. To recall, the strategies of representation employed by the writer in the early 1920s were often sharply differentiated by genre: fictional texts typically conveyed her private persona, while nonfictional writings and poetry were used to construct a public persona in conformity with dominant ideological norms. The period between 1927 and 1935, on the other hand, constituted a notable exception to this model with the differentiation of genre functions under the influence of the debates on authoritarianism and literary canonization. In contrast, the post-World War II period represents a return to the earlier model, in which both short stories and novels once again serve as spaces in which the author expresses her inner world, her emotional complexity, and her criticisms of gender norms, even if at times implicit. These fictional texts reveal a deeply personal space that contrasts with the more normative tone of the author's non-fictional texts. This return to the earlier model invites a broader reflection on the ongoing role of fictional genres in enabling emotional and critical expressions that are not explicit in public

⁴⁷⁸ “Türk Kadın Birliği,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 112 (April 1949): 1.

⁴⁷⁹ Dişbudak, “Türk Kadınlar Birliği,” 87. İsmet Kür details the candidacy attempts of Halide Nusret in her memoir: İsmet Kür, *Yarısı Roman* (İstanbul: Everest, 2011).

discourse, and points to a long-standing narrative strategy rather than a spontaneous shift.

4.3.1. *Suffrage and the Limits of Political Agency*

With the rise of post-war liberalism and the advent of multi-party politics in Turkey, the question of women's political agency became a key issue in public discourse. As an active voice in *Kadın Gazetesi* and the Turkish Women's Union (TWU), Halide Nusret engaged with this topic repeatedly throughout the period. In her writings, she called for the protection and advancement of women's political rights, particularly their representation in parliament, but she did so in a tone deeply rooted in the dominant ideological framework of the time. Rather than confronting patriarchal structures directly, she framed the problem as a consequence of deviating from Atatürk's original vision for women. Her objections were rarely explicitly feminist or activist in nature; instead, they emphasized loyalty to a Kemalist conception of women's progress. The next section will examine how this limited political horizon manifested itself in her discourse and how it both aligned with and subtly diverged from the dominant narratives of the time.

Following the 1950 elections, a growing wave of concern emerged among women, particularly within the Turkish Women's Union (TWU) and its official publication, *Kadın Gazetesi*. The limited representation of women in parliament intensified anxieties about the erosion of earlier political gains—concerns that had already begun to surface in the mid-1940s. In May 1950, just before the elections, Halide Nusret published two pieces in the newspaper—one article and one poem. In addition, the text of a speech she delivered on the 19th anniversary of women's entry into parliament is published in the *Kadın Gazetesi*. In general, she expresses her discontent with the low number of female parliamentary candidates. The poem titled “Atam” functions as a call for help addressed to Atatürk and refers to his legacy as the guarantor of women's rights:

Baba, kardeş, evlât.. verdi cepheye;	Father, brother, child... gave to the front;
Kendi de döğüştü "tam ecesine,,	She herself fought "to the very end,"
Hayatı benziyor bir efsaneye,	Her life resembles a legend,
Gökler cevap verdi onun sesine.	The skies answered her voice.
Unutuldu bu gün hep bunlar, Atam!	Today, all these are forgotten, My
Yüreklerimizde dertler var, Atam!	Ata(türk)!
Hor görülmektedir bu gün kadın, hor.	There are sorrows in our hearts, My
Bu yüksek varlığa hiç aldırın yok.	Ata(türk)!
Senin inkılâbın baltalanıyor,	Today, women are despised, despised.
Zincir döğülüyor.. Tutup kıran yok!	No one cares for this noble being.
Başını kaldır da bir yol bak, Atam!	Your revolution is being undermined,
Çiğnendi yine bir kutsal hak, Atam!	Chains are being forged... No one to
Bari sen yetiş gel imdadımıza;	break them!
Eserini bozan parmakları kır!	Raise your head and look once, My
Tercüman ol kalbimizdeki kıza,	Ata(türk)!
Göklerde gürleyen sesinle haykır,	A sacred right is trampled again, My
Görmeyen gözlere sen göster, Atam!	Ata(türk)!
Kadına hakkını yine ver, Atam! ⁴⁸⁰	At least you come to our aid;
	Break the fingers that spoil your work!
	Be the interpreter for the girl in our
	hearts,
	Cry out with your thunderous voice in
	the skies,
	Show to the blind eyes, My Ata(türk)!
	Give women their rights again, My
	Ata(türk)!

In the tone of an elegy, the poem argues that Turkish women, who fought alongside men for the nation and raised generations of soldiers, are now wronged and forgotten. This complaint is about the political representation issue, a theme

⁴⁸⁰ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Atam," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 166 (May 1950): 1.

that is constantly expressed by the female intellectuals and organizations of the time. The remarkable point here, Halide Nusret's criticism rises from a limited framework, within the system itself. In the poem, the inequalities women face are not attributed to patriarchal order or male-dominated structure, but to divergence from the rights Atatürk gave to women. In fact, it signifies Atatürk as a father-hero figure to save his little daughters, as indicated by the phrase "girl in our hearts." This reminds what Esra Özyürek calls "the elderly children of the republic." Based on her fieldwork in the 1990s, Özyürek argues that the first generations of the Republic could not become real adults because they devoted their lives to the republic project and are still referred to themselves as the children of the republic: "Their nostalgia for the past marked that period as irretrievably lost, similar to one's happy childhood during which all the family members loved each other under the protective authority of the father."⁴⁸¹ Halide Nusret's poem reflects an early, wishful version of this situation before it turned into nostalgia.

The prospects for the improvement of women's situation produce a discourse based on Atatürk's paternal protection, a strategy that was frequently employed in those years: Relying on Atatürk's founding authority creates a legitimate and safe ground for defending women's rights. Yet while this framework has provided safe space, it has also limited women's ability to assert their independent political and social agency. Although the poem articulates the injustice suffered by women, it does not identify patriarchy or gendered power structures as the source of this injustice. Instead, the solution is framed as a return to the ideals established by Atatürk, rather than a critical engagement with systemic inequality. In this sense, "Atam" reflects the limited understanding of women's rights that characterized much of the women's movement of the period, which was largely limited to issues such as suffrage. While the poem objects to the exclusion of women from the political sphere, it expresses this objection without going beyond the boundaries set by state feminism.

Halide Nusret wrote an article about the low representation of women by the parties, right before the elections on 15 May 1950. It was titled, "Kadın

⁴⁸¹ Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern*, 63.

İnkılâbımıza Dair” (On Our Revolution for Women), which reminds the foundational aspect of the issue. She begins by listing the main concerns of the public. There are three topics she asserted: ‘Backwardness,’ ‘disrespect for Atatürk’s revolution,’ ‘belittling Turkish women despite their heroism in the War of Independence’ and ‘parties cutting the branch they hold on to.’⁴⁸² She touches upon them very shortly, indicating how there is truth in each and every one of them. In the following section of the article, she focuses on the statements that the public does not want women MPs, which was used as an excuse for the low number of women parliamentary candidates.

Her main argument against this statement is built around the question of “which public?” For her, claiming that Turkish people do not want women MP is “an insult to the great Turkish nation whose common sense survives against all odds.”⁴⁸³ The ones who does not want this are the “aghas, who, despite the law on civil marriage, keep four wives within the four walls of their homes - through religious marriage. They do not want a woman MP. They don’t want a woman judge or a woman doctor. They don’t want women without veils or çarşaf.”⁴⁸⁴ Here, the emphasis on polygamy and public appearance shows that Halide Nusret’s stance in her earlier periods is preserved. Even in her early period, despite her nostalgic attitude towards the *peçe* and *kafes*, she stated that women’s public rights were too essential to be sacrificed to nostalgia. And on polygamy, she was never compromising. Here, in 1950s, these issues had already turned into matters that signals certain political dichotomies. In her thesis, Mesadet Maria Sözmén interprets this discussion in *Kadın Gazetesi*, which Halide Nusret’s article was a part of, as a dichotomy of “the real Turkish nation versus anti-woman Islamist

⁴⁸² Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Kadın İnkılâbımıza Dair,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 168 (May 1950): 1, 4.

⁴⁸³ Zorlutuna, “Kadın İnkılâbımıza Dair,” 4.

⁴⁸⁴ “Medeni nikâh kanununa rağmen, hâlâ evinin dört duvarı arasında - imam nikâhı ile nikâh - dört kadın besleyen ağalar (...) Onlar kadın milletvekili istemezler. Kadın hâkim, kadın hekim de istemezler. Onlar peçesiz çarşafsız kadın da istemezler.”

minority.”⁴⁸⁵ According to Sözman, Halide Nusret’s use of the term “ağas” in her article symbolized those opposing secularism, a reading she supports with references to İffet Halim Oruz’s articles published during the same period. Given that many debates around women’s public presence were indeed shaped by a secular-religious divide, Sözman’s argument is not unfounded. However, it is noteworthy that Halide Nusret chose the term “ağa” rather than explicitly religious titles such as “molla,” which would have carried a clearer ideological charge. Although the Islamism-secularism dichotomy is also present as a background in this narrative, the figures she gives as examples—peasants or poor students—all belong to lower social classes and do not construct this dichotomy. This suggests that Halide Nusret’s criticism is more about power dynamics than a simple ideological divide.

Halide Nusret also wrote extensively on religion during this period, addressing various topics that reveal her discomfort with the polarized framing of religiosity versus secularism.⁴⁸⁶ These writings show that she does not see the two as inherently contradictory and often resists the stereotypical assumptions that form the basis of this dichotomy. Also in her 1954 speech, she asserts that religion is not an obstacle for women’s rights. She directly refers to the patriarchy by stating that the real problem here is not religion, but men who indulge in pleasure: “Again, according to a flawed claim put forward by some narrow-minded people, it was (religion) that caused women to fall into this situation. It was religion, the Muslim religion, not superstitions, ignorant softas, selfish bigots, tyrannical and hedonistic men...”⁴⁸⁷ Therefore, I interpret her stance in the article as highlighting power relations especially those embedded in class and gender structures, rather

⁴⁸⁵ Mesadet Maria Sözman, “Gender, State, and Women in Turkey: Intellectual Women’s Interactions with the Conservative Consensus, 1935-1960” (University of California, 2023), 164.

⁴⁸⁶ Zorlutuna, “Din Meselesi”; Zorlutuna, “Yine Din Meselesi”; Zorlutuna, “Din Dersleri.”

⁴⁸⁷ “1 Mart 1954 Günü T.K.B Genel Merkezinde Yapılan 19uncu Yıl Töreninde H. N. Zorlutunanın Enteresan Konuşması,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 567 (March 1954): 1,6. “Yine bazı dar görüşlülerin ortaya attıkları sakat bir iddiaya göre, kadınların bu duruma düşmelerine (Din) sebep olmuş. Hurafeler, cahil softalar, menfaatperest yobazlar, müstebit ve zevkine düşkün erkekler değil de, din imiş, müslüman dini...”

than merely reinforcing the secularism-Islamism binary. While she does not confront patriarchy directly, the words she chooses and the examples she uses subtly acknowledge broader structural inequalities.

The article further extends this framework by highlighting how debates on women's public visibility are often instrumentalized for political propaganda. In response, Halide Nusret shares her first-hand observations from the many cities in Anatolia where she served. She uses these experiences to contrast her stereotypical assumptions about the Turkish people with what she presents as the authentic character of “real people”. According to her, the idea that the public would reject a woman deputy is baseless; on the contrary, Anatolian public has enough common sense not to oppose the visibility of women in public life.

To challenge the perception of women as inherently weak or marginal, she recounts encounters with strong female figures and men who treat women with evident respect. She recalls older women who were respected simply for being literate and, more significantly, notes that students who openly challenged male teachers in girls' high schools still unhesitatingly respect their female instructors. This last example is noteworthy as it points out a type of awareness about gendered power dynamics—a recognition that that questions in the face of a man, even if he is a teacher.

In the latter part of the article, Halide Nusret's criticism turns more explicitly toward the Republican People's Party (CHP). She expresses an opinion that she says was shared by many women of the period: the party was directly responsible for the decline in women's political representation. Reminding us of women's efforts in the party's establishment, her argument is based on the fact that throughout its long history and extensive organization, the CHP has had more eligible women in its ranks. The article concludes with a strong emotional call to action, declaring that the current situation constitutes a wound to Turkish women that neither they nor Atatürk can forgive. With this ending—mirroring the rhetorical strategy of the poem *Atam*—Halide Nusret reactivates the dominant discourse of “betrayed rights,” echoing a sentiment central to the post-war women's movement.

In this respect, the article reflects a recurring trend in Halide Nusret's writings since the early years of her career: once again, the confrontation with patriarchal authority occurs in an implicit, often veiled way, rather than in explicit ideological conflict. Yet, through personal anecdotes and rhetorical strategies that foreground common sense, respect for women, and the failure of political institutions, she conveys a powerful critique—albeit framed within the safe boundaries of state feminism and nationalist discourse.

Halide Nusret's speech delivered at the 19th anniversary of women's parliamentary suffrage in 1954—published in full in *Kadın Gazetesi*—offers a valuable follow-up to her earlier writing on political representation.⁴⁸⁸ Beginning with an emphasis on women's increasing visibility in public life, she frames this transformation as something remarkable compared to her own youth. The opening sequence, which quotes the famous slogan “Rights are not given, they are taken” (Hak verilmez, alınır!), at first glance seems to challenge the dominant narrative of passive reception. Indeed, the speech challenges the idea that women's political rights were simply granted, but the justification it offers does not come from the recognition of pre-Republican feminist struggles. Rather, she argues that Turkish women earned their rights through historical merit and wartime contributions. While this reading rightly acknowledges that women's wartime roles were crucial to post WWI gains, as global feminist historiography has recognized, it erases the long struggle of organized women's activism of which Halide Nusret was also a part. As in her 1933 article for the Turkish Women's Union,⁴⁸⁹ she repeats the early Republican narrative in which gender equality is framed as an ideal blessed by the state rather than a result of women's movement. Her rhetoric promotes Kemalist ideals, portraying Atatürk as the enlightened “sun-headed man” whose wisdom granted Turkish women the right to vote as a rational recognition of their natural value. In this sense, her discourse both reflects and reinforces the dualistic logic of early Republican state feminism: while seeming to affirm women's agency, it locates its origins outside of women

⁴⁸⁸ “1 Mart 1954 Günü T.K.B Genel Merkezinde Yapılan 19uncu Yıl Töreninde H. N. Zorlutunanın Enteresan Konuşması.”

⁴⁸⁹ Halide Nusret, “Kadın: İnkıaptan Evvel ve Sonra.”

themselves. Yet this should not imply passivity, as feminist history often assumes. The speech, like other pieces from the early part of the decade, expresses disappointment at the slow erosion of women's political rights and is a response to this setback. Like the reopening of the Turkish Women's Union and the launch of the *Kadın Gazetesi*, Halide Nusret's stance should be understood within a responsive framework.

Regarding Halide Nusret's accounts on political representation of women, what we find here is a multilayered rhetoric: the outer shell reveres Atatürk with uncritical devotion—a common trait in all major women's associations of the time, including Democrat Party women's branches.⁴⁹⁰ But underlying this is a subtle but persistent awareness of the gendered power dynamics that threaten hard-won gains. While Halide Nusret does not directly confront patriarchy or question the male-dominated structure, she nonetheless mobilizes a critical, demanding voice, articulating concern about the marginalization of women, albeit from within the safe boundaries of Kemalist ideology.

These narratives ultimately display Halide Nusret's *public persona* - a respectful and loyal cultural figure committed to the ideals of the Republic and Atatürk's legacy. The consistent emphasis on national unity, gratitude, and historical legitimacy closely aligns with her long-standing public-facing rhetoric. However, beneath this respectful tone lies a more critical tone, one that senses the erosion of hard-won rights and voices clear discontent with women's decreasing visibility in public life. Although she frames this concern within the protection of Kemalist discourse, the act of voicing such a complaint, point to a form of political criticism that exceeds mere loyalty.

This layered rhetorical strategy - overt respect masking deeper dissatisfaction - also exemplifies a broader pattern often overlooked in feminist historiography. As this thesis argues, much of the post-1980 feminist literature has chosen to pass over this complexity, treating such accounts as ideologically monolithic or passively conformist. In contrast, a closer reading reveals that even

⁴⁹⁰ Burcu Çalikuşu Aykanat, "Demokrat Parti Döneminde Kadın Algısı (1950-1960)" (Ph.D., Eskişehir Anadolu University, 2023), 98.

within the margins of the “safe” discourse, Halide Nusret opened up a space for voicing concerns, demanding recognition, and defending the legitimacy of women's communal participation.

4.3.2. Halide Nusret's Vision on Women's Employment in the Post WWII period

Halide Nusret Zorlutuna's writings on women's public roles after the war offer a rich but somewhat contradictory portrayal of working women. While consistently acknowledging the value of women's labor outside the domestic sphere - especially when aligned with national service, education or caring professions - her advocacy is framed within a broader moral discourse that emphasizes duty, sacrifice and feminine virtue. Rather than presenting working life as a path to personal freedom or gender equality, Halide Nusret closely associates it with service to family and nation, reflecting the dominant gender ideology. Her ideal woman is productive and socially engaged, yet firmly committed to domestic values and traditional gender roles. In this sense, her writings can be read as a response to the emerging post-war image of the consumer woman image shaped by liberal economic policies and the increasing influence of mass media. Halide Nusret challenges this representation not through an explicitly oppositional rhetoric, but by presenting an alternative model of active femininity based on public responsibility and moral clarity. However, her writings also reveal moments of resignation and acceptance: her acknowledgment of societal resistance to women in professional roles shows a subtle acceptance of the enduring power of patriarchy, and her idealism is often smoothed by a sense of structural limitation. This layered stance, simultaneously affirming, cautious and restrictive, which is also emphasized in terms of political representation, constitutes an important aspect of the public persona she developed in the post-war years. In what follows, I analyze how Halide Nusret constructs this figure of the working woman in her articles, poems, interviews and public speeches, exploring how her discourse both reinforces and also implicitly challenges the gender norms of her time.

A prominent example appears in her article “Kadın İnkılâbımıza Dair,”⁴⁹¹ which outlines the figure of the ideal Republican woman. While Halide Nusret emphasizes the respect that Turkish women deserve, she also praises women who serve the nation not just as mothers or wives, but also as teachers, nurses, doctors and even farmers: “Sending brave men to the fronts; helping her soldier fighting against the enemy in the fire; earning her white bread from the black soil, spending her life behind the plow; working as a teacher in school, a judge and lawyer in court, a nurse and doctor in the hospital-the Turkish woman who works in these roles-giving her as little space as possible in the Grand National Assembly; isn't this belittling this great power (women of the nation)?”⁴⁹² She underlines the role they played as caregivers and productive citizens during the war. This definition implicitly challenges the image of the passive consumer woman promoted by the liberalizing economic policies of the 1950s by presenting instead a model of selfless and hardworking figure. The civic-minded working woman becomes the symbol of ideal femininity - both modern and traditional, a model based on sacrifice rather than independence.

In “Kadın Hâkim” (The Woman Judge), she offers a more direct intervention. Written in response to a student forum at a law school where male students debated the legitimacy of female judges, Halide Nusret criticizes the persistence of both popular and elite prejudices against women in judicial roles. She attributes the public's skepticism about the question “Will justice be served if a woman rules?” to ignorance but directs her strongest criticism at educated young people who repeat these feelings. Based on the “sense of duty,” “compassion” and “intuition” she assigns to women, she argues that these qualities make women naturally suited for such positions. At the same time, she concludes her article with a reminder of “social reality,” admitting that society at large is still

⁴⁹¹ Zorlutuna, “Kadın İnkılâbımıza Dair.”

⁴⁹² Zorlutuna, “Kadın İnkılâbımıza Dair,” 1. “Bağrından erler koparıp cephelere gönderen; ateş karşısında düşmanla döğüşen erine ercesine yardım eden; kara topraktan ak ekmeğini çıkarmak için karasaban peşinde ömür harcayan; okulda öğretmen, mahkemede hakim ve avukat; hastahannede hemşire ve doktor olarak çalışan Türk kadınına Büyük Millet Meclisinde mümkün olduğu kadar az yer vermek; bu muazzam kuvveti küçümseme değil de nedir?”

not processing these changes: “However, when we say, “our society today still cannot accept this, “unfortunately, we are expressing a great truth.”⁴⁹³ This dual structure—asserting women’s capabilities while recognizing existing limits—reflects the characteristic tone of her writings: reformist, but not radical.

Her interview with coiffeur Ms. Suat clearly reveals how Halide Nusret’s ideas on women in business life were transformed.⁴⁹⁴ Unlike in examples such as the 1920s poem “İş Kadını,”⁴⁹⁵ the shift in her style, depicting work as a source of pride rather than a burden, marks a notable departure from her earlier, more hesitant reflections on women’s labor. Halide Nusret opens the piece with a celebration of entrepreneurial Turkish women who work as hard and as productively as men;

“We often hear in everyday talk that government offices are full of employees. Some even say that most of these are women who just knit and don’t do much work. This is a clear lie. Turkish girls work just as hard and are just as useful as men in every job they take on. Even though I believe this, I don’t support girls waiting around for government jobs. That’s why, whenever I see a young girl who bravely starts a job on her own, keeps her honor and dignity, and earns her living and future with her own effort, it makes me very proud.”⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹³ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Kadın Hâkim,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 105 (February 1949): 1, 11. “Fakat, “bu günkü cemiyetimiz henüz bunu hazmedemiyor,, dediğimiz vakit de, maalesef büyük bir hakikati ifade etmiş oluyoruz.”

⁴⁹⁴ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Ankara’nın Kibar Kadın Berberi Bayan Suat ile Bir Konuşma,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 216 (Nisan 1951): 5.

⁴⁹⁵ Halide Nusret, “Şehirde Türk Kadını.”

⁴⁹⁶ Zorlutuna, “Ankara’nın Kibar Kadın Berberi Bayan Suat ile Bir Konuşma.” “Dairelerin memurla dolup taşmakta olduğunu, günün dedikoduları arasında her vakit duyuyoruz. Bazıları, daha ileri giderek, bunlardan çoğunun, dairede örmekten başka iş görmeyen bayan memurlar olduğunu söylüyorlar. Bu, açık bir iftiradır. Türk kızı, üstüne aldığı her işte muhakkak ki erkeği kadar çalışır ve faydalı olur. Buna inanmış olmakla beraber ben; kızlarımızın devlet kapısında iş beklemelerine taraftar değilim. Bunun içindir ki, herhangi bir serbest meslekte, cesaretle ortaya atılıp, şeref ve haysiyetini koruyarak, kolunun kuvveti, alınının teri ile rızık ve istikbal kazanmak isteyen bir genç kız gördüm mü, dünyalar benim oluyor.”

Rather than idealizing government jobs as easy routes to employment, she praises women who made their way in the private sector. In a tone that combines patriotic pride with feminist encouragement, she positions working women as active contributors to the national economy. Although this does not constitute a break with her earlier views, it signals a softening—a willingness to affirm that working is not just a necessity or a burden but a virtue.

Halide Nusret's poem "Yardımssevenler"⁴⁹⁷ summarizes another recurring theme: the feminization of charity work as an extension of maternal labor. But in doing so, she also reveals her stance on the issue of women's work. Describing the women's aid organization of the same name, she personifies it as a tireless mother—nurturing, protective, and active. The association is pictured as a space where young women experience the dignity and fulfillment of labor. Here, as in her interview with Mrs. Suat, she portrays work not as a burden but as a source of pride, marking a notable departure from her earlier ideas on women's labor. In this poem, working women are not just in need of economic power; they are already empowered, dignified and essential for national life.

Halide Nusret clearly supported the idea that women could and should work—indeed, she considered it a patriotic duty. But her support was shaped by a narrative that tied female labor to national service and moral virtue. She rarely advocated directly for economic independence and she never positioned the working woman as a figure of resistance against male dominance. Instead, labor was cast as an extension of women's moral responsibilities, a way to follow the tradition while participating in modern life.

This ideological framework can be understood as part of what I call her "public persona." Her support for working women never extended to a direct critique of patriarchy or systemic gender discrimination. Rather, it remained loyal to a vision of the Republican woman as loyal, obedient, and duty-oriented. In this way, Halide Nusret's discourse on women's labor fits squarely within the parameters of post-war conservative-liberal discourse: rights and opportunities were celebrated as long as they did not threaten the established moral and social

⁴⁹⁷ Zorlutuna, "Yardımssevenler," March 1953.

order. Thus, the legitimacy of women's work was often measured not by its economic value, but rather by its alignment with moral frameworks such as womanhood, motherhood and national duty.

While emphasizing the economic value of women, Halide Nusret challenges the new image of femininity of the period. In the years following the WWII, Turkish print media witnessed an increase in the representation of women as consumers, especially under the impact of liberal economic policies and the expanding cultural influence of the United States.⁴⁹⁸ After 1945, followed by 1950s, American magazine figures and encouragement to adopt their values to Turkish context appeared on magazine covers. Advertisement were also important to changing the habits of Turkish women. Whether working or not, women were positioned in domestic sphere. In this direction, in addition to kitchen appliances such as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, sewing machines, many new products ranging from cosmetics to childcare entered women's lives.⁴⁹⁹ Within this shifting visual and discursive landscape, Halide Nusret Halide Nusret's writings stand out as a pointed and consistent critique of the emerging image of the consumerist woman or wife. Remaining faithful to the discourse of women's domestic responsibilities, Halide Nusret emphasized women's national and familial duties as the guardians of the national economy, and constructed an alternative model of womanhood that centered on modesty, resilience and productive labor, especially in the domestic sphere.

In her 1949 article “Kahraman Kadınlar,”⁵⁰⁰ Halide Nusret sets the tone of this criticism by highlighting the nameless, everyday women “heroes” who shoulder the burden of domestic survival. Halide Nusret depicts a multi-layered portrait of female identity through an anecdote about two young women she sees on a bus, one a student and the other a working woman supporting her siblings. One shows the other the hand-painted cushions she sells and they talk about the difficulty of working and doing housework at the same time. These women appear

⁴⁹⁸ Şenol-Cantek, “Ellili Yıllar Türkiye’inde Basın,” 429–33.

⁴⁹⁹ Çalığıuşu Aykanat, “Demokrat Parti Döneminde Kadın Algısı (1950-1960),” 200,203.

⁵⁰⁰ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Kahraman Kadınlar,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 110 (March 1949): 1,3.

delicate and feminine on the surface, yet one of them is engaged in a daily struggle marked by economic hardship, domestic responsibility, and quiet heroism. In this depiction, the desires of the consumption are presented in combination with a deeper sense of sacrifice and duty. By offering this image of real-life heroism in contrast to the glamorous, consumption-driven womanhood celebrated in media, Halide Nusret questions the narrow ideals promoted by post-war cultural trends.

This theme continues in another article, “Ev Ekonomisi,”⁵⁰¹ in which Halide Nusret recalls traditional Turkish grandmothers and their careful management of household resources. She positions the woman—whether elderly or a young girl—as the moral and economic center of the home, responsible for preventing the dangerous temptation of luxury. Similarly, in her 1950 article on the *Yardımsevenler Derneği*, Halide Nusret praises the workshop-based activities of young women who joyfully produce items inspired by Turkish art. The workshop manager's statement “My girls rush here with pleasure, like going to the movies, and they always work with enthusiasm and joy!”⁵⁰² is specifically quoted, replacing leisure-oriented consumption with productive excitement, reinforcing a version of femininity based on collective benefit and cultural pride. By treating consumerism as an epidemic and glorifying self-discipline and prudence, Halide Nusret reconstructs the ideal woman not as a consumer but as the protector of the household economy. Emphasizing duty over desire and collective responsibility over personal gratification, Halide Nusret constructs an ethical counter-narrative to the post-war consumerist discourse—a narrative based on nation, family and a complex, often overlooked womanhood.

Here I would like to point out that Halide Nusret's perception of female beauty is also constructed within the framework of austerity. While she did not reject the patriarchally constructed image of femininity, she strongly opposed the idea that beauty should be linked to luxury or consumer habits. For her, cosmetics and expensive clothes were signs of a dangerous culture of waste. In her article

⁵⁰¹ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Ev Ekonomisi,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 200 (December 1950): 1,6.

⁵⁰² Zorlutuna, “Yardımsevenler,” February 1950, 2.: ““Benim kızlarım sinemaya gider gibi zevkle buraya koşarlar ve daima istekle, neşe ile çalışırlar!”

“Ev Ekonomisi,” she warned women not to waste money on make-up and fashion. She believed that true beauty did not come from artificial products but from a woman’s dedication to her family, society, and moral values. As she writes, “the peace of mind that comes from having served herself, her family and her country will give the woman a beauty far above the artificial beauty of paints (makeup).”⁵⁰³ This idea also appears in her other works. In *Kahraman Kadınlar*, she praises “makeup-free” beauty: “As she passed in front of me, I looked at her noble, small face with admiration. She wore no makeup. What happiness!... The face of a young girl without makeup! Unfortunately, one of the beauties rarely seen these days!”⁵⁰⁴ Halide Nusret replaces the artificial attempt at beauty, which she defines as “painting,” with another definition linked to productivity. In “Ankara Kız Lisesini Bitirenler Derneği,”⁵⁰⁵ she describes young girls as combining all material and moral beauties, with features glowing from kindness and hard work: “their cheeks, rosy with the noble flush that comes from getting tired “for goodness;” her eyes, shining with the unique brightness of “compassion and self-sacrifice,” all of them beautiful, each sweeter and more charming than the other, they were like “fairies of kindness.”⁵⁰⁶ In contrast to the glamorous, consumptive image of women promoted by the media in the 1950s, Halide Nusret presents an alternative ideal based on natural beauty, modesty, productivity and moral strength. While this approach still reflects the traditional gendered definition of women's appearance, it challenges the increasing consumer pressure on women and links beauty to ethics and social responsibility.

⁵⁰³ Zorlutuna, “Ev Ekonomisi,” 6.: “Bu suretle, hem kendisine, hem ailesine, hem de memleketine hizmet etmiş olmanın; gönüle bahşedeceği huzur, kadını; boyaların sun”ı güzelliğinden çok daha üstün bir güzelliğe kavuşturacaktır.”

