

# Suffragettes of the empire, daughters of the Republic: Women auto/biographers narrate national history (1918-1935)

Hülya Adak

## Abstract

This paper explores modes of autobiographical writing by female authors in the early republican period. Women's autobiographies draw a strict distinction between the narration of the private and the public self, as they promote the narration of the undomestic, professional self at the expense of the private. Ironically, even if the autobiographers in question were politically active in suffrage, women's autobiographies either do not represent the authors' involvement in such campaigns, or praise state feminism for granting emancipation. "Personal is political" only becomes a maxim for a later generation of women writers, with autobiographies and autobiographical novels of the post-1970 period underscoring the importance of exploring the subjectivity of the adult woman/narrator. More recent examples of auto/biographical writing blur the boundaries between private and public and narrate gendered accounts of republican history.

Keywords: *women's autobiographies, suffrage, women's biographies, republican reforms, republican history.*

This paper seeks to examine Turkish women's autobiographies of the early republic, in an attempt to analyze modes of writing and interpret narrative strategies of silencing in the texts; it aims to illustrate the particular ways in which not only the particular modes of writing but also those of silencing are *gendered*. Women's autobiographies that focus on the formative years of the republic, i.e. the 1920s and 1930s, and particularly those that have been written prior to the 1970s, draw a strict distinction between the private and the public self and excessively promote the public self at the

---

Hülya Adak, Sabancı University, Orhanlı, Tuzla 34956 İstanbul, Turkey, [hadak@sabanciuniv.edu](mailto:hadak@sabanciuniv.edu)

expense of narrating the private. Most of the autobiographers analyzed in this paper were prominent figures either during Turkey's struggle for independence (1919-1922) and/or in the formative years of the republic. Their integral role in national history is narrated in the autobiographical accounts as if this history were not their own; rather, their autobiographical accounts resemble biographical accounts of prominent men. Women politically active in suffrage do not find the autobiographical mode to be a fruitful zone to discuss their own or others' involvement, since the histories in these women's autobiographies center mostly on men's history. This emphasis negates and silences the presence of other female historical actors or of collective women's campaigns.

### The private/public schism

The *Bildungsroman* predominantly characterizes the generic nature of fictional works (particularly of an autobiographical nature) by women writers in Turkey. According to Jale Parla, the female protagonists of women's fiction wrestle with their personal histories, as the novels narrate in succinct detail their development and maturation from the early stages of childhood into adulthood.<sup>1</sup> This generic categorization can be extended to women's autobiographies. In men's autobiographies, the self has already reached a profound stage of maturation, and the narrative—rather than focusing on the development of this self—concentrates on an exploration of the already mature self. In contrast, women's autobiographies center on tracing personal history as a development, at the end point of which the self may or may not reach a certain level of maturation. However, women's autobiographies, particularly those written during or narrating the formative years of the republic, complicate Parla's theory because of their strict private/public distinction. In such autobiographies, the exploration of the private self begins with the childhood years but culminates in (early) adolescence.

Following the publication of *Fatma Aliye Hanım yahut Bir Muharrir-i Osmaniye'nin Neşeti* (Fatma Aliye Hanım or the Birth of an Ottoman Woman Writer, 1895)—a hybrid auto-biographical text by Ahmet Midhat which includes many autobiographical passages written by Fatma Aliye herself—the transition to womanhood, the psychological exploration of the self, and experiences of the body and sexuality were not narratable in women's autobiographies.<sup>2</sup> Hence, in these texts, the child does not mature into an adult woman. The compensation for suppressing the private self is

1 Jale Parla, "Tarihçem Kabusumdur! Kadın Romancılarda Rüya, Kabus, Oda, Yazı," in *Kadınlar Dile Düşünce: Edebiyat ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet*, ed. Sibel İrzik and Jale Parla (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004), 180.

2 Hülya Adak, "Gender-in(g) Biography: Ahmet Mithat (on Fatma Aliye) or the Canonization of an Ottoman Male Writer," *Querelles*, no. 10 (2005): 194-95.

the narration of the public self's development in excess. *Ergo*, adulthood exclusively permits women's autobiographies to explore in chronological order the history of the professional, undomestic self and her involvement in the public sphere and key stages of national history. "Private is political" becomes a maxim for a later generation of women writers.<sup>3</sup>

### Techniques of self-infantilization

In women's autobiographies, the stages of childhood and early adolescence are excessively loaded with the exploration of the self. First, because of the high degree of (auto)censorship in narrating the adult self, many women's autobiographies only narrate stages of childhood, culminating at the point when the narrator reaches puberty or early adulthood. Examples include Samiha Ayverdi's *Bir Dünyadan Bir Dünyaya* (From One World to the Other, 1974) and Selma Ekrem's *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl* (1930).

Second, underscoring childhood experiences is a politically loaded strategy because the autobiographers' states of childhood overlap with the last few decades of the Ottoman Empire. These "transition from empire to nation" autobiographies<sup>4</sup> emphasize the *continuity* from empire to nation in order to counter the myth of discontinuity expounded in national historiography.<sup>5</sup> Examples include *Memoirs of Halide Edib* (1926) and *The Turkish Ordeal* (1928) by Halide Edib, *Türk Kadını* (Turkish Woman, 1931) by Nezihe Muhiddin, and *Roman Gibi* (Like a Novel, 1969) by Sabiha Sertel. In the case of works published outside of Turkey—such as Selma Ekrem's *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl* and, to a certain extent, Halide Edib's *Memoirs of Halide Edib*—memories of traveling in the vast territories of the Ottoman Empire and encountering people of different ethnic groups might have been of ethnographic value to western readers hungry for Orientalist history.

Third, in women's autobiographies, childhood is a stage overburdened with subjectivity, a stage in which the narrator explores her own

3 In the post-1970s period, many women writers have engaged in exploring the private at the center of their politics. Examples include Sevgi Soysal, Adalet Ağaoğlu, Latife Tekin, Aslı Erdoğan, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, and Elif Şafak, as well as autobiographers such as İsmet Kür, Cahit Uçuk, and Güner Kuban. The latter is the writer of the first lesbian autobiography in Turkey, entitled *Sevişmenin Rengi* (The Color of Making Love) (1982).

4 Many male autobiographers wrote accounts of continuity to counter republican historiography which insists on a rupture between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. One such example is Dr. Rıza Nur's *Hayat ve Hatıratım* (My Life and Memoirs, 1993).

5 For a detailed analysis of the myth of discontinuity, see, Hülya Adak, "National Myths and Self-Narrations: Mustafa Kemal's Nutuk and Halide Edib's Memoirs and The Turkish Ordeal," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2/3 (2003).

psychological development and offers information on family life and other details related to her personal history. The analysis of personality in childhood generally serves to describe an unchanging state which, in the absence of further narration, allows the reader to project the characteristics of the child self to that of adulthood. In the case of Halide Edib's *Memoirs*, Edib's political tolerance to multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism and her philosophy of non-violent nationalism are foreshadowed in her childhood. For instance, as a child, she was sent to a kindergarten hosting the children of the Christian officials working for Abdül Hamid and recounts the experience of speaking Greek without knowing that it was different from Turkish.

