

## Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

### The Social Role of Women in the “Varna Postası” Weekly<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

One of the developments contributing to the modernization movements in the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century was the publication of Turkish newspapers. After the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War, Bulgaria remained attached to the Ottoman Empire in the status of an autonomous principality until the Balkan Wars. In Bulgaria during that period, newspapers were published in Bulgarian, French, and Turkish. Turkish newspapers were mainly published for the Muslim population in Bulgaria to receive news, address their issues, and contribute to their education. *Varna Postası* (1887) newspaper is one of the periodicals published in Turkish in Varna, occasionally including columns in Bulgarian. The subject of this article is to examine the articles in *Varna Postası* regarding the education of Muslim women and the participation of women in modernization. Looking at *Varna Postası*, we see articles aimed at the education and general cultural development of children, teenagers, and adult girls from elementary to middle school levels. These articles address the educational situation in schools in cities such as Ruschuk, Varna, and Sofia, offering support for various subjects. Articles on literature, architecture, child rearing, and social life aim to develop

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the general culture, reading habits, and aesthetic tastes of boys and girls. Some articles emphasize the goal of raising knowledgeable, quality, and modern individuals who can adapt to modernization. *Varna Postası* only seemingly pointed to the enormous social role of women. The image emerging from published texts depicts a society where men remained in a socially stronger position. They were decision-makers, politicians, soldiers, etc. Even if women took advantage of the right to education and could have a chance to be educated for political roles, the possibility of pursuing such a profession was not offered to them. They were supposed to educate themselves for the roles of wives and mothers in order to "serve" men. Going beyond these boundaries was, in reality, impossible. This topic is examined in detail in this article.

*Keywords:* Bulgaria, Varna Postası, women, education, modernization

## Haftalık "Varna Postası"nda Kadınların Sosyal Rolü

### Öz

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda modernleşme hareketlerine katkı yapan gelişmelerden biri, XIX. yüzyılda Türkçe gazetelerin yayımlanmasıdır. 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı'ndan sonra Bulgaristan, 13 Temmuz 1878'den itibaren özerk bir prenslik statüsünde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na Balkan Savaşları'na kadar bağlı kalmıştır. Bulgaristan'da o dönemde hem Bulgarca hem Fransızca hem de Türkçe gazeteler yayımlanmıştır. Türkçe gazeteler daha çok Bulgaristan'daki Müslüman ahalinin haber alması, sorunlarının dile getirilmesi, eğitim hayatlarına katkı yapmak gibi farklı amaçlarla yayımlanmıştır. *Varna Postası* (1887) gazetesi, Varna'da yayımlanmış Türkçe ve zaman zaman bazı sütunları Bulgarca çıkmış süreli yayınlardan biridir. Bu makalenin konusu, *Varna Postası*'nda bilhassa Müslüman kadınların eğitimi ve modernleşmeye katılımı hususunda çıkan yazıları incelemektir. *Varna Postası*'na bakıldığında ilkökul ve ortaokul seviyesinden itibaren çocukların, gençlerin ve yetişkin kızların iyi yetişmeleri; kültür, sanat yönünden genel kültürlerinin gelişmeleri için yazıların çıktığı görülür. Bu yazılarda Bulgaristan'da Rusçuk, Varna, Sofya gibi şehirlerde bulunan okullardaki eğitime ve derslere destek mahiyetinde yazılar yayımlandığına şahit oluyoruz. Kız ve erkek çocuklar ile gençlerin genel kültürlerinin, okuma ve estetik zevklerinin gelişmesi için edebiyat, mimari, çocuk yetiştirme ve toplumsal hayat ile ilgili yazılar çıkmıştır. Bazı yazılarda temel hedefin bilgili, iyi, kaliteli ve modernleşmeye ayak uydurmuş uyumlu bireyler yetiştirmek olduğu dikkat çekmektedir. *Varna Postası*, genelde kadının muazzam sosyal rolüne işaret ediyordu. Yayımlanan metinlerden ortaya çıkan görüntü, erkeklerin hâlâ toplumsal açıdan daha güçlü bir konumda kaldığı gerçeğidir. Karar verici, siyasetçi, asker gibi erkek egemen roller öne çıkmaktadır. Kadınlar eğitim hakkından yararlansa ve siyasi roller için eğitime şansına sahip olsalar bile onlara böyle bir meslek edinme imkânı sunulmuyordu. Erkeklerle "hizmet etmek" için kendilerini eş ve anne rolleri konusunda eğitmeleri gerekiyordu. Bu sınırların ötesine geçmek aslında imkânsızdı. Bu hususlar makalede incelenmeye çalışılmıştır.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Bulgaristan, Varna Postası, kadın, eğitim, modernleşme

The area of gender studies has been the subject of scholarly inquiry for over a decade. The position and portrayal of women in a certain society have become topics of research related to socio-cultural gender identity. *Varna Postası*, reflecting the spirit of its time, played a crucial role in shaping opinions on various subjects. During the period when Bulgaria sought independence, women actively participated in the process, although their role was largely tied to traditional social roles and norms.

The aim of this study is to present the linguistic portrayal of the social role of women on the pages of the Turkish-Ottoman language newspaper titled *Varna Postası* (“Варненска Поща”). The analysis falls within the scope of feminist studies, sociology of the family, and pedagogy related to the educational role played by women. The methodology is based on the research traditions and analytical methods of feminist literary criticism. In collecting material for analysis, specific texts were selected, focusing on articles related to the lexeme “woman” and all its synonyms and paraphrases. Thus, this analysis covers all the texts concerning women and girls published between 1887 and 1888 in the periodical in question.