⁵⁰⁴ Zorlutuna, “Kahraman Kadınlar,” 3.: “Önümden geçerken asil, küçük yüzüne hürmetle baktım. Boyasızdı. Ne saadet!.. Boyasız bir genç kız yüzü! Son zamanlarda maalesef nadir görülen güzelliklerden biri!”

⁵⁰⁵ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Ankara Kız Lisesini Bitirenler Derneği,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 144 (November 1949): 1,3.

⁵⁰⁶ Zorlutuna, “Ankara Kız Lisesini Bitirenler Derneği,” 3.: “Yanakları; “iyilik için” yorulmanın verdiği asil bir pembelikle gül gül; gözleri; “şefkat ve feragat”ın o eşsiz aydınlığı ile parıl parıl, hepsi de birbirinden güzel, birbirinden tatlı ve sevimli, birer “hayır perisi”, idiler.”

Having mentioned gendered definitions, I would like to pay special attention to how Halide Nusret Zorlutuna's attitude towards women's public appearance reflects such definitions. Although Halide Nusret often praises the increasing visibility of women in the public space in her writings of this period, her discourse on women's labor continues to be shaped by a submissive and conciliatory tone towards patriarchy. While her earlier writings tended to portray working women with a degree of pity—framing employment primarily as a burden or necessity, her post-war accounts reflect a shift toward a more respectful and even celebratory tone. However, this transformation does not directly translate into a challenge to gendered power structures. For example, “Kadın Hâkim” criticizes the skepticism towards women in positions of authority in different segments of society, but ultimately avoids confronting the patriarchal assumptions behind such judgments.⁵⁰⁷ Instead, she legitimizes women's eligibility for judgment by means of traditionally feminine virtues such as compassion, empathy, sensitivity and a strong sense of duty - qualities that are often used to reaffirm gender stereotypes. The article concludes not with a call to action, but with a submissive reminder of the “social reality” that frames social change as desirable but unattainable. Her undertone is not anger, but passive acceptance, which locates the text firmly within the limits of her non-confrontational public persona.

Other articles perpetuate this pattern. In *Kahraman Kadınlar*, Halide Nusret describes strong and resilient women navigating public life, yet avoids assigning blame for their difficulties or proposing systemic solutions. She writes about the difficulties of life from a woman's perspective and points out the problems of women in the public sphere. However, there is nothing that underlines women's agency on the path to change. The article ends with a wish “May Allah help you all!” As appears in these lines, she is sympathetic but never oppositional.

⁵⁰⁷ Zorlutuna, “Kadın Hâkim.”

Her essay “Ev Ekonomisi”⁵⁰⁸ (Home Economics) is perhaps the clearest expression of her internalized patriarchal framework, as she emphasizes the increasing workload of women both at home and at work, but concludes with a declaration of divine necessity. “Since Allah created us as women, let us accept that we are obliged to be sacrificing, very sacrificing. We are obliged to show the maximum sacrifice to our husbands as wives, to our children as mothers, to our duties as professional women and above all to the Turkish homeland as Turkish women, and to devote ourselves for this cause!”⁵⁰⁹ she writes - a clear assertion that women should embrace devotion as their destiny. Even when addressing men, her call is not for structural change, but for appreciation: they should simply appreciate women's sacrifices. In this way, her engagement with working women's realities remains within the ideological patterns of duty, virtue, and service.

4.3.3. *Motherhood, Domesticity and the Gendered Nation in Halide Nusret's Public Ideals*

Among the many themes that Halide Nusret addressed throughout her long literary and public career, the subjects of motherhood and domesticity remain among the most persistent. While her political writings were often concerned with questions of suffrage and public representation, her construction of the ideal woman was deeply rooted in a vision of gendered division of labor, moral duty and national identity. Halide Nusret continued to glorify the roles of mother, wife and housewife as the founding pillars of the Turkish nation in her post-World War II writings, especially in her columns published in *Kadın Gazetesi* and other leading newspapers and magazines of the period. Even in articles praising the public achievements of working women or political figures, motherhood remained the unquestioned moral basis of female identity.

⁵⁰⁸ Zorlutuna, “Ev Ekonomisi.”

⁵⁰⁹ Zorlutuna, “Ev Ekonomisi,” 6. “Madem ki Allah bizi kadın yarattı, şunu kabul edelim ki, fedakar olmağa, çok fedakar olmağa mecburuz. Zevce olarak kocalarımıza, ana olarak çocuklarımıza, meslek kadını olarak vazifemize ve bütün bunların üstünde Türk kadını olarak Türk vatanına azami fedakarlığı göstermeğe, bu uğurda kendimizi harcamaya mecburuz!”

As mentioned earlier, the post-WWII period, similar to the post-WWI era, was a period of intensified association of the image of women with home and family. In many countries, this reflects a response related to declining birth rates and demographic imbalances. Although Turkey was not directly involved in the war, it was nonetheless influenced by global trends and similar concerns emerged, and patriarchal norms were reinforced through the language of national protection. Halide Nusret's writings offer a striking example of how this discourse was internalized and reproduced by a female intellectual who, despite her active public life, advocated a highly moralized and nationalized vision of the domestic sphere. Considering Halide Nusret's widely discussed nationalist approach, it is possible to read her vision of motherhood as part of a broader regime of governance, drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics. As he puts it, "biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living [...] passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention."⁵¹⁰ In this context, women, and mothers in particular, are imagined as vital actors in the reproduction of the population as well as the moral and ideological fabric of the nation.

In "Yardımsevenler" poem composed in honor of the women's philanthropic organization of the same name, Halide Nusret constructs the image of the association as a nurturing, tireless female (mother) figure.⁵¹¹ The association is depicted as a maternal protector of orphans, the unemployed, and the impoverished—an "ever-giving mother" whose strength lies in her self-sacrifice and compassion: "The hand of compassion reaches out to the child and the old; She rushes to heal wherever she sees a wound."⁵¹² What makes this poem's portrayal particularly noteworthy is its dual emphasis: it celebrates women's self-sacrifice, while at the same time suggesting that work - especially socially useful labor - is not just a duty, but a source of moral elevation and feminine virtue: "She

⁵¹⁰ Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol 1: An Introduction* (Pantheon Books, 1978), 142.

⁵¹¹ Zorlutuna, "Yardımsevenler," March 1953.

⁵¹² Zorlutuna, "Yardımsevenler," March 1953. "Şefkat eli uzanır çocuğa ihtiyara; Hemen sarmağa koşar nerde görse bir yara."

offers young girls the taste of 'work', She protects, employs and elevates her women.”⁵¹³ While reflecting a shift from previous decades when labor was framed more as a burden, this image remains rooted in traditional gender norms. The portrayal of the association in the metaphor of the mother as a caring, nurturing, healing, sacrificial figure reflects the poet's ideal of motherhood.

In her 1949 article “Ankara Kız Lisesini Bitirenler Derneği” (Ankara Girls' High School Graduates Association), Halide Nusret reflects on the alumni of Ankara Girls' High School by emphasizing their moral character, domestic refinement, and potential as future wives and mothers.⁵¹⁴ These young women are praised primarily for their beauty, compassion, mercy and virtue, which she regards as the traditional merits of Turkish women. Instead of educational or professional ambitions, she prioritizes the domestic orientation of these young women, by listing their identities, putting being a wife and mother first : “As for the duties of this masterpiece of a being in the world: These are endless to list. A faithful wife, an honorable mother, a devoted teacher, an excellent doctor, a famous writer, a professor, a member of parliament, a painter, a musician... And whatever else comes to your mind...”⁵¹⁵ This portrayal is striking, particularly when considered in light of the institutional history of girls' education in the early Republic. As Kıvanç Kılınç and Didem Kılıçkiran argue, girls' high schools were designed to cultivate an upper-middle-class, professionally oriented female citizen, in contrast to vocational institutes, which trained working-class girls in domestic skills to become modern housewives.⁵¹⁶ Halide Nusret's celebration of the students' domestic virtues thus appears at odds with the very ethos of the

⁵¹³ Zorlutuna, “Yardımsevenler,” March 1953. “Genç kızlara o sunar ‘çalışma’nın tadını, O; korur, çalıştırır ve yükseltir kadını.”

⁵¹⁴ Zorlutuna, “Ankara Kız Lisesini Bitirenler Derneği.”: “Bu şaheser mahlûkun dünya üzerindeki vazifelerine gelince:

Bunlar saymakla tükenmez: Sadık bir zevce, şerefli bir anne, fedakâr bir öğretmen, mükemmel bir doktor, ünlü bir yazar, bir profesör, bir milletvekili, bir ressam, bir müzisyen... Daha, ne bileyim, aklınıza ne geliyorsa...”

⁵¹⁵ Zorlutuna, “Ankara Kız Lisesini Bitirenler Derneği,” 3.

⁵¹⁶ Kıvanç Kılınç and Didem Kılıçkiran, “Modernliğin Diğer Kadınları: 1930ların Kız Okulları Üzerinden Sınıf, Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Mekana Dair Bir Okuma,” in *Tek Parti Dönemini Yeniden Düşünmek: Devlet, Toplum ve Siyaset* (Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, n.d.).

school she writes about. Rather than aligning with the school's mission to encourage a group of educated, professionally active women, her emphasis on their suitability for private life reflects the conservative turn not only in gender discourse during the post-war period at large, but also her own public persona, which has often identified femininity with contentment, morality and service. This disconnect illustrates how dominant gender expectations can reframe and even override institutional goals, channeling women's educational achievements back into the realm of domestic virtue.

This prioritization of motherhood and domestic roles is specifically repeated in her work “Ev Ekonomisi” (Home Economy), which was partially analyzed in the previous chapter. For this reason, I would like to briefly return to this text. This article is entirely dedicated to advice on women's domestic duties. It praises the domestic practices of elderly women and shows how the new generation can apply them within their own means. Halide Nusret's respect for domestic labor becomes evident through symbolic references in this article. She celebrates the practice of preparing a girl's dowry chest from an early age, praising both the tradition and the labor it entails: “Now I'm getting to the main issue: The dowry chest of our daughters... Today, this task seems to have been taken over by the girls' art schools, and we see with great satisfaction that the girls who attend these schools, while learning all kinds of beautiful works, are also preparing some of their dowries.”⁵¹⁷ Rather than questioning the symbolic burden placed on girls, she honors it as a formative and dignified aspect of womanhood. This perspective complements her stance in the article “Ankara Kız Lisesi” (Ankara Girls' High School). She touches upon the dual school system mentioned by Kılınç and Kılıçkiran, this time in favor of vocational schools for girls, and signifies the confirmation of the foundational mission of training professional housewives.

⁵¹⁷ Zorlutuna, “Ev Ekonomisi,” 6.: “Şimdi asıl meseleye geliyorum: Kızlarımızın çeyiz sandığı... Bu vazifeyi bugün, kız sanat okulları üzerlerine almış gibidir ve büyük bir memnuniyetle görüyoruz ki bu okullara devam eden hanım kızlarımız, bir taraftan türlü güzel işler öğrenirlerken bir yandan da bir kısım çeyizlerini hazırlamış oluyorlar.”

Her article “Var Olsun Adivar” offers a different context for the repetition of these ideals.⁵¹⁸ The article, in which Halide Nusret acts as the spokesperson for the *Kadın Gazetesi*, expresses pride about Halide Edip's conversation in English with the British MP. Halide Edip, one of Turkey's strongest women writers, is praised for her qualifications on behalf of Turkish women. The article reproduces the image of the Republican woman constructed especially from the 1930s onwards. The educated, politically enfranchised, intelligent Turkish woman, but above all a mother. Even in political critique, Halide Edip's concerns about the negative effects of the European Union on the lifestyle in Turkey are characterized in the article as a “compassionate mother” before other identities such as writer, intellectual, political figure. This confirm once again that motherhood, for Halide Nusret, is not a private identity but a filter through which all aspects of womanhood—even intellectual or political ones—must be viewed.

This essentialization of domestic roles and their overshadowing of other professional fields also shapes her public self-representation. In the short interview in 1952, published just before her serialized memoirs, she lists poetry and teaching as her vocations.⁵¹⁹ Yet she adds a third as the most essential: “housewifery and motherhood.” She calls motherhood “the most sacred, most honorable, and most delightful profession of all.”⁵²⁰ Although her response is brief, it is telling. The reporter senses her exhaustion in her “lined forehead, her thoughtful and perhaps suffering black eyes.”⁵²¹ Even when offered the chance to reflect critically on the burdens of multiple careers, she does not question the expectations placed upon her. Instead, she presents suffering and self-denial as noble virtues.

⁵¹⁸ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Var Olsun Adivar!,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 207 (February 1951): 1–5.

⁵¹⁹ Bedia K. Aksoy, “Kıymetli Şair ve Romancımız H. Nusret Zorlutuna ile Görüşme,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 287 (August 1952): 1–6.

⁵²⁰ Aksoy, “Kıymetli Şair ve Romancımız H. Nusret Zorlutuna ile Görüşme,” 6. “Ev kadınlığı ve analık. Analık! Bu her kadının en tabii en mukaddes, en şerefli ve zevkli mesleği.”

⁵²¹ Aksoy, “Kıymetli Şair ve Romancımız H. Nusret Zorlutuna ile Görüşme,” 6. “Bu sual muhterem ve kadın şairimizin çizgilenmiş alnı, dalgın ve belki de mustarip siyah gözleri karşısında sızlayan yüreğimden kopup gelmiştir.”

In sum, Halide Nusret's vision of motherhood and homemaking is coherent, deeply moral, and in line with the dominant traditional nationalist ideology of the time. Her non-fiction writings form a unified narrative in which the ideal Turkish woman is defined by her devotion to her family and homeland above all identities and relationalities. While she occasionally points to the difficulties of balancing professional and domestic responsibilities, these moments again do not develop into a systemic critique. Rather, they underline the boundaries of her public persona—a persona that prefers moral virtue to rebellion, self-sacrifice to agency. In the next section, I turn to her fictions, where the patriarchal assumptions are questioned and challenged, as opposed to her non-fictions and poems. They foreshadow the dilemmas of everyday women, albeit within a limited scope, and complicate the monolithic representations constructed in her public voice.

4.4. Fictionalizing the Private Self: The Complex Patterns of Motherhood in Halide Nusret's Characters

This final section examines Halide Nusret Zorlutuna's fictional output between 1945 and 1960, including her short stories and novels written during this period. Unlike this exceptional return in the 1930s, when fiction was used as a vehicle for her public persona as a result of the matter of the national canon, her post-war fictional writings largely return to the expressions of her private self. With the exception of the “Gelin” story,⁵²² most of these texts can be placed in the same trajectory as their fiction of the early 1920s, when a more introspective and often critical response to patriarchal norms became visible. In her fiction, one can observe a narrative space that can be defined as a more “authentic” female subjectivity that foregrounds the intimate, more complex experiences of women. In addition to this critical stance, the reappearance of traces from her 1930s diaries in her fiction of the same period reinforces the impression that these texts reveal the other side of the idealized motherhood and womanhood emphasized in her non-fiction works.

⁵²² Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Gelin,” *Yeni İstanbul*, March 23, 1950, 5.