What did that mean to the little girl? She had not yet entered that narrow human path where religion, language, and racial differences make human beings devour each other. The little girl was still in a world where the joy of life is heart fusion and natural existence.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, the grave problems of loading childhood with an exploration of personal history while at the same time stripping adulthood of such an exploration emerge in the narration of the adult woman. In *Memoirs* and in *The Turkish Ordeal*, Halide Edib's narration of decisions or courses of action in her private life are reduced to incoherent scribbblings, devoid of cause-and-effect logic, consequences, and psychological depth or exploration.<sup>7</sup> For instance, in the first volume of her autobiography *Memoirs*, the verbose prolixity of the narration about her rigorous educational endeavors in Syria in 1916 is interrupted with a lapse into illness, during which she allows her readers a faint glimpse into her private life: "It was during this week of utter sickness that I made an important decision concerning my own life. I decided to marry Dr. Adnan."<sup>8</sup> In the ensuing passage, the details of the marriage are recorded: Halide Edib can not attend the wedding which is to take place in Bursa, but her father will represent her, carrying her letter of consent. Halide Edib notes dry details, such as the date of the wedding on April 23, 1917: "When I received my father's telegram and that of Dr. Adnan that I was married, I was creeping back to life and work again."<sup>9</sup>

To a reader not familiar with Halide Edib's biography, the decision to marry might seem *ill-conceived*, both because of the decision's timing

6 Halide Edib Adivar, *Memoirs of Halide Edib* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004), 27.

7 Other examples of women's autobiographies which do not focus on personal history include Sabiha Sertel's *Roman Gibi* (Like a Novel, 1969) and Halide Nusret Zorlutuna's *Bir Devrin Romanı* (The Novel of an Epoch, 1978). For further details on women's autobiographies and personal history, see, Nazan Aksoy, "Kadın Otobiyografileri ve Beden," *Virgöl*, no. 102 (2006).

8 Adivar, *Memoirs of Halide Edib*, 450.

9 Ibid.

(during sickness) and because she did not actually attend her own wedding. However, many sources suggest that hers was a successful marriage and that Halide Edib had found a lifelong partner whose death would become the cause of insufferable trauma.<sup>10</sup> It is not only the wedding itself that is only marginally mentioned; Halide Edib also neglects to tell us about the details of how she met Dr. Adnan and when they decided to turn their relationship into marriage. In the next volume of the autobiography, *The Turkish Ordeal*, the passages referring to Dr. Adnan underscore his efforts in the independence struggle of Turkey and the establishment of the Turkish republic. After this passage, she does not narrate Dr. Adnan as a flesh-and-bone character.<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, the narration of body experiences are exclusively restricted to the narration of the various stages of childhood. Because it is a site of discomfort for the narrator, the body no longer figures in her post-adolescence narration, and being dis-embodied signals the ultimate triumph: “But I had by now mastered the flesh—I was not even conscious of its misery more than I was conscious of the obvious misery of other people around me.”<sup>12</sup> During the national struggle, the narrator describes her utter fatigue after a day-long horse ride not through her body, but in pursuit of escape from it: “‘If my body goes on like this,’ I said to myself, ‘I will change it and get another one.’ This comforted me immensely, I remember: I laughed and groaned, repeating it all the time. ‘I will change my body.’”<sup>13</sup>

In these narratives, the topic of sexuality is censored and/or denied.<sup>14</sup> Edib’s account of sexuality during the national struggle is quite brief: “This was about the middle of the summer of 1920. Life at headquarters was of the austerest. We lived like members of a newly founded religious order in all the exaggerated puritanism of its inception.”<sup>15</sup> This account does not

10 For further details on Halide Edib in the post-1950 period, see, İnci Enginün, *Halide Edib Adivar’ın Eserlerinde Doğu ve Batı Meselesi* (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1978).

11 The details of Halide Edib’s private life are even further censored in the translation of the two-volume autobiography into Turkish in the 1960s, under the titles *Mor Salkımlı Ev* (The Wisteria-Covered House, 1963) and *Türk’ün Ateşle İmtihanı* (The Turk’s Ordeal with Fire, 1962). For instance, in *The Turkish Ordeal*, the passage where Edib finds out about the death of her first husband Salih Zeki and nostalgically narrates her teenage love for him is omitted altogether from the Turkish version.

12 Halide Edip Adivar, *The Turkish Ordeal* (New York: The Century Co., 1928), 83.

13 Ibid., 119.

14 Women’s autobiographies written during the early republican period, including the ones written in exile in other languages, do not overcome the boundaries of the Turkish modernization project which allowed women to unveil without “unburdening them from the requirement of chastity.” In the words of Deniz Kandiyoti, this resulted in “a new veil—that of sexual repression.” Ayşe Parla, “‘The “Honor” of the State: Virginity Examinations in Turkey,’” *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 75. Parla quotes from, Deniz Kandiyoti, “Slave Girls, Temptresses, and Comrades: Images of Women in the Turkish Novel,” *Feminist Issues*, no. 8 (1988): 47.

15 Adivar, *The Turkish Ordeal*, 168.

explain the situation prior to or after the struggle. Could individuals have lived like monks for three years during the struggle? How could Halide Edib have known that abstinence ruled the lives of all persons at the headquarters? These questions remain unexplored. For a woman writer who dared to write fiction about sexual relationships without the “sanctity of marriage” (*Seviye Talip*, 1912) or about women’s extramarital relationships (*Handan*, 1912) the repression of sexuality in her own autobiography about a decade later is striking.<sup>16</sup>

Lastly, self-infantilization is not just a narrative device or a means for overcoming the patriarchal taboos that cause a crisis around the narration of the adult woman. Rather, self-infantilization also manifests itself in the act of internalizing childhood as a perpetual state of womanhood. Such is the case of Sabiha Gökçen, one of the adopted daughters of Mustafa Kemal.

### Sabiha, the eternal daughter

Even the title of Sabiha Gökçen’s memoirs, *Atatürk’ün İzinde Bir Ömür Böyle Geçti* (How A Life Passed in the Path of Atatürk, 1982) suggests that the sole reason for writing the autobiography was to illustrate Sabiha’s proximity to Mustafa Kemal. Born in 1913 in Bursa, Sabiha lost her parents at an early age, met Mustafa Kemal during one of his trips to Bursa, and succeeded in convincing him to provide the means for her education. Mustafa Kemal adopted Sabiha in 1925. In her twenties, Sabiha was trained as a pilot and later, after the Dersim bombing, became known as the first woman war pilot in the world.

In her autobiography, she attempts to give meaning to a life which starts in 1925 and ends on November 10, 1938, the precise date of Mustafa Kemal’s death. In the introduction, the narrator underscores that her life was short-lived, only 13 years, between 1925 and 1938.<sup>17</sup> In her article on Sabiha Gökçen, the anthropologist Ayşe Gül Altınay recounts her bewilderment at not being able to find Gökçen’s autobiography in bookstores in the section on women’s history or auto/biography studies, but rather in the section on Mustafa Kemal.<sup>18</sup> In terms of its reception, it is quite appropriate that the work is categorized into that section. In fact, the

16 For a discussion of women’s sexuality in *Seviye Talip* and *Handan*, see, Hülya Adak, “An Epic for Peace,” in *Memoirs of Halide Edib* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004), ix, Hülya Adak, “Otobiyoğrafik Benliğin Çok Karakterliliği: Halide Edib’in İlk Romanlarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet,” in *Kadınlar Dile Düşünce: Edebiyat ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet*, ed. Sibel İrzık and Jale Parla (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004), 166-70.

17 Sabiha Gökçen, *Atatürk’ün İzinde Bir Ömür Böyle Geçti*, ed. Oktay Verel (İstanbul: Evrim Matbaacılık Ltd., 1982), iv.

18 Ayşe Gül Altınay, “Ordu-Millet-Kadınlar: Dünyanın İlk Kadın Savaş Pilotu Sabiha Gökçen,” in *Vatan-Millet-Kadınlar*, ed. Ayşe Gül. Altınay (İstanbul: İletişim, 2000), 250.

autobiography was commissioned by the *Türk Hava Kurumu* (Turkish Aeronautical Association) for the centennial of Mustafa Kemal's birth (1981) and first published in 1982. In terms of its production, however, Altınay's reaction is quite justified because the book is indeed presented to the readers as the "autobiography" of Sabiha Gökçen.