*Varna Postası* is an archival periodical, with a volume of four pages, published weekly –which was typical for the majority of Muslim publications of that time – between 1887 and 1888. It was targeted at Muslims residing in Bulgarian territories and did not contain illustrations. The newspaper was edited by Necip Nadir, a teacher at the Varna *gymnasium*, and associated with the Varna *rushtiyе*. After *Varna Postası* was closed down, Necip Nadi started to publish the weekly “Bulgaristan” in 1888 in Varna and “Serbest Bulgaristan” in Sofia. Both newspapers were criticising the Sultan and his rule and eventually, they were shut down under pressure from the Sublime Porte. The editor was bribed and swapped publishing newspapers for a position in Istanbul (Popek, 2022, s. 440-441). According to archival documents, in the future, he was to serve as, among other roles, the governor in the town of Karapınar (Konya) (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Zabtiye Nezareti (BOA-ZB.), 25/28). According to the Turkish press historian Münir Süleyman Çapanoğlu (Çapanoğlu, 1964: 31), Sultan Abdülhamit II (1842–1918) did not want Necip Nadir to stay in Istanbul because he saw him as a patriot known for his fight against tyranny. For this reason, he repeatedly delegated him as a teacher and later a state official to Europe, deep into Anatolia, or to Saudi Arabia. In addition to *Varna Postası*, Necip

Nadir became the editor-in-chief and main writer of the newspaper *Hukuk-ı Umumiye*, published from September 16, 1908, and held this position until the 23<sup>rd</sup> issue, released on October 8, 1908, when he was appointed to an official position (BOA-ZB., 326/146) and had to leave Istanbul again.

According to research published in Turkish by Dr. Ökkeşâ Nariñ and in Polish by Dr. Krzysztof Popek, *Varna Postası* was the sixth Turkish-Ottoman language periodical published in Bulgaria (Nariñ, 2021, s. 173-200). The Turkish press market was unstable, and the longevity of newspapers was rare. Contemporary periodicals, similar to the one we are discussing about, often ran for only a few issues, with circulations usually around 1,000, a maximum of 3,000 copies (Popek, 2022, s. 445). Pioneering titles in this regard included:

- "Tuna" – a crucial title for readers from the Ottoman Empire and Turkic peoples, published in Ruse from 1865 to 1877. It served as the official newspaper of the Danube *vilayet* and was considered a precursor to modern Muslim press in the region. Articles were contributed by local Muslims (including Ahmet Mithat) and Bulgarians (including Dragan Tsankov). It ceased publication due to the Russian invasion in 1877 (Popek, 2022, s. 439).
- "Mecra-ı Efkâr" – a weekly published from 1867 to 1877 in Ruse. Besides Ottoman Turkish, it was also published in French and, eventually, closed due to the Russian invasion (Popek, 2022, s. 440).
- "Güneş" – a newspaper published from 1875 to 1877 in Ruse. It was closed following the entry of Russian forces into Bulgarian territories (Popek, 2022, s. 440).
- "Eftap" ("СЛЪНЦЕ") – a newspaper published in Ruse in 1875, featuring content on trade, politics, and economics in the issues from 1 to 6. The editor and director of the newspaper was N. Spanopulo (Nariñ, 2021, s. 180).
- "Bulgaristan Resmi Gazetesi Tercümesi" ("Държавен вестник") – the Ottoman-Turkish version of the Bulgarian journal of laws published in Ruse from 1880 to 1882 (Popek, 2022, s. 440).
- "Tarla" ("Нива") – a political-literary newspaper printed in Sofia every Saturday. The editor and publisher of the newspaper was Yusuf Ali Bey. The annual subscription cost 15 leva. Between June 5 and December 24, 1882, 29 issues of the weekly were released. It may have continued to come out later, but there is no information on this. The first page of this title was in Bulgarian, while the following

three were in Turkish. The main goal of the weekly was to support the Turkish minority. The newspaper was closed due to criticism directed at the Turkish government (Narinç, 2021, s. 194).

- “Kozmopolit” (“Космополит”) – a newspaper whose first issue was released on January 30, and the second and last on February 6, 1883, in Plovdiv. The newspaper covered international agriculture, trade, and industry (Narinç, 2021, s. 187).
- “Dikkat” (“Внимание”) – a political-literary weekly published on Thursdays. It also included texts in Bulgarian. The magazine was printed in the house of text editor Yusuf Ali Bey in Sofia. It cost 20 coins, and the annual subscription was 5 roubles. Between April 7 and May 12, 1883, 5 issues were released (Narinç, 2021, s. 178).
- “Şark Yıldızı” – a newspaper published in Plovdiv from 1883 (Popek, 2022, s. 440).
- “Hilal” (“Полумесец”) – reportedly published from 1884 in Plovdiv. However, no copies have survived (Narinç, 2021, s. 184).
- “Çaylak” – published in Sofia from 1884 to 1885. It was also distributed in Russia (Popek, 2022, s. 440).
- “Vakit” – published in 1885 by editor Manizade Yusuf and Ali Turabi. It was an anti-Sultan periodical closed under the pressure from the Sublime Porte (Popek, 2022, s. 440).
- “Balkan” – a weekly published in Ruse from 1885 to 1886. It was a Young Turk newspaper whose editor was Mustafa Racip (Popek, 2022, s. 440).

