



## **WOMEN TRANSFORMING SPACE AND COMMUNICATING A MESSAGE THROUGH USE OF SPACE: THE CASE OF FATMA ALIYE\***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Fatma Aliye is the daughter of Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, an eminent statesman of the last century of the Ottoman State, and the sister of Emine Semiye who was likewise a novelist. Having grown up in such a family made her sensitive to the issues of the period and the social structure she was living in. However, her main focus has been literature and women's issues. She manages to bring together these two intellectual concerns in the novels she writes. The center of Fatma Aliye's novel is female heroines. The writer narrates the lives, world views and adventures of these heroines as starting point and constructs the plot around these elements. All the intrigues and events in the novel come together around the central female character. Other characters enter the novels through their relationship to this character. The female heroines have the capacity and experience to change not only their own lives but also those around them. They demonstrate this powerful influence on spaces as well as the living conditions around them. They arrange and transform space and environmental conditions according to themselves. Fatma Aliye's heroines are ideal figures and they deliver the message of the writer through their lives and the attitude they take in the face of various events. These messages sometimes are related directly, and sometimes indirectly. The position of the characters and to a certain extent the narrator vis-à-vis space provides a fitting stage for the writer to put out her indirect message. That is to say the narrator offers a picture of the dynamics of ideal space-Man relationship through the heroine's understanding of space, the way she makes use of or organizes it.

**Key Words:** Turkish Literature, Fatma Aliye, women's literature, women, space.

## **KADININ MEKÂNLARI DÖNÜŞTÜRMEİ VE MEKÂN ÜZERİNDEN VERİLEN MESAJLAR: FATMA ALİYE ÖRNEĞİ**

### **ÖZET**

Fatma Aliye, Osmanlı Devleti'nin son yüzyılının önemli bir siması olan Ahmet Cevdet Paşa'nın kızıdır ve kendisi gibi bir romancı olan Emine Semiye'yle kardeştir. Böyle bir aile içerisinde yetişmek onu

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devrin meselelerine, toplumsal yapıya duyarlı hâle getirmiştir. Ancak onun en önemli dikkatlerini edebiyat ve kadın meseleleri oluşturur. Düşünce hayatında yer eden bu iki hususu bütünleştirme imkânına ise yazdığı romanlarda kavuşur. Onun tüm romanlarında başlıca odak kadındır. Merkeze, o âna dek hakkında yine sadece erkeklerin konuşmuş olduğu, kadını ve kadın dünyasını yerleştirir. Fatma Aliye'nin romanlarında merkezde kadın kahramanlar yer alır. Yazar bu kadın kahramanların yaşamlarını, hayata bakış açılarını ve maceralarını hareket noktası kabul ederek romanın kurgusunu bu çerçevede oluşturmaktadır. Roman içerisindeki tüm entrikalar ve vakalar onların karakteri etrafında birleşir. Diğer kahramanlar romanlara bu ana kişiyle ilişkileri doğrultusunda dâhil olmaktadır. Kadın ana kahramanlar hem kendi hayatlarını hem de çevrelerindeki yaşamları değiştirebilecek yeterli donanım ve birikime sahiptir. Onlar bu güçlü etkilerini sadece yaşam şartları üzerinde değil mekânlar üzerinde de gösterirler. Mekânı, çevre şartlarını kendilerine göre düzenler ve dönüştürürler. Fatma Aliye'nin başkahramanları aynı zamanda ideal tiplerdir, hayatları, olaylara karşı takındıkları tutum ve davranışlarıyla en önemlisi de düşünceleriyle yazarın mesajlarını okura iletirler. Bu mesajlar, doğrudan zaman zaman da dolaylı biçimde verilebilmektedir. Eser içerisinde kahramanların ve kısmen de anlatıcının mekân karşısındaki durumu, yazarın dolaylı mesajlarını sunabilmesi/sergileyebilmesi için uygun bir sahnedir. Yani anlatıcı, kahramanın mekâna bakışı, onu kullanışı veya düzenlemesi vasıtasıyla ideal mekân-insan ilişkilerini örnekler. Bu durum nesnel dünyası için de geçerlidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türk edebiyatı, Fatma Aliye, kadın edebiyatı, kadın, mekân.