As autobiography, the text is testimony to Sabiha's intense experience of a combination of the Electra<sup>19</sup> and Héloïse complexes.<sup>20</sup> In 1925, the Electra complex is sealed when the "orphan Sabiha" becomes "Sabiha, the daughter of Atatürk," roughly around the same time as Mustafa Kemal divorces his wife Latife Hanım.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in the absence of the mother the daughter joins the father, only to share him with her sisters, other adopted daughters of Mustafa Kemal, namely Zehra, Rukiye, and Afet.<sup>22</sup> It is also noteworthy that Sabiha remarks she had no thoughts of marriage during Mustafa Kemal's lifetime. Consequently, she refused Kemal Esiner's pleas for marriage, accepting his hand only after Mustafa Kemal's death. The adult woman is not visible in the entire text; this gives the reader the impression that, as the daughter of Mustafa Kemal, the narrator never grows out of the infant stage. The only clues into Sabiha's post-mortem life—Mustafa Kemal's death is, in parallel fashion, Sabiha's death—exist in fragments in the family photograph album that exposes the reader to the pictures of her husband and daughter, next to them tiny notes revealing the identity of the faces.<sup>23</sup>

Sabiha Gökçen's autobiography confounds the line between the Electra and Héloïse complexes. The profound desire to join the father is coupled with the promise to follow the guiding "truth" of the father, or his principles—be they Kemalism, Turkish militarism, modernization, or any of Mustafa Kemal's personal demands or wishes. The intensity of her adoration for the father Mustafa Kemal takes over Sabiha's entire being to the point of self-abnegation. She succumbs to all his desires, although in the autobiography she admits that to several of his orders she yielded rather

19 According to Greek mythology, Electra conspired with Orestes to murder their mother, Clytemnestra, in order to retaliate for the murder of their father, Agamemnon. Thus, in contemporary psychoanalytic theory the Electra complex is the female analogue to the Oedipus complex. In both cases, the child desires to kill the parent of the same sex in order to secure sexual involvement with the parent of the opposite sex. For details of the Oedipus complex, see, Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 294-98.

20 According to Michèle Le Doeuff, in the context of women's relationship to philosophy, the Héloïse complex "prompts a woman to hope that a man will offer her a truth to change her life." See, Michèle Le Doeuff, *The Sex of Knowing*, trans. Kathryn Hamer and Lorraine Code (London: Routledge, 2003), 237.

21 Gökçen, *Atatürk'ün İzinde*, 19.

22 *Ibid.*, 31.

23 *Ibid.*, 196.

reluctantly. She lives to make him happy and strives to realize his dreams. Adopting the last name Gökçen because Mustafa Kemal deems it appropriate for her, she becomes a war pilot upon his command.<sup>24</sup> The beginning and end of the narrative mark a life that has meaning solely because it was lived according to the principles of Mustafa Kemal. The last sentence of the autobiography which repeats the title of the last chapter—“[o]nly if I think of you, if I understand you, if I love you, if I am in your path, I am”<sup>25</sup>—proclaims her *raison d'être*.

The narrative structure of the autobiography echoes the Héloïse complex of the self-negating narrator. At a certain point, Sabiha Gökçen's autobiography is interrupted and the unpublished journal of Mustafa Kemal inserted. Entitled “Tarih Rüzgarları ve Atatürk'ün Bir Yapıtı” (“The Winds of History and a Work of Atatürk”), it narrates the details of the Battle of the Dardanelles (1915) and the struggle for independence.<sup>26</sup> In the ensuing passages, a series of letters between Mustafa Kemal and other leaders as well as long quotations from Mustafa Kemal's *Nutuk* (The Speech, 1927) are included, so that the narrator can shed light on our “national history with the goal of binding us to one another.”<sup>27</sup> The unpublished journal and correspondence of Mustafa Kemal—that is, the words of the father—are deemed by the narrator-daughter to be more important than her own words and her own narrative.

### Self-abasement: The speck, the dust and the tiny women's work

The undomestic public self or the adult woman are not necessarily the centrifugal forces of women's autobiographies. Many of the autobiographies of this period are produced in order to narrate the author's involvement in national history; yet, history seems to be made outside the self. In contrast to male autobiographies where self and national history are conjoined and where the autobiographical self galvanizes the nation by determining and changing national history,<sup>28</sup> in women's autobiographies the self exists only

24 The last name suggests the word “gök” (sky), but also connotes “blue-eyed, blond, courageous.” Even though the narrator of *Atatürk'ün İzinde Bir Ömür Böyle Geçti* remarks that many people associated her name with her role as war pilot, it seems that the name was given to her by Mustafa Kemal a year before she started her pilot training. The name seems to have decided the profession, and not vice versa. Altınay, “Ordu-Millet-Kadınlar,” 248, Gökçen, *Atatürk'ün İzinde*, 69. For details on how Gökçen became the first woman war pilot in the world, see, Gökçen, *Atatürk'ün İzinde*, 95-96.

25 The original reads as follows: “Seni düşünüyorsam, seni anlıyorsam, seni seviyorsam, senin yolundaysam, yaşıyorum demektir.” Gökçen, *Atatürk'ün İzinde*, 423-31.

26 *Ibid.*, 175-228.

27 *Ibid.*, 228.

28 Examples of such male autobiographical writing include Mustafa Kemal's *Nutuk*, Kazım Karabekir's works on the different phases of nationalism in Turkey, including *İstiklal Harbimizin Esasları* (The Foundations of Our War of Independence, 1951), Dr. Rıza Nur's *Hayat ve Hatıratım* (My Life and



in interjections, interventions, or in being complicit in a historical narrative that is either already in the making or made. Hence, with few exceptions,<sup>29</sup> narrators of women's autobiographies assume not the role of an agent of, but of a witness to history, as they trivialize their importance or roles in national development.

The strategy of trivializing the self might well be connected to the complexities of self-infantilization. In the case of Sabiha Gökçen's memoirs, self-infantilization is synonymous with self-trivialization as a result of paternal worship. In Selma Ekrem's case, the autobiography exclusively represents the narrator's childhood and adolescence. Thus, the narrator is not the center of historical development and can only act as witness to historical change. The autobiography focuses mostly on the unstable political climate of the last few decades of the Ottoman Empire through her father Ali Ekrem's controversy with Sultan Abdül Hamid. As a child, Selma Ekrem is unable to take part in this significant historical affair. Ali Ekrem moves from one position and one province to the other, including Jerusalem, Rhodes, and many Greek islands, and the narrator passively follows and acts as witness to her father's professional and political struggles. The only active agency the narrator seems to have is in refusing to don the veil as she reaches adolescence. This struggle does not necessarily take place within the household but outside, against the orders of the Unionists who banned unveiled Muslim women from public places.<sup>30</sup> When the narrator finds it difficult to accept the oppression of women in Turkey, she seeks refuge in the United States.

Besides fashioning the self into a passive witness, women's autobiographies manifest a wide range of examples of self-abasement in the literal sense of the word, in order to allow the self a role in male historiography. Halide Edib's role as orator to a war-stricken nation, her influence in motivating hundreds of thousands of people to join the Independence War immediately after the defeat in World War I is narrated in *The Turkish Ordeal* with profound humility. In May 1919, during a speech she gives at the girls' college, the narrator describes herself as a "little shabby black figure," concealed under a *çarşaf*.<sup>31</sup> In June 1919, during a speech she gives in Sultanahmet, she is not a majestic figure delivering a

---

Memoirs, 1993), and Ali Fuat's *Siyasi Hatıralar* (Political Memoirs, 2002).

29 According to Halide Edib, her autobiography was not necessarily a work of history, but received as such. In the *Times Literary Supplement*, *The Turkish Ordeal* was described as a "history written by the novelist who helped to make it history." John Murray, "The Turkish Ordeal," *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 November 1928.