“Gelin” (Bride) stands in a peculiar place within this collection. The limited narrative depth and didactic tone of the story, which contains a stereotypical comparative portrayal of two female characters, suggests that it was written primarily to convey a moral message rather than to construct a personal realm like other texts. Although in this respect it can be grouped alongside her non-fiction writings, I have chosen to include “Gelin” in this section to better illustrate the distinction between it and her more complex fictional structures. Particularly in relation to the novel *Aydınlık Kapı*, *Gelin* provides a useful counterpoint. While it presents a schematic comparison between the characters with a clear stereotype, *Aydınlık Kapı* offers a more layered narrative structure and a more nuanced characterization.

Although the short stories and novels do not directly address the previously discussed themes of suffrage or women's work life, they open a window into Halide Nusret's perspective on women's situation within a patriarchal framework. Most notably, motherhood and domesticity emerge as central themes across these texts. Similar to the genre-based persona division identified in the 1920s, these fictional works once again appear to construct a private voice that stands in contrast to the monolithic, duty-bound model of femininity seen in her public writings. Although this chapter lacks access to personal archival material from this period, the traces of her diaries from the 1930s are quite evident in the fiction and mark a return to the inner voice and emotional texture of her earlier literary self.

This section is divided into two subsections on her short stories and her novels. Through these analyses, I aim to show how fiction serves as a space in which Halide Nusret can construct an alternative, more complex female figure - a female figure that neither conforms to the moral imperatives of her public identity nor completely breaks with them, but rather lives in the ambiguities of lived female experience. While motherhood is consistently glorified, these narratives often point to the emotional, moral and structural contradictions women face in upholding this ideal.

4.4.1. Post WWII Short Stories

Halide Nusret Zorlutuna's short story "Yetiş Doktor" offers a striking example of how her fiction complicates the ideological clarity of her nonfiction writings in the post-war years.⁵²³ It narrates the story of Fahriye, a mother who resists sending her son to war during the First World War, and centers on the theme of motherhood overriding nationalist sentiments. At first glance, the story seems to reproduce the nationalist and maternal ideals - self-sacrifice, duty and domesticity - that were prominent in Halide Nusret's public persona. However, a closer reading reveals a more layered structure in which the idealized housewife ultimately challenges the national norms she supposedly represents. The protagonist begins as a traditional mother: despite the war conditions, her house is spotless and her loyalty to her children is emphasized as well as her domestic competence. Yet beneath this "ideal" surface, a potential emerges that openly resists patriarchal and nationalist expectations. When her son is conscripted Fahriye initially refuses to send him and daringly says: "I didn't raise my child so he could burn in the desert. What homeland? Are those deserts and ice mountains, whose names I don't even know, my homeland?"⁵²⁴ This moment of resistance is important. Instead of passively accepting her husband's scolding - "You are a soldier's daughter, wife and mother, this behavior does not suit you"⁵²⁵ - Fahriye rejects the attitude imposed on her by national and gender ideologies. Her husband tells a story from the past and talks about a woman who, unlike Fahriye, struggles for her son to become a soldier. Women are compared as a classic example of patriarchal language. Fahriye, on the other hand, is not interested at all, which is a point where the language of the story moves away from the classic patriarchal discourse. Fahriye is finally convinced, but not by

⁵²³ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Yetiş Doktor," *Yeni İstanbul*, September 23, 1950; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, "Yetiş Doktor 2," *Yeni İstanbul*, September 24, 1950.

⁵²⁴ Zorlutuna, "Yetiş Doktor.": "Ben çocuğumu çöllerde yansın diye büyütmedim. Hangi vatan? Adını bilmediğim o çöller, o buz dağlar benim vatanım mı?"

⁵²⁵ Zorlutuna, "Yetiş Doktor." ""Hanım sen asker kızı, asker karısı, anasısın, sana bu tavır yakışmaz."

submitting to her husband's harsh and sarcastic words, but to avoid damaging her son's morale/spirituality.

Later, during the Turkish War of Independence, Fahriye volunteers for service herself, taking her younger son with her and caring for the wounded on the front. For this she is given a symbolic “motherhood medal”. Even in this active, public role, she remains tied to domestic language, her work is appreciated through maternal metaphors. This is not a fictional choice made by the author in a critical attitude. Nevertheless, the outcome of the story changes the ideological focus. Far from combining motherhood and nationalist sentiments, the story favors the former. When he encounters a wounded Greek soldier, she initially responds with hatred - “let him die” - but when he hears the soldier moaning for his mother, she imagines a grieving woman somewhere in Greece praying for her son's return. This moment of maternal empathy overrides national boundaries, and Fahriye cries out to the doctors, “Help him! Save him! Let not his poor mother suffer!”⁵²⁶ Thus, the figure of the nationalist-mother is transformed into a transnational, emotional solidarity between women, constructed through shared experiences of motherhood.

While structurally simple, “Yetiş Doktor” (Help, Doctor!) constructs a surprisingly complex ethical and emotional realm. Fahriye does not simply represent national ideals; she negotiates, reinterprets and ultimately reframes them. The story challenges rigid dichotomies between national duty and private sentiment by showing how motherhood can humanize and exceed, rather than serve, nationalist aims. Although the narrative affirms many of the moral values Halide Nusret upheld in her public writings, it also quietly displaces them. Motherhood emerges not as a passive or purely domestic identity, but as a potent, deeply subjective experience that disrupts dominant masculine ideologies of war, duty, and homeland. In this respect, “Yetiş Doktor” reflects how Halide Nusret's fiction expresses a more intimate and self-reflexive voice as an extension of her private personality that goes beyond the constraints of her public image.

⁵²⁶ Zorlutuna, “Yetiş Doktor 2.” ‘Yetiş! Kurtar! Anacığının bağı yanmasın!’

“Bir Annenin Hikâyesi: Telefon İki Defa Çalındı” (A Mother's Story, The Phone Rang Twice), which was serialized later in the decade, also deals with the theme of maternal suffering, but this time in a more tragic tone.⁵²⁷ The story centers on a middle-class family—Zeki Bey, a successful contractor; his wife, Pakize; and their adult son, Orhan. Pakize is described in Halide Nusret's familiar terms: she is not attractive or cheerful, but a modest, clean, patient and emotionally deep ‘girl of the old times.’ Her husband, proud to remain faithful to his unpretentious wife despite his wealth, blames her for the perceived failure of their son, even though he actually sees her as a good-natured woman. Even the way the characters in the story are addressed shows the family dynamics. The husband is addressed Zeki Bey as a sign of reputation, while the wife is just Pakize.

When the family receives a shocking phone call that Orhan has committed murder, the emotional center of the narrative shifts to Pakize, whose inner monologue reveals years of emotional repression, self-blame and over-affection for her son. Through Pakize's long inner reflections, the reader is presented with a portrait of a woman caught between the emotional void of her marriage and the social expectations of motherhood. This is further revealed when Zeki Bey angrily accuses Pakize for letting Orhan come between them. He immediately corrects the words he had spoken in anger: “You always came between us, you came between him and me, you foolish woman...”⁵²⁸ As this slip of the tongue reveals, Pakize is left alone between her two social roles as part of domestic manipulations. The narrative strategy focusing on inferiority and self-

⁵²⁷ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Bir Annenin Hikâyesi: Telefon İki Defa Çalındı 1,” *Hâkimiyet Gazetesi*, May 8, 1955; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Bir Annenin Hikâyesi: Telefon İki Defa Çalındı 2,” *Hâkimiyet Gazetesi*, May 9, 1955; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Bir Annenin Hikâyesi: Telefon İki Defa Çalındı 3,” *Hâkimiyet Gazetesi*, May 10, 1955; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Bir Annenin Hikâyesi: Telefon İki Defa Çalındı 4,” *Hâkimiyet Gazetesi*, May 11, 1955; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Bir Annenin Hikâyesi: Telefon İki Defa Çalındı 5,” *Hâkimiyet Gazetesi*, May 12, 1955; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Bir Annenin Hikâyesi: Telefon İki Defa Çalındı 6,” *Hâkimiyet Gazetesi*, May 13, 1955; Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Bir Annenin Hikâyesi: Telefon İki Defa Çalındı 7,” *Hâkimiyet Gazetesi*, May 14, 1955.

⁵²⁸ Zorlutuna, “Bir Annenin Hikâyesi: Telefon İki Defa Çalındı 2.” “— O, daima aramıza girdi! Ağzından çıkan bu cümle kulağına çarpınca da şaşkın, pişman, isyankâr, düzeltmek istedi. — Sen, daima aramıza girdin, onunla benim arama girdin, akılsız kadın, mânî oldun. Sen olmasaydın ben onu adam ederdim!”

doubt creates a powerful critique of the emotional burden women carry under patriarchy, even though the framework of the story continues to be shaped by the ideal of sacrificial motherhood.

The gendered dynamics of responsibility and blame create a sharp contrast between Zeki Bey and Pakize. As Betül Coşkun observes, Mr. Zeki fears the social stigma of being the “father of the murderer” and displays an egocentric reaction shaped by social status anxiety. Pakize, on the other hand, represents a deeper emotional attachment: She would rather be labeled as a murderer than see her son bear such shame.⁵²⁹ The story ends tragically - Orhan returns home and reveals that the phone call was a cruel joke, but Pakize has internalized her guilt so deeply that she runs away and dies in a car accident. Her death functions as a kind of ultimate sacrifice, fully in line with socially promoted ideals of motherhood, including Halide Nusret's own writings. While the story does not directly criticize the sanctification of motherhood, it subtly reveals the psychological cost of emotional repression and patriarchal manipulation. The character of Pakize is surrounded by three figures—her husband, mother-in-law and aunt—who explicitly or implicitly suppress her maternal instincts and autonomy. Her ultimate death is not simply a moral end. It is a manifestation of the concept of the home as an unsafe space for women and the image of the “woman victimized within the domestic sphere” that is often repeated in Halide Nusret's fiction. Through Pakize, the author subtly points to a protest: even in the exalted sphere of motherhood, female subjectivity is constantly challenged, manipulated and ultimately erased. Even a woman who is a conventionally ideal wife and mother cannot survive in this pattern. In doing so, Halide Nusret points toward a gendered experience largely absent from her nonfiction—making fiction a key site where her private persona offers deeper, more critical reflections on womanhood.

Another remarkable aspect of this story is that it proves the claim of private persona in her post-WWII fiction. Halide Nusret's own experience of motherhood in her diaries from an earlier period is directly implicated in this story. The narrative resolution in “Bir Annenin Hikâyesi” (A Mother's Story) is

⁵²⁹ Coşkun, “Halide Nusret Zorlutuna -Hayatı-Eserleri-Fikirleri,” 286.

shaped around Pakize's maternal compassion. Despite her aunt, mother-in-law and husband, she does not give up her compassionate approach to her son. When her aunt belittled her by saying, "I wouldn't call someone a mother who doesn't know how to control her compassion," Pakize said, "he will have to struggle with the world all his life anyway, let him relax now. When the time comes, my child will know how to overcome all difficulties."⁵³⁰ This response directly echoes Halide Nusret's earlier reflections in her unpublished diary from 1935 titled *Biricik Oğlumun Defteri*. There, she records a nearly identical exchange with her own mother, who questioned her tolerant attitude toward child-rearing: "I indulge him too much. He gets spoiled. Sometimes I wonder if the fault is mine... Until now, I have done almost everything he wanted. My mother says that this is not kindness to the child, but harm. I don't agree with this idea. In life, people face many difficulties and hardships. In such times, one should be able to take refuge in the beautiful memories of "childhood," like a ship seeking shelter in a harbor."⁵³¹ Halide Nusret's reply—both in life and fiction—emphasizes a belief in protecting the emotional well-being of children as a foundation for their future resilience.

This striking parallel between diary and fiction illustrates the consistency in Halide Nusret's thinking about motherhood while also reinforcing the reading of her fictional narratives as expressions of her private persona. Although no personal diary survives from the post-war period, this alignment between her earlier autobiographical writings and her later short stories demonstrate the extent to which her fiction continued to serve as a vehicle for articulating deeply held personal values. In this sense, "Bir Annenin Hikâyesi"—like much of her post-war fiction— can be understood as a literary extension of the personal

⁵³⁰ Zorlutuna, "Bir Annenin Hikâyesi: Telefon İki Defa Çalındı 5." "-Şefkatini frenlemeği bilmeyene ben ana demem... yarın hayatın zorluklarıyla karşılaştığı zaman bu çocuk ne yapacak? - Zaten ömrü boyunca hayatla mücadele etmek zorunda kalacak, bırakın şimdi rahat etsin. Zamanı gelince bütün müşkülli yenmeği bilir benim çocuğum evel Allah."

⁵³¹ Zorlutuna, "Biricik Oğlumun Defteri," 10. "Ona çok yüz veriyorum. Şımarıyor. Acaba suç benim mi, diye de düşünüyorum... Şimdiye kadar hemen her istediğini yaptım. Annem bunun çocuğa iyilik değil, fenalık olduğunu söylüyor. Ben bu fikirde değilim. Hayatta insanlar birçok güçlükler, fenalıklarla karşılaşır. Böyle zamanlarda 'çocukluk'un güzel hatıraları içine insan, limana sığınan bir gemi gibi sığınabilmelidir."

framework that the author developed from early in her life, shaped by both personal experiences and enduring emotional beliefs.

“Bizim Gecekondular ve... Bizim Elif,” unlike the other texts, is not a work of fiction but a memoir.⁵³² Another difference from other texts is that it offers a nuanced depiction of post-war urban poverty and women's experiences rather than motherhood and domestic roles. It begins with a vivid and unusually detailed description of Ankara's *gecekondu* neighborhoods (shanty towns), aestheticized and rendered with a sense of empathy rare in her writings. While reflecting the effects of rural-to-urban migration in the 1950s, Halide Nusret's sensitivity to class differences is hinted, even though she writes from a more privileged perspective. The main subject of the work is Elif, a young domestic worker whose lack of expression, incomprehensible speech, and her attitude, which the author describes as “a half-animal, half-human creature,”⁵³³ initially arouse a reaction of disgust in Halide Nusret. However, this harsh judgment is later complicated by small but meaningful moments in which Elif reveals her emotional depth. One of these is her relationship with her husband. Elif does not give her husband the money she earns, but she is loyal and devoted to him despite his violence. When her husband is injured, Elif displays a fierce sense of responsibility and devotion, prompting Halide to reflect on the contradiction between Elif's loyalty and her earlier portrayal. While she finds this attitude noble, her daughter thinks differently: “- Well done Elif, I smiled, you are a brave woman! My daughter smiled too, but with completely different thoughts. She seemed a little disgusted by this woman and her unconditional, unconditional, foolish love.”⁵³⁴ Emine (İşinsu) as a young woman despises Elif's affection to her violent husband. It leaves this difference of judgment without comment but shows how Halide Nusret and her daughter are different in terms of female loyalty.

⁵³² Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, “Bizim Gecekondular ve... Bizim Elif,” *Hâkimiyet Gazetesi*, July 28, 1955, 2.