### Introduction

Fatma Aliye is the daughter of Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, an eminent statesman of the last century of the Ottoman State, and the sister of Emine Semiye<sup>1</sup> who was likewise a novelist. Having grown up in such a family made her sensitive to the issues of the period and the social structure she was living in. However, her main focus has been literature and women's issues. She manages to bring together these two intellectual concerns in the novels she writes. In all her novels women are central; that is she puts women and women's world at the centre- an element that has up to that moment again been described only by men. In **Muhadarat** she focuses on women's attitudes towards marriage, in **Refet** their education and in **Udi** financial independence through work. Thus she treats all aspects concerning life's important turning points and fundamental issues. These make their appearance in the plot as characteristics that stem from the choice of 'woman as central character'. Almost all elements of the plot, the list of characters, the emplotment etc. are props to construct this world. In this study, Fatma Aliye's main problematic through the aspect of space is investigated which is one of the most important elements in her writing.

<sup>1</sup> For Emine Semiye's biography and Works see; Şahika Karaca, **Emine Semiye Hayatı, Fikir Dünyası, Sanatı, Eserleri**, Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yayınlanmamış Doktora Tezi, Kayseri 2010.

## Women and Space<sup>2</sup>

In Fatma Aliye's novels it can be said that there are two types of woman's relationship to things and space. The first is the relationship between the protagonist and space. This consists of very positive and strong communion. The second is the position of side characters or antagonists. Since antagonists are negated as individuals in every possible respect, their outlook on space can be seen as part of an overall negative framework. It'll be fruitful to focus our consideration of the novelist's work around this relationship and to analyze the novels one by one through the construction of their heroines.

**Muhadarat** is one of the best-known novels of Fatma Aliye. The author's entry to the world of belle-lettres has been through this novel. "This novel reflects a feminine point of view that is particular to its period, concerning how women-men relationships should be organized in Turkish society which has entered a period of social and cultural transformation."<sup>3</sup> This novel contains a similar dramatic persona to her other novels. The heroine's name is Fazıla, meaning virtue. Fazıla's character has been constructed to merit her name in every possible way, she is an idealized woman, vis-à-vis her moral attitude towards her life. We see her in various adventures and spaces throughout the plot. She is an influential and active character and plays a transformative role in her relationships with people and space.

We first encounter Fazıla in the space of her own home. When her mother dies, she is left with her brother Şefik and her father, and she starts playing the role of 'mother' with a maturity that can hardly be expected from her young years and tries to take on the work of the house. As time goes by she loses her reign over them and sense of belonging to her own home due to the pressures that of Calibe, her stepmother and subjecting her to. At this stage space appears not with its physical but its conceptual aspects.<sup>4</sup> Before the arrival of the stepmother Caliba, the home is a private space, however, it is also a dimension that bears within itself possibilities of expansion; the heroine is happy. However Calibe, with her actions, alienates her from this home. After Calibe, what Fazıla experiences with other characters such as Nabi and Süha drive her to stay in her room. At this point, her room replaces greater space. The heroine lives in a state of defence. This space which is for her as a refuge, is enclosed by the house which is under the sovereignty of opposing forces. When this enclosing space starts to encroach on her defences, the only option left for the heroine is to leave that space. When Fazıla loses her influence on her father and the universe she belongs to, when she no longer has a say in it, she decides to leave the manor house. She achieves quit the space that she is no longer able to transform by marrying Remzi Bey. She considers herself new home an incomplete copy of the world she used to live in and thus starts to interact with it. However, the misfortunes that she experiences here lead her almost to suicide and thus she is obliged to set her life on a new course. Her real adventure starts after she gets herself sold off as a *cariye*/slave. In this section, Fazıla reappears as a *cariye* named Peyman.

Fazıla takes on the new name Peyman in the house that she is sold to. However, she is a *cariye* with a difference and takes on responsibilities far beyond her abilities of a slave and transforms the house she lives in. She starts her new life by arranging space in a particular order, and then she starts to intervene in human relations- interventions that always lead to positive results. This approach is a behaviour that Fatma Aliye expects of her heroines. Her heroines always

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<sup>2</sup> Relationship women have with space is also considered in; Ayşen Akpınar, Gönül Bakay, **Kadın ve Mekan**, Turkuvaz Yayınları, İstanbul; **Cins Cins Mekan**, (Ed.: Ayten Alkan, Varlık Yayınları, İstanbul 2009; Robert Seidenberg, Karen DeCrow, **Eviyle Evli Kadınlar**, Afa Yayıncılık, İstanbul 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Nazan Aksoy, "Fatma Aliye Hanım'ın Muhazarat'ında Kadın Açısı", **Batı ve Başkaları**, Düzlem Yayınları, İstanbul 1996, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> For an in depth discussion of this see Ramazan Korkmaz, "Romanda Mekânın Poetikası", (Ed.: Ayşenur Külahlıoğlu İslam-Süer Eker), Grafiker, **Edebiyat ve Dil Yazıları, Mustafa İsen'e Armağan**, Yayınları, İstanbul.