30 Selma Ekrem, *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1930), 267.

31 Adıvar, *The Turkish Ordeal*, 23-24.

heartening message to 200,000 people, but a “mere speck to those human bunches above and to the human sea below.”<sup>32</sup> The narrator finds it so difficult to identify herself with the legendary orator of the Sultanahmet speech that she narrates this entire section in the third person: “I believe that the Halide of Sultan Ahmet is not the ordinary, everyday Halide.”<sup>33</sup> At the end of the narration of the series of speeches, the author announces the return of the “ordinary, everyday Halide”: “And my story comes back to the first person again, for that unnatural detachment which had created a dual personality was no more.”<sup>34</sup> Lastly, her duty as nurse in the national struggle is recounted as utterly insignificant in comparison to that of males: “Sergeant Mustafa was worth some two hundred Halides.”<sup>35</sup>

When Nezihe Muhiddin published *Türk Kadını* (The Turkish Woman) in 1931, it was the first document of the history of the Ottoman Turkish women’s movement, listing and describing the significant activists and their struggles in the process of women’s emancipation. Yet, the narrator herself put down this great contribution to republican history in the part entitled “Büyük Rehber İthaf” (“Dedication to the Grand Guide”), as praise was bestowed upon Mustafa Kemal: “And I wrote this tiny woman’s work taking a thin ray of light from your ever-shining torch. Like a humble flower, I dedicate this as a gift to your path of enlightenment.”<sup>36</sup>

### The “exceptional woman” approach to writing history

In most women’s autobiographies, writing about a particular self involves proximity to male historical actors. The anxiety of self-legitimization, the constant attempt to become a central force of male history seems to result in making contemporary female historical agents into the “other.” With the exception of Nezihe Muhiddin’s ambitious project—which exemplifies that women’s history need not be told as the history of singular women, but can be narrated as a collective undertaking—most women’s autobiographies do not incorporate relationships, interactions, or histories of other women into their accounts.

In her *Memoirs* and *The Turkish Ordeal*, what is Halide Edib’s relationship to other women writers, journalists, or women who participate in the struggle for independence? The response cannot be

32 Ibid., 31.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., 33-34.

35 Ibid., 262.

36 The original reads as follows: “Ben de bu küçük kadın eserini ancak senin parlak meşalenden bir zerre ışık alarak yazdım. Onu alçakgönüllü bir çiçek gibi ışıklı izine armağan ediyorum.” Aşegül Baykan and Belma Ötüş-Baskett, eds., *Nezihe Muhittin ve Türk Kadını* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1999), 66.

formulated from the text. The *Memoirs* offers the reader a skewed glimpse of the first decades of the twentieth century; it seems as if amidst the multitude of male Ottoman writers Halide Edib were the only woman writer. It seems as if for her neither the vibrant women's literature of that period, nor the previous generation of female writers (Fatma Aliye, Emine Semiye, and Şair Nigar) existed. In depicting female characters, Halide Edib fails to represent the multi-ethnicity of the Ottoman Empire which she so nostalgically praises in her work. The Armenian, Jewish, and Greek women writers and activists of the last few decades of the Ottoman Empire do not find mention in her memoir. Even Nezihe Muhiddin's detailed account of the Ottoman women's movement in *Türk Kadını* fails to record women from a variety of ethnicities who struggled for Ottoman women's emancipation. Further, with the exception of a few women characters, Halide Edib's *The Turkish Ordeal* gives the reader the impression that Halide Edib was the only female protagonist of the national struggle. Similarly, *Prof. Dr. Afet İnan* (2005) depicts Afet İnan as the sole feminist activist of the 1920s and 1930s. The names of Nezihe Muhiddin, Halide Edib, and Latife Hanım are not mentioned in this auto-biographical account.

### Unemancipated self-narratives

With the exception of the work of Nezihe Muhiddin—which was produced to recognize important actors in the Ottoman and later the Turkish women's movement—the history of the women's movement (particularly the struggle for suffrage) and the narrators' involvement in it (if that was the case) were silenced in women's autobiographies.

The issues discussed in the sections above constitute a few of the reasons for such silencing. For the infantilized, passivized, trivialized narrator whose narrative gains legitimacy not necessarily through the exploration of her own or other women's histories, but through her proximity to important male agents of history, it is not surprising that she did not imagine or write herself into her autobiography as a political subject or as a subject in the process of a collective struggle for suffrage.<sup>37</sup>

37 Needless to say, male autobiographers obsessively wrote the history of the 1920s and 1930s because this history became excessively politicized after the publication of Mustafa Kemal's *Nutuk*, which monopolized national history for decades, so much so that most alternative accounts were silenced or banned. For further details on the *Nutuk's* monopoly on Turkish history, see, Adak, "National Myths." Men's autobiographies of the period presented an underlying sense of intense party politics, even though their explicit content was the national struggle of Turkey. In accounts that explicitly explore party politics, there is no reference to women's suffrage, except for those narratives which condemn it altogether. See Dr. Rıza Nur's *Hayat ve Hatıratım*.

## Condemning Ottoman women's emancipation: The orientalist Demetra Vaka Brown

This does not mean that women's struggle for suffrage (or earlier accounts of it) did not exist. In fact, as early as at the turn of the century, Demetra Vaka Brown, the first Ottoman-Greek female immigrant to the United States, recounts in her travelogue *Haremlik: Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women* (1909) meetings with Ottoman women in İstanbul who were actively fighting for women's emancipation in the year 1901.<sup>38</sup> Among other goals of the women's organization, Brown cites the right to divorce, the freedom to marry a spouse of their own choice, the end to the segregation of sexes in public places, and the freedom to travel without male companions. In the meeting, a few of the women discuss the idea of having six of their members commit suicide, so as to illustrate to men the importance of their cause. Beside the identity of the organization's president, Zeybah Hanım, and the fact that they all were dressed in the color of dawn, the women's names are not disclosed in the narrative.

Brown entitles the passage recounting this meeting "Suffragettes of the Harem," in order to propose that the title itself is an oxymoron. To a narrator who claims that "Turkey would be better off without the influx of any European thought,"<sup>39</sup> the women's movement in the Ottoman Empire is a source of contempt. Hence, "I was utterly disgusted at the whole meeting. I might just as well have been in one of those silly clubs in New York where women congregate to read their immature compositions. They were totally lacking in sincerity, the spontaneity, and the frankness which usually characterize Turkish women,"<sup>40</sup> and they "were attracted by the worst features of our Western civilization."<sup>41</sup> Even though Demetra Vaka Brown is highly critical of the Oriental woman breaking her chains, she still records the important lines of the speech delivered by Zeybah Hanım:

By nature woman was meant to be the ruler. By her intuition, her sympathy, her unselfishness, her maternal instinct, she is the greatest of the earth. One thing alone brute nature gave to man—strength! Through that he has subjugated woman. Let us rise and break our bonds! Let us stand up *en masse* and defy the brute who now dominates us! We are the givers of life; we must be the rulers and lawmakers as well.<sup>42</sup>

38 Demetra Vaka Brown, *Haremlik: Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004), 153.

39 *Ibid.*, 187.

40 *Ibid.*, 166-67.

41 *Ibid.*, 186.

42 *Ibid.*, 164-65.

### Waiting for my rights to rain: Selma Ekrem as spectator to Republican reforms

Even though pushing for the formulation of new laws was the pursuit of several of the women's organizations in the early twentieth century, not all women writers explicitly referred to emancipation as their goal as they narrated their perspectives on women's liberation in their autobiographies. For instance, the least politically engaged writer of all the women autobiographers, Selma Ekrem, identified liberation with wearing the hat instead of the "tcharshaf,"<sup>43</sup> being allowed equal opportunity in the professions, and the mixing of the sexes in the public sphere.