⁵³³ Zorlutuna, “Bizim Gecekondular ve... Bizim Elif.” “Yarı hayvan, yarı insan bir mahluk”

⁵³⁴ Zorlutuna, “Bizim Gecekondular ve... Bizim Elif.” “Aferin Elif, diye gülümsedim, mert kadınmışsın! Kızım da gülümsedi ama bambaşka düşüncelerle. Bu kadından onun bu kayıtsız, şartsız, budalaca sevgisinden biraz öğreniyor gibiydi.”

Another part that establishes the depth of Elif's character is the contrast between loyalty to her husband and freedom. Elif's brother takes her to the movies for the first time in her life. When she is asked, "Aren't you afraid of your husband?" she responds carelessly, "Where will he hear about it? Halide Nusret makes the following comment while describing the state of Elif, enjoying the cinema greatly: "Ah, my beautiful freedom!... As the poet said, (how enchanting you were!) you have conquered both love and that primitive - and as fierce as all primitive feelings - love of our elif! Elif no longer cries!..."⁵³⁵ This shift from disgust to admiration is crucial in understanding the tension between class, gender, and individual agency in the text.

This piece differs stylistically and thematically from Halide Nusret's moralistic and patriotic style, which usually centers on the devoted woman. While in her earlier stories she emphasized domestic ideals and women's service to the nation or the family, here we see a different picture: a woman who works, earns her own money and unapologetically asserts her will even in small actions such as going to the movies. The text reveals a form of female subjectivity that is not idealized, but based on harsh realities and subtle acts of resistance. Elif, Halide, and Halide's daughter Emine, in this sense, embody the symbolic contrasts between the slum and the apartment building, between lower-class hardship and upper-class comfort, as well as the generation gap between Halide and her daughter. Unlike the author's non-fictional writings, where women were portrayed more monolithically, this story reveals various kinds of female subjectivity. Yet, it ultimately ends up focusing on what unites them: a fondness for freedom. While her public writings often avoid directly challenging patriarchal norms and present a uniform femininity, this story contains more private, complex reflections on women's emotional lives and choices. When considered alongside her other stories, it becomes evident that the fictional texts from this period present a more diverse range of narratives about womanhood than those of earlier times. For instance, compared to earlier works like "Bir

⁵³⁵ Zorlutuna, "Bizim Gecekondu ve... Bizim Elif." "Ah, güzelim hürriyet!... Şairin dediği gibi, (meğer ne efsunkar imişsin!) aşka da, bizim Elif'in o iptidai -ve bütün iptidai duygular gibi şiddetli- aşkına da galebe çaldın! Elif artık ağlamıyor!..."

Annenin Hikâyesi” (A Mother's Story), where a mother attempts to overcome her emotional struggles at home through love and fear for her son, “Bizim Elif” portrays a similar experience of emotional deprivation in marriage but shifts the focus from sacrifice to agency. In this way, the stories complement one another and illustrate Halide Nusret’s evolving and increasingly multifaceted discourse on women during this period.

“Gelin,” by contrast, offers a return to conventional patriarchal ideals. Set in the domestic sphere, the story is narrated from the perspective of a male protagonist who evaluates the “feminine skills” of his wife and blind mother. The conflict unfolds as the husband considers whether to invite his mother to a formal dinner, ultimately deciding to spare her feelings by lying about the guest list. The story romanticizes the elderly mother’s intuitive understanding and frames the young wife as submissive but emotionally shallow. The absence of narrative empathy for the female characters and the reproduction of patriarchal norms - especially through the male character's comparison of the older woman's refined “ladyliness” to the younger woman - make this story less critical than Halide Nusret's other fictional works. Moreover, the omnipotent narrator uses the metaphor of the “cat” to describe the “bride”, a typically misogynistic choice.

However, despite its overall conventional tone, “Gelin” also contains undercurrents that reveal the precarious position of women within patriarchal family structures. The elderly mother, though idealized for her quiet dignity and intuitive understanding, is also portrayed as someone who has lost her influence and economic autonomy following her husband’s death: “The magnificent feasts his mother managed on his father's days... Tables that were famous for their silver, crystal and delicious food - especially under the management of the lady of the house... Then, with the sudden death of his father, this chapter of her life was suddenly closed.”⁵³⁶ Her diminished role in the household—now dependent on her son’s goodwill and domestic decisions—quietly illustrates how widowhood can strip women of authority, even when they embody the ideal traits celebrated

⁵³⁶ Zorlutuna, “Gelin.” ‘Babasının gününde annesinin idare ettiği o muhteşem ziyafetler... Gümüşleri, billurları nefis yemekleriyle-bilhassa evin hanımının idaresiyle- dillere destan olan sofralar... Sonra babasının ani ölümüyle hayatın bu faslı birden kapanmıştı.’

by patriarchal norms. In this sense, “Gelin” highlights some traditional values, while at the same time revealing how women can become vulnerable and dismissible when their relational roles (as wife or mother) change.

Seen this way, the story comes across as more ambivalent than it initially appears. It upholds the ideal of the selfless, morally superior mother -in contrast to selfish young counterpart, but it also shows the fragility of this ideal when detached from male-centered family structures. This ambivalence adds another dimension to Halide Nusret’s post-war fiction, suggesting that even her fictions which are more loyal to stereotypical lines, may contain implicit commentaries on the costs of gendered power hierarchies. Rather than representing a complete break from the author’s more empathetic and complex portraits of women, it can be argued that “Gelin” reveals the complexity of her fictional universe.

4.4.2. *Post-WWII Novels*

In her novels, as in her short stories, Halide Nusret expresses subtle but important criticisms of the idealized image of women in post-war Turkish society. Since the novel as a literary genre allows for more complex and layered reflections, these texts allow for a deeper exploration of certain recurring themes. In particular, her treatment of motherhood and the female body stands out as a quiet challenge to dominant gender roles, while also echoing some of the concerns that would later become central to second-wave feminism in the 1960s. Although feminist historiography often situates the second wave in Turkey in the 1980s, the international character of the post-war period made possible the emergence of shared concerns among women intellectuals in both Turkey and the Western world. As several important studies have emphasized, the post-war years laid the groundwork for the politicized feminist movements that followed. Pointing to a parallel sensitivity before second-wave feminism, Halide Nusret’s fiction—especially in its problematization of motherhood and bodily autonomy—reflects the growing gendered concerns of the time and deserves to be reconsidered within these broader global currents.

Her novels from this period—*Beyaz Selvi* (1945) and *Aydınlık Kapı* (1955)—are especially significant in this regard. Unlike her earlier writings or public essays, where she often idealized the domestic woman, in these novels the domestic sphere becomes unstable and even threatening. The private sphere, which her public persona often defended as the natural space for women, is now portrayed as filled with emotional oppression, moral contradictions and structural injustice. In this sense, post-WWII novels share a similar ground to the post-WWI fictions discussed in the first chapter. While these novels do not focus on topics like work or suffrage, they instead explore intimate and deeply gendered roles—motherhood, wifedom, chastity, and self-sacrifice—with a more questioning tone.

What makes these novels particularly meaningful is their capacity to present domestic life as both detailed and ambiguous. Following Bakhtin's description of the novelist as one who embraces heteroglossia and linguistic diversity,⁵³⁷ Halide Nusret constructs a fictional world that gives place to a range of female voices—including critical and ambivalent ones—through multi-layered characters and narrative techniques. This is particularly evident in *Aydınlık Kapı*, which features numerous female characters with distinct perspectives. Even in *Beyaz Selvi*, which focuses on a single female protagonist, the narrative includes the perspectives of male characters who contribute to the woman's vulnerability—showing how even "ideal" women can be unhappy, and how "perfect" men may use the system to their advantage.

These novels should be read within the context of post-war discourses that redefined ideal womanhood. As Kathleen A. Laughlin notes in the introduction to *Breaking the Wave*, many women in the United States responded to the loss of wartime gains by organizing around a sense of gender solidarity.⁵³⁸ In Turkey, the re-emergence of women's organizations like the Turkish Women's Union and the growing number of women's magazines reflected similar anxieties about the

⁵³⁷ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, with Ralph Ellison Collection (Library of Congress), University of Texas Press Slavic Series, no. 1 (University of Texas Press, 1981), 298.

⁵³⁸ Laughlin and Castledine, *Breaking the Wave*, 4.

erosion of women's public roles. Halide Nusret, who was actively involved in such organizations, cannot be seen as isolated from these concerns. Her fictional work from this period reflects the contradictions of the time: while public discourses glorified the “perfect family,” her novels quietly questioned how sustainable or fair that ideal really was. It was one of the multifaceted and complex ways to promote women’s interests, as did her counterparts in the Western world, during this pre-‘second wave’ period.⁵³⁹

In the following pages, I will examine how these two novels undermine the supposedly safe and moral private space for women. Focusing on representations of motherhood, marriage, sexual morality and sacrifice, I will show how these themes, which she never problematized in her public writings, became sites of emotional tension and dissent in her novels. Ultimately, these works reveal that even the most “domestic” women live under conditions that are far from secure, and that idealized gender roles often carry hidden dangers.

Beyaz Selvi was partially serialized in *Çınaraltı* magazine in 1944, until the publication was discontinued. The novel was later completed and published as a book in 1945. It marks the beginning of Halide Nusret’s renewed literary productivity following a relatively inactive decade. At the center of the narrative is Nadide—a modestly beautiful, married woman with children—who embodies the “ideal” woman through her appearance, lifestyle, and choices. Serpil Sancar notes that the fictional texts of what she terms the conservative modernization period are marked by their ability to concretely define and represent the modern Turkish woman and the values that would shape the urban middle-class Turkish family. Nadide's family fits into this framework, but the novel itself seems far from idealizing it, instead offering a more critical and complex portrayal.

The story begins in Varna, where Nadide is briefly staying with her children. There, she unexpectedly encounters Dünder, a younger man she knew a decade earlier. This meeting renews Dünder's obsessive feelings for Nadide and creates a tension that will last throughout the novel. His obsession is conveyed through a series of letters to Nadide, offering insight into his inner world.

⁵³⁹ Laughlin and Castledine, *Breaking the Wave*, 3.

In the third part of the novel, the perspective shifts to Nadide's husband, Hamid, a doctor. One of his patients, Gülten, begins to openly flirt with him; eventually he falls for the temptation. What Nadide does not know is that Gülten was deliberately put in Hamid's path by Dünder, who staged the situation to expose Hamid's moral weakness. While Dünder frames his interference as protective, his motivations remain ambiguous, clouded by possessiveness and resentment. Eventually, Nadide discovers the affair, prompting a deep inner struggle as she begins to question her role as wife and mother. The narrative then explores the emotional unrest within the family as Nadide moves away from her husband but chooses to stay married. Tensions escalate when her son, Demir, becomes romantically involved with Gülten. Unable to withstand the emotional strain, Nadide is weakened by her illness and dies.

This part of the novel is narrated through Hamid's diary, offering a second narrative perspective. In the aftermath of Nadide's death, Hamid takes his own life out of guilt. Dünder remains in contact with the children, frequently visiting them. He also composes a song in Nadide's memory, which becomes a world-famous piece. Through the pain of losing Nadide, Dünder reaches a sense of maturity ("büyük hazza erişmek").⁵⁴⁰

In *Beyaz Selvi*, the home appears at first as a peaceful and ideal space. Especially through Dünder's eyes, Nadide's body, house and life are described almost like pieces of paradise: "You were standing as a white cypress in the middle of the magnificent decor of your living room."⁵⁴¹ As the wife of a famous doctor in Ankara, Nadide seems to live the "perfect" urban middle-class life with her children. Again from the letters of Dünder, this life is described: "You have a famous husband, a wonderful life and children of all colors and sizes."⁵⁴² The house and the children seem to belong fully to Nadide, while Hamid, her husband, remains in the background. This domestic space gives an impression of female

⁵⁴⁰ Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, *Beyaz Selvi* (Panama, 2019).

⁵⁴¹ Zorlutuna, *Beyaz Selvi*, 42. "Salonunuzun muhteşem dekoru ortasında [...] bir beyaz selvi hâlinde duruyordunuz."

⁵⁴² Zorlutuna, *Beyaz Selvi*, 60. "Meşhur bir kocan, muhteşem bir hayat tarzın ve boy boy, renk renk çocukların var."

control; however, as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that this power is only symbolic. When Hamid's affair is revealed, Nadide becomes the sole emotional authority in the house, but this position cannot protect her. Despite the house's aesthetic being shaped by Nadide, its meaning and value are still socially and economically tied to the man. Revealing this aspect, Nadide's first inner thoughts are about getting rid of the house and the children that belongs to the man of the house: "Ah! If only she could get away from this room, from this house, from these familiar voices (her children's voices) that are now ringing in her ears!... Twenty years... She was so shocked that she had been able to spend her entire youth in the terrible imprisonment of these four walls...."⁵⁴³ (p.90) The idea of freedom reveals who the house belongs to in reality.

As Gülsüm Baydar notes in her study on the modern house image in 1930s magazines: "First of all, the modern house is seen as the microcosm of the space of the nation. As such, it is owned and guarded by man... Both the modern house and the modern Turkish woman are desired to be highly visible with similar characteristics of beauty and elegance without extravagance."⁵⁴⁴ Recalling Halide Nusret's earlier novel *Gül'ün Babası Kim?*, written in the 1930s, it ended with this idealized image of the house and family, as Mecla was 'tamed' in Mümtaz's house as his wife. But in *Beyaz Selvi*, written in 1945, this idealization gives way to a more critical view. Although Nadide is emotionally the 'owner' of the house, she is trapped under her husband's authority based on powerful social mechanisms.

Hamid's affair does not result in divorce, which deepens the emotional tension in the house and makes it an even more hostile space for Nadide. This emotional pressure contributes to her illness and eventual death. Despite fulfilling her duties as a wife and mother and staying within moral boundaries, Nadide cannot find happiness - because the man's invisible power is still present and her

⁵⁴³ Zorlutuna, *Beyaz Selvi*, 90. "Ah! Bir kere bu odadan, bu evden, şu anda kulağına çarpan bu aşına seslerden (her children's voices) kurtulsa!.. Yirmi yıl... Bütün bir gençliğini bu dört duvarın korkunç hürriyetsizliği içinde geçirebildiğine o kadar şaşırıyordu ki!..."

⁵⁴⁴ Gülsüm Baydar, "Tenuous Boundaries: Women, Domesticity and Nationhood in 1930s Turkey," *The Journal of Architecture* 7, no. 3 (2002): 240, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602360210155429>.

limited agency does not affect the outcome. Even after being rejected by his wife and children, Hamid's position in the public sphere does not suffer. He is still able to enjoy his social status and pursue his desires, as revealed in his diary.

Serpil Sancar, analyzing the period's press, writes that "the desires and aesthetic preferences of the modern man started to become visible, along with his financial power. A form of hegemonic masculinity was slowly being shaped, aiming to dominate middle-class modern manhood."⁵⁴⁵ Hamid reflects this type of man. The novel reveals that a man's financial power does not affect the emotional dynamics within the household. Hamid is a well-known and rich doctor, but once he crosses the boundaries of morality, he becomes a stranger in his own home. Still, this cannot be read as him accepting his guilt or being socially punished for it. He continues to desire going back to other women and social environments, using his resources. Despite all his faults, even his suicide at the end does not damage his reputation. Society still protects his "honor."⁵⁴⁶ In social gossip, he is remembered as the doctor who "could not bear his wife's death," not as a man who caused her pain. The novel emphasizes this inequality through Hamid's diary as well, which reveals the gendered gap between inner/domestic and public/social life. Through these multiple perspectives, the novel shows how the home and family is not a safe space for women, and how the balance of power between men and women remains deeply unequal.