The next Turkish-Ottoman language newspaper on the Bulgarian market was the socio-political *Varna Postası*. The texts it published mainly covered current events in the country (from Varna and Sofia) and abroad. The periodical, which was published in Varna, in addition to news and extensive *Travel Reports*, regularly published a chapter titled “Literature”. This section included texts related to broadly defined culture, including articles illustrating the social role of women, their influence on culture, and the way they were perceived by men. It was an anti-Sultan title. Targeted at Muslims residing in today’s Bulgarian territories, the series of articles entitled “Education of women” was intended to help men choose the ideal candidate for a wife and mother, and to recognise the influence of the education of girls and adult women on the morality and future of the nation. Additionally, it portrayed the role and place of women in the contemporary society, which is shown in the analysis below.

The first issue of *Varna Postası*, dated December 4, 1887, featured an article discussing love in the "Literature" section, including the following fragment:

Science tells us that every creature and plant have its male and female variation. Female plants emit a particular fragrance and possess different colours and shapes compared to male plants. Female plants are elegant and pleasing to the eye. Their fragrances, colours, and shapes bring happiness to humans. All these attributes are the result of love. Animals seek each other out by making sounds. Nightingales sing, lions roar, and these sounds are made at specific times of the year when they seek each other out. (Necip Nadir, 1887, s. 4)

This seeking of each other gives the reader a certain sense that female and male specimens, despite their different appearances and performing different functions, are essentially equal, necessary to each other to the same degree, and striving for the same goal. The intentions are portrayed in such an egalitarian manner that one might overlook factual errors. Not all plant and animal species exhibit sexual dimorphism, after all. Where it exists, male genes are often responsible for a more attractive appearance. For instance, in many birds, males have brighter colours designed to attract female attention. Sexual dimorphism in plants, on the other hand, is scarcely visible. Moreover, in nature, the approach of males and females to coming together occurs under entirely different conditions, making it difficult to compare them. It might be the case that the male is more attractive when the female chooses a partner based on his features or based on who is the strongest and wins the fight against other males. Biologically, the goal of the male is to pass on his genetic material. The author probably wanted to apply a metaphor in his text, drawing attention to the beauty of women and their difference from men, and for this purpose, he decided to use examples from nature, equating men and women and their aspirations. However, the sense of balance between both sexes is disrupted a few sentences later, when we read that:

Some animal species have the peculiarity that many females mate with one male. For example, this is the case of a rooster. Just like with tigers, similarly in most species in our cosmos, there are more females than males, because males need to have more females around them. (Necip Nadir, 1887, s. 4)

As the text aims to depict the relationship between a man and a woman in love, it is difficult to deny that the author, not only by comparing humans to animals but also by reminding us of animal species that have more than one female partner, gives the reader a sense of permission for a man to have more than one woman. According to his view, this runs against the female nature, so it cannot be considered that a woman could have more

than one partner. This is in no way supported by the religion followed by Balkan Muslims, as they did not accept polygamy. From the perspective of analysing the perception of women in Islam, it is worth noting that, as historian Dr. Krzysztof Popek states, “Ottoman Islam did not have a fundamentalist character, and Balkan Muslims were no more or less religious than Christians. Among this community, neither polygamy nor veiling of the face by women was approved, and alcohol consumption and eating pork were accepted” (Popek, 2020, s. 63).

The author of the text likely did not have access to such knowledge, but thanks to scientists, we now know that biologically, women and men are not motivated to engage in intimate relationships to the same extent (Plopa, 2022, s. 22). According to researchers, women are more inclined towards monogamy than men. They often cite love and emotional needs as reasons for getting involved in a potential romance (Schmookler and Bursik, 2007, s. 825). In contrast, men point to the satisfaction of sexual needs as the reason and goal of romances (Thompson, 1984, s. 57). Research by psychologist Dr. Alicja Kuczyńska indicates that both genders exhibit different types of behaviours in initiating intimate relationships and in later stages when the goal is to sustain the relationship. Typical female behaviours include physical closeness and actions for the benefit of the community and partner. On the other hand, male behaviours are characterised by sexual, imposing, and conciliatory actions (Kuczyńska, 1998, s. X). Comments on women’s external appearance can also be found in an excerpt reproduced from the *Dictionary of Philosophy*, which states:

Usually, women are weaker than men; they do not have as much strength. They have cold blood, long hair, shorter hands, smaller lips, they are taller. They have wider hips and are bigger than men. Based on these characteristic features, one can distinguish women from men all over the world. (Nadir, 1888, s. 3-4)

This description reflects gender stereotypes and introduces simplified, erroneous assumptions about the differences between women and men. According to feminist criticism, such generalisations are harmful as they contribute to perpetuating gender inequality and discrimination. In the context of feminist theories, efforts are made towards gender equality, eliminating harmful stereotypes, and understanding gender as a socially constructed rather than biologically determined category. The assertion that women are “weaker” than men overlooks the fact that physical abilities can vary depending on the individual, not just gender. Feminist criticism also focuses on the idea that the valuation of traits related to appearance (e.g., hair length, hip width) should not impact an individual’s social worth or their position in society.

Similar content is found in the article titled "Woman – physique and upbringing":

Women's body organs differ from those of men. This is particularly because they can breastfeed children. Always and in every state, nature gives women the strength and courage to fight and argue with men. Allah has endowed them with such skills and gifts that in disputes with men, they always win and control men. (Nadir, 23/1888, s. 3)

Necip Nadir attempts to categorise women and men multiple times, not only based on their external appearance but also by assigning them different character and personality traits. In the article "Situations of Women" he writes:

Whether a man has aged or not, one should ask a woman who sees him. Women most often talk about what does not concern them and has no influence on them. Men, on the other hand, talk about what moves and concerns them. Many times, it has been seen that if a woman loves a man, she will not confess it to him. And men, even if they do not love, say they love (...). (Nadir, 17/1888, s. 4)

Another topic discussed in *Varna Postası* is the issue of women's upbringing. At irregular intervals, a series of articles titled "Upbringing of women" was published, and the following analysis and interpretation apply to them:

Special attention should be paid to the upbringing of women because their morality is the source of the nation's morality. How well-educated they are determines how educated those who come after us (future generations) will be. (Nadir, 7/1887, s. 4)

The author's reflections not only emphasise the importance of women and demonstrate an awareness of their role in society, but also suggest their agency and influence on the development, behaviour, and ways of functioning of men in society. However, this approach may be subject to feminist criticism. Assigning women only the role of guardians of the nation's morality reinforces the stereotype that their value is primarily based on a societal function, rather than individual aspirations, desires, or talents. It would be more appropriate to consider the diversity of roles and values of women beyond traditional limitations. Moreover, the fragment may suggest that female education is important primarily for the benefits to society, rather than for the woman herself. From a feminist perspective, women's education should be valued as good itself, not just because of its potential effects on society. A similar perception of women is seen in the following excerpt:

The first sound a child hears when entering the world is the mother's voice.  
The first thing they see is the mother's eyes. The first touch that soothes



the child's heart is the mother's touch. When we are small, our mothers raise and protect us. And when we are adults, just like in childhood, they continue to protect us. A mother's love helps us grow, and the love of a beloved completes our love life. (Nadir, 7/1887, s. 4)

The subject of analysis in family sociology, which falls within the scope of general sociology, is the family as both a group and a social institution. Women have always played a fundamental role in establishing and running families. Similarly, pedagogy, focusing on the educational and socialisation functions, is a field that examines the family and processes determined by it (Kamprowski, 2011, s. 3). Through research in these two fields, as well as thanks to history, anthropology, and demography, we have information about the entire social role of women from ancient times onwards. Women's roles have evolved over centuries, and in the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries in European cultures, women as mothers became the “first teacher, revealing and explaining the mysteries of life, formulating prohibitions and orders, introducing norms and principles” (Bogucka, 1994, s. 67). Therefore, the author presents an entrenched approach to the subject, stating that women should be individuals who need special care in society, as they ensure high-quality social life and are the reason for better entrepreneurship and thriftiness:

Taking care of the upbringing of every woman and mother is taking care of our upbringing. If women are educated at a high level, our male affairs will also go better: we will find solutions more calmly and easily because women will suggest them to us. (Nadir, 7/1887, s. 4)

Looking from a slightly different perspective, one can observe that the presented fragments depict an image of a woman whose body and physiology determine proper roles and a place in society. For many centuries, motherhood was a central and dominant element of femininity (Budrowska, 2003, s. 20). According to prevailing beliefs, a woman's destiny was marriage and motherhood, which is clearly visible in subsequent articles.

Necip Nadir repeatedly emphasises in *Varna Postası* how important the upbringing and education of women are. He cites examples of his acquaintances, presenting them as role models to the readers:

My soldier friend has two daughters. Both are still very young, but despite that, they already know important and necessary fields of study such as mathematics and history. As for languages, they are proficient in Turkish, French, and English. They are knowledgeable about music, and besides, they can also sew/embroider beautifully. Think about how educated the future children of these two girls will be, and whether the children of an

uneducated woman have a chance to be the same. They will never have a chance. (Nadir, 7/1887, s. 4)

Possessing all these skills, if not unattainable, is challenging for many women, let alone for young girls, who are mentioned in the above fragment. It is likely the result of the medium, performing his or her persuasive function, choosing a linguistic image of women that aligns with the character of the periodical. The image of women presented in the newspaper is close enough to readers to make them want to buy the weekly, while simultaneously being somewhat distant and inaccessible, so that readers aspiring to this image would have to use the advice provided by *Varna Postası* in subsequent issues. The editor suggests a specific worldview to its audience, thereby influencing the formation of the readership.

In contemporary Turkey, it is still very easy to find individuals or entire families who believe that there are much better and more profitable investments for the future than educating daughters. Many believe that such an investment does not pay off when a woman, for example, gets married after her studies and becomes a mother. As a result, she does not go to work, and the education provided to her does not generate income, and the investment does not pay off. The fact that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century a significant portion of society still considers educating girls unnecessary is a stark contrast to the articles from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in which Necip Nadir not only highlights the immense need for providing education to women but also places responsibility for most areas of life on women, stating that "bad upbringing and bad education lead to the functioning in society of people who do not know their roles and duties" (Nadir, 12/1888: 4). Pedagogical literature is full of research proving that the family is the primary educational environment (Matyjas, 2007, s. 6). However, in the image of a family which emerges from *Varna Postası*, the mother plays a central role, and no one else comes close to being as significant. The term "mother" has a relational character. The word exists in relation to another person – the child (Bakiera, 2009, s. 56). On the one hand, there is the image of a woman as an extremely important figure with a significant and responsible mission. On the other hand, the woman is not perceived as an individual on her own, and in this and other fragments, she is presented in relation to other individuals: children, men, husbands, families, etc.

Necip Nadir seeks to prove his thesis regarding the social role of women with the following words:

Those individuals, especially women, who do not know the purpose of their lives, when they get married, become subservient to men. Such women are, in fact, slaves. If a mother is uneducated, and her daughter is

educated, then they cannot form a close relationship. We could educate such a mother so that she catches up with her daughter in education. Then their relationship would improve. An educated mother would change the quality of her life. (Nadir, 12/1888, s. 4)

The above quotation contains several elements that may be subject to feminist critique. The statement that women who do not know the purpose of their lives and get married become subservient to men may foster harmful stereotypes about the role and value of women in the context of marriage. The assertion that uneducated women are slaves is a strong and potentially controversial generalisation. It suggests that a lack of education automatically places women in a submissive role, disregarding many other factors influencing an individual's social and economic situation. According to feminist theory, it is essential to respect the individuality and diversity of women's life choices. Valuing education is a positive concept, but it is important not to assess the worth of women solely through the prism of their educational achievements. Education is not the only indicator of an individual's value or the quality of the mother-daughter relationship.

Since while gathering material for this study, i.e. selecting texts for analysis, I focused on articles referring to the lexeme "woman" and its synonyms and paraphrases, it should be added that, beyond subjective views on the issue of women's education, *Varna Postası* also published data on gender balance in the education sector. For example, the newspaper reprinted the following from the "Svoboda" magazine:

In Bulgaria, there are 449 male schools and 425 female schools, where 569 male teachers and 75 female teachers teach. In all these schools, there are a total of 21,737 male students and 2,073 female students. (Nadir, 15/1888, s. 2)

Although the editor conveys this data without commentary, it sheds light on the education system in Bulgaria and shows that in the country, ten times more men attended school than women, even though the number of female schools was relatively high. This paints a picture of a society in which, despite the offered opportunities (available female schools), a certain factor hinders the education process of girls. As Dr. Krzysztof Popek writes, "After 1878, the transformation of Bulgarian education gained a new impetus, while for Islamic education, it was a time of stagnation. The division of Muslim schools into primary, middle (*rushtiye*, established in 1838, and medreses of a strictly religious nature), and pedagogical (*idadiye*) was a remnant of Tanzimat reforms." (Popek, 2022, s. 200). Commenting on the presented data from the perspective of feminist criticism, it should be added that the low number of female teachers compared to male teachers may affect the experiences of male and female students in schools. The low

percentage of female teachers could affect the lack of female representation in some schools and perpetuated stereotypes related to gender roles. The low percentage of female students compared to male students might not only signal inequality in access to education but also could influence the atmosphere in schools, where the dominance of one gender could generate various social dynamics.

Erich Fromm, describing culture, writes that as a society, we seek people who are "attractive," which means "usually a set of qualities sought on the human market. 'What makes a person attractive depends on the prevailing fashion at a given time, both psychologically and physically (...)' (Fromm, 2006, s. 17). The significance of female beauty, often discussed in the periodical, also became a topic in the article "Women's situation," in which we read:

A well-bred man and a woman who maintains her morality will be happy together. The external appearance of women is essential, but their internal beauty is the most important (...). (Nadir, 16/1888, s. 3)

The above quote contains a certain contradiction. On the one hand, the author recognises the superiority of personality traits over physical characteristics, but on the other hand, the external appearance of women is to be one of two factors, alongside morality, determining the happiness of a couple.

It is widely known that friendship is an important relationship in human life because it provides a source of emotional support and, consequently, improves well-being. As a significant factor in social and cognitive development, it influences the communication process, exerting a positive impact on relationships between people (Fiske, 1999, s. 16). One of Necip Nadir's articles addressed potential male-female friendship, and contained the following fragment:

If from the beginning no one in a group of individuals consisting of two men or two women has the intention of sleeping with anyone of the opposite sex, then friendship between them is possible. But even if they become friends, for women, men will always be men, so they will look at them through the prism of their masculinity, and for men, women will always be women because they perceive them through the prism of their femininity. Such acquaintance is neither love nor true friendship. Such relationships are based on gaining some benefits and are selfish. Falling in love is something that happens suddenly and is unplanned. We do not have to do anything to fall in love. We do not know what beauty is until we fall in love. Only then do we notice beauty. On the other hand, friendship requires time, experience, and dedication. A beautiful face and a beautiful gaze lasting only a moment can have a significant impact on a person.

But a friendship relationship lasting for years does not have such power and influence on a person as that gaze that lasts only a moment. Time strengthens friendship. Falling in love is like the sun. (Nadir, 2/1887, s. 4)

*Varna Postası* also published an article that was a response to the question “What should be the ideal candidate for a wife?”:

1. *She should be equally knowledgeable in the sciences and literature as I am.*
2. *She must be skilled in handicrafts to be able to decorate the home herself. She should also have enough knowledge of music to sing in a way that cheers up the family.*
3. *She should be knowledgeable about global events and men. And she should know women as well as possible.*
4. *She must fall in love with me first.*
5. *As much as possible, she should be discreet. Her family should not have a lower social status than mine.*
6. *She should not be prettier than me, but she should not be uglier than me either (Nadir, 16/1888, s. 3).*

The editor-in-chief asked a selected colleague about what, according to him, the ideal candidate for a wife should be, so this is the opinion of one man from Varna. Probably, these points are typical enough for the owner of the periodical to consider them worthy of publication. It is difficult to deny that in the above considerations, the woman is objectified. The status of the subject, that is, the man, dominates the status of the object, which is the woman. The man, as the subject, is active and endowed with agency. The woman is passive – subjected to action. This article aligns with the societal narrative prevailing even in today’s media, where the status of the subject and object is heavily dependent on gender.

In one issue, there was also a passage stating that the editor perceives both genders equally:

(...) I would like to emphasise that it does not matter whether someone is a man, a woman, or a teacher. My respect for you is enormous. (Nadir, 8/1888, s. 4)

It is probable that this equality applies only to the perception of gender in the category of readers, and indeed, this would not be strange from the author’s perspective. The owner of the periodical emphasising that he respects women as much as men indicates that this is not self-evident in society and needs to be stressed. As a result, it paints a picture of women who are less important and respected than men, but some individuals may consider them equal to men in specific moments or relationships. For

example, when they appear as readers, they are as important to the writer as men, but they are not essential as persons to be written about or to whom articles should be addressed.

The contents published in the periodical did not receive a positive reception from the entire society. Its conservative part disliked content emphasising the enormous role of women in civilisational progress, the need for the education of the female part of society and demands for gender equality. Aware of this fact, *Varna Postası* reiterated in its texts that different opinions on this matter are possible, once again trying to convince readers of its reasoning by providing examples of countries and figures that the majority of society might want to emulate. For example, in the regular column "Local news," we read:

In our newspaper, we have published articles about raising women. Some conservatives disagree with what we wrote there. But we still know how much importance is attached to children and raising women in Istanbul. Sultans also strongly support these ideas. Teachers who come from Europe, from France, Italy, and Germany, to Istanbul teach in a modern European way. As the newspaper "Son Posta" writes in its latest issue, Tevfik Pasha will send his two daughters to Europe so that they can receive proper education. (Nadir, 43/1888, s. 3).

In the following passage, we once again see a patriarchal point of view, where a man tells us how women should live.

I present to you the question: what will women gain by going to school and receiving education? Just going to school and having some knowledge is not enough. Women should also follow the example of their educated family members. Learn good and useful behaviour. (Nadir, 18/1888, s. 4).

The periodical also deliberated multiple times on female physicality. In one of the articles, titled "Women – states of the body," we read:

It cannot be emphasised enough that both the internal and external parts of the female and male bodies differ. Women's hair is long, thinner, and softer. Their skin is whiter and more yellow like gold. Women's arms and hips are prettier.

Setting aside considerations of the truthfulness of these words, exaggerated subjectivity in describing a social group, and the assumption that women are not allowed to have short hair while men are not allowed to have long hair, it is worth noting the double scrutiny imposed on women on the pages of *Varna Postası*. On the one hand, they are limited by the requirement to fulfil the traditional role of giving birth and being a mother, expanded to include education and upbringing. On the other hand, the contemporary canon of female beauty is described in the following excerpt:

Men usually like tall, plump, strong, robust, and beautiful women with wide faces. The health of a nation's bodies depends on women, and it is in their hands. (Nadir, 19/1888, s. 4)

Bronisław Malinowski, who described tribal communities, drew attention to the existence of taboos within them, which formed the basis for social control. This taboo consisted of a set of traditional customs and prohibitions, the violation of which resulted in a negative reaction from the environment. The existence of these prohibitions implied the creation of mechanisms to enforce compliance. Failure to adhere to these principles caused a person to “feel and look, in the eyes of others, ridiculous, awkward, and uncouth” (Malinowski, 1984, s. 44). For centuries, the family was the most significant, or even the only, area of action for women, defining their relationships with other people and social groups, determining their social status, shaping their identity, and serving as a criterion for their evaluation (Garncarek, 2013, s. 59). It shaped them, influenced their behaviour, aspirations, and ways of perceiving the world. The social and family roles of women were strictly defined, predetermined, and constituted a dominant component of their personality (Garbacik and Węgrzyn, 2008, s. 76).

In newspapers published at the time, the owner, publisher, and editor were often the same person. This was also the case of *Varna Postası*, where a Varna high school teacher created a certain image of women. The portrayal presented by the journalist might have been subjective and not aligned with the views of most of the society. The newspaper itself did not provide information on whether public opinion perceived women in the same or a different way. Nevertheless, the small number of newspapers published at that time undoubtedly reinforced the opinion-forming function of *Varna Postası*. Apart from shaping readers' opinions, by reaching conservatives or people with different views, it paved the way for discussions on topics not previously addressed in those circles.

At first glance, the following passage may seem to represent feminist aspirations for gender equality. In the article titled “Raising women,” we read:

The times have come when, just like men both work at home and take on various professions, women should do the same. Education is needed for women just as it is for men. If a girl is not educated and later marries and entrusts her life to some man, that man can do and manage her as he pleases because she has no options (...). (Nadir, 9/1888, s. 3)

A closer analysis leads to the observation that, due to certain assumptions and the potential perpetuation of stereotypes, this opinion could provoke criticism from feminists. For instance, there is a risk that the statement

“just like men both work at home” might be interpreted as suggesting that housework and family care are duties that were previously assigned exclusively to women. This assumption could solidify traditional gender roles, implying that equality merely means a similarity in responsibilities rather than their equal distribution.

Despite this, the above article contains some feminist demands, although they are written in a very simple and unsophisticated language. Firstly, calling certain activities performed by men at home “work” is a step towards acknowledging the work of household management and unpaid work for the benefit of the family performed by women. Secondly, at least in theory, by encouraging women to pursue professions traditionally associated with men, the author contributes to ensuring women’s full and effective participation in society and, consequently, in decision-making processes at all levels of political, economic, and public life, as well as equal opportunities in assuming leadership roles. I say mainly in theory because, according to feminist criticism, the mere rejection of a gender-differentiated approach, i.e. introducing neutral and equal access to benefits or positions for both women and men, is not sufficient to eliminate actual discrimination against women. This stems from the fact that in a society functioning in this way, women are forced to compete with men for social positions that were already defined for men and by men in such a manner that, despite the lack of formal restrictions, women usually lose in the process of applying for them. This is mainly related to the issue of motherhood, childcare, and managing the household. As the Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka wrote, it is not recognised that including childcare in the recruitment process is indisputable confirmation of gender inequality, stemming from the historical shaping of the economy by men in line with their interests (Kymlicka, 1998, s. 266). It is also worth noting that men, both in the discussed period and today, are perceived as better employees because they are usually not the ones who worry about reconciling work with childcare responsibilities. In 19<sup>th</sup>-century Bulgaria, it was obvious that women were responsible for taking care of children. The unavailability and lack of efficiency resulting from maternal duties meant little chance of employment. Neither the state nor any other institution had the means or the ability to intervene to counteract this, even if it had similar intentions and goals.