Ekrem was neither involved in the national struggle, nor in the women's movement. Her apolitical stance might seem to be inconsistent with her long pedigree of politically involved ancestors, particularly Namık Kemal (her grandfather) and Ali Ekrem (her father), but perhaps the family memories and experiences of perpetual exile, imprisonment, and torture backfired, numbing her interest in political involvement. She expected her rights to be handed to her, rather than to actively fight for them. Because she could not tolerate living in a land where a woman could neither wear a hat nor work freely, she decided to leave Turkey. This escape was a revolt against the new government in Ankara in 1923, a government that asked the women of the republic to be patient because the procedure of granting them rights would be gradual. "What would be the attitude of the new Republic towards Turkish women? The Republic was at present concerned with vital questions, and we Turkish women had to be patient," the narrator remarks with a touch of irony, adding that she can not join the rest of the Turkish women in the wait: "But I felt that my patience had burst at last. I could not remain in this atmosphere of doubt any longer [...] I had felt chained by tradition, my country, and even members of my own family. I had no work and no opportunity in Turkey [...] I would go to America."<sup>44</sup>

When Selma Ekrem returns to Turkey after a year and a half, she remarks that she is content that women can freely wear a hat and no longer need to be segregated in public places. The teleology of the autobiography—that is, of "unveiling"—could be accomplished in Turkey itself:

I had been prepared for a struggle, for the eternal question of the veil, and now I was told that I could wear a hat in peace and that the new government would even smile upon me for doing so!

43 Ekrem, *Unveiled*, 288.

44 *Ibid.*, 289.

It was a new Turkey to which I had come. [...] This was no longer the land of shackles. I had fled to America for freedom and now America had come back with me to Turkey. Turkish women were free. When I saw them in theaters, restaurants, and cinemas I could not believe that the pupils of my eyes were my own. The red dividing curtain in the trolleys was gone, gone were the lattices and the cumbersome tcharshafs. The new Republic was not only strong and united, but it was also a country where one could breathe.<sup>45</sup>

But if Selma Ekrem found it so easy to breathe in the new republic, then why was she not content in staying there? As the autobiography draws to a close, one senses the narrator's subtle dissatisfaction with the progress of republican reforms. Even though the narrator does not explicitly describe the nature of her dissatisfaction, it seems that for her the right to don hats and to mix with the opposite sex in public places might not have constituted significant advancements in women's liberation. Hence, "no matter how happy I was in Turkey, the far-off call of America would never leave me."<sup>46</sup> This might explain why Selma Ekrem seems to have chosen this "far-off call" in lieu of staying in Turkey. Ekrem continued living in America until her death in 1986.

### **From utopia to dystopia, from "New Turan" to unemancipated republic: Halide Edib**

Halide Edib and Nezihe Muhiddin were two of the most prominent women discontented with the early republic's promises for women. In the case of Halide Edib, suffrage was an ideal which she desired for Turkey as early as during the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution. In 1912, the *Yeni Turan* party in Halide Edib's utopian novel *Yeni Turan* (New Turan, 1912), a popular work during World War I, granted suffrage to women. The novel is interpreted by the narrator of *Memoirs of Halide Edib* in the following words: "It looks forward to a new Turkey where a chastised and matured Union and Progress has taken the reins of power, where women have the vote, and women work with the qualities of head and heart which characterize the best Turkish women."<sup>47</sup> With the exception of these few lines as well as the mention of the educational activities under the leadership of Nakiye Hanım<sup>48</sup> and of the women's charity organizations

45 Ibid., 318-19.

46 Ibid., 319.

47 Adivar, *Memoirs of Halide Edib*, 332.

48 See, Ibid., 300, 50-52, 66-69.

that aided in the series of wars in the 1910s,<sup>49</sup> the *Memoirs* and *The Turkish Ordeal* do not refer to women's active campaigning for emancipation. The reader does not learn that many cities gave the vote to Halide Edib during the 1919 elections in Turkey, even though suffrage had not been granted.<sup>50</sup> Since the period after 1922 is altogether silenced, the books do not mention that Halide Edib was the most prominent intellectual strategist behind the women's struggle for emancipation.<sup>51</sup> Hence, Halide Edib's self-imposed exile in 1925 does not seem to be exclusively motivated by Dr. Adnan's disillusionment with Mustafa Kemal's single-party regime, the establishment of which entailed the closing down of the Progressive Republican Party. It was equally motivated by Halide Edib's disillusionment about the women's movement being silenced and the fact that emancipation seemed a distant hope.<sup>52</sup>

### Nezihe Muhiddin and her "alleged" eulogy to Kemalism

Another woman dissatisfied with the reforms of the early republic was Nezihe Muhiddin. As the founder of the first-ever political party in *Turkey*, *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası* (Republican Women's Party), on June 16, 1923, Nezihe Muhiddin had to dissolve her party on the pretenses that it "would lessen the support for (Mustafa Kemal's) People's Party"<sup>53</sup> and that Mustafa Kemal was about to establish a party with the same name.<sup>54</sup> Further, *Türk Kadın Birliği* (Turkish Women's Union) which Muhiddin established on February 7, 1924, in order to further the struggle for women's suffrage was asked to dissolve itself immediately after the state

49 See Halide Edib's description of *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti* (Society for the Development of Women) where women educated other women and members organized fund-raising activities to establish hospitals during the series of wars, starting with the Balkan War. *Ibid.*, 334-35.

50 Edib received 10 votes from Beyşehir, 20 from Beypazarı, eight from Giresun, three from Erzurum, and one from İstanbul in the general elections in which the number of voters was generally in the two-digit range. Ayşegül Yaraman, "72 Yılın Ardından Kadını İçermeyen Siyaset," *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 156 (2006): 15. Edib was perhaps even more successful in the 1923 elections, even though women still had not gained the vote. She received one vote from İzmir, two from Şark-ı Karahisar, 30 from Konya, and several votes from Malatya and Diyarbakır. İpek Çalışlar, *Latife Hanım* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2006), 201-02, Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadinsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği* (İstanbul: Metis, 2003), 139.

51 It was Halide Edib's suggestion that Turkish women should establish a political party of their own that motivated Nezihe Muhiddin to establish the Republican Women's Party in 1923. Yaraman, "Kadını İçermeyen Siyaset," 15.

52 She stated in an interview in 1924 that she supported none of the prevalent political parties because of their refusal to grant women suffrage. Enginün, *Doğu ve Batı Meselesi*, 69.

53 Ayşe Gül. Altınay, *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism, Gender and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 54. See also Zafer Toprak, "Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkasından Önce Kurulan Parti: Kadınlar Halk Fırkası," *Tarih ve Toplum* 9, no. 51 (1998): 30-31, Mete Tunçay, "Kadınlar Halk Fırkası," *Tarih ve Toplum* 11, no. 62 (1989): 46, Zihnioğlu, *Kadinsız İnkılap*.

54 Yaraman, "Kadını İçermeyen Siyaset," 15.

granted suffrage to women in 1934, dismissing the union's organizations and demonstrations that lasted over a decade.<sup>55</sup> According to the state, in 1935 the Union had no purpose left, and there was no longer a need for women's organizations.<sup>56</sup>

How does Nezihe Muhiddin present the political situation in her autobiographical text *Türk Kadını*? This semi-autobiographical, semi-historical text narrates not only her involvement in the women's movement but the entire movement itself, starting from the last few decades of the Ottoman Empire and ending with the date of publication (1931). The date is quite significant since it immediately followed the granting of the women's right to vote in municipal elections that Nezihe Muhiddin describes in this chronicle. Therefore, the text is celebratory in tone. Opening with a photograph of Mustafa Kemal and asserting that this work is dedicated to him, the text proves itself to be a eulogy not only of the many significant women in the movement but, more significantly, to the unparalleled genius of Atatürk who is the catalyst and the source of the maturation and progress of the women's movement: "The imagination and movement created by your unparalleled genius will mature and renew our women's life with its constant reverberations."<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, in this text, all Kemalist reforms are related to women's progress and liberation. For instance, the narrator considers it particularly important for women that the Latin alphabet was adopted in 1928 in lieu of the Arabic script. The narrator sees this reform as redemption: "The dates of 1927-1928 signal the real liberation of Turkish women. Women, who made up the most ignorant factions, reached the bliss of literacy."<sup>58</sup> The celebration is not restricted to the narrator *per se*. One of the most important goals of the Turkish Women's Union was to spread propaganda about the republic's reforms among all women's organizations in Europe.<sup>59</sup>

55 Altınay, *The Myth of the Military Nation*, 54, Zihniöğlü, Kadınsız İnkılap.

56 In 1925, the Union started campaigning for suffrage, becoming a member of the International Women's Union a year later and organizing the twelfth congress of the International Women's Union in İstanbul in 1935. Zehra Toska, "Cumhuriyet'in Kadın İdeali: Eşiği Aşanlar ve Aşamayanlar," in *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler/Bilanço 98* (İstanbul: İş Bankası ve Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1988), 84. It was after the Union hosted this conference that it was asked to dissolve itself. Women's organizational activities were interrupted from this moment until the late 1970s. Altınay, *The Myth of the Military Nation*, 54.