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have a feeling of responsibility towards their environment. Their sense of duty includes guiding events to the direction that they should take, and encouraging people towards ideal forms of behaviour. This is an understanding that can be expressed by the western term ‘to make a difference’. Fazıla starts on this mission by organizing the house she lives in. This section takes place in Lebanon; the narrator speaks at length about how Fazıla serves Şebip, how she arranges his room. What she does differs from the general work that other *cariyes* do- it has to differ:

*“Fazıla entered Şebip’s room and tidied and arranged everything when Şebip should reach out for something, he would find it where it should be. Then Fazıla left the room. The master’s travelling bags had arrived; they were at the door of his room. The cariyes were afraid to take them into his room because they didn’t know where he wanted them placed. Fazıla took the trunk and put it in a suitable corner. Then she looked at the room once again and saw that all was in order, and then said to herself: ‘I did everything as it should be done. If the master still insists on being choleric, that’s his choice. Even if he should censure me, such unfair censure will not affect me at all’ and left the room.”*<sup>5</sup>

These lines are not about how women should organize the rooms of their men. The real message given by the narrator is between the lines as in all other Fatma Aliye novels: that one has to have a sense of responsibility. Here this message is being related through using the element of space. The ideal is what Fazıla does, the others are in error. Fatma Aliye always shows both the right and wrong and points to the right, and thus she is taking her own responsibility as a writer.

Fatma Aliye’s novel **Refet** also offers insights as to transformation of space and the messages given. The heroine of the novel Refet lives under very hard conditions with her mother. Her only goal is to do her condition better, to stand on her two feet and shape her own destiny. Refet organizes all aspects of her life to serve this purpose. She considers education to be a step that would lead her to her goal and holds onto it as unto dear life, and tries to make use of every opportunity that presents itself. For her, the most important aspect of both home and school is they are places of work the fact that Refet and people around her, have to work for a living is the main reason why they transform their homes to work places. They sew, read and work in the houses that they live in. For them, the concept of ‘home’ is related more to hard reality than spiritual bonds. Refet can think of the spiritual bonds she has with space only after she has seen to her basic needs. Her conception of space is always marked by this fundamental concern:

*“Refet came first in her class in secondary school and went on her studies in the school for teachers. Now she had only four years before she gained her teaching diploma. When she thought of the day she would get her diploma and start getting her salary and thus be able to feed her mother who would no longer have to work, she felt the sweetest sensation. Refet was now nineteen years old. Her mindset was not like the poetic worldview of girls her age. She was going to earn a living, look after the home, make her mother comfortable, and have a role to play in the education of many children of the homeland. All these children would respect and love her and call her ‘Our teacher’! This was the sum of all Refet’s dreams. Sometimes she would take it further. To save enough money for a house, to have their own space, and then to buy various furnishings for the house as she earned more money. She would go even further to imagine a garden where she would tend to the lawn and flowers, and then have a cup of coffee with her mother on summer evenings when she got back from school, then after that eat dinner that has been prepared by the maid who looks both after the*

<sup>5</sup> Fatma Aliye Hanım, **Muhadarat**, Kasbar Matbaası, Dersaadet, 1326, p. 211.

*cooking and the cleaning, overlooking that very garden. These are the limits that her dreams reached.”<sup>6</sup>*

For Refet the real home is the one she constructs in her dreams. The spaces that she lives in reality are spaces that provide for her housing and working. They are mere tools and as such they don't generate the emotional relationship expected between person and space. For Refet, the transformation that will turn a space into a home is a long process that has many phases.

The difference between the protagonist and antagonists are made evident through their differences in wealth, and in relation to that, their attitudes towards objects. In all the novels, the heroines are after spiritual fulfilment and peace rather than money and things that money can buy. These heroines also articulate that real virtue does not require material tools but that the real goal should be spiritual wholeness and inner peace. The narrator reveals whether or not the women in the novel are on the right path through using images of space and objects. For instance in **Muhadarat** what distinguishes Fazıla from Calibe are their attitudes towards space and objects. Calibe is the antagonist in the novel, and as such she is portrayed as a woman who is only after wealth and the satisfaction that the objects that money can buy will provide for her. The ideal values that Fazıla exalts such as love, peace and happiness have their counterparts as clothes, jewellery and a sumptuous house in her world. For these goals she rejects Süha's love, although she is in fact loves him too. She marries Sai Efendi who equates with wealth. However, Calibe's adventure takes on a downward spiral, and the narrator's comments as to Calibe's inner disquiet suggest to the reader that happiness cannot be achieved through material things. This idea is consolidated and conveyed to the reader sometimes with the narrator addressing the reader directly, such as in the following:

*“The jewellery that Calibe had so yearned for in her younger days and that she now possesses lie locked up in the drawer. She doesn't want to wear a single one. She doesn't take the trouble to wear any of the dresses that are in her many wardrobes. She doesn't go visiting anybody, nor does she want anyone to visit her which should provide ample opportunity for her to strut her stuff about! Calibe has understood that money alone cannot be expected to bring peace and comfort. She had failed to appreciate that with wealth, happiness had also come at hand. Can there be a bigger lesson than Calibe's predicament for a thinking mind? Although she has attained everything she wanted, because she has prevented other people from wanting what is rightfully theirs, God has put her in this sorry situation.”<sup>7</sup>*

Besides the worldview of such antagonistic characters like Calibe, there are other ideal characters whose conduct should be adopted. The heroine of the same novel marries Remzi Bey who is also rich. But for Fazıla, the important thing is not wealth or objects, but the happiness that will come about through harmony. If material elements are not used to further inner peace, they have no value. For the heroine of **Udi Bedia** money, wealth and objects are nothing but a means. Bedia is the person who earns money for the house in her marriage to Nail. For her neither money, nor lavish spending is important. Most important thing is that money should serve their personal happiness. Anything element doesn't serve this purpose has no value.

It is only the narrator that categorizes women in social life according to their attitudes towards objects and space: the heroines themselves engage in this categorization. A letter that we read in **Levayih-i Hayat** points to this practice:

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<sup>6</sup> Fatma Aliye Hanım, **Refet**, Haz.: Şahika Karaca, Kesit Yayınları, İstanbul 2012, p. 104-105.

<sup>7</sup> Fatma Aliye Hanım, **Muhadarat**, p. 132.

*“How happy are young women who think of nothing but the tulle of the wedding dress, the height and figure of their husbands, their eyebrows and eyes, in short, the beautiful faces of their spouses. Men, should marry such women if they also want to be happy, to live a comfortable life too. When they start to talk about how beautiful their prospective wives should be, they should also add that the wife should be stupid to such and such extent, devoid of ideas to such and such degree, and apathetic as well! They can fool such women as they want, give them such lives as they want. What right do men who have no intention of giving up their bad ways have to marry a woman like Sabahat and make her unhappy? Why don't they seek women who can adopt themselves to their ways? Why don't they think of this before hand? ‘Marriage’, what an important issue! What great event! What has this to do with putting on a glamorous bridal dress? A ‘spouse’ is something to be considered at length! Ah, the difference of the dream of a beautiful face and reality!”<sup>8</sup>*

For the narrator the idealized heroines life consists of two separate parts: the material and the spiritual. The material world is where man sees to his basic needs. However, a person cannot be defined solely through her/his material needs and their satisfaction. He/she also has a spiritual side. And this is the aspect that needs to be developed, enriched and shaped. In order for human beings, especially women to make progress, they have to go beyond the world of objects. For women like Calibe who have become slaves to space and objects, or women who have made these elements goals instead of means, it is impossible to take the leap from the material to the spiritual. Due to this failure, neither their minds nor their souls can develop further and they become individuals who are described as ‘stupid, devoid of ideas and apathetic’.

In **Refet** there are messages that are relayed within a different framework. In a conversation between Cazibe and Şahab, a sympathetic character Şahab, the writer underlines some issues that she wants to discuss at large. The conversation is about their visit to Refet’s mother who falls ill. Şahab is surprised that his sister wants to visit such a poor house. Cazibe explains her intentions:

*“- That’s not what I mean dear sister, I mean such a poor house....*

*- Don’t you share the same space with poor people at school? What harm does it do if I enter their house? The poor man’s house is a place where one goes to give help and support. I am surprised at you Şahab! The reason I sent you to that school is not solely for the benefit of the education that your teachers give you. You can get that sort of schooling at home as well. You have an instructress to help you with lessons in the morning, the afternoon, and even in the evening! We can also call in an instructor for the extra lessons you are learning at school. What I want is that a lad like you who lives in affluence and knows nothing of poverty except for what he has read on paper, or heard through people; a lad like you who lives only in genteel circles and has not seen how those below him live- I want you to learn through seeing other lives in the school, and thus get educated in the school of life! I want you to see what rich and poor are. I want you to be able to differentiate and understand the life of the genteel and the poor! I want you to understand that what we call the world is not composed solely of the wealth and the genteel; I want you to understand life.”<sup>9</sup>*

Just like the ideal heroines in the other novels, what is essential for Cazibe is the spiritual heritage that a person has a heritage that is inherent and that one takes recourse to through the course

<sup>8</sup> Fatma Aliye Hanım, **Levayih-ı Hayat**, Haz.: Ayşe Demir, Kesit Yayınları, İstanbul 2012, 76.

<sup>9</sup> Fatma Aliye Hanım, **Refet**, Haz.: Şahika Karaca, Kesit Yayınları, İstanbul 2012, p. 122-123.

of one's life. Material circumstances may offer a comfortable life to an individual, but one should not pay undue attention to that, one should see material elements as a means to achieve humane values.

In **Enin** also, the reader is cautioned against seeing wealth, the good life, space and objects stemming from it as the only source for true happiness. In this novel also the most distinguishing feature between the sympathetic and unsympathetic characters are their attitudes towards the world of objects. The heroine Sabahat emphasizes often that possessions, jewellery or money have no importance so long as they do not serve the happiness and peace of mind of the individual. In contrast, for the unsympathetic character Nebahat money is the main goal of one's life, along with a life that can be enriched only through wealth.

Within this framework we see that there are two female characters who have different approaches and whose life stories converge in **Udi**. Here, the writer has constructed her thesis antithesis and has embodied them in these female characters. It is also interesting that these two messages are constructed around the concept of space. Bedia and Helvila represent opposing worldviews as the heroine and the antagonist. Helvila makes the heroine Bedia's husband fall in love with her, like she does many other men: this is how she earns a living. Bedia's life changes due to his infatuation with Helvila. The two women meet at a wedding feast, recognize each other and start a discussion about women's working space. Helvila argues that a weak and lonely woman has nothing to resort to but immoral ways of earning a living, a thesis that Bedia opposes:

*“ ‘When a widowed woman is left poor and alone with her three children, do you think it would be easy to find her a husband? When the woman is forced to earn a living what has she but her coquettish looks and dimples?’*

*‘One can also sell various things, sew and wash clothes.’*

*‘Oh yes? And what is she to do with her children in the meanwhile, put them in her pockets? And what you speak of are such low paid jobs. How can you feed four mouths with such earnings? My own mother had enough to provide for a nanny for us, and then enough to send us to school. We can read and write to a certain extent.’*

*‘Well then, your mother is also literate. Why didn't you then educate the children of your neighbourhood at home rather than opening your doors to every sort of man?’*

*‘You really are in a dream world my dear sister! How many do you think would send us their children? How much money do you think they would be able to give? You would have us go from door to door begging not for bread but for children? But men, those big children, they come running themselves. And they give money by the bundle, and diamonds.’*

*‘Bedia shivered when she heard these words. Helvila had described the predicament of women who had to earn a living in rather terrifying terms. Her own money was dwindling, maybe in a short while she herself would be in those dire straits described. She was thinking what would become of her if Mail left her.’<sup>10</sup>*

Indeed, what Bedia fears comes to pass. Mail leaves her, and the only relative she has who could take care of her, her brother Şemi dies. Now Bedia has to work and faces the same difficult decision that Helvila has described. However, she acts according to the principles that she

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<sup>10</sup> Fatma Aliye Hanım, **Udi**, Haz.: Şahika Karaca, Kesit Yayınları, İstanbul 2012, p. 82.

defends, that is to say according to the ideal code of behaviour. She starts giving *ud* lessons and in contrast to Helvila she transforms her house in a music school. She buys a house with the money she earns and thus attains a space where she can find refuge. Thus the writer emphasizes that there are more than one route that one can take and consolidates the ideal route that she has Bedia take.

### Conclusion

In conclusion one can relate Fatma Aliye's concern to construct idealized heroines and to communicate social messages through them with both the conditions of the period and her personal attitudes. In this framework Fatma Aliye foregrounds her identity as an intellectual as much as her identity as a writer. The responsibility that this identity entails includes, for her, constructing characters that can set examples and be role models for women. The central characters of her novels are the products of this responsibility.

This approach that Fatma Aliye adopts thematically, and the way she applies it by way of form needs thorough investigation through different angles. Each study that is done on her work will crystallize and consolidate her position both in the field of Turkish and women's literature.

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