Let us return to the fact that in some fragments, Necip Nadir refers to motherhood and household management by women as work. However, what may be lurking under the pretext of appreciating women is the danger of “commodifying” the family and replacing bonds based on emotions



with contracts. Feminist Professor Jean Bethke Elshtain believed that the family is the only place where a calculation of gains and losses should not matter, where solidarity should prevail over competition, and goodwill over calculation (Środa, 2003, s. 326). Treating marriage as a contract and motherhood as a profession contradicts these assumptions to the extent that it would mean the end of a real family. Moreover, it would irreversibly destroy what is specifically feminine by incorporating the *oikos* sphere into the market exchange area defined by men.

In the article "Rural women," Necip Nadir wrote the following:

In every country, the status of rural women is worthy of sympathy. Village girls feed animals, graze them, sow and harvest crops. It is very hard work. As soon as girls grow up a bit, fathers or older brothers immediately take them to work in the field. In addition, these girls are given heavy things to carry, which should actually be carried by animals. Let no one think that this is the situation only in Eastern countries. If you want an example, you can read some work by a French writer. You can immediately read about situations of girls and women there. I have a fragment here, which I took from just such a book: "I am not talking about Africa. I am saying that in France, they run together with cattle behind the plough". (Nadir, 14/1888, s. 3-4)

The above passage describes the situation in which rural women and girls had to live. The fact that part of the column was reserved to describe the situation of women, while the characters in the vast majority of press texts were men, deserves attention. However, the passage represents a stereotypical portrayal of the role of rural women. It suggests that the main occupation assigned to girls and rural women was working with animals, cultivating land, or carrying heavy loads. This perspective does not take into account the diversity and complexity of the lives of rural women. It ignores their individual aspirations, skills, and occupations. The text also does not mention gender inequalities and social structures that could affect the situation of rural women. It does not consider potential barriers and limitations that women in rural areas faced due to traditional gender roles or a lack of equal access to resources. The author of the text made a generalisation of the situation of women, without examining their diversity and the complexity of experiences related to work.

An article regarding the life of a girl from Bulgaria contains the following text:

A certain girl, whose mother passed away when she was 3 or 4 years old, was taken in and raised by a Christian man. However, the girl came from a Muslim family. At the age of 11, last Sunday, Hacı Halil Efendi, who had emigrated to Istanbul, took her to Istanbul. (Nadir, 1/1887, s. 2)

The text is difficult to critique because it does not provide information on whether the decisions were made with or without the girl's consent. The absence of her active participation in the decision-making process, especially in the context of changing religion, culture, and residence, would raise concerns from a feminist perspective.

In his periodical, in the article titled "Woman – materiality and the education of women," Necip Nadir also included a fragment concerning historical events.

A certain lawyer wrote a book, and in this book, he writes that in a certain country, a ruler established a law that women could marry several men. The people were outraged. This happened in Rome. Later, they even proposed in the Roman parliament that the person governing a given region should have the opportunity to sleep with any woman he desires. Such absurd events brought humiliation to women, their health, and pride. (Nadir, 25/1888, s. 3)

The *Varna Postası* editor's interpretation of these sentences focuses on the criticism of social and legal norms leading to the discrimination and humiliation of women. It is possible that the author wanted to express disapproval of the abuse of power and the introduction of absurd regulations that, in his view, harm individuals and society as a whole.

Contents related to women published in *Varna Postası* primarily concerned issues of education and upbringing. They addressed the struggle against male domination, women's right to education, and the position of mothers in society. All these issues fall within the scope of feminist activity. The texts exhibit numerous references to radical feminism, such as the fight against the traditional division of roles based on gender, attributing motherhood to women as an obligation, and opposing male domination. Some articles are consistent with the principles of feminist ideology and demonstrate how important a role women play in society, especially as individuals who, through raising children, influence the development of society or its hindrance. A woman is important not only as a mother, because, according to the author, she also educates the men who surround her. By thinking for them, advising them, and solving their problems, she is a figure who actually has a significant impact on social life because she manages and educates, is a source of happiness, and at the same time, of the morality and future of the nation.

However, all these functions of women limit them. Feminist criticism allows us to see in Necip Nadir's texts that women functioned in a patriarchal society: it is men who determined and defined what women should be. The female gender was subject to strong social control. The lives of objectified

women were determined by biology; traditionally, they were associated with physicality, and the sexual and procreative function remained closely linked. This is evident in the analysed passages from the *Varna Postası* articles. Despite emphasising the role of women, men still “told” women what to do and how to be. A woman was supposed to sacrifice herself for the good of the family in a way, but it was still a man who dominated in family and social relationships. Moreover, in most articles, the protagonists or the subject were men; hence, it was possible to analyse fragments of all articles related to the female gender, which amounted to just 17 texts. Publishing mainly stories focusing on men in the newspaper led to the persecution of society by androcentrism. All articles in *Varna Postası* led to the replication of a well-known situation where successive generations are raised in such a way as to perceive the world and women from the perspective of men. As a result, only the male gender is perceived as complete, and men as complete human beings. Such articles may give the impression of being pro-feminist, but only superficially, because, once again, men decide about women’s ability to play an important social role and the right to education. Women are denied agency; they are perceived from the outside, and their awareness, thoughts, and feelings are overlooked. In none of the 17 texts was a woman given a voice, nor was an attempt made to look at any issue from a female perspective.