57 The original reads as follows: "Eşsiz dehanın yarattığı hayal ve hareket, sürekli dalgalanmalarıyla kadınlık hayatımızı daima anlı bir olgunlaşma ve yenilenme ile ilerletecektir." Baykan and Ötüş-Baskett, eds., *Nezihe Muhittin ve Türk Kadını*, 66.

58 The original reads as follows: "1927-8 tarihi Türk kadınının gerçek bir kurtuluşudur. En cahil bir sınıf halinde kalmış olan kadın okumak mutluluğuna kavuştu." *Ibid.*, 163.

59 *Ibid.*, 164.



Hence the text was written a few years prior to the second and final disillusionment, which came after the Turkish Women's Union was asked to dissolve itself and when feminism was appropriated by the state. This celebratory tone probably explains why the text was published without any impediment in the year 1931. At the moment when women's campaigning was in the process of being suppressed by the state and Muhiddin was regularly tried on false accusations (such as corruption charges),<sup>60</sup> this text, as a eulogy to the state leader and to Kemalist reforms, seems to be a compromise enabling Muhiddin to publish her own version of the history of the women's movement.<sup>61</sup> Sadly enough, this was the last political work Nezihe Muhiddin was ever to publish.<sup>62</sup>

### **Suffrage is daddy's reform: The case of Professor Afet İnan**

Even though the state impeded women's campaigning for their own rights, state feminism found many women adherents, its best allies being Mustafa Kemal's adopted daughters who were showcases for the progress of the Turkish nation and the endorsement of women's rights by the state. In a book entitled *The Emancipation of the Turkish Woman* (1962), prepared at the request of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Prof. Afet İnan only mentions protest meetings by women during and after World War I, culminating in co-ed education. According to İnan, apart from this minuscule exception in the Ottoman-Turkish women's movement, women's activities did not necessarily focus on feminism: "[W]omen engaged in charitable activities and worked for the Red Crescent"; in Anatolia, "women took an active part in the War of Independence."<sup>63</sup>

Professor Afet İnan records that in 1923, when female suffrage was discussed in parliament, Mustafa Kemal did not find it opportune to push for women's emancipation. A member of parliament representing the district of Bolu, Tunalı Hilmi, reminded the parliament of the extraordinary achievements of Turkish women during the War of Independence.<sup>64</sup> However, his reminder provoked much debate and controversy and, in Afet İnan's words, the parliament "could not even bear to discuss the inclusion of women in the census, let alone concede any rights to them."<sup>65</sup>

60 Zihnioglu, *Kadinsiz İnkılap*, 246.

61 For further details on the compromise, see, *Ibid.*, 231.

62 *Ibid.*, 248.

63 Afet İnan, *The Emancipation of the Turkish Woman* (Amsterdam: Drukkerij Holland N.V., 1962), 44.

64 *Ibid.*, 54.

65 *Ibid.*, 56.

Both in the auto-biographical mongrel text *Prof. Dr. Afet İnan* and in *The Emancipation of the Turkish Woman*, the merit of the Municipal Laws Bill of April 1930 that gave women the right to vote and to stand in municipal elections was attributed not to active women's campaigning in Turkey, but to Mustafa Kemal and to the speeches Prof. Afet İnan delivered prior to the passing of the bill.<sup>66</sup>

On 3 April 1930, on the recommendation of Atatürk, I gave a lecture on universal suffrage for women where the president, ministers, many diplomats, members of parliament, members of the press, etc. were present. The press published an article of mine on this topic. [...] But although I did work on this subject personally, the [...] conference, the press coverage and the publication of my booklet were all done with the approval of Atatürk himself.<sup>67</sup>

Bestowing additional praise on Mustafa Kemal regarding the issue of suffrage, Afet İnan explains the events of 1934 as follows:

President Atatürk was in favor of [suffrage] and often tried to induce members of the government to accept his views. In the then constitution, mention of franchise was always accompanied by the words "every Turkish male" (Art. 10-11). I myself supported the idea that the words "every Turkish male" should be replaced by "every Turkish subject," and on 11 December 1934 the words "and female" were added to the phrase in question.<sup>68</sup>

If Afet İnan encouraged women to pursue social action, she did so after the vote had been granted to them in 1934: "On that day (11 December 1934), I encouraged women in Ankara to demonstrate and to go to parliament to express their gratitude."<sup>69</sup> To conclude, Afet İnan does not write the story of how women took their rights, but a story of how Mustafa Kemal granted them rights after having on certain occasions taken the prompt from Prof. Afet İnan's lectures and initiatives.

### **The absence of autobiographical documents: Latife Hanım**

When İpek Çalışlar's biography *Latife Hanım* was published in 2006, it breached a silence that had lasted more than 80 years. Latife Hanım, a

66 Arı İnan, *Prof. Dr. Afet İnan* (İstanbul: Remzi, 2005), 106.

67 İnan, *The Emancipation of the Turkish Woman*, 57.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

brilliantly educated polyglot and suffragette from İzmir became the first “first lady” of the Turkish republic in 1923. Her short-lived marriage with Mustafa Kemal ended in a divorce in 1925, after which she became a forgotten and reticent figure until her death. Mustafa Kemal, his and Latife’s families, and their friends shrouded themselves in silence about the marriage and divorce. In 1980, five years after Latife Hanım’s death, private documents found in her home, including her journals and her correspondence with Mustafa Kemal, were handed to the *Türk Tarih Kurumu* (Turkish History Foundation) under the condition that the documents would not be published for 25 years. In 2005, when the 25 years of guardianship over the documents ended, the President of the Turkish History Foundation, Prof. Dr. Yusuf Halaçoğlu, refused to publish the private documents, in compliance with the demands of Latife Hanım’s family members who wanted to preserve their confidentiality.<sup>70</sup> In the absence of a future date of publication, İpek Çalışlar wrote a biography of Latife Hanım with the help of documents she collected from a multitude of auto-biographical writings, Turkish and international newspapers, and by interpreting the silences in the interviews conducted with remaining family members.

Çalışlar’s biography of Latife Hanım shatters many myths. First, prior to the proliferation of the “daughters of Atatürk” who were showcases for modernization and women’s liberation, Latife Hanım herself promoted women’s suffrage and pushed Mustafa Kemal to pass a relevant bill in parliament. Other sources suggest that in 1923, during discussions of legal reforms in parliament, Mustafa Kemal “countered the resistance put forth by the conservative constituency in the Parliament by citing the heroic role women had played” in the national struggle.<sup>71</sup> According to Çalışlar’s account, in 1923 Mustafa Kemal acknowledged suffrage for women but he did not support Latife Hanım’s attempt to become Member of Parliament. Clearly, his refusal was of a personal nature.<sup>72</sup> Hence, this biography represents Latife Hanım as a political actor in women’s emancipation, rather than as a passive observer of women’s rights.