Aydınlık Kapı is the second novel Halide Nusret wrote during this period. It was first serialized in *Kadın Gazetesi* between 1947 and 1950 under the title *Yaralılar*. Five years later, it was serialized again in *Hakimiyet Gazetesi*, this time with the title *Aydınlık Kapı*. There are minor differences between the two versions, including the names of the main characters, but these do not significantly affect the novel's central themes. It was published in book form in 1974.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁵ Sancar, *Türk modernleşmesinin cinsiyeti*, 238. "Öncelikle modern erkeğin arzularının, estetik tercihlerinin açığa çıkartılması ve parasal gücü görünür hale gelmeye başlamıştır. Bu dönemde bir tür hegemonik erkeklik değerleri de yavaş yavaş oluşuyor; orta sınıf modern erkeklik değerlerini egemenliği altına alma yolunda ilerler."

⁵⁴⁶ Zorlutuna, *Beyaz Selvi*, 173.

⁵⁴⁷ For this analysis, I use the 2008 edition published by Timaş Yayınları, which is a comparative version that incorporates both serializations.

Compared to *Beyaz Selvi*, this novel features a more complex character structure and plot. It allows for multiple voices and perspectives, presenting a wide range of characters from various social backgrounds. The narrative also spans a much longer time period, covering key turning points in Turkish history. The novel essentially tells the story of a family, focusing on the lives of two sisters whose contrasting characters and appearances create a tension that persists throughout the narrative. The story begins in the late 19th century, during the Hamidian era, with the birth of the younger sister, Vildan. Her older sister, Lerzan, is the favorite of both parents, admired for her lively, cheerful, and outgoing personality. She is also ambitious and rebellious, characteristics symbolized by her red hair and her name in the earlier version, Neyran—which literally means “hell” or “fire.” In contrast, Vildan is more docile, introverted, and committed to traditional values.

The novel is divided into four main chapters. In the first, the sisters’ father dies, leaving them a considerable inheritance. Lerzan falls in love with Ziya, a man who is primarily interested in their wealth, and marries him against her family’s wishes. The second chapter opens with Lerzan’s letter to Fazilet, a mutual friend of both sisters, in which she reveals her inner world and the emotional toll of her unhappy marriage. After Ziya dies during the war years, Lerzan falls in love with another man, İsmail, in Istanbul. In this period, Lerzan embodies the image of the “degenerate woman” that Halide Nusret frequently criticized in her writings from the World War I era. After a long flirtation, Lerzan marries İsmail and moves to Urfa, where she is subjected to jealousy, oppression, captivity and ultimately domestic violence. The chapter closes with Lerzan’s escape from Urfa.

The third chapter consists of Vildan’s journal, offering her perspective on the events. Around the time Lerzan moves to Urfa, Vildan marries Ali. When Lerzan returns, she begins to flirt with Ali along other men as well. For several years, she lives a flamboyant life and becomes notorious in society for her “playful” behavior. One night, during a circumcision celebration for the children, Lerzan crosses another boundary. Unable to tolerate her behavior any longer, Ali—asserting his authority as the man of the house—shoots her dead. Vildan and their

mother witness the murder but choose not to report it, in order to protect the children and preserve the family's honor. Vildan continues to live with her sister's murderer until his death.

In the final chapter, Ali dies, tormented by guilt over how he treated Vildan as a husband. Afterwards, Vildan remains in the house with her children, who eventually leave one by one—each departure reflecting a form of betrayal or disloyalty to their self-sacrificing mother. In the end, Vildan finds peace only through religion and spiritual devotion.

In this section, I want to focus on the marriages of Vildan and Lerzan, and how the novel represents domestic life through their experiences. In *Beyaz Selvi*, we saw how the 'ideal' wife and mother Nadide uses all her willpower to keep the family together, following the rules of patriarchy, but the house still becomes a deadly space for her. In *Aydınlık Kapı*, this narrative becomes more complex. The novel opens the doors of different houses and presents different female characters, showing that there is not a single example of a truly happy marriage or ideal home.

The contrast between the two sisters is one of the central tensions in the novel. Because of their opposite characters and appearances, a sense of rivalry and comparison between them is created. In several scenes, we see the two women compared in terms of their 'feminine' features, or even competing for the same man. This reminds us of the "emphasized competition between women for male attention," which was a common theme in the popular culture of the 1950s.⁵⁴⁸ We also see the articulation of similar ideas in Turkish newspapers of the time. For example, *Kadın Gazetesi* included a survey that openly asked men about their ideal woman, and compared different female types.⁵⁴⁹ While *Aydınlık Kapı* reflects some traces of this popular discourse, it also moves beyond it. In the end, both Vildan and Lerzan experience different types of marriages, and show different domestic attitudes, but their stories end with similar feelings of unhappiness and disappointment.

⁵⁴⁸ Laughlin and Castledine, *Breaking the Wave*, 1.

⁵⁴⁹ Melahat Faik Gökmen, "Bugünkü Erkeğin Aradığı İdeal Kadın Nasıldır?," *Kadın Gazetesi*, no. 253 (December 1951).

Lerzan gets married twice, but neither marriage leads to a happy home. Her first husband is Ziya, whom she elopes with. “Kahyagillerin oğlu Ziya” was in a servant position in relation to Lerzan’s family, which already points to a class distinction between them. Lerzan tells about her marriage and family life in her letters to Fazilet. Lerzan shares details of her marriage and domestic life in her letters to Fazilet. Her first impression shows her lack of belonging. After making peace with her family, Lerzan and Ziya move to the farmhouse where she spent her childhood. She writes, “...the beautiful house in which I spent the beautiful days of my childhood is not mine.[...] But the sad part of the matter is that I feel that the house I am in now is equally alien to me. [...] I feel like a poor tree sapling that has been torn from its soil and has not taken root in the new soil it was planted in.”⁵⁵⁰ Although Lerzan marries for love, she cannot feel attached to her home. This is not because of a desire for freedom, as one might expect from her character, but due to external pressures rooted in patriarchal values. Her mother-in-law treats her as inferior, likely due to her own class-based insecurities. Lerzan cannot take ownership of the home; it is controlled by the mother-in-law. Meanwhile, Ziya becomes increasingly jealous and confines her to the house, turning it into a prison. Thus, Lerzan’s first marriage is far from ideal.

Her second marriage turns out to be no better, even though the circumstances and her husband's background are different. Unlike the irresponsible Ziya, İsmail is a disciplined professional soldier whom Lerzan meets after deciding to divorce her first husband. Following a long period of flirtation, she marries İsmail and moves to Urfa. However, Urfa becomes a place of suffering not only for Lerzan but also for many women she encounters there. She witnesses the lives of women trapped in unhappy marriages, forced into polygamy, and exposed to domestic violence. Lerzan is particularly disturbed by how even the

⁵⁵⁰ “...içinde çocukluğumun güzel günlerini geçirdiğim,..güzel ev de benim değil.[...] Fakat meselenin asıl acıklı tarafı, şimdi içinde bulunduğum evi de kendime aynı derecede yabancı hissetmekliğimdir. [...] Kendimi toprağından koparılmış, yeni ekildiği toprağında da tutmamış bir zavallı fidana benzetiyorum.”Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı* (Timaş, 2014), 82. “

mothers of female children are devalued socially.⁵⁵¹ Gradually, her own story begins to resemble to those of other women around her. İsmail turns oppressive and jealous, eventually beating her. Confined to the house and placed under constant watch, Lerzan experiences her second home as a living hell. In the end, she escapes with the help of another suffering woman and her mother's financial support. Lerzan's unhappy marriages are not portrayed as a result of her incapacity as a homemaker, despite her non-ideal actions. On the contrary, she is supported by other women who also suffer from similar conditions. This shows a strong reaction from the writer against the system, by choosing to protect Lerzan rather than punish her. This critique is further emphasized through Vildan's story—an ideal woman throughout her life—who still experiences the same trajectory in marriage as her sister: lack of love, oppression, and domestic violence.

Vildan marries the young manager of their farm, Ali, the European-educated son of a noble family who had lost their fortune. This happens during the flirt phase of Lerzan with İsmail. Lerzan puts eye on Ali, but he chooses Vildan. In the end, Lerzan decides to marry İsmail and goes to Urfa. This crossing reveals the contrast and confrontation between two sisters. During their marriages, Lerzan and Vildan experiences the same fate. This chapter of the plot is narrated through Vildan's journal. She states; "A whole new life of enslavement began for me in my husband's house."⁵⁵² Regardless of their character, the institution of marriage treated them the same. Vildan experienced the humiliations of her mother-in-law, having no authority in the house, not even before the servants. Similar to Lerzan's first marriage, Vildan's husband was working for her family, living nearby. When Vildan looks at the farm she grew up in, she felt the same feeling of non-belonging as Lerzan. However, Ali was far from Ziya. In Vildan's words, "Ali was not a bad guy. He was honorable and

⁵⁵¹ Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 130–31.

⁵⁵² Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 181. "Kocamın evinde benim için yepyeni bir esaret hayatı başladı."

hardworking. He had all the qualities of a good family man.”⁵⁵³ This ideal man of the house was not offering peace to his wife. Vildan next lines in the diary proves that: “But I was terrified of him.”⁵⁵⁴ His lack of compassion, love and cold manners made her feel distant to their life. Similar to almost every marriage in the novel, Vildan was witnessing economic violence from him. This marriage turns into a torture for Vildan, but it was not due to her lack of love towards her husband. It was again the systemic faults that put the women into an inferior position within the marriage. This is something Halide Nusret never problematized in her public writings. The schematically idealized house in those writings was there in Vildan’s life, with the full set, husband, nice house and a baby. But in the diary notes of the character reveals the reality: “In this house with its furnished floors, a cook and servants, with my kingly husband by my side and my child moving in my belly, no one but Allah knew how miserable I was.”⁵⁵⁵ These lines comes from the ideal character according to Halide Nusret’s public accounts, with her simple, non-ambitious, humble and loyal personality. In the end, Vildan was left alone by her children too, having nothing gained for the sacrificial, domestic roles she adopted unquestioningly. Vildan’s fate allows the reader question the ideals Halide Nusret established in her public accounts.

Vildan’s and Lerzan’s stories, told through different narrative voices, reveal the failure of the domestic ideal that is often celebrated in Halide Nusret’s non-fiction writings. Both sisters enter marriage with different expectations and personalities, but the result is the same: emotional isolation, oppression, and a sense of non-belonging. These parallel experiences show that the problem is not in the women themselves, but in the gendered structure of marriage and home life. In her public writings, Halide Nusret often assigns women specific manners or actions, encouraging them to embrace their roles as wives and mothers, while

⁵⁵³ Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 185. “Ali fena adam değildi. Namuslu ve çalışkandı. İyi bir aile babasında bulunması lazım gelen vasıfları haizdi.”

⁵⁵⁴ Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 185. “Fakat, ondan korkuyordum”

⁵⁵⁵ Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 191. “Bu döşeli dayalı, aşçılı hizmetçili evde; yanımda aslan gibi kocam ve karnımda kıpırdayan çocuğumla, ne derece bedbaht olduğumu Allah’dan başka kimseler bilmezdi.”

almost never mentioning the risks or violence they may face in that space. The novel, on the other hand, does the opposite. It avoids blaming women for the failure of domestic life, even in the case of “naughty” characters like Lerzan. Instead, it reveals the deep problems within the system itself. Through private writings like diaries and letters, the novel allows a more complex and critical look at women’s lives under patriarchy in post-war Turkey.

A similar pattern emerges around the theme of motherhood. Just as the home is not a safe or comforting space for women, motherhood is also far from being a seamless or purely natural experience. During the post-war years, women were encouraged to embrace motherhood due to demographic concerns, and Halide Nusret supported this discourse. In her public writings, she often advised women to see motherhood as their primary duty or a path to personal fulfillment. Even in her short stories—which are often more critical on other themes—motherhood was placed in a protected, almost sacred sphere, though she occasionally acknowledged its unjust and difficult aspects.

Her novels allow for a deeper and more critical questioning of motherhood. In *Beyaz Selvi*, Nadide’s relationship with her children begins as the image of ideal motherhood. In the early pages, we see her close bond with them during a family trip to Varna. This setting introduces her as a loving and compassionate mother. Nadide also defines herself through this role, as reflected in the narrator’s words: “She was of the class that regarded the institution of the family as sacred above all else and was a true ‘mother’.”⁵⁵⁶ However, this ideal image begins to fall apart when Nadide finds out about her husband Hamid’s affair. This moment forces her to confront the institutional and emotional limits of motherhood. Her frustration is so intense that she even questions whether the children, like the house she built, truly belong to her: “Their fathers’ betrayal had aroused a grudge in her against the children. She did not want to see them or their

⁵⁵⁶ Zorlutuna, *Beyaz Selvi*, 72. “O aile müessesesini her şeyi üstünde mukaddes tanıyan sınıftandı ve hakiki bir ‘ana’ idi.”

fathers. [...] They can go to the devil for all I care!...”⁵⁵⁷ These are striking words coming from a “true mother.” When Dünder offers to run away with her, she hesitates—because of both her values, and also because she is overwhelmed by what motherhood has demanded from her: Children!... His children!... The children of the man who responded to twenty years of endless devotion and affection with a lowly betrayal!... As if it wasn't enough that she wasted an entire lifetime on them, should she now stay in this hell for them?⁵⁵⁸ Nadide's internal conflict shows how motherhood is shaped not just by emotion, but by systemic injustice. The power imbalance between men and women becomes clear when we learn that Hamid opened his clinic with Nadide's money. Yet, by the end, it is he who has the financial and social power to control the family. These details expose how the role of the mother is not just emotionally demanding but structurally unsupported. In the end, Nadide regrets even thinking of leaving her children, especially when her son gets seriously ill that same night.⁵⁵⁹

Earlier readings of *Beyaz Selvi* often present it as a story that praises motherhood, sacrifice, and chastity.⁵⁶⁰ Nadide, the betrayed wife, never leaves the family home, and slowly loses her beauty, health, and finally her life—despite reacting strongly against her husband. This makes it possible to read the novel as one that glorifies the image of the “ideal woman.” However, I argue that another reading is also possible. As discussed earlier, Halide Nusret was deeply concerned

⁵⁵⁷ Zorlutuna, *Beyaz Selvi*, 84. “Babalarının hainliği onda çocuklara karşı bir hınç uyandırmıştı. Onları da babalarını da görmek istemiyordu. [...]hepsinin yüzünü şeytan görsün!...”

⁵⁵⁸ Zorlutuna, *Beyaz Selvi*, 92. “Çocuklar!.. Onun çocukları!.. Yirmi yıllık sonsuz feragat ve muhabbete alçakça bir ihanetle mukabele eden adamın çocukları!... Bütün bir ömrü onlara harcdığı yetmiyormuş gibi şimdi de, yine onlar için bu cehennemin içinde mi kalmalı?”

⁵⁵⁹ Zorlutuna, *Beyaz Selvi*, 109.