Finally, the articles in *Varna Postası* can be perceived as an attempt to transition society from patriarchy to a system where both genders are equal. It is worth emphasising that the concept of feminism, understood as activity aimed at improving the social status of women, was likely introduced by Hubertine Auclert in 1882 (Auclert, 1888, s. 1), just a few years before the publication of *Varna Postası*. It is obvious that its editor did not have access to feminist theories. However, it is possible to find the seeds of certain feminist ideas in his way of thinking and presenting women. On the other hand, in scholarly circles, feminism is mostly categorised within the post-positivist movement due to criticism and opposition to dominant gender hierarchies and the so-called male gaze. Thus, similar to other post-positivist concepts, feminism assumes transcending boundaries and, consequently, criticising the positivist legacy and deconstructing theories considering the variable of gender (Gasztold, 2017, s. 142). The main proponents of feminist concepts have been and still are women. Men who study them are more often referred to as “researchers”. It is rare to label them as “feminists”; they are called “pro-feminists” or “sympathisers of feminism”. This implies that women are the only ones engaged in the demands of the feminist movement, and men are assumed to have either supporting or negating roles (Ślęczka, 1999,

s. 12). Armed with this knowledge, when reading these articles focused on women one expects from the start that the ideas and concepts aimed at elevating the social status of women may only superficially share common ground with feminist concepts. The author of the texts assigned different places to women than to men. He did not even attempt to indicate similar roles or functions.

He did not try to place women in men's positions or alongside them. He assigned them places and roles in which they were meant solely to serve as mothers and wives to men, to whose success they were supposed to contribute. In summary, Necip Nadir only seemingly pointed to the enormous social role of women. The image emerging from the texts he published depicts a society where men remained in a socially stronger position. They were decision-makers, politicians, soldiers, etc. Even if women took advantage of the right to education and could have a chance to be educated for political roles, the possibility of pursuing such a profession was not offered to them. They were supposed to educate themselves for the roles of wives and mothers, in order to "serve" men. Going beyond these boundaries was, in reality, impossible.

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## Extended Summary

The article examines the portrayal and social role of women as depicted in the *Varna Postası* weekly, a late 19th-century Turkish newspaper. Central to the article is the representation of women as the cornerstone of the family and society, particularly through their roles as mothers and educators. The text reflects on how these roles have historically evolved, emphasizing the significant influence women have on society by nurturing and educating the next generation.

The article begins by highlighting the critical role of women, especially mothers, in shaping the moral and educational foundation of society. This perspective aligns with traditional views that position women as the “first teachers” of life, responsible for imparting essential norms, principles, and knowledge to their children. The *Varna Postası* underscores the importance of women’s education, arguing that well-educated women are better equipped to contribute positively to society and family life. Necip Nadir, the editor of *Varna Postası*, emphasizes the importance of educating women, using examples from his acquaintances to illustrate how education can empower women to become role models for their children. Nadir suggests that the quality of future generations depends heavily on the education of women, positing that an uneducated mother cannot provide the same opportunities to her children as an educated one.

The article presents a dual view of women’s roles, combining traditional expectations with a recognition of the need for education and personal development. While the newspaper promotes the idea that women should be educated and capable of contributing to intellectual and cultural life, it simultaneously reinforces traditional gender roles. For instance, Nadir describes women as inherently tied to their roles as mothers and wives, often in relation to men and children rather than as independent individuals. This duality is further illustrated in Nadir’s critique of uneducated women, whom he describes as becoming subservient to men, likening them to slaves. He argues that education can liberate women, allowing them to form more meaningful relationships with their children and contribute more effectively to society. However, this perspective also perpetuates certain stereotypes, suggesting that a woman’s value is tied to her educational achievements and her ability to fulfill traditional roles.

The article notes the resistance to the ideas presented in *Varna Postası*, particularly from conservative segments of society. Some readers disagreed with the newspaper’s emphasis on women’s education and the suggestion that women should have a more active role in public life. Nadir addresses this resistance by citing examples from other countries, such as the educational practices in Istanbul, to argue for the importance of educating women. The article also touches on the broader societal context, noting that even in contemporary Turkey, there are still widespread beliefs that investing in women’s education is not worthwhile, especially if women do not enter the workforce after marriage. This contrasts sharply with Nadir’s 19th-century advocacy for women’s education, highlighting the persistence of these debates over time.

The article engages with feminist critique, particularly regarding the portrayal of women in *Varna Postası*. While Nadir's writings include some progressive ideas about gender equality, they also reflect the limitations of his time. For example, while advocating for women's education and professional development, Nadir's views often reinforce traditional gender roles rather than challenge them fundamentally. The discussion of women's physicality in the newspaper also raises concerns from a feminist perspective. The article notes how Nadir's descriptions of women's bodies, while sometimes complimentary, also objectify women by focusing on their appearance rather than their individual qualities or achievements.

The article briefly addresses the depiction of rural women in *Varna Postası*, highlighting the harsh conditions they often faced. Nadir describes the physical labor and responsibilities that rural women and girls had to endure, drawing comparisons between their lives and those of women in other countries, such as France. This section underscores the universal nature of certain challenges faced by women, regardless of their geographical location.

The article concludes by reflecting on the broader implications of the content published in *Varna Postası*. Despite its conservative undertones and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, the newspaper played a significant role in shaping public discourse on women's education and their social roles. It provided a platform for discussing issues that were often overlooked, thereby contributing to the gradual evolution of societal views on gender equality. In summary, the *Varna Postası* weekly offers a complex and sometimes contradictory portrayal of women. While it advocates for the education and empowerment of women, it also reinforces traditional roles and stereotypes. The article's analysis reveals how these portrayals both reflect and influence societal attitudes toward women, highlighting the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the recognition of women's contributions to society.