Second, similar to Nezihe Muhiddin’s *Türk Kadını*, the “exceptional or isolated woman” approach to history or to the women’s movement is

70 “Latife Hanım Tartışması Bitti,” *Radikal*, 4 February 2005.

71 Parla, ““The ‘Honor’ of the State,” 71.

72 Focusing closely on the micro-history of the couple’s relationship, Çalışlar fails to investigate the reasons for denying suffrage to women in Turkey in 1923. Further, Latife Hanım seems not worried in the least about Mustafa Kemal’s refusal to grant suffrage and to help her to become a member of parliament. When Mustafa Kemal remarks that one can always find women in Turkey to become members of parliament, but that he would be at a loss to find a spouse of the likes of Latife, Latife Hanım just shakes her head (in disapproval) and puts her arm on his. This is the only information that the biography provides about her reaction. Çalışlar, *Latife Hanım*, 202.

challenged in this text. Latife Hanım's struggle for emancipation is contextualized within a vibrant Ottoman and, later, Turkish women's movement, as the biographer informs us that Latife Hanım's efforts were strengthened by the presence of such organizing.<sup>73</sup> The text emphasizes the continuity between the Ottoman women's movement and that of the early republic, showing examples of Latife Hanım's earlier feminist activities during the Unionist regime.<sup>74</sup>

Lastly, in *Latife Hanım*, the private/public dichotomy so familiar to all the autobiographical texts analyzed thus far is blurred, as we meet an adult woman and activist close to Mustafa Kemal in all her intellectual and psychological complexity. The biography partly exposes us to their correspondence during the marriage and to the details of their relationship. This text proves that Latife Hanım herself desired to shatter her image as "first lady" or "the wife" by becoming a member of parliament. An article published in *The New York Times* on December 23, 1923, suggests that Latife Hanım was capable of becoming the President of Turkey, should the serious heart attack that Mustafa Kemal suffered at the time prove fatal.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, the representation of Latife Hanım in Çalışlar's biography is a paradigm shift in terms of early republican women's (self-)representations,<sup>76</sup> which infantilized, belittled, passivized, and subjected these women (writers) to the paternal authority of the state leader or to the dictates of Kemalist ideology.<sup>77</sup> Unlike the "daughters of Atatürk," this biography presents Latife Hanım not as a subjugate, but as a surrogate to Mustafa Kemal. This indicates that an earlier showcase of state feminism through the "exemplary family of Mustafa Kemal" was of a more egalitarian nature, consisting of a female counterpart rather than of an authoritarian paternal figure with adopted children. The year of 1925 marked the end of Mustafa Kemal's attempts at marriage, and from this point onwards Mustafa Kemal extended his paternal authority to his own

73 Ibid., 274-75.

74 Ibid., 261.

75 Ibid., 231-32.

76 The many merits of *Latife Hanım* do not mean that it does not have its shortcomings. Latife Hanım's post-divorce life is relatively briefly treated, compared to the parts narrating her relationship and marriage with Mustafa Kemal. The text gives the impression that Latife Hanım's life history is still guided by Mustafa Kemal's biography and that she only gains legitimacy because of her proximity to him.

77 For metaphors of the people/nation as infants, or particularly of women as children under the paternal, patriarchal authority of Mustafa Kemal's leadership, see also, Yeşim Arat, *Patriarchal Paradox: Women Politicians in Turkey* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989), Taha Parla, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Kültürün Resmî Kaynakları: Atatürk'ün Nutuk'u* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1991), 167, Zihniöğlü, *Kadınsız İnkılap*, 227-28.

family, not by becoming a spouse to a woman, but by underscoring his role as “father” to his adopted daughters.<sup>78</sup>

As radical as İpek Çalışlar’s biography may be, the small number of first-person documents used in writing the biography clearly marks its limitations. Without access to most of Latife Hanım’s letters, journals, or other private documents, the biography is mostly based on third-person accounts, which prevents the reader from rapprochement to Latife Hanım as a person. Furthermore, even though the biography of Latife Hanım has been received with much enthusiasm and reprinted more than thirteen times, the journals of Latife Hanım, her private documents and her correspondence with Mustafa Kemal have yet to be published.

The potential contribution of these documents to the scholarship on the republican period is located in the area where biography differs from autobiography in the analysis of the same historical actor. According to Stephen Spender, autobiography has two dimensions: one narrates “the self” through the third person, “the self that others see—the social, historical person, with achievements, personal appearance, social relationships,”<sup>79</sup> while the other involves the self that can only be experienced by that person alone, “the self felt from the inside and that the writer can never get ‘outside of.’”<sup>80</sup> The latter dimension is most significantly a self of which others might not have a grasp and which others might only understand through the reading of how this self narrates the particular experience. Smith and Watson refer to Spender’s definition by extending his example to the narration of driving a car. “The biographer can circle the car with the driver in

78 In fact, for several important reasons the year 1925 was a turning point in the paternalist nature of Mustafa Kemal’s authority as state leader. The party opposing the Republican People’s Party was closed down, the Independence Tribunals tried and executed remaining Unionists and opposition leaders, many intellectuals in disagreement with the regime fled into exile, the oppositional press was silenced, and Mustafa Kemal divorced Latife Hanım. In the ensuing period, the Republican People’s Party became a single-party regime; Mustafa Kemal’s paternalist charisma and leadership qualities over his “child-nation” were sealed with his speech (*Nutuk*) in 1927, in which he endowed himself with many titles, the most notable among them *Halaskâr Gazi*, the Saviour and Creator of the Turkish Nation. This paternal authority was further reinforced when Mustafa Kemal donned the last name “Atatürk” (“Father of the Turk”) in 1934, as he passed the bill that all citizens of Turkey had to receive last names. It is striking that this last name was only reserved for him and could not be used by anyone else, including his family members. For instance, his biological sister was given the last name “Atadan” (“from Ata”). Neither were any of his adopted daughters allowed to use his family name. Through sole propriety of the name “Father of the Turk,” he gained epic distance to the present, becoming hierarchically always superior to any “Turk” living in the present or future.

79 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 5. In this work, Smith and Watson refer to Stephen Spender’s article “Confessions and Autobiography.” Stephen Spender, “Confessions and Autobiography,” in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 116.

80 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 5.

it to record the history, character, and motivations of the driver, the traffic, the vehicle, and the facts of transportation. But only the life narrator knows the experience of traffic rushing toward her and makes an interpretation of that situation, that is, writes her subjectivity.”<sup>81</sup>

This ability to write the experience from inside the self gives the autobiographer, in comparison to a biographer, a unique positionality in writing about the self. From the perspective of readers, self-narrative might entail more empathy, curiosity, understanding and compassion for the historical actors in question. It seems that the persistent campaign to prevent the publication of Latife Hanım’s autobiographical documents also prevents the possibility of more empathy with Latife Hanım. Moreover, the documents might underscore her significance in national history; they might point to the possibility of gendering republican history so that it no longer remains the monopoly of one great man; and they might illustrate the gender relations involved in the foundation of the republic, so that not only the possibilities for, but also the shortcomings in the republic’s treatment of women are underlined.

But more importantly, the documents might illustrate quite clearly that silencing or silence is nothing praiseworthy. In the case of Latife Hanım, in challenging the post-1925 defamation campaign which targeted her under the assumption that, since Mustafa Kemal divorced her, “she must be bad or guilty,” Latife Hanım’s uninterrupted silence until her death was ennobled by most. Sadly enough, Latife Hanım not only remained silent when confronted by journalists and writers and refused to make public appearances, but also burnt several of her journals shortly before she passed away.<sup>82</sup> If read through her first-person narrative, Latife Hanım’s painful life of silence might motivate many to challenge all modes of silencing.

