



*Araştırma Makalesi • Research Article*

**Women's Issue According to Sırâtmüstakim Writer Ferîd Vecdî and Women's Rights Advocate Fatma Aliye Topuz**

*Sırâtmüstakim Yazarı Ferîd Vecdî ile Kadın Hakları Savunucusu Fatma Aliye Topuz'a Göre Kadın Meselesi*

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**Abstract:** Ferîd Vecdî and Fatma Aliye Topuz are people of two different worlds who lived in the same period. Although there are some differences in their views on women's issues, the sources they refer to are the same. Both authors approach the women's issue by reinterpreting Islam's perspective on women. The aim of the study is to explain the position of women in social life from the perspective of Ferîd Wajdî and Fatma Aliye Topuz. The authors sought ways for women to create surplus-value in society and came to some conclusions. Methodologically, the study is based on the works of two authors. Although the thoughts of both authors are outdated in the modernizing world, when interpreted historically, they provide readers with arguments to make a socio-economic analysis of a period. As it is known, what a historian should not do when evaluating events and phenomena is not to fall into anachronism. The idea of Westernization, which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, gave rise to two types of intellectuals. The first was Ferîd Vecdî style intellectuals who defended the traditionalist understanding, and the second was Fatma Aliye Topuz style intellectuals who were influenced by Western value judgments and advocated for women's presence in social life. The study also provides information about the historical background of the West-East irreconcilable contradiction in our country.

**Keywords:** Ferîd Vecdî, Fatma Aliye Topuz, Westernization, West, East.

**Öz:** Ferîd Vecdî ve Fatma Aliye Topuz aynı dönemde yaşamış iki farklı dünyanın insanlarıdır. Her ikisinin de kadın meselesine bakışında bazı farklılıklar olsa da referans aldıkları kaynaklar aynıdır. İki yazar da İslâm dininin kadına olan bakış açısını yeniden yorumlayarak kadın meselesine yaklaşmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı; Ferîd Vecdî ve Fatma Aliye Topuz'un bakış açısı ile kadının sosyal hayattaki konumunu açıklayabilmektir. Yazarlar kadının toplumda artı-değer oluşturabilmesinin yollarını aramışlar ve birtakım sonuçlara varmışlardır. Çalışma yöntemsel olarak iki yazarın eserlerinden yola çıkılarak oluşturuldu. Modernleşen dünyada iki yazarın da düşünceleri geride kalsa da tarihsel açıdan yorumlandığında bir dönemin sosyo-ekonomik analizini yapmak için okuyuculara argümanlar sunmaktadır. Bilindiği üzere olayları ve olguları değerlendirirken tarihinin yapmaması gereken şey anakronizme düşmemektedir. On dokuzuncu yüzyılın ortalarından itibaren ortaya çıkan Batılılaşma düşüncesi iki aydın tipi ortaya çıkarmıştır. Birincisi gelenekselci anlayışı savunan Ferîd Vecdî tarzı aydınlar, ikincisi ise Batılı değer yargılarından etkilenecek kadının sosyal hayatta daha çok varlık göstermesini savunan Fatma Aliye Topuz

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tarzı aydınlar. Çalışma aynı zamanda ülkemizde Batı-Doğu uzlaşmaz çelişkisinin tarihsel arka planını anlatması açısından da bilgiler sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ferîd Vecdî, Fatma Aliye Topuz, Batılılaşma, Batı, Doğu.

## Introduction

The issue of women in Turkey became a topic of discussion in intellectual circles with the efforts of Westernization. Women who joined the workforce faced many problems especially with the Industrial Revolution. Women face socio-economic problems because their physical strength is not the same as men's and because of the prejudices of certain religious circles (Oğuz et al., 2018: 579-586). Gender inequality has negative effects on women's education, income and participation in business life (Başar, 2017: 131-137).

The concept of "*feminization of poverty*" was first used by Diane Pearce in 1978. Pearce used this term because two-thirds of the poor in the US in those years were women. Although women's participation in business life has increased from past to present, their economic position has gradually deteriorated. Studies conducted after Pearce concluded that the number of poor women is higher than the number of poor men (Ulutaş, 2009: 25-40).

It is seen that the modernist world has not been able to produce a fair solution to the problem of women from past to present. Ideologies that offer solutions to many social issues, including the women's issue, emerged in the Modern Age. For example, Socialism, Liberalism, Social Democracy, Fascism, Nazism are some of them. However, none of these ideologies could find a solution to gender equality and the exploitation of women's labor. Although Soviet socialism, which had its own labor theory, took important steps towards the appearance of women in social life, a competent desire for women's socio-economic conditions wasn't observed (Karakuş, 2019: 1580-1598).

Apart from the ideologies mentioned above, there is one religious belief that has a rhetoric against women: "*Islam*". Islam had determined the social position of men and women. Proposing that the primary duty of women is motherhood, Islam did not oppose women's participation in business life under certain conditions. Although there are disagreements among Islamic thinkers (Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Said Halim Pasha) on this issue, both groups accept this proposition. However, the subject of disagreement is the fact that women's participation in business life may neglect the family livelihood. However, women are encouraged rather than excluded from business life in Islam (Karaman, 1993: 95).

The culture of the society in which an individual lives determines how a man and a woman behave. In other words, it stigmatizes the socially constructed characteristics of a man and a woman. In other words, a person is born female or male, but society determines how they behave. Accordingly, men are expected to be the breadwinners because they are physically stronger, while women are expected to manage the household with patience and understanding. This situation manifests itself most clearly in the institution of the family (Günay et al., 2011: 157-171). However, responsibilities in the family should be equally distributed. The woman should help the man in providing for the family, and the man should lighten the burden by showing compassion and patience to the woman in managing the family.

This study examines how two intellectuals with different worldviews who lived in the same period evaluated the period-specific problems regarding the issue of women. Although Ferîd Vecdî and Fatma Aliye Topuz had the same source of inspiration, their philosophical hermeneutics differed. First, Ferîd Vecdî's and Fatma Aliye Topuz's life will be briefly mentioned and his perspective on the women's issue will be explained

### 1. Ferîd Vecdî' and the Women's Issue

Ferîd Vecdî is one of the important figures of the last period of Islamic thought. Although he did not receive a formal education, Ferîd Vecdî was a self-educated intellectual. Affected by the

intellectual structure of the period, Ferîd Vecdî wrote on many subjects influenced by the sociological and psychological structure of the period (Bayram, 2016: 612-642).

Although the exact year of Ferîd Vecdî's birth is unknown, it is accepted that he was born between 1875-1878. He was originally born into a family of Turkish origin. His father's name was Mustafa Vecdî and his grandfather's name was Ali Resad. It is known that he had a brother named Ahmed from al-Hājiri who studied at the law faculty. He spent his childhood in his birthplace. The anchoring of the Anglo-French fleet in the port of Alexandria left a deep impression on him. Due to his father's work, they moved to Cairo in 1892, Dimyat in 1894 and Suez in 1899 when he was about 14 years old. He stayed there for 6 years and finally moved to Cairo in 1905 and lived there. In 1899, Ferid Vecdî moved to Suez and decided to start a private magazine as his first business. Vecdî published a magazine called "*al-Hayat*". The magazine often criticized the imitation of Westerners by Eastern peoples. Al-Hayat magazine was closed after a while. Vecdî also wrote for the newspapers al-Liva and al-Muayyed. After a while, Vecdî moved to Cairo in 1905. After moving to Cairo, he started publishing the magazine "*al-Hayat*" again. This magazine was published for three years. At the time, Cairo was a center of vitality for intellectuals. Vecdî became a well-known intellectual in certain circles with his writings. After meeting Mustafa Kamil Bey, Vecdî turned towards nationalist thought. After a while, Vecdî published a newspaper called "*al-Dustur*". The newspaper followed a non-partisan editorial policy. While Vecdî wrote articles on religious issues, he later started to address social problems. At the end of his life, Vecdî became the head of Al-Azhar magazine. His fame increased with his writings there. Ferîd Vecdî died on February 15, 1954 after writing various articles for many years. (Geyin, 2011: 36-41).

Ferîd Vecdî's views on women's issues were published in the "*Sırâtü'müstakim Journal*". Mehmet Akif Ersoy, the author of our National Anthem, translated Vecdî's views. Vecdî's writings on women provide information about the view of the period on women's issues. According to Vecdî it was not right for Eastern societies to imitate the West. Vecdî lamented that imitating the West, even in useful matters, was not successful. The author's thoughts on this subject were as follows: "*Even though the outward appearance of the present civilization is superficial, there are some serious diseases within it that have devastated its foundations. Therefore, let our society beware of being deceived by the superficial disguise of such a civilization, which is not as solid as it seems! Our fascination with the West in the cage of civilization has made us famous to such an extent that even in the aspects where we claim to imitate them, we cannot imitate them in a useful way!*" (Vecdî, 2012: 40).

Regarding women, Vecdî claimed that men and women were not equal in terms of creation. He argued that women were inferior to men both spiritually and physically and that women should not be caught up in the view of equality put forward by Westerners. According to Vecdî, the solution to the women's problem lies in fully implementing Islam. Regarding this issue, the author stated the following: "*(...) For this reason, the conflict between the body of women and men is so great that it becomes obvious that these two sexes were not created to compete in the same arena. In the encyclopedia of the nineteenth century (Muhitü'l-Ulûm), the following words appear under the word "woman": "The difference between women and men is not limited to the differences in their reproductive organs. Although the greatest conflict between these two species is seen in the reproductive apparatus, there is a specificity in the range of other organs, even in those that are most similar to each other. After comparing and applying all the members of both sexes with a very precise dissection, the author says: "The physical composition of women is close to that of children. For this reason, women, like children, have an extreme sensitivity. They are quickly affected by various specialties such as joy, sorrow and fear. (...) That is why women are subject to lack of perseverance. However, if people had followed the true Islamic rules of education regarding the upbringing of women, the situation of women today would not be an example of oppression and tolerance like those in the West: There would be nothing left but a crazy danger of dressing up and wandering around."*" (Vecdî, 2012: 53).

According to Vecdî, the primary duty of women was to take care of the upbringing of children. She should not have entered men's workspace. If women entered business life, it would disrupt their primary duties. Women should not work in heavy labor. Excessive sadness and stress for the woman

would be reflected in her children. The author's ideas on this subject were as follows: *“We say similar words here. However, the bitter complaints of the civilized world about the wombs that women have opened to the civilization by dealing with men's work will be seen in the following chapters. Now we have a question as follows: Is it possible that a woman cannot fulfill her primary duty in external affairs to the perfection of her partner with a man? This is the answer: During the nine months of the period of pregnancy, a woman cannot do any job well, and even perform her duties with great difficulty and pain. During this period, the fetus in the womb goes through various stages. Every era has certain signs and symptoms that are seen on the mother, which are no less than the most important ones. Because such transfer of the fetus from one age to another is the result of many internal evolutions. This interaction has various effects depending on the composition of the body, the weakness and strength of the body.”* (Vecdî, 2012: 55).

According to Vecdî, men and women were not physically equal. Giving examples such as height and weight, he claimed that men were more durable and different from women. The author also stated that men were more intelligent than women. He also lamented that as civilization progressed, the conflict between men and women increased: *“Science proves that man differs from woman in many ways, and to a degree that can be properly felt. As for the differences between men and women: Science proves from experience that the average height of a man is 12 cm more than the average height of a woman. This difference is evident even in children, as it is seen in regular people. When it comes to weight, the average male weight is 74 kg. However, this weight is, on average, 42.5 kg for women. As for the heart, which is the center of vital powers, it is smaller in women and is, on average, 60 grams lighter than in men. Breathing is more rapid in men. It is scientifically established that a man excretes approximately 11 grams of carbon per hour. However, a woman cannot burn more than 6 grams of carbon in the same period of time. That's why women's heat is less than men's. As civilization increases, the natural conflicts between the sexes become more and more obvious. Today, the difference between a man and a woman belonging to the white race is manifested much more than the difference between two various genders belonging to the black race.”* (Vecdî, 2012: 71-72).

According to Vecdî, women should live under the domination of men and such a lifestyle was obligatory for women. No matter what a woman did, she could not keep up with the man, both materially and spiritually. The author claimed that such a lifestyle was not slavery for women. In addition, because the woman was physically weak, she could not withstand the stress of business life. Ferîd Vecdî asked what the socio-economic conditions of men would be if women were in business life: (Vecdî, 2012: 84-98). *“Today, women work in weaving, printing and many other similar jobs. Likewise, governments employ them in their own institutions, and they earn a little money because of this. But on the other hand, they are seriously destroying the foundations of their family. Men began to benefit from the fruits of their wives and their sacrifices. However, since women attempted to argue and compete with men in external deeds, their earnings decreased.”* (Vecdî, 2012: 98).

Vecdî claimed that the social life of women living in Europe and America was worse than that of Eastern women. Additionally, the author said that the breadwinners of the house belong to men, so it is not right for women to work: *“If you visit the largest factories in Europe and America, you will be suddenly amazed by the situation you will see when you enter the magnificent majesty of that divine edict, with its size that almost leaves the eye incapable of encompassing it. . You will see many crowds of women there, engaged in the most arduous and tiring work for the judicial forces: They stand in front of the fiery furnaces, trying to get the goods of life and livelihood. Then, you will read this phrase on the faces of the wretched people, who are scorched while standing in front of that hellish fire, that will never be erased from your imagination: “This state is the final degree of slavery imposed on women by men. Especially, go to the poor women for a while and ask them how much daily wage they were getting. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of women among them, refute the objection and answer that the wage each of them receives for all that physical pain and suffering does not exceed twenty centimes a day, that is, one Egyptian penny.”* (Vecdî, 2012: 116).

*“The man must be able to provide for the woman. This principle is a natural law for human beings. If there is a law that is compatible with the essential life of women, it is this one. Likewise, this*

is the law that shows that the worst form of society will improve and become perfect in proportion to the progress of humanity.” (Vecdî, 2012: 117).

According to Vecdî, just as women have rights over men, men also have rights over women, and men's rights over women are inherent. The man can open or close the woman's hijab if he wants. But women who wear hijab are stronger both materially and spiritually than those who are uncovered. (Vecdî, 2012: 148-207). The author attributed the reason for the increasing number of divorces to women's entry into business life. (Vecdî, 2012: 254).

## 2. Fatma Aliye Topuz and the Women's Issue

The lineage of Fatma Aliye Topuz, one of the three important people of the Tanzimat period, was based on an old Turkish family settled in Lofça. His grandfather was Yular Kıranoğlu Ahmed Ağa. Fatma Aliye Topuz, whose family we have briefly mentioned, was born in Istanbul. Fatma Aliye Topuz was Türkiye's first female novelist. Fatma Aliye did not only live in Istanbul. She lived in various neighborhoods of the Empire. For example, when Ahmed Cevdet Pasha was transferred to Halep, she also lived in this neighborhood. Topuz received private education until the age of thirteen. After the age of thirteen, she stopped studying with male teachers. She experienced serious difficulties after she entered the hijab. She wrote letters to Ahmed Cevdet Pasha and Mademoiselle Alfa to get out of this situation. After returning from Damascus, she began to work intensively with Mademoiselle Alfa, but her marriage plans interrupted her work. Married in 1878 or 1879, the author faced some obstacles because of her husband. Two children were born from this marriage. Topuz devoted most of her time to the care of her children. Meanwhile, after becoming a mother for the second time, she suffered a severe illness. She moved to Göztepe for the treatment of her illness. She wrote her novel "*Re'fe*" in Göztepe, where she went for treatment. The author included scenes from her own life in her works. She also addressed the problems faced by women in her works. By 1915, the author devoted his whole life to writing. Alienated from the society, the writer was disappointed when his daughter became a Christian (Aşa, 1993: 27-38). The author, who presented important works for social scientists, died in 1936. (Er, 2011: 380-395).

Ottoman society was transformed not by its own internal dynamics, but by the guidance of certain elitist groups. The Tanzimat period was the starting point of the transformation in the Ottoman Empire. The works of this period dealt with the subject of Westernization and modernization. Two issues came to the forefront around this theme: "*The place of women in society and the Westernization of upper class men*" (Er, 2011: 380-395). Fatma Aliye Topuz was among those who were influenced by the Westernization thought of the period. However, the author remained under the influence of the traditionalist understanding on some women's issues.

In her book *Women in the Ottoman Empire (Concubinage, Polygamy, Fashion)*, Fatma Aliye Topuz exchanged some information with Mademoiselle F in a defensive position about the position of women in the Ottoman Empire and Islam. In the dialogues in the book, the author tried to explain the logical aspects of traditionalist culture to the other side. For example, to Mademoiselle F's question "*Don't you buy concubines with money?*" (Aliye, 2009: 18) the author's answer was as follows: "*Yes! But we give the money to the one who sold her. There is no benefit from it for the concubine. The money benefits the relative or the master who sold the concubine. Islam commands that we should not leave the rights of concubines on us. That is why every concubine is given a gift of money and dowry for her labor*" (Aliye, 2009: 18). When Mademoiselle F said "*Then these people are servants*", the author's reply was as follows: "*Yes! They are like servants with monthly or annual salaries. But when a servant is hired, her wage and length of service are determined in advance. If the amount of the wage or working time is not known, a wage agreement (icare-i faside) is in question, which has incomplete legal principles. However, it is not known how much money will be spent for a concubine, and the duration of service is not certain. (...) Although the service period of the concubines is not precisely determined, the sharia orders: "Free the concubine after nine years of service. If you do not have enough power and wealth, sell her to a benefactor who will free her."* (...) For a concubine to enter a house she is not

*happy with, it is enough for her to say "Sell me". And she is sold to the customer who she will like. She cannot be forced to sell to a customer she does not like. In religious laws, no cruelty or punishment is considered permissible towards captives. (...) We don't owe that much to servants. The maid only gets her salary. We allow her when we don't want it. If she gets married, she makes her own dowry. But this is not the case for the concubine! If the concubine gets married and she cannot get along with her husband and gets divorced, she comes directly back to her master's house, just like her father's house. We cannot trust our drawers and chests to a servant. But we hand over the keys to all of them to our concubine."* (Aliye, 2009: 19-20).

According to Fatma Aliye Topuz, the main condition for hijab was to cover her hair. If a woman does not cover her hair, she would not be an apostate, but she would be a sinner. The basis of the Islamic religion was belief in Allah and the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad. (Aliye, 2021: 95). Yashmak, abaya, chador and veil were regional customs that emerged later. In villagers and tribes, women were content to just wear the headscarf, and in this section, men and women could chat together. However, it later became customary to ban men and women from being in the same environment. (Aliye, 2009: 68). The author argued that such a practice regarding polygamy exists in Islam, but is not obligatory: *"If it were God's command, every man would be obliged to marry his wife. God Almighty did not order you to marry anyone other than your wives. He allowed it to happen when the need arose."* (Aliye, 2009: 54). Fatma Aliye Topuz viewed the issue of marriage with four women as follows: *"What you call this command is a permission given by God to be used when necessary. In pre-Islamic religions, polygamy was allowed and there was not even a suitable restriction. In Islam, more than four are prohibited. On the other hand, this was subject to so many terms and conditions that it became very limited and difficult. So much so that it has become very difficult to implement it in accordance with religion. Because, a person who will marry more than one wife must take care to keep each of his wives in a separate house, to ensure that the furnishing of the house, even the embroidery and paint of the rooms are in the same order, and that their clothes and ornaments are never different from each other. There is no need to understand how difficult this is. In our country, it is the man's duty to provide for his wife and provide her with clothes. (...) Because in our country, if a woman's husband does not provide for her and does not manage her, that woman has the right to apply to the court. In such cases, the courts order the man to provide alimony to his wife."* (Aliye, 2009: 54-55). However, the author acknowledged that if a man is rich and can afford to support four women, he cannot be prohibited from marrying. According to her, the only condition was that the man should be able to do justice among his women. (Aliye, 2009: 55).

### 3. Discussion

Women have become more visible in social life in the world with industrialization. With the participation of women in business life, there have been both proponents and opponents of this situation. Women's use of religious symbols in the public sphere has led to the politicization of the issue. While traditionalist intellectuals such as Ferîd Vecdî argued that women's primary duty was to mother children within the family, women's rights advocates such as Fatma Aliye Topuz argued that women should be more visible in social life. Both intellectuals relied on religion as a source for theorizing their thoughts. However, although their approaches to the issues differed, it can also be stated that they had similar aspects. For example, both intellectuals left the responsibility of providing for the woman to the man. The reason why I chose Ferit Vecdi and Fatma Aliye Topuz in particular is that both writers represent different lifestyles.

Islam has laid down certain rules for the relationship between men and women. According to Islamic understanding, men were advised to treat women with mercy and justice. Hz. Hatice, the first wife of Prophet Muhammad, was a person engaged in trade. Hz. Ayşe was one of the people consulted on religious questions. Later on, this understanding of Islam was abandoned and women were turned into a commodity that was only concerned with household chores. Women's participation in business life was subject to objective and subjective conditions in Islam. For example, permission from her husband and favorable conditions in the work environment paved the way for her participation in

business life. In this process, there was no binding ruling in Islam prohibiting women from holding public office

As a result, the politicization of the women's issue creates problems in terms of improving the current situation of women. Women suffer the most from this situation. The interpretation of the issue through religious symbols prevents a common sense solution to the problem. However, women's structural problems need to be addressed. For example, women do not receive equal pay for equal work today, they are subjected to harassment and mobbing in their workplaces and their working conditions need to be improved in a more humane way. It is not possible for women to produce surplus-value in business life without solving structural problems.

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