⁵⁶⁰ Coşkun, “Halide Nusret Zorlutuna -Hayatı-Eserleri-Fikirleri”; M. Fatih Kanter, “Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Beyaz Selvi Romanı Üzerine Bir İnceleme,” in *100 Yılda Yeni Türk Edebiyatı İncelemeleri: Prof. Dr. Hülya Eraydın Argunşah Armağanı*, 1st ed., by Dilek Çetindaş et al. (Cappadocia University Press, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.35250/kun/9786054448852>; Baloğlu, “Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Romanlarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Kimlik”; Zambak, “Halide Nusret Zorlutuna'nın Romanlarında Cumhuriyet Kadını: Tespitler, Öneriler, Eleştiriler.”

with the “the burden of womanhood,” and her private writings—especially on having daughters—show how emotionally invested she was in these issues. When we read the novel from this perspective, Nadide appears not simply as an idealized woman but more specifically as a victimized mother. She fits the image of the acceptable mother/woman of her time, but she is also tempted, conflicted, and at times even emotionally distant from her children. Halide Nusret writes a less schematic and more emotionally complex female character. Even though Nadide is idealized and attributed mystical maternal traits, she is also someone who questions her role and feels the weight of motherhood. Still, possibly due to the author’s conservative narrative style, Nadide eventually returns to the role of the self-sacrificing mother—choosing the family over herself, and ultimately being destroyed by it.

This brings her close to the female characters in Halide Nusret’s earlier novels from the 1920s. Like the woman in *Küller*, Nadide becomes a victim of family codes and the idealized marriage system. However, unlike *Küller*, Nadide comes close to stepping onto a “wrong” path—but the novel doesn’t judge her. Instead, it presents her inner conflict and conscience, allowing readers to see the emotional burden and social inequality built into motherhood. In doing so, Halide Nusret’s novel opens space for questioning not only motherhood, but also fatherhood, and the systemic inequality between them.

The novel *Aydınlık Kapı* complicates the idealized image of motherhood by presenting it as a source of deep ambivalence, emotional distress, and social hardship. Through the intertwined experiences of Lerzan and Vildan, the narrative exposes how motherhood is shaped by structural inequalities, gender expectations, and psychological burdens. Rather than celebrating maternal sacrifice or unconditional love, the novel allows readers to critically reflect on the costs of idealized motherhood and the devastation it causes to women’s emotional well-being.

A similar dynamic unfolds for both Lerzan and Vildan: their pregnancies are not occasions for joy, but are instead met with fear, anxiety, and even despair. From the very beginning, Lerzan experiences motherhood not as a fulfillment but

as a regret. Her early marriage to Ziya leaves her defenseless and unsupported; she expresses this fact in a letter to her friend Fazilet: “I am going to die, Fetişim. And I’m scared, you can’t imagine how scared I am of death! Imagine, I’ll be a mother at sixteen! And I’m so weak!”⁵⁶¹ As her pregnancy progresses, Ziya grows more distant, further deepening her sorrow. After giving birth to Süha, her regret intensifies to the point that she states her eyes don’t even catch sight of her own child.⁵⁶² Her second pregnancy brings her to the edge of suicidal thoughts: “Sometimes I look at the huge bread knife as if it were a savior. I feel that if I cut my stomach with it, I will be relieved.”⁵⁶³

Lerzan is far from the idealized mother figure; she openly expresses that she does not always love her children⁵⁶⁴ and frequently views them as a burden: “They’re trying to grow up while tormenting me a thousand times.”⁵⁶⁵ Over time, her detachment grows, and the caregiving role is increasingly taken over by Vildan, who disapproves of Lerzan’s behavior: “What kind of woman was she, what kind of mother was she?”⁵⁶⁶ However, Vildan’s own experience with motherhood turns out to mirror Lerzan’s more than she ever realizes. Upon discovering she is pregnant, Vildan too is overcome by despair and suicidal thoughts: “Sometimes I get so miserable that I feel the urge to tear my stomach open with a huge bread knife.”⁵⁶⁷ Even the object of suicidal fantasy — the bread knife — is identical, suggesting a deeper narrative symmetry. That both Lerzan and Vildan, despite being contrasting characters, share the same emotional

⁵⁶¹ “Öleceğim Fetişim. Ve korkuyorum, tasavvur edemezsiniz, ölümden ne kadar korkuyorum! Düşününüz on altı yaşında anne olacağım! Öyle de zayıfım ki!..” Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 88.

⁵⁶² Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 94.

⁵⁶³ “Kocaman ekmek bıçağına bazen inanır mısın, bir halaskâra bakar gibi bakıyorum. Karnımı onunla yarıversen rahatlayacağım sanıyorum.” Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 98.

⁵⁶⁴ Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 94, 113.

⁵⁶⁵ “Onlar da bana, binbir eziyet vere vere büyümeye çalışıyorlar.” Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 101.

⁵⁶⁶ “Bu nasıl kadındı yarabbi, bu nasıl ana idi?..” Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 197.

⁵⁶⁷ “Bazen o kadar yeise kapılıyorum ki içimden; kocaman ekmek bıçağı ile karnımı baştanbaşa yırtıvermek arzusu kabarıyordu.” Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 188.

burden points to a broader solidarity among women rather than a moral comparison between ideal and failed mothers.

This parallel also resonates with Halide Nusret's own reflections on motherhood. While she maintained a public image of the devoted, loving mother, her personal writings reveal a much more conflicted and painful experience. Like Lerzan and Vildan, Halide Nusret faced depressed and suicidal thoughts during her pregnancies, particularly those that ended in miscarriage.⁵⁶⁸ As discussed in the relevant chapter, her first diary entry after her son's birth does not celebrate motherhood but reflects on its agony — and her relief that the child was a boy, not another “ıstırap makinesi,” a machine of suffering, meaning a girl.⁵⁶⁹ The alignment between the author's personal history and the emotional journeys of her characters further connects the novels to her private persona and promotes a sense of solidarity among women—one that highlights shared vulnerability rather than passing judgment or idealizing one mother over another.

The novel's critique extends beyond physical and emotional toll of motherhood but also the questioning of the idealized maternal figure that Halide Nusret herself often promotes in her public writings. Vildan, who embodies the selfless, dutiful maternal figure in contrast to Lerzan, ultimately suffers the same fate. She devotes her life to raising her children and maintaining a family with Ali, the man who murdered her sister. Despite her selfless sacrifice, none of her children appreciate her efforts. They eventually abandon her, leaving her to seek refuge in religion. The sharpest criticism comes from his eldest son Behçet, after she gives him her ring to temper his fiancée's indulgence and materialism: “Oh, Mom!... [...] Are you doing me a favor? Do you think you're doing me a favor. Don't you realize you're pushing me into the cliff again? Oh, this weakness of yours! [...] And in that moment the woman felt the collapse of the most beautiful, the greatest thing inside her.”⁵⁷⁰ This criticism — from Vildan's thoughtful child

⁵⁶⁸ Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, 31/05/1930 Cumartesi, 24/9/1930 Çarşamba.

⁵⁶⁹ Halide Nusret, “Günlük,” 1929, v. 10/01/1930.

⁵⁷⁰ Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 266. “‘Ah Anne!... [...] Sen bana iyilik mi ediyorsun? Bana iyilik ettiğini mi zannediyorsun. Beni yeniden uçuruma ittiğinin farkında değil misin? Ah senin bu zaafın!’ [...] Ve kadın, o anda, içinde en güzel, en büyük bir şeyin yıkılıp çöktüğünü duydu.”

— shatters the idea that devotion to the mother leads to familial harmony or moral success.

Vildan's final emotional collapse comes when her daughter, Feza, gets married. Though she had encouraged the marriage, Vildan is consumed by obsessive thoughts of abandonment: "How could this girl, this beloved monster, shut herself up within the four walls of her own happiness, not realizing in the slightest degree that she was killing her mother?"⁵⁷¹ Her irrational jealousy and heartbreak make the reader question her emotional stability. In the end, she finds peace not through family, but through spirituality — an acknowledgment that self-effacement, even for one's children, leads to emptiness rather than fulfillment.

Through the mirrored experiences of Lerzan and Vildan, *Aydınlık Kapı* reveals the emotional and social costs of idealized motherhood. By blending autobiographical elements with fictional criticism, Halide Nusret challenges the model of maternal virtue that she defends in the public domain. Rather than offering one model of "good" or "bad" motherhood, the novel presents a more nuanced vision that invites critical reflection on the unrealistic demands placed on women. In this way, *Aydınlık Kapı* opens a space for feminist questioning and solidarity, featuring women's emotional complexity in the face of fixed gender roles.

⁵⁷¹ Zorlutuna, *Aydınlık Kapı*, 277. "Bu kız, bu sevgili canavar, anasını zerre zerre öldürdüğü'nün zerre kadar farkında olmadan, kendi saadeti'nin dört duvarı içine nasıl kapanabiliyordu?"

Conclusion

This chapter challenges the persistent narrative of stagnation that has shaped both global and Turkish feminist historiography by reconsidering the post-war period in Turkey through the lens of gendered civic engagement and the inclusion of different literary genres. Moving beyond frameworks that define activism only in terms of organized feminist movements, it emphasizes how women like Halide Nusret Zorlutuna were involved in the political and cultural life of the time - often in subtle, genre-mediated and ideologically complex ways. In her narrative realm, non-fiction becomes a space for ideological negotiation; fiction, a space for emotional and critical expression. Reading her intellectual work through this lens reframes her positioning while contributing to a broader re-evaluation of women's history in post-war Turkey.

The years following World War II marked a turning point in Turkey's political and social trajectory. Although Turkey remained officially neutral during the war, its aftermath brought about major shifts, including the transition to multi-party democracy in 1946 and the Democrat Party's rise to power in 1950. This new political environment, characterized by liberalization, freedom of the press and increased space for civil mobilization, created new opportunities for women's participation in the public sphere. It was a period of dynamic transformation marked by relatively more opportunities, not only politically and economically, but also socially and culturally. In this context, women writers, activists and public figures have found ways to express and negotiate their identities, even while remaining within conservative circles.

At the same time, broader sociopolitical trends were reinforcing traditional gender norms. Pronatalist policies and national recovery discourses emphasized women's reproductive and domestic roles, reflecting both earlier nationalist ideals and new Cold War family ideologies. Turkey's further alignment with Western modernization policies, especially the American model, reinforced these expectations and contributed to a narrative that simultaneously invited women's public participation and limited it to patriarchal ideals of femininity and

family. These global and national dynamics have shaped the ways in which women like Halide Nusret Zorlutuna have addressed issues of visibility and agency.

In this contradictory environment, Halide Nusret Zorlutuna is a significant cultural figure. Her increasing public activity, from her contributions to women's magazines and national newspapers to her participation in civic organizations, reflects the self-conscious construction of a public persona that hardly conflicts with the dominant ideological climate. However, her fiction from this period - short stories and novels written in the relatively more open intellectual atmosphere of the 1950s - returns to the self-reflexive and empathetically complex narrative strategies of her earlier literary work. These fictional texts reveal a private persona capable of expressing criticism, paradoxicality and plurality of voices in a way that her public writings do not. In particular, the themes of motherhood and the home are depicted—not idealized—based on lived experience, reflecting the more nuanced perspectives the author had also expressed in her earlier personal diaries. In doing so, Halide Nusret constructs a more complex narrative world that does not reject the ideals she publicly promotes but rather reveals their other side, exposing the tensions and ambiguities within them. This genre distinction - non-fiction as a site of ideological conformity, fiction as a site of personal expression - recalls her narrative patterns of the early 1920s and suggests a continuity rather than a spontaneous post-war shift in Halide Nusret's strategies of representation.



Conclusion

What does it mean for a woman to inscribe herself into the story of national progress — not merely as a witness, but as an active defender of its ideals? Halide Nusret Zorlutuna built a public image that conformed closely to the normative expectations of Republican womanhood: devoted mother, respectful wife, and intellectual agent of moral norms. In her public-facing texts—including opinion pieces and autobiographical writings, she consistently demonstrated a character rooted in and happy with domestic roles, modesty and national service. However, as Sara Ahmed points out, happiness is not just an emotional state, but a social directive - a normative prescription that rewards women for conforming to predetermined roles such as motherhood, domesticity and obedience.⁵⁷² Within this framework, ‘the promise of happiness’ Ahmed formulated, functions as a form of regulation, shaping especially public narratives or individuals. Halide Nusret not only embodied this idealized script in her public persona, but also actively contributed to its rhetorical reproduction. In this sense, her public persona acts like a character performing the role of happiness and “follows the lines that have already been given in advance,”⁵⁷³ as Ahmed puts it.

⁵⁷² Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Duke University Press, 2010).

⁵⁷³ Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 48.

However, the private realm exposes the backstage of this performance of happiness, revealing the emotional complexity, breakdowns, exhaustions and impossibilities. Individuals are overwhelmed by the weight of social expectations, surfacing dissatisfaction and internal conflict. The direct parallels between her fiction and her diaries reveals how two literary modes feed each other, constructing a more conflicted and emotionally rich private persona that challenged the public image she maintained throughout her career.

This tension between genre and voice, between public representation and private experience, is not simply a matter of literary form. It outlines the methodological argument of this thesis: women's history requires engaging with sources that are often ignored in conventional historiography—fictional texts, diaries, and genre-based narrative formations. By tracing these discursive shifts in Halide Nusret's self-representation and portrayal of womanhood, this study contributes not only to a re-evaluation of her legacy but also to broader debates on how gendered lives are recorded, silenced, and remembered in historical writing.

In the first main chapter (Chapter II), I adopt a thematic approach, analyzing Halide Nusret's writings across various genres, each section centered around a distinct theme. These themes—such as nationalism, religion, legal reforms, women's labor, domesticity, and fashion—were selected based on their prominence in public discourse of the time, including periodicals, policies, and popular culture, and their reflection in Halide Nusret's texts. As the post-World War I years had a sharply transformative effect on women's lives, this chapter enabled a deeper discussion of issues that would significantly shape the decades that followed. The thematic analysis was applied to Halide Nusret's work and also to the historical background of the chapter, providing an outline of both global and local gender debates. This broader view helped to reveal how similar tensions around women's roles emerged across different national contexts after the war. The thematic structure also allowed me to identify the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of Halide Nusret's discourse on women's issues. It helped trace the moments when she deviated from dominant narratives—moments that

proved not to be arbitrary, but rather shaped by the genre she was writing in. For example, in her non-fiction essays like “Kadında Hak-ı Talak” (1923) and “Türk Ocağında İctima,” Halide Nusret adopted a moderate tone that emphasized family unity and existing social structures over the individual rights of women. However, in fictional works such as the “Öldüren Kadınlar Serisi” (1924), she articulated a far more radical critique, portraying female characters who resorted to violence to reclaim their agency in a deeply unequal society. This observation laid the groundwork for the genre-based readings in the following chapters, showing that Halide Nusret’s engagement with the “woman question” involved strategic shifts in tone, rhetoric, and voice. These shifts ultimately created two distinct personas—public and private—that often stand in tension with one another.

In the next chapters of this thesis, I adopted a genre-based approach to deepen the analysis initiated through the thematic reading in Chapter II. This shift was not merely stylistic but analytical: the thematic inconsistencies observed in Halide Nusret’s earlier writings made it necessary to examine how genre shaped her discourse on women. From 1927 onward, as the state’s control over the public sphere intensified and the women’s movement lost its earlier momentum, Halide Nusret’s public writings—including opinion pieces and fiction—began to reflect the official ideology of the time more directly. Particularly during the early 1930s, her discourse increasingly aligned with the Kemalist framework, emphasizing the “savior father” figure (Atatürk) and promoting domesticity as the natural and ideal domain for women. In doing so, she reproduced the contradictions of Republican gender discourse: praising reforms that brought women into professional life while simultaneously reinforcing the notion that a woman’s true fulfillment lies in her home.

Interestingly, this shift was not limited to her essays. Her fictional writings from this period, which had previously served as spaces for more subtle and complex critiques, also began to conform to the dominant narrative. For instance, her only novel from the 1930s, *Gül’ün Babası Kim?* breaks from her earlier fictional strategies, adopting the stylistic and ideological codes of the emerging Republican literary canon. This novel centers on a morally redemptive female

character who finds salvation not through personal agency or critique but by settling into a domestic marriage in Ankara—an allegory of the ideal Republican womanhood. In this context, Halide Nusret's fiction no longer offers a space that problematizes gendered social structures; rather, it becomes an extension of her public persona and nationalist agenda.

However, the diary she kept during her early years of motherhood (1929-1931) gives a notable counterpoint. In contrast to her public writings, the diary captures the emotional labor, personal exhaustion, and identity conflicts that she experienced in her private life—especially as a woman juggling motherhood, intellectual work, and self-expression. Through this source, it becomes clear that the divide between Halide Nusret's public and private personas was not just discursive but deeply experiential. Moreover, the diary stands out as a rare and rich document for the writing of women's history in Turkey. Personal accounts of female Republican intellectuals from this period are extremely rare, and Halide Nusret's detailed reflections help to comprehend how an educated, conservative woman navigated the gendered expectations of the early Republic. The genre-based analysis thus illuminates how her engagement with the “woman question” was shaped by form as much as by content, offering a more complex view of both the writer and her time.

In the final chapter, which covers the post-World War II period until 1960, genre-based analysis continues to reveal the duality in Halide Nusret Zorlutuna's public and private personas. This period marks her increasing institutional engagement in women's associations, her regular contributions to national newspapers and magazines, and a growing presence in civic and literary culture. These texts construct a consistent and ideologically conforming public persona aligned with the dominant gender norms of the era, particularly shaped by pronatalist policies and Cold War family ideals. Halide Nusret's non-fiction writings in this period do not significantly differ from her earlier conservative stance, but reflect a more defined and strategically constructed image. Her voice here remains in dialogue with the regime-led framework that emphasized women's participation in public life without radically challenging patriarchal

structures. Yet, this alignment was not uncritical. Halide Nusret and her contemporaries in the Turkish Women's Union actively articulated their concern that the reforms granted by Atatürk were being undermined. In both her articles in *Kadın Gazetesi* and her institutional presence, she urged the country to return to the founding ideals of the Republic—especially regarding women's representation in parliament and political life. Thus, public discourse in this period reflects not only ideological fidelity, but also a defensive stance characterized by a concern that the early Republican efforts to achieve gender equality had retreated. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to say that this was a complete feminist breakthrough, as it simply echoed the patriarchal narrative of the Kemalist discourse, which relied on the savior figure rather than emphasizing women's agency.

By contrast, her fictional writings—especially the two novels *Beyaz Selvi* (1945) and *Aydılık Kapı* (1955), as well as various short stories—allow for a critical ground for idealized definitions and duties of womanhood. These works revisit many of the themes introduced in her earlier fiction, such as motherhood, family roles, and moral patterns, through an analytical and self-reflexive lens that draws on her own experience. Motherhood is not idealized but portrayed as an emotionally burdensome and psychologically intricate experience. The male figure in the family is also questioned, revealing the unresolved tensions in the family structure promoted by the popular culture and official discourse of the time. Through fictional characters and narrative density, Halide Nusret expresses doubts and frustrations that do not appear in her public writings. This suggests that she continues to develop a private personality in her fiction that is emotionally expressive, critically engaged and more distanced from hegemonic ideals. In this sense, the genre-based distinction in this chapter confirms an ongoing narrative strategy rather than a period-specific preference. Similar to her 1919-1927 period, fiction emerges as a space for Halide Nusret to articulate complexity, pluralism, and inner conflict, while public texts function as instruments of ideological conformity.

The division between Halide Nusret's public and private writings cannot be understood simply as a matter of genre, but must be situated within her broader ideological positioning. From the beginning of her career, she presented herself as a compliant and loyal figure within the dominant discourse, be it the traditionalism of the Armistice period or the norms of the Republican project. Expressing her dissatisfaction in her public writings or pointing out gender-based inequalities too explicitly would have been contradictory to this preference. Therefore, Halide Nusret cannot be expected to make radical criticisms with feminist consciousness. Yet it is precisely what makes her an intriguing subject: a woman writer reinforcing patriarchal discourse from the outside, while subtly chronicling dissent, unease and contradiction through her personal writings and fiction.

Feminist historiography has often excluded figures like Halide Nusret—women who appear to uphold dominant ideologies and do not express bold opposition. While this exclusion is understandable within the framework of some feminist critiques, a closer examination of these women gives a valuable opportunity to question and explore the background of the narratives constructed by those who seem to embrace patriarchy. Therefore, this thesis argues that although Halide Nusret openly contributed to patriarchal discourse, the private experiences and challenges revealed in her personal writings and fictional works enable a highly significant feminist historical comprehension. These moments of emotional, intellectual and experiential confrontation are not just anomalies, but reflect the complex contradictions faced by women caught between Republican ideals of womanhood and their own subjectivity.

Moreover, Halide Nusret's importance lies both in the ideological complexity of her writing, and in her longevity and depth of experience. As an intellectual who lived through—and actively responded to—nearly all the major turning points of twentieth-century Turkey, she stands as a unique witness to the country's history. Her career as a teacher in various Anatolian cities, her engagement in literary and civic circles, and her prolific writing across multiple decades make her an essential figure for women's history. The fact that such a

visible, productive and historically prominent woman has been largely absent from historical scholarship stresses the need for such studies. Examining Halide Nusret's life and works within this framework gives her a voice while offering a deeper understanding of female agency under patriarchy.

This study has explored how Turkish women's history can be expanded through the inclusion of diverse voices and source materials. Halide Nusret is only one among many women intellectuals who witnessed—and were shaped by—the turning points of twentieth-century Turkey. As this thesis demonstrates, even during periods traditionally seen as politically or culturally stagnant, women continued to participate in public life. These activities were not always oppositional; they often operated within the parameters set by dominant ideologies, while still creating space for action, negotiation and reflection. To fully understand these dynamics, it is essential to look beyond public achievements and also consider how such women experienced and interpreted private life under shifting historical conditions.

Women's visibility in the political and professional spheres, whether in academic or popular literature, has often led to debates on domestic and private identity. However, the private sphere is often underexplored when writing women's history. This gap has made it difficult to challenge established narratives and capture the multilayered character of women's lives. A multidimensional historical approach that takes into account the interaction between public discourse and private experience is crucial. This thesis presents a model for such a methodology.

An important contribution of this thesis is its source-based approach. By drawing on personal diaries, unpublished notebooks in private family archives and a wide range of fictional texts, it demonstrates the importance of looking beyond official records and institutional histories. These sources offer a unique and complex perspective on the lived experiences, internal conflicts and participatory strategies of women navigating complex social expectations. Fiction serves here not simply as an aesthetic text, but also as a form of historical testimony, revealing emotional and ideological tensions that are often not found

in publicly available documents. Diaries and personal writings also offer insights into how such tensions are personally experienced and handled. A more inclusive and critical historical lens that treats literature and private archives as central, rather than auxiliary, sources of historical study can reveal diverse dimensions of women's histories.

The history of Turkey contains many important women's testimonies that remain undiscovered. For example, the lives and intellectual contributions of the founding members of the Women's People's Party (Kadınlar Halk Fırkası), or the Turkish Women's Union (Türk Kadınlar Birliği) both of which Halide Nusret was also a part, are still not adequately researched. Even Nezihe Muhittin, a prominent figure in political activism, arguably the most debated topic in women's history, has been largely ignored in historical research on her literary production and private life, despite the attention she has received in recent years. . Similarly, many other women who played important roles as writers, professionals and public figures have not been studied beyond superficial biographies so far. To address this, we need more interdisciplinary studies that bring together different genres and sources. This approach will uncover individual experiences and also help to trace the networks of women intellectuals that shape public discourse. The much-criticized claim of a disconnect between Ottoman and Republican women's histories, originating from Kemalist historiography, still lacks a strong alternative narrative. As feminist historiography reveals, a strong network of solidarity emerged among women in the late Ottoman period through periodicals and intellectual collaboration. How these networks transformed - or persisted - in the first decades of the Republic remains an unanswered question. I believe this question can only be addressed through a multifaceted approach to women's lives, actions and productions that pushes the boundaries of dominant historiography.

Appendix A – Selected Pages from Halide Nusret Zorlutuna's Diary

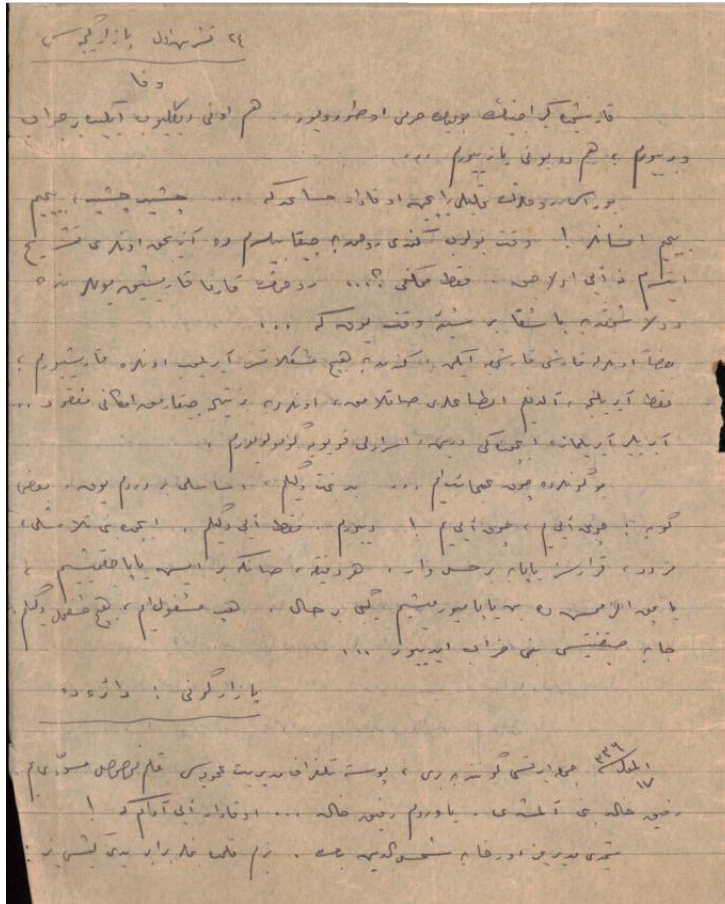


Fig. 1: A page from Halide Nusret's diaries, 22 October 1920, Vefa. Archive of Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi

ve Bilgi Merkezi (The Women's Library and Information Center)

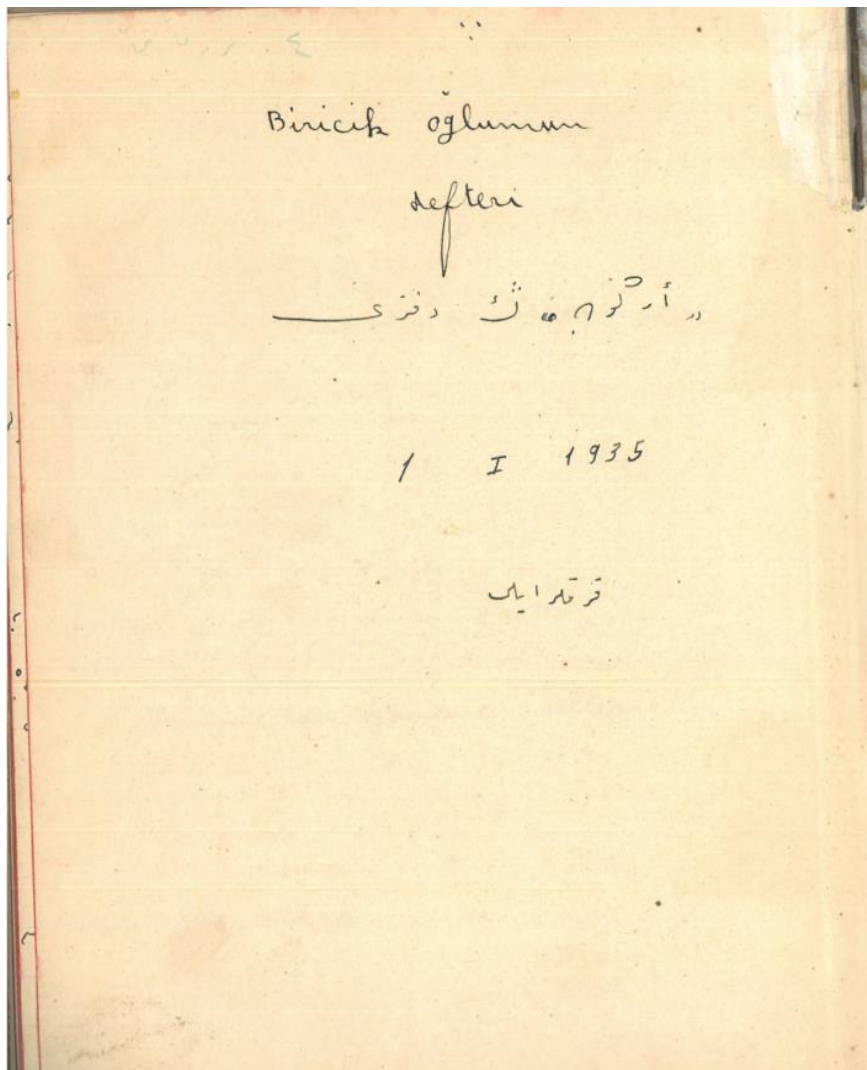


Fig. 3: A page from Halide Nusret's notebook, dedicated for her son, 1 January 1935. Courtesy of the Zorlutuna Family Archives

Appendix B – Photographs of Halide Nusret Zorlutuna



Fig. 1: Early 1920s, with her students and her sister İsmet. Courtesy of the Zorlutuna Family Archives



Fig. 2: 1920s, with her colleagues and students. Courtesy of the Zorlutuna Family Archives



Fig. 3: Halide Nusret with her friends in 1930s. Courtesy of the Zorlutuna Family Archives



Fig. 4: Halide Nusret with her daughter on her lap, Late 1930s. Courtesy of the Zorlutuna Family Archives



Fig. 5: Must be 1950s. Courtesy of the Zorlutuna Family Archives



Fig. 6: 1980s. Courtesy of the Zorlutuna Family Archives

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