# 19. Ömer Seyfettin's *Eleğimsağma* (*The Rainbow*): A Little Girl with a Male Writer by Her Side[1]

**Fatmanur KALKAN[2]**

**APA:** Kalkan, F. (2026). Ömer Seyfettin's Eleğimsağma (The Rainbow): A Little Girl with a Male Writer by Her Side. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (50), 322-333. **DOI:** https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18802700

## Abstract

This paper explores Ömer Seyfettin's 1917 short story *Eleğimsağma* (The Rainbow) through the lens of gender roles in the context of gender studies, analysing how a male author critiques the oppressive social constructs imposed upon women in Ottoman society. Focusing on the story's ten-year-old protagonist, Ayşe, the paper examines how femininity is not a biological destiny but a culturally enforced identity. Ayşe's desperate desire to become a man, symbolized by her attempt to pass under a magical rainbow, is portrayed as a means of escaping societal constraints and gaining the agency, freedom, and power reserved for men. Through powerful imagery and symbