

## Claims to Fame: An Exhibition of Women Artists from Turkey

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Since the day it was inaugurated in 2004, the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art (from here on Istanbul Modern or the Museum), has assumed a pivotal role in re-establishing the history of modern and contemporary artistic practices in Turkey. Over the past fifteen years, Istanbul Modern has gradually substituted for the state-run Museum of Painting and Sculpture in Istanbul. Despite having the greatest holdings of modern Turkish art, this older museum has been only intermittently open to visitors in the past few decades, due to issues of administration and conservation resulting from the problems the historical building posed for artworks. In the absence of an institution to collect, preserve and show past and present art production, Istanbul Modern has informally taken over the role of a national modern art museum. Although initially, the permanent collection of Istanbul Modern consisted of many pieces on loan from private and public collections, recently, it has exponentially grown, thereby correspondingly redefining its institutional agenda and widening participation.<sup>2</sup> Several other privately-owned art museums have been launched in Istanbul in the last couple of decades, including Sakıp Sabancı (2002), Pera (2005), Borusan Contemporary (2011) and Arter (2019). As these museums are run by some of the largest corporations in Turkey, such as Koç and Sabancı, they made conspicuous the intricate relationship of the capital and politics with arts. But also, similar to the exhibitions of Istanbul Modern, which are always major talking points, with each new display they brought up the question of rewriting art history to debate. So far, however,

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, press releases for 'Artists in Their Time' and 'Past and Future' exhibitions (Accessed 8 June 2019 at [https://www.istanbulmodern.org/en/press/press-releases/artists-in-their-time\\_1669.html](https://www.istanbulmodern.org/en/press/press-releases/artists-in-their-time_1669.html) and [https://www.istanbulmodern.org/en/press/press-releases/past-and-future\\_1130.html](https://www.istanbulmodern.org/en/press/press-releases/past-and-future_1130.html)).

there has been little discussion on the contribution of museum exhibitions and their curatorial display strategies to narrational frameworks, particularly of the shows organised by the new art institutions in Turkey. More importantly, much uncertainty still exists about the relationship between art historical narratives refashioned by museums and the discursive models through which they construct difference including of gender, ethnicity, race and sexuality. As these imaginings of the past deeply complicate the ways in which we understand art today, they denote an urgent need to address their implications for art history.

The major all-woman exhibition titled ‘Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey’ (‘Dream and Reality’ from here onwards), which was opened in late 2011 at Istanbul Modern, constitutes an important case study to prompt deeper exploration into the narrative frameworks within which the art museum reproduces differences. In this chapter, I will revisit the institutional and the curatorial discourse of ‘Dream and Reality’ by examining the statements released in the media and in catalogue essays with a view to comprehending the allegedly conflicting notions of gender and feminism on which the exhibition was premised and how differences were articulated against the politics of the state and art history writing. This reconsideration will not only allow me to address the reverberations of these framings in the art histories of Turkey but will also enable me to relocate them within the debates of art’s new transnational landscape. Lately, women artists have been foregrounded but also artists from the Global South have been highlighted as never before by way of staging in solo or women-only group shows across this new art world. While considering flaws as this in large women-only exhibitions, I will specifically address how the politics of Turkey produce a particular version of this form of survey exhibition that reveal the tensions around modes of feminism within both historical and contemporary spans. The figure of the Ottoman woman writer Fatma Aliye, whose 1892 novel *Dream and Reality* (co-authored with Ahmet Mithat) inspired the title of the exhibition, will be at the heart of this analysis, leading me to scrutinise the

social, political and cultural resonances of choosing this title for Istanbul Modern's first exhibition on women's art.

### **Women in the (Trans)National Museum**

Istanbul Modern was opened in 2004 as the first privately-owned modern and contemporary art museum in Turkey. The first retrospective that followed the initial collection displays was of Fikret Mualla (1903–1967) in 2005. The first retrospective that included a woman artist was the 'Fahrelnissa & Nejad: Two Generations of the Rainbow' exhibition, which was organised in 2006 and displayed the work of the renowned abstract painters, Fahrelnissa Zeid (1901-1991), and her son, Nejad Devrim (1923-1995), from the post-war era. Until the first solo show of a woman artist, İnci Eviner (b. 1956) 'Who's Inside You?' in 2016, all other retrospectives have focused on male artists, including that of Cihat Burak (1995–1994) in 2007, Sarkis (Zabunyan, b. 1938) in 2009, Hussein Chalayan (b. 1970) in 2010, Kutluğ Ataman (b. 1961) in 2010, and Erol Akyavaş (1932–1999) in 2013. Among all the thematic exhibitions that Istanbul Modern had organized it is important to note none had a particular approach to highlight women's art or feminist practices. However, it is also important to note that works by underrepresented individuals in art history and museums—for example queer, female and diasporic—have been displayed at Istanbul Modern in 2010: for example, the solo exhibitions of Kutluğ Ataman, queer contemporary artist and filmmaker, and Ani Çelik Arevyan (b. 1961), woman photographer of Armenian origin.

Over the past few decades, Turkey has seen the remarkable transformation of its art historiography, as different voices, practices and methods have enriched narratives with their contributions.<sup>3</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, in this period a number of artists of diverse identities, such as Armenian artist Sarkis, Kurdish artist Halil Altındere, and women artists such as Füsün Onur and Gülsün

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<sup>3</sup> I have explored these and related questions in my monograph (2016), which discusses the forty years of art history writing in Turkey, *Türkiye'de Sanat Tarihi Yazımı (1970–2010)*, based on the comprehensive analysis of over two-hundred art historical texts from books, periodicals and exhibition catalogues. Also, an ever-growing body of literature addressing these questions have recently emerged in Turkey. See, for example, the special issue of *Varlık* magazine on art historiography in the age of social media from 2019.

Karamustafa, who were previously side-lined, became the focus of attention in art histories.<sup>4</sup> Especially in the early 2000s narratives began highlighting the gender dimension of art.<sup>5</sup> Disrupting the authority of mainstream art history, by resisting the superiority of masculine creativity, binary roles of gender and sexuality, and ethnic/racial Turkish identity, the emerging narratives departed from the set models of periodization and writing about art.<sup>6</sup> However, linear progress narratives, which all too often unfairly place different individuals and groups on the scene of history, still largely perpetuate in exhibition narratives.<sup>7</sup>

In the light of this background information, the significance of ‘Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey’ becomes more evident. Certainly, as the first survey of women’s art organised by a museum<sup>8</sup> in Turkey, specifically the first by Istanbul Modern, ‘Dream and Reality’ was one of the much-anticipated art events of 2011, alongside the 12th Istanbul Biennial, whose openings coincided in September that year. Endeavouring to show artistic production across a century, the exhibition extended from the late Ottoman (the late 1800s) and the early Republican period of Turkey (1923–50) to the post-war era up until 2011, spanning modern and contemporary art, from paintings and sculptures to installations and videos. A showcase of a body of multifarious artworks by seventy-three individual women artists and one collective,<sup>9</sup> ‘Dream

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<sup>4</sup> See, Ceren Özpınar, ‘Recontextualizing Gülsün Karamustafa’s Shield: The Politics of Writing Feminist Art Histories in Turkey’, *Art Journal*, 78:3 (2019), 60–3; Özpınar, ‘Playing Out the “Differences”’, pp. 50–61; Özpınar, *Türkiye’de Sanat Tarihi Yazımı (1970–2010)*, pp. 36–45 and 125–34. See also, Gizem Tongo, ‘Eleni Iliadis (1895–1975): Une Artiste Grecque Ottomane dans l’Istanbul Fin-de-Siècle’, *CLIO Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, 48 (2018), 43–67.

<sup>5</sup> I further explore this and related questions in my forthcoming monograph, *Politics of Writing Art Histories: Narratives of Contemporary Art, Feminism and Women Artists from Turkey* (British Academy Monographs with Oxford University Press).

<sup>6</sup> Özpınar, ‘Periods in the Art History of Turkey’, *Art in Translation*, 10 (2018), 257–68.

<sup>7</sup> Ceren Özpınar, ‘Playing Out the “Differences”’, pp. 50–61. See also for a discussion on museum narratives, Zeynep Yasa-Yaman, *Beyond the Apparent: A Selection from the Art Collection of the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey* (Istanbul: Pera Museum Publication, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> One exception to this was the ‘Contemporary Turkish Woman Artists’ exhibition at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (1993), curated by Tomur Atagök. However, this exhibition was far from being a modern museum exhibition, as it was rather a temporary art show within a gallery space.

<sup>9</sup> Following is the list of participating artists: Mihri Müşfik, Melek Celal Sofu, Belkıs Mustafa, Güzin Duran, Nazlı Ecevit, Zeid, Aliye Berger, Bedia Gülerüz, Sabiha Rüştü Bozcalı, Nermin Faruki, Sabiha Ziya Bengütaş, Hale Asaf, Maide Arel, Şükriye Dikmen, Eren Eyüboğlu, Semiha Berksoy, Füreya, Frumet Tektaş, Zerrin Bölükbaşı, Leyla Gamsız, Naile Akıncı, Tiraje Dikmen, Bilge Civelekoğlu Friedlaender, Bilge Alkor, Candeğer Furtun, Tülay Tura Börteçene, Alev Ebüzziya Siesbye, Füsün Onur, Nil Yalter, Tomur Atagök, Neş’e Erdok, İpek Duben, Nur Koçak, Nevhiz, Seyhun Topuz, Meriç Hızal, Nancy Atakan, Gülsün Karamustafa, Canan Beykal, Ayşe Erkmen, Azade Köker, Fatma Tülin, Hale Arpacıoğlu, Canan Tolon, İnci Eviner, Kezban Arca Batıbeki, Handan Börüteçene, Canan Dağdelen, Hale Tenger, Selda

and Reality’ was co-curated by the (male) chief curator of Istanbul Modern, Levent Çalıkođlu, and three invited (women) guest curators: Fatmagül Berkday, a professor in gender studies, Zeynep İnankur and Burcu Pelvanođlu, art historians with respective academic expertise in modern and contemporary artistic practices of 20th century Turkey. In their catalogue texts curators repeatedly state that the exhibition aims ‘to focus on Turkey’s social and cultural history through the works of female artists, intends to recall [their] place in art history, and renders visible their encounter with the socio-cultural dynamics of Turkey and their pioneering and critical position, especially in contemporary art’.<sup>10</sup> Some media statements revealed another motive of ‘Dream and Reality’, as Burcu Pelvanođlu stressed in an interview, considering the international audience that would arrive for the Istanbul Biennial, the curatorial team designed a ‘didactic and a large-scale’ exhibition.<sup>11</sup> In the global art world in which ‘Dream and Reality’ clearly wanted to leave a mark, there was already a rising focus on women’s art and feminism, manifested in numerous exhibitions in the hot spots of contemporary art since 2005. For example, just a few years before ‘Dream and Reality’ took place, 2007 was hailed as ‘the year of feminism in art’ in the United States.<sup>12</sup> In different parts of the world, women’s art and feminism were also celebrated with exhibitions such as ‘Life Actually, The Works of Contemporary Japanese Women’ at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo, Japan (2005), ‘Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe’ at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien in Austria (2009) and ‘Žen d’Art: The Gender History of Art in the Post-Soviet Space: 1989-2009’ at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art in Russia (2010).<sup>13</sup> It,

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Asal, Selma Gürbüz, Aydan Murtezaođlu, Gül Ilgaz, Şükran Moral, Arzu Bařaran, Gülay Semerciođlu, Mürüvvet Türkyılmaz, Neriman Polat, CANAN, Nezaket Ekici, Esra Ersen, Ebru Özseçen, Elif Çelebi, Leyla Gediz, Bengü Karaduman, Aslı Sungu, İnci Furni, Nilbar Güreş, Seda Hepsev, Ceren Oykut, Ekin Saçlıođlu, Gözde İlkin, Güneş Terkol, and the all-woman visual arts collective AtılKunst.

<sup>10</sup> Levent Çalıkođlu, ‘Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey’, in Esin Eřkinat (ed.), Nazım Dikbař, Nermin Saatçiođlu, Fred Stark, Linda Stark (trans.), *Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Artists from Turkey* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Museum of Art, 2011), p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Burcu Pelvanođlu quoted in Oktay Orhun, ‘Hayal ve Hakikat Sergisinin Kūratorlerinden Burcu Pelvanođlu ile Söyleři: Toplumun Her Alanında Olduđu Gibi Sanat Alanında da Sivil Yapıyı Koruyamıyoruz’, *Birikim*, 272: 12, (2011), 92.

<sup>12</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, ‘Feminist Time: A Conversation - Rosalyn Deutsche, Aruna D’Souza, Miwon Kwon, Ulrike Müller, Mignon Nixon and Senam Okudzeto’, *Grey Room*, 31 (2008), 32.

<sup>13</sup> For an exhaustive list, see Hilary Robinson, ‘Feminism Meets the Big Exhibition: Museum Survey Shows Since 2005’, *Anglo Saxonica*, 3:6, (2013), 132.

seems therefore, that ‘Dream and Reality’ was one of the latest iterations of this interest. However, several studies showed the serious shortcomings these exhibitions suffered from, most of which seem to be present also in ‘Dream and Reality’.

In their introduction to *All-Women Art Spaces in Europe in the Long 1970s*, Agata Jakubowska and Katy Deepwell describe a ‘frequent collapse of discussions about women artists into discussions about feminism’ in contemporary writings.<sup>14</sup> The two tendencies they enlist seem to be closely relevant to the curatorial narrative and discourse of these exhibitions and by extension ‘Dream and Reality’. The first tendency describes the political or cultural history of art as directly linked to the women’s liberation movement. The second, which is often seen in women-only exhibitions, constructs a ‘history of art produced by women artists’ with ‘a genealogy of women artists as women’.<sup>15</sup> In a key study that discusses some of these exhibitions, Hilary Robinson problematises the way they ‘present[ed] their own definitions of what they consider a feminist art movement to be, or what they consider contemporary art by women to be capable of saying ... these institutions determin[ed] an Art Historical category of ‘Feminist Art’ or ‘Art by Women’.<sup>16</sup> In addition to their heteronormative view that affirms gender binary being problematic, these exhibitions, as Robinson stresses, advance ‘a definition of feminist art that hinges on “women’s issues” [that] is both limiting and misleading’.<sup>17</sup> Similar points were also made by Rosalyn Deutsche and Alexandra M. Kokoli. Deutsche, for example, has criticised exhibitions such as ‘Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art’ at the Brooklyn Museum in New York City, USA (2007) and ‘WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution’ at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, USA (2008) for their mode of collecting the ‘past of feminism and art’ and drew attention to the distinctive categories of

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<sup>14</sup> Agata Jakubowska and Katy Deepwell, ‘Introduction’, *All-Women Art Spaces in Europe in the Long 1970s* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), pp. 12–3.

<sup>15</sup> Jakubowska and Deepwell, ‘Introduction’, pp. 12–3.

<sup>16</sup> Hilary Robinson, ‘Feminism Meets the Big Exhibition’, p. 132.

<sup>17</sup> Hilary Robinson quoted in Angela Dimitrakaki, ‘Crossing Borders and Other Dividers in Western Europe and British Isles’, in Hilary Robinson and Maria Elena Buszek (eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Art* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2019), p. 132.

‘work by women’ and ‘work informed by feminism’.<sup>18</sup> Deutsche has suggested that these exhibitions have conflated these distinct gender categories as they favoured ‘gender-exclusive feminism that locates oppression in male persons rather than in masculinist positions of social authority, positions with which women can identify’.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Kokoli has argued that ‘the category of the “woman artist” is always risky and open to misinterpretation and misuse, liable to reproduce the very gender biases that the work of women artists aims to challenge’.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the well-intentioned objectives of ‘Dream and Reality’, including one of showcasing such a large number of women artists together for the first time in Turkey and ‘to be a corrective to the generally neglected position of women in the arts (and Turkish society at large) since the late 19th-century’,<sup>21</sup> the exhibition suffered from similar drawbacks. Many critics argued that, for example, in spite of displaying some art informed by feminism, the exhibition’s unthematic, yet chronological, approach attempted to gather women artists just based on them being ‘woman’.<sup>22</sup> While, one critic condemned the exhibition as reductive for exclusively engaging with feminism to interpret artworks by women that were not inherently ‘feminist’,<sup>23</sup> another argued that the exhibition promoted gender-exclusive heteronormative feminism, which has been so far common for several feminist exhibitions in Turkey that prioritized a framework centring on the issues of ‘women-oriented gender politics’.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Deutsche, ‘Feminist Time: A Conversation’, 32–3.

<sup>19</sup> Deutsche, ‘Feminist Time: A Conversation’, 32–3.

<sup>20</sup> Alexandra M. Kokoli, ‘The “Woman Artist” as Curatorial Effect: The Case of Tracey Emin’s Scottish Retrospective’, in Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (eds.), *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 189.

<sup>21</sup> HG Masters, ‘Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists From Turkey Part One’, *ArtAsiaPacific*, February 2012, (Accessed 5 July 2019 at <http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/WebExclusives/DreamAndRealityModernAndContemporaryWomenArtistsFromTurkeyPartOne>), and Esra Yıldız, ‘Hayal ve Hakikat Sergisinin Gösteremedikleri’, *Bianet*, 1 September 2011 (Accessed 13 June 2019 at <https://bianet.org/biamag/kadin/133086-hayal-ve-hakikat-sergisinin-gosteremedikleri>).

<sup>22</sup> Beral Madra quoted in Ebru Nalan Sülün, ‘Bir Kadın Retrospektifi: “Hayal ve Hakikat”’, *Artist Actual*, 25 (2012); Susanne Fowler, ‘Modern Women Artists in Turkey Meet Their Trailblazing Counterparts’, *The New York Times*, 14 December 2011, (Accessed 2 June 2019 at <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/15/world/europe/modern-women-artists-in-turkey-meet-their-trailblazing-counterparts.html>).

<sup>23</sup> Masters, ‘Dream and Reality’, *ArtAsiaPacific*.

<sup>24</sup> Ebru Yetişkin, ‘Moving Towards Paratactical Curating: A Critical Overview of Feminist Curating in Istanbul in the Twenty-First Century’, in Hilary Robinson and Maria Elena Buszek (eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Art* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2019), pp. 92–3, 98 and 105.

Surprisingly, Çalıkoğlu himself also raised this question in his catalogue essay, albeit failing to answer,

What contexts must a selection assembled under the heading “Women Artists” highlight and address? ... How correct is the attempt to determine the art historical position of female artists via a gender-based approach? Would such a definition not repeat and [reproduce] exactly the kind of categorization desired by make power?<sup>25</sup>

Çalıkoğlu subsequently purported to explain the curatorial reasoning as a simple desire to bring together women artists because of ‘the unique nature of the diversity of their production’.<sup>26</sup> In other words, he admitted that the exhibition brought the work of these artists just because they are women. Certainly, the exhibition’s universalising notion of woman, as rightly pointed out by critics, is somewhat exclusive and essentialist, as it failed to entail, for example, transgender, nonbinary and genderqueer-identifying people. However, as I have argued elsewhere, this group was not the only one that was excluded from the show, as also artists from different ethnic backgrounds including those of Armenian, Greek or Kurdish minority identities were equally overlooked.<sup>27</sup>

It is now well established from a variety of studies that ‘women of colour’ have been consistently either excluded from or problematically included in feminist exhibitions in Western Europe and North America.<sup>28</sup> As Kimberly Lamm argues, even some of the previously global feminist exhibitions, such as ‘elles@centrepompidou’ at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, France (2009), while signalling to be transnationally and racially inclusive were burdened by former colonial patterns of exclusion and injustice.<sup>29</sup> Along the same lines, ‘Dream and Reality’ was troubled by the nationalist, religiously conservative, rhetoric while trying to be transnationally mindful and politically secular.

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<sup>25</sup> Çalıkoğlu, ‘Dream and Reality’, pp. 17 and 22.

<sup>26</sup> Çalıkoğlu, ‘Dream and Reality’, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> Özpınar, ‘Playing Out the “Differences” in “Turkish” Art Historical Narratives’, pp. 43-56; Özpınar, *Türkiye’de Sanat Tarihi Yazımı (1970–2010)*, p. 115–35.

<sup>28</sup> Elke Krasny, Lara Perry, Dorothee Richter, ‘Editorial: CURATING in Feminist Thought’, *OnCurating*, 29 (2016), 3. Amelia Jones, ‘Feminist Subjects versus Feminist Effects: The Curating of Feminist Art (or is it the Feminist Curating of Art?)’, *OnCurating*, 29 (2016), 7–8.

<sup>29</sup> Kimberly Lamm, ‘Gestures of Inclusion, Bodily Damage and the Hauntings of Exploitation in *Global Feminisms* (2007)’, in Victoria Horne and Lara Perry (eds.), *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2017), p. 232.



As I have argued elsewhere, ethnic/racial inclusivity was seemingly gestured in the subtitle of the exhibition, ‘Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey’, by the use of ‘*from* Turkey’, rather than more exclusive ‘Turkish’ that denotes the dominant national identity.<sup>30</sup> However, while the exhibition subscribed to transnationalism by way of involving diasporic artists such as Nil Yalter (b. 1938), Alev Ebüzziya Siesbye (b. 1938) and Nezaket Ekici (b. 1970), it foreclosed on minority identities, especially on those who have been seen as ‘ethnically and religiously diverse citizenry’<sup>31</sup> and thereby categorically cast as the ‘other’ of the ‘white Turkish’ (canonical) women artists. Considering the fact that Nil Yalter was among transnational artists who were invited to both ‘elles@centrepompidou’ and ‘WACK!’, ‘Dream and Reality’s motivations seem convenient. On the other hand, for example, feminist artist Zehra Doğan (b. 1989)—or any other Kurdish women artists for that matter—was not one of the artists of the exhibition. (Figure 1) Indeed, until she was imprisoned for three years by the Turkish government for ‘terrorist propaganda’ in 2017 and had a small-scale solo show at Tate Modern in London on her release in 2019, the Istanbul-oriented Turkish art scene paid little notice to her.<sup>32</sup> This incident not only points out to the exclusionary curatorial tactics of the local art world and Istanbul Modern, at least in this specific case, but also reveals how their institutional and curatorial doublespeak operates in the entwined art world.

### **Feminism Meets History**

In a discussion of Tate Modern and feminist curating, Lara Perry argues that feminism in the museum should resist art historical narratives that marginalise women artists, particularly chronological and genealogical ones, which make women systematically secondary to the main

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<sup>30</sup> Özpınar, ‘Playing Out the “Differences” in “Turkish” Art Historical Narratives’, pp. 48-50.

<sup>31</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, ‘The Travails of the Secular: Puzzle and Paradox in Turkey’, *Economy and Society*, 41:4, (2012), 527.

<sup>32</sup> For the whole story, see Dilan Seven, ‘Jailed Kurdish artist Zehra Doğan recalls war at Tate Modern’, *Ahval News*, 27 May 2019 (Accessed 10 July 2019 at <https://ahvalnews.com/turkey-kurds/jailed-kurdish-artist-zehra-dogan-recalls-war-tate-modern>).

story.<sup>33</sup> However, while structuring its permanent collection and institutional agenda, Istanbul Modern has gradually expanded the idea of the ‘modern’ into contemporary art, establishing a chronology, a canon and a progress narrative. In this scenario, the art was conceived, as Wendy M. K. Shaw describes, modern and ‘in the Western modality’, promoting a view of the nation and the national identity that favoured ‘elite, urban culture over the populist policies of the early republican era.’<sup>34</sup> (Figure 2)

The construction of ‘progress narratives’ is commonplace in the art historiography of Turkey.<sup>35</sup> Several histories of art suggest that Turkey’s success in cultural development should be assessed by a view that positions the ‘West’ as standard. In her pivotal discourse analysis of pre-war Turkish radio programmes, Meltem Ahıska observed the same ‘occidentalist’ *modus operandi* that, as a discursive strategy, ignored the complex heterogenous structure and history of culture in Turkey and was confined to a monolithic binary opposition, manifested in tensions such as modern and traditional, secular and religious and East and West.<sup>36</sup> This approach has created a rhetoric of inadequacy in master narratives of Turkish art and culture, which, as a trope, not only sees and reshapes cultural production through the eyes of an imaginary ‘West’ but also ceaselessly re-inscribes a ‘national identity’ for Turkish art.<sup>37</sup>

In the curatorial narrative of ‘Dream and Reality’, this attitude is particularly evident, as it seems to offer a view of women’s issues through the ages as ‘improvements’ made in gender politics – especially from the late-Ottoman period to the early Republican period (1923-50). In the exhibition display, this strategy was faithfully reflected in how it followed a chronology that started with

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<sup>33</sup> Lara Perry, “‘A Good Time to Be a Woman?’ Women Artists, Feminism and Tate Modern’, in Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (eds.), *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> Wendy M. K. Shaw, ‘National Museums in the Republic of Turkey: Palimpsests within a Centralized State’, in Peter Aronsson & Gabriella Elgenius (eds.), *European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen Conference Proceedings 2011* (Linköping University Electronic Press, Accessed on 12 June 2019 at [http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp\\_home/index.en.aspx?issue=064](http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=064)), p. 939.

<sup>35</sup> Ceren Özpınar, ‘The Istanbul Biennial and the Reproduction of the Urban Public Space’, *Art & the Public Sphere*, 7:1, (2018), 9. Ceren Özpınar, ‘Periods in the Art History of Turkey’, *Art in Translation*, 10:3, (2018), 259.

<sup>36</sup> Meltem Ahıska quoted in Özpınar, *Türkiye’de Sanat Tarihi Yazımı*, p. 33–5.

<sup>37</sup> Özpınar, *Türkiye’de Sanat Tarihi Yazımı*, p. 34–8.

portrait paintings by earlier artists, whose practice was predominantly restricted to indoors and to certain genres, such as Mihri Müşfik (1886–1950) and Sabiha Rüştü Bozcalı (1903–1998), to the images of women who participated more in different areas of social life, including those by Maide Arel (1907–1997) and Semiha Berksoy (1910–2004). The works that covered the period from post-war to the 2000s showed numerous ways in which artists have responded to women’s issues, albeit still mirroring the progressive curatorial rhetoric. In this section, a great range of artworks interrogated a variety of questions from motherhood, gender roles, physical and sexual violence, such as in the installation of Gözde İlkin (b. 1981), *Wall* (2011), and the video work of CANAN (b. 1970), *İbretnüma* (2009), to debates around intersectionality and sexuality, including Şükran Moral’s (b. 1962) performance *Bordello* (1997), Güneş Terkol’s (b. 1981) textile panels titled *Desire Passed by Band* (2010), and Nilbar Güreş’s (b. 1977) photograph series called *The Front Balcony* (2010). This visual arrangement was unwaveringly premised on a concern to demonstrate how ‘progressive’ and ‘innovative’ women’s art has been in Turkey compared to feminist art in ‘the West’, thereby reproducing the Occidentalist binary opposition between the narratives of the East and the West. (Figure 3)

The generational model on which the exhibition was founded also endorsed a progress narrative in which every generation or artist supposedly moves forward in a linear conception of time and artistically surpasses each other. In narratives as these, however, in contrast to male-oriented histories, women artists become ‘heroines’ due to unconventional, independent lives they led, rather than their talent.<sup>38</sup> Altogether considering the artworks in the exhibition, it is clear that a curatorial selection that supports this progressive historical discourse was intentionally made. In her analysis of feminist exhibitions worldwide, Miwon Kwon recounts that the generational approach reductively promotes ‘unidirectional progress’, which in turn, ‘position "the other" as the past of the West.’<sup>39</sup> In her ‘Dream and Reality’ catalogue essay that lays out post-1970s practices, Ahu Antmen creates a

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<sup>38</sup> Özpınar, ‘Playing Out the “Differences”’, pp. 60–1.

<sup>39</sup> Miwon Kwon, ‘Feminist Time: A Conversation - Rosalyn Deutsche, Aruna D'Souza, Miwon Kwon, Ulrike Müller, Mignon Nixon and Senam Okudzeto’, *Grey Room*, 31 (2008), 54.

unidirectional narrative such as this, in which the history of women's art in Turkey is structured from the point of a contradiction, in which art production of the modern era appears to be placed in opposition to 'postmodern' artistic practices. In this layout, compared to the experiences of modernity, postmodern times not only provide women artists with a myriad of techniques, themes and materials but also liberated them to a great degree.<sup>40</sup> Despite upholding differences between modernism and postmodernism, Antmen appears to form a paradigm favouring the latter and positively considers the impact of global capitalism while disregarding earlier contributions.

In this respect, equally relevant is how the other catalogue essays parallel their narrative with the histories of European feminism. For example, in Fatmagül Berktaş's text, the way that the account of the Ottoman women follows from the battles of historical feminist figures such as Mary Astell (1666–1731) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), reinforces the plausibility of an age-old and uninterrupted account of feminism for Turkey, instead of also minding the temporal and spatial differences of this story.<sup>41</sup> Correspondingly in her essay, Ahu Antmen compares the story of feminism in Turkey to the European one, concluding that 'the women's movement was in general late in devolving [in Turkey] compared to the West'.<sup>42</sup> By marking the 1990s in Turkey as a belated milestone for women and feminism, set against the West, Antmen paints this history as inadequate. (Figure 4)

This discourse illustrates the prevalent progressivist trope in art historical narratives, which suggests a single chronology of a universalized feminism that does not take local contexts and differences into account. As underscored by Clare Hemmings, views such as these produce a linear trajectory that inevitably moves from gender theory to sexual difference, from white to black feminism and from

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<sup>40</sup> Ahu Antmen, 'Why Do the Pioneers of Contemporary Art Have Pink IDs?', in Esin Eşkinat (ed.), Nazım Dikbaş, Nermin Saatçioğlu, Fred Stark, Linda Stark (trans.), *Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Artists from Turkey* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Museum of Art, 2011), p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> Fatmagül Berktaş, 'Dream and Reality or the Endless Journey to the Reality of Dream(s)', in Esin Eşkinat (ed.), Nazım Dikbaş, Nermin Saatçioğlu, Fred Stark, Linda Stark (trans.), *Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Artists from Turkey* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Museum of Art, 2011), p. 30.

<sup>42</sup> Ahu Antmen, 'Why Do the Pioneers of Contemporary Art Have Pink IDs?', p. 70.

Western to postcolonial feminism.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in her study of feminist art histories, Michelle Meagher defines a related, if not artificial, divide that ‘between an essentialist first generation and a poststructuralist second generation’, which support the generational and linear advancement and disidentification.<sup>44</sup> Along the same lines, analysing the narratives of feminism in Estonia, Redi Koobak observes that the story of Eastern European feminism has been imagined in a time lag concerning ‘the West’s great progress narrative of sexual modernization’,<sup>45</sup> as a result of a similar way of thinking. To oppose this, Koobak convincingly argues for articulating the story of local contexts that are distinctly different ‘from the Western hegemonic feminist frameworks’.<sup>46</sup> Examining the metaphor of waves as an example, Koobak asserts that, although a proliferated mode of viewing the past of feminism,

[it] is often used as a measurement of the progress of feminism in places where feminist thought and movement has come about differently. Taking into account the argument that the wave metaphor discards certain types of feminisms or makes them ‘less’ feminist<sup>47</sup> we should ask how might telling stories of feminisms with other trajectories look like? How would that complicate the cartography of feminisms, break the hegemony of the wave narrative?<sup>48</sup>

Drawing parallels with the histories of European and North American feminism in this way thus not only leads ‘Dream and Reality’ to disregard particular cultural and temporal dimensions of the historical account in Turkey, of art or otherwise, but also reinforces the dualistic framework within which the progressive ‘occidental’ rhetoric is reproduced. (Figure 5)

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<sup>43</sup> Clare Hemmings, ‘Telling Feminist Stories’, *Feminist Theory*, 6:2, (2005), pp. 120–6. Also see, Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> Michelle Meagher quoted in Francesco Ventrella, ‘Temporalities of the “Feminaissance”’, in Victoria Horne and Lara Perry (eds.), *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2017), p. 210.

<sup>45</sup> Redi Koobak, ‘Narrating Feminisms: What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Feminism in Estonia?’, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25:7, (2018), 1015.

<sup>46</sup> Koobak, ‘Narrating Feminisms’, 1015.