### **Veiling the unveiled**

Women’s autobiographies of the early republic internalized (and/or narratively performed) many or all of the following: the paternalist nature Mustafa Kemal’s leadership; the corporatist nature of the state that co-opted the leadership of all social organization (including women’s organizations); the monopolization of national history through one solipsist narrative (*Nutuk*); and, later on, men’s autobiographies and histories chronicling the transition from empire to republic. In each case, these women autobiographers wrote first-person accounts of national history not as agent but as witnesses, not as political subjects but as the subjugated.

81 Ibid.

82 Çalışlar, *Latife Hanım*, 464.

In the autobiographical mode—which actually offers a multitude of possibilities for exploring feelings, sexual and emotional experiences, or the subjectivity of the adult woman—women writers veiled their (now physically) unveiled presence in narrative, by means of such techniques as self-infantilization or silencing. These modes of writing persisted even in exile, as manifest in the works written in English and published in Great Britain and the United States by authors such as Halide Edib and Selma Ekrem. In other words, some of the silences in women’s autobiographies (such as the silencing of the adult self) might not be restricted exclusively to the cultural context of Turkey, since writing in a different language, in the context of a different literary and autobiographical tradition, or for a different group of readers does not bring a sense of liberation for the writer. In the context of authors such as Halide Edib and Selma Ekrem, the silence concerning women’s organizing for suffrage or the state’s procrastination in granting emancipation to women might be attributed to defensiveness—an aegis shielding the modernizing republic against criticism from (prejudiced) western reading groups. Hence, the writers’ national pride might have overshadowed their feminist politics.

### **By way of conclusion: Autobiographical utopias**

The well-known woman journalist Sabiha Sertel’s autobiography, *Roman Gibi*, is a myth-shattering work in many respects. Written in exile in Baku in 1969, the narrator challenges the intellectual premises of the national struggle as presented in national historiography, reports her own activism for workers’ rights, criticizes the myth of the “classless republic,” and illustrates how she had been tried many times and imprisoned for her leftist articles. During World War II, after writing an article analyzing the war as a struggle to divide up the colonies between British, French, and American capitalists on one side and German and Japanese capitalists on the other side, she is banned from writing altogether by the state-controlled Press Directory.<sup>83</sup> Knowing that whatever she puts down on paper will lead the government to close her newspaper *Tan* (Dawn), she decides that the best outlet for her writing is a black notebook where she would keep journal entries unrestricted by (auto) censorship. She finishes three large notebooks of articles, but in 1945, when the “fascist flocks” destroy *Tan*’s printing press, the police search her apartment and confiscate these notebooks along with other documents. To the narrator’s great chagrin, these documents are not returned to her.<sup>84</sup>

83 Sabiha Sertel, *Roman Gibi* (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1987), 244.

84 *Ibid.*, 245.

Sabiha Sertel is only one among many women whose journals were confiscated and destroyed. In the absence of the many possible women auto/biographies that were not published either because of the women's own reluctance, or because of their family's or the state's reluctance or fear, Sabiha Sertel's utopia that initiates those "journal-entries-to-herself" is powerful in its resonance to all involved in the production and publication process of self-narratives: "I announced liberty by myself to myself. From this point on, I fear no oppression."<sup>85</sup>

## References

- Adak, Hülya. "An Epic for Peace." In *Memoirs of Halide Edib*, v-xxv. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004.
- . "Gender-in(g) Biography: Ahmet Mithat (on Fatma Aliye) or the Canonization of an Ottoman Male Writer." *Querelles*, no. 10 (2005): 189-204.
- . "National Myths and Self-Narrations: Mustafa Kemal's Nutuk and Halide Edib's Memoirs and The Turkish Ordeal." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2/3 (2003): 509-27.
- . "Otobiyografik Benliğin Çok Karakterliliği: Halide Edib'in İlk Romanlarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet." In *Kadınlar Dile Düşünce: Edebiyat ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet*, edited by Sibel Irzik and Jale Parla, 159-79. İstanbul: İletişim, 2004.
- Adivar, Halide Edib. *Memoirs of Halide Edib*. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004.
- Adivar, Halide Edib. *The Turkish Ordeal*. New York: The Century Co., 1928.
- Aksoy, Nazan. "Kadın Otobiyografileri ve Beden." *Virgöl*, no. 102 (2006): 6-12.
- Altınay, Ayşe Gül. "Ordu-Millet-Kadınlar: Dünyanın İlk Kadın Savaş Pilotu Sabiha Gökçen." In *Vatan-Millet-Kadınlar*, edited by Ayşe Gül. Altınay, 246-79. İstanbul: İletişim, 2000.
- Altınay, Ayşe Gül. *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism, Gender and Education in Turkey*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Arat, Yeşim. *Patriarchal Paradox: Women Politicians in Turkey*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989.
- Baykan, Ayşegül, and Belma Ötüş-Baskett, eds. *Nezihe Muhittin ve Türk Kadını*. İstanbul: İletişim, 1999.
- Brown, Demetra Vaka. *Haremlik: Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women*. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004.
- Çalışlar, İpek. *Latife Hanım*. İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2006.
- Ekrem, Selma. *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl*. New York: Ives Washburn, 1930.
- Enginün, İnci. *Halide Edib Adivar'ın Eserlerinde Doğu ve Batı Meselesi*. İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1978.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: Avon Books, 1965.
- Gökçen, Sabiha. *Atatürk'ün İzinde Bir Ömür Böyle Geçti*. Edited by Oktay Verel. İstanbul: Evrim Matbaacılık Ltd., 1982.
- İnan, Afet. *The Emancipation of the Turkish Woman*. Amsterdam: Drukkerij Holland N.V., 1962.

85 The original reads as follows: "Ben kendi kendime hürriyet ilan ettim. Artık hiçbir baskıdan korkmuyorum." Ibid.



- İnan, Arı. *Prof. Dr. Afet İnan*. İstanbul: Remzi, 2005.
- Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Slave Girls, Temptresses, and Comrades: Images of Women in the Turkish Novel." *Feminist Issues*, no. 8 (1988): 35-49.
- "Latife Hanım Tartışması Bitti." *Radikal*, 4 February 2005.
- Le Doeuff, Michèle. *The Sex of Knowing*. Translated by Kathryn Hamer and Lorraine Code. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Murray, John. "The Turkish Ordeal." *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 November 1928.
- Parla, Ayşe. "'The "Honor" of the State: Virginity Examinations in Turkey." *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 65-87.
- Parla, Jale. "Tarihçem Kabusumdur! Kadın Romancılar da Rüya, Kabus, Oda, Yazı." In *Kadınlar Dile Düşünce: Edebiyat ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet*, edited by Sibel İrzık and Jale Parla, 179-200. İstanbul: İletişim, 2004.
- Parla, Taha. *Türkiye'de Siyasal Kültürün Resmi Kaynakları: Atatürk'ün Nutuk'u*. İstanbul: İletişim, 1991.
- Sertel, Sabiha. *Roman Gibi*. İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1987.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Spender, Stephen. "Confessions and Autobiography." In *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, edited by James Olney, 115-22. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Toprak, Zafer. "Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkasından Önce Kurulan Parti: Kadınlar Halk Fırkası." *Tarih ve Toplum* 9, no. 51 (1998): 30-31.
- Toska, Zehra. "Cumhuriyet'in Kadın İdeali: Eşiği Aşanlar ve Aşamayanlar." In *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler/Bilanço 98*, 71-88. İstanbul: İş Bankası ve Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1988.
- Tunçay, Mete. "Kadınlar Halk Fırkası." *Tarih ve Toplum* 11, no. 62 (1989): 46.
- Yaraman, Ayşegül. "72 Yılın Ardından Kadını İçermeyen Siyaset." *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 156 (2006): 14-22.
- Zihnioğlu, Yaprak. *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*. İstanbul: Metis, 2003.