<sup>47</sup> Iris van der Tuin, ‘Jumping Generations’ On Second- and Third-wave Feminist Epistemology’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 24:59, (2009), 10–11, 21, quoted in Koobak, ‘Narrating Feminisms’, 1017.

<sup>48</sup> Koobak, ‘Narrating Feminisms’, 1017.

## Ottoman Feminism Reloaded

To crystallise the dynamics of feminist thought in Turkey seems crucial in understanding the realpolitik of ‘Dream and Reality’, to which I believe the exhibition title holds the key. The origin of the title is indeed very significant as ‘Dream and Reality’ comes from the same-titled 19th century novel. *Dream and Reality* [*Hayal ve Hakikat*] was initially a serial that appeared in the Istanbul-based newspaper *Tercümân-ı Hakikat*, which was published by Ahmet Mithat (1844–1912), an Istanbul-born male novelist, journalist and publisher, in December 1891, over a nine-day period, and was printed in book form a year later, in Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) in 1892. *Dream and Reality* was co-authored by Ahmet Mithat and Fatma Aliye (Topuz) (1862–1936), an Istanbul-born woman novelist, translator and columnist, who is regarded as the first Muslim woman writer of the Ottoman Empire.

However, when Fatma Aliye and Ahmet Mithat’s novel was announced as the title of Istanbul Modern’s first exhibition of women’s art, questions were raised. Previous research has established that Fatma Aliye was indeed one of the first feminists of the Ottoman world, working as a columnist of *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (*The Ladies’ Journal*), which was one of the long-lived Ottoman women’s journals published from 1895 to 1908.<sup>49</sup> Yet, neither the public nor the academic sentiment concerning Fatma Aliye’s position on gender and women’s liberation, let alone the social mores of the late Ottoman society in which she lived and worked, has been highly regarded in contemporary Turkey. The general opinion has tended to consider her feminism and the understanding of gender of her time as rather ambivalent and ‘imprisoned into an Islamic identity’.<sup>50</sup> Not surprisingly, a few years before the opening of ‘Dream and Reality, when Fatma Aliye was chosen as one of the faces of the new banknotes by the conservative government of Justice and Development Party (JDP, *Adalet*

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<sup>49</sup> Çakır, ‘Feminism and Feminist History-Writing in Turkey: The Discovery of Ottoman Feminism’, *aspasia*, 1 (2007), 69.

<sup>50</sup> Senem Timuroğlu, ‘Women’s Nation from Ottoman to the New Republic in Fatma Aliye and Halide Edip Adıvar’s Writing’, in Amelia Sanz, Francesca Scott, Suzan van Dijk (eds.), *Women Telling Nations* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014), pp. 433–4. See also, Zeynep Direk, ‘Fatma Aliye Hanım: Gender Debates in Turkey’, *Études Asiatiques*, 72:3, (2018), 693–716.

ve *Kalkınma Partisi*—AKP in Turkish) in 2009, this opinion gained even more popularity.<sup>51</sup> During this time JDP's 'neo-conservative', 'religion-inspired' 'patriarchal value system' became gradually more visible.<sup>52</sup> Considering JDP's discourse and policies on gender equality and women's reproduction, it was observed that then-party leader and prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan often openly and publicly praised 'traditional gender roles',<sup>53</sup> epitomized in his speeches from 2010 and earlier, where 'in the interest of the nation' and holding the population decline accountable Erdoğan prescribed 'at least three children' to newlyweds.<sup>54</sup> The close relationship between Istanbul Modern and the central authority has been common knowledge. As explicated by Shaw, Erdoğan not only opened the Museum in 2004 but also 'identified the museum and subsequent projects with ameliorating Turkey's international status. ... emphasized his political role in supporting it and subsequent endeavors'.<sup>55</sup>

Certainly, referencing the *Dream and Reality* novel in the title of the exhibition now appears more curious than before. What these connections meant for the 'Dream and Reality' exhibition cannot be considered in isolation either from the gender politics or the discursive planes on which the novel and the exhibition stood over a century apart. Perhaps, the first question that needs to be asked is in what ways choosing this title contributed to the curatorial and institutional narrative that the exhibition attempted to constitute. The way in which Çalikoğlu describes the *Dream and Reality* novel in his text offers a first potential explanation. As he notes,

[The novel] emphasizes the founding presence of male power, manifested here in literary content, and institutionalized in many fields of social life. [It] attempts to establish the fact

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<sup>51</sup> Robert Tait, 'First Woman on Banknote "Snub" to Secular Turkey', *The Guardian*, 13 October 2008, (Accessed 15 July 2019 at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/oct/13/turkey-gender>).

<sup>52</sup> Feride Acar and Gülbanu Altunok, 'The "Politics of Intimate" at the Intersection of Neo-Liberalism and Neo-Conservatism in Contemporary Turkey', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 41 (2012), 16.

<sup>53</sup> Acar and Altunok, 'The "Politics of Intimate"', 16.

<sup>54</sup> Serdar Değirmencioğlu, '3 Değil, En Az 3 Çocuk!', *Bianet*, 4 November 2010 (Accessed 18 July 2019 at <https://bianet.org/english/toplum/125874-3-degil-en-az-3-cocuk>). See also *Spiegel* quoting him 'I don't believe in equality between men and women' in Daniel Steinvoth, 'Turkish Prime Minister Assaults Women's Rights', *Spiegel Online*, 19 June 2012 (Accessed 18 July 2019 at <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/turkish-prime-minister-erdogan-targets-women-s-rights-a-839568.htm>).

<sup>55</sup> Wendy M. K. Shaw, 'National Museums in the Republic of Turkey', p. 939.

that the structure of rational thought inspired by the Enlightenment, ... is the sole possessor of reality; and that in contrast, the female has always been restricted to the domains of contra-realities such as nature and dream that emphasize ambiguity. ... In this context, the exhibition problematizes through visual examples how the metaphor of dream in the female identity, deemed appropriate for it by the founding male structure, transforms into reality; and the place of the relationship [that] female artists form with various strata of reality through their works [in contemporary art today].<sup>56</sup>

Çalikoğlu's play on words suggests a transfer of 'power' and a reconsideration of woman's gender role by turning the metaphor of dream into reality, signalling more progressive views on gender.<sup>57</sup> Also, the way this metaphor describes the sea change from dream to reality plays out, in other words from modernism to contemporary culture, clearly entails the idea of progress. (Figure 6)

Let us now consider the significance of the novel for further possible explanations. Consisting of three chapters that communicate both sides of a platonic romance, *Dream and Reality* primarily critiques the old-fashioned rules of engagement and arranged marriages of the day but also the expectations imposed on young people concerning romantic love. While the first two chapters give a first-hand account of the woman and the man, respectively written by Fatma Aliye and Ahmet Mithat in letter form, the last chapter, which was also written by Ahmet Mithat, draws on scientific knowledge to inform the reader of hysteria, the psychological disorder that caused the death of the young woman after having found out that her love was not reciprocated.

By giving an unmediated voice to the female character, and, by extension, agency to the woman author, albeit alongside a man, *Dream and Reality* constituted a precursor of the emerging modern Ottoman–Turkish novel. Nonetheless, several studies suggest that as a consequence of making room for two male accounts that strongly complement each other, the first of which voiced the object of

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<sup>56</sup> Calikoğlu, 'Dream and Reality', p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> It is surprising to see that Calikoğlu does not comment further on the novel, even though it was him who had proposed to use it in the title of the exhibition. See Pelvanoğlu's interview with Orhun, 'Hayal ve Hakikat Sergisinin Kûrâtorlerinden Burcu Pelvanoğlu ile Söyleşi', 92.



the romantic interest who preferred studying at university to marrying, and the second that of the scientist in the last chapter, the story overpowers the voice of the woman, thereby discrediting the sensibilities of women.<sup>58</sup> Much of the literature notes that these discrepancies owed to the beliefs of the authors, who also, by inserting the dualistic tension of dream–reality in the title of the book, which epitomizes the opposing sides of the romantic affair recounted in the novel, reinforced the gender disparity between women and men in late Ottoman society.

Scholars have long studied the extent to which during the late 19th century the Ottoman literati responded to women’s issues by criticising gender inequality in their work.<sup>59</sup> In her important study on modern Turkish literature, Nüket Esen pointed out that both Ahmet Mithat and Fatma Aliye supported women’s rights in many ways. More crucially, we know that both of them asserted the significance of women’s education in their work. This is particularly visible in the way in which Fatma Aliye developed her women characters striving to become working individuals, with obstinate determination to pursue an independent life, especially after writing *Dream and Reality*.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Esen notes that Fatma Aliye had been interested in literature and languages all along, despite her family’s discouragement.<sup>61</sup> Yet, having read some of Fatma Aliye’s early work and been impressed by her talent, Ahmet Mithat, who was a family friend as well as a renowned publisher and author, took her as his protégée and eventually, proposed that they write a novel together. Certainly, their intellectual disposition not only suggests their mutual desire to cooperate with a like-minded writer but also indicates Ahmet Mithat’s egalitarian views on gender. Their approach to women’s liberation, however, might not explain the discrepancies in *Dream and Reality* or the fact that Fatma Aliye wrote under the pseudonym of ‘a woman’ and avoided using her name until her first single-authored novel, *Muhadarat*,<sup>62</sup> which was published following *Dream and Reality* in 1892. What

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<sup>58</sup> İrfan Karakoç, ‘Hakikat’i Romanla Hayal Etmek: Hayal ve Hakikat’te Karşılıksız Aşkın Histerik Eleştirisi’, *Çanakkale Araştırmaları Türk Yılığ*, 161:13, (2015), 163–65.

<sup>59</sup> Karakoç, ‘Hakikat’i Romanla Hayal Etmek’, 19 and 171.

<sup>60</sup> Nüket Esen, *Modern Türk Edebiyatı Üzerine Okumalar* (İstanbul, İletişim Publications, 2012), p. 235.

<sup>61</sup> Esen, *Modern Türk Edebiyatı Üzerine Okumalar*, p. 234.

<sup>62</sup> Muhâdarât means ‘lectures’ in modern Arabic (محاضرات) but in Ottoman-Turkish it meant ‘stories to remember’.

might do, instead, is the surprising aspect of their biographical record, which is that neither of them were completely detached from a set of ‘Islamic’ and ‘traditional beliefs’ in their understanding of gender liberation, as they were, at the same time, supportive of practices such as polygamy and concubinage.<sup>63</sup>

Fatma Aliye’s feminist views were neither noted in the catalogue texts of ‘Dream and Reality’ nor mentioned in curator interviews. Instead, her views on women’s rights appear to be assigned to the general category of ‘women’s rights’. Only in Burcu Pelvanoğlu’s text, which surveys women’s education since the mid-19th century Ottoman era, is this aspect of Fatma Aliye and her work raised. Even here, the particulars are not detailed, and Fatma Aliye is described amongst other women who, ‘played a pioneering role in helping their fellow women acquire important positions in society ... with her 1891 essay *Nisvan-i Islam (Muslim Women)* defended women’s rights – she was also the daughter of Cevdet Pasha known for opposing Westernization’.<sup>64</sup> This characterization fails to acknowledge the convergence embodied in Fatma Aliye’s work of varied opinions on the intricate relationship between modernity, gender, religion and tradition in late-Ottoman culture. By mentioning her father Cevdet Pasha’s views, Pelvanoğlu appears to contrast Fatma Aliye’s opinions on gender equality to her father’s position in order to reinscribe her as a reformist. By obscuring these nuanced discussions about feminism and women’s resistance in the texts, and instead, focusing on portraying Fatma Aliye solely as the ‘first’ and ‘one of the first female novelists in Turkey’<sup>65</sup> pro-women’s rights, ‘Dream and Reality’ attempts to place the exhibition within a secular narrative and a certain idea of feminism that exclusively stems from her. Moreover, the role that *Dream and*

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<sup>63</sup> Esen, *Modern Türk Edebiyatı Üzerine Okumalar*, p. 238, and Çakır, ‘Feminism and Feminist History-Writing in Turkey’, 62.

<sup>64</sup> Burcu Pelvanoğlu, ‘Women, Education and Art’, in Esin Eşkinat (ed.), Nazım Dikbaş, Nermin Saatçioğlu, Fred Stark, Linda Stark (trans.), *Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Artists from Turkey* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Museum of Art, 2011), p. 44.

<sup>65</sup> Oya Eczacıbaşı, ‘Foreword’, *Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Artists from Turkey*, in Esin Eşkinat (ed.), Nazım Dikbaş, Nermin Saatçioğlu, Fred Stark, Linda Stark (trans.), *Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Artists from Turkey* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Museum of Art, 2011), p. ix. Çalıkoğlu, ‘Dream and Reality’, p. 19. However, previous research established that the first Ottoman-Turkish woman novelist was Zafer Hanım, who published her first novel in 1877. See Hülya Adak, ‘Biyografide Toplumsal Cinsiyet: Ahmet Mithat ya da bir Osmanlı Erkek Yazarın Kanonlaşması’, in Nüket Esen and Erol Köroğlu (eds.), *Merhaba Ey Muharri! Ahmet Mithat Üzerine Eleştirel Yazılar* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University Press, 2006), p. 203.

*Reality*'s the more conservative Ahmet Mithat played as a mentor and collaborator in Fatma Aliye's career has been side-lined in these texts. This approach brings up the question of how and why the curators reconciled the different feminist views of this past with the agenda and ideals of contemporary feminisms.

In her pivotal study on the history of feminism in Turkey, commenting on the gender ideology of the late 19th century Ottoman world, Serpil Çakır notes that three main trends shaped opinions, which were Westernism, Islamism and Turkism.<sup>66</sup> Although traditional and Islamic thoughts were widespread and predominantly premised on women's 'birth-giving qualities to reproduce and raise future generations',<sup>67</sup> ideas regarding women's role and position in society were widely discussed and challenged by reformists. At the same time, it is crucially important to note that in this very climate, where both Ahmet Mithat and Fatma Aliye's views on gender roles were shaped, tradition and reform persistently if not divergently informed each other. However, as Deniz Kandiyoti argues, the dualistic paradigms such as 'secularism vs Islamism' or 'Westernization vs tradition' proved to be narrow in understanding the issues of religion with regard to women's rights and have long 'acquired the quality of a national obsession' in Turkey.<sup>68</sup> Such rhetoric draws on a struggle between the values of a secular elite and a traditional Muslim society and serves to construct the history from the perspective of the 'positivist notions of progress'.<sup>69</sup> What also makes this history more progressively constructed is presenting it in a linear narrative of political achievements in gender politics – very similar to (feminist) progressive art historical narratives. This approach often relies on studies that assert the role played by either the Ottoman Reform Movement (*Tanzimat*, in other words 'modernization', 1839–76) or the foundation of the modern Turkish republic in 1923, as stimulants to modernizing several areas of life including gender.<sup>70</sup> Although these may be important

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<sup>66</sup> Çakır, 'Feminism and Feminist History-Writing in Turkey', 67.

<sup>67</sup> Çakır, 'Feminism and Feminist History-Writing In Turkey', 67.

<sup>68</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Disentangling Religion and Politics: Whither Gender Equality?', *IDS Bulletin*, 42:1, (2011), 11-12, and Kandiyoti, 'The Travails of the Secular', 514.

<sup>69</sup> Kandiyoti, 'The Travails of the Secular', 515.

<sup>70</sup> Çakır, 'Feminism and Feminist History-Writing in Turkey', 69–70.

events per se, they also attest to the trope in that they appear to embody the moment in which progressive politics started to dissociate itself from old models narrating ‘the history of modern Turkey as a struggle between the values of a secular ... state elite and a traditional Muslim society’.<sup>71</sup> Turning now to 2012, while the ‘Dream and Reality’ exhibition was still open to visitors, analysing the political climate in Turkey, Nilüfer Göle observes that since the Justice and Development Party (JDP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*–AKP in Turkish) came to governmental power in 2003, ‘a fusing of the conservative democratic tradition with an Islamic past’ has hitherto occurred.<sup>72</sup> During this time, to become a member of the European Union, Turkey had committed to make reforms that required the mobilisation of the whole society. Several different segments of society, from the intellectuals to the non-governmental organisations, ‘from Kurds to Alevis, from feminists to homosexuals’ found this change ‘relevant to their own everyday lives’.<sup>73</sup> Clearly, the political climate the JDP government had created in the decade leading up to the ‘Dream and Reality’ exhibition are evocative of the seemingly disparate yet innately blended ideological camps of the late 19th century Ottoman world. However, picking up on this, in her studies concerning the diverse experiences of modernity and gender in the ‘Muslim world’, Kandiyoti proposes the rejection of the unavailing conflict of these seemingly opposing notions that have been categorically pitted against each other as encapsulations of ‘cultural authenticity (expressed through an Islamic idiom)’ and “‘foreign” contamination (with modernisation being equated to Westernisation)’.<sup>74</sup> Instead, Kandiyoti points at cases of conflation where, for example, the notion of gender has assumed a central role within the wider ideological debates and negotiated the binary modes of ‘modernist reformism and conservative reaction’. In some Muslim cultural contexts such as Turkey this tension

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<sup>71</sup> Kandiyoti, ‘The Travails of the Secular’, 515.

<sup>72</sup> Nilüfer Göle quoted in Eric X. Li, ‘Globalization 2.0’, *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 29 (2012), 7. Although, later on in 2017, considering the decline in human rights and sustained unjust treatment of academics, journalists and in general diverse groups in Turkey, even Göle would comment against JDP government. See Nilüfer Göle, ‘Turkey is Undergoing a Radical Shift, From Pluralism to Islamic Populism’, *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 34 (2017), 45-6.

<sup>73</sup> Göle quoted in Li, *Globalization 2.0*, 7.

<sup>74</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, ‘Islam, Modernity and the Politics of Gender’, in M. K. Masud, A. Salvatore and M. van Bruinessen (eds.), *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 91. Also see Saba Mahmood, ‘Feminism, Democracy, and Empire: Islam and the War of Terror’, in Joan Wallach Scott (ed.), *Women’s Studies on the Edge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 81–85.

between tradition and reform has sometimes constituted an ‘indigenously defined modernity’ that has not only negotiated subjectivities but has also been deeply shaped by them.<sup>75</sup> Drawing upon these perspectives, the *Dream and Reality* novel appears to displace the claims that it simply and uncritically reproduced the gender roles and identities of the late-Ottoman social and cultural sphere, but instead manifested these new if not complex experiences of modernity and gender, exposed by the authors and personified in the fictive characters in a changing society.<sup>76</sup> In this respect, the exhibition does not adopt the late 19th century Ottoman gender ideology, or that of the conservative JDP government by appropriating the novel, but rather creates connections between the imperatives of the 19th century world that inhabited the novel *Dream and Reality*, and the socio-political discourse of the period in which Istanbul Modern organised the exhibition ‘Dream and Reality’. In turn, these connections form a double-discourse which was embodied in both the visual and verbal rhetoric of the curatorial team and the institution. Highlighting fluid agendas and alignments between local and international actors, while *Dream and Reality* serves to reflect the diverse experiences of after-modernity and gender in Turkey and navigate the local realpolitik, ‘Dream and Reality’ negotiates the national desire of progress—manifested in the Museum display but also the generational chronological narrative—and of claim to fame in the global arena of art and feminism.

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<sup>75</sup> Nilüfer Göle, ‘Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries’, *Public Culture*, 14:1, (2002), 187.

<sup>76</sup> Karakoç, ‘Hakikat’i Romanla Hayal Etmek’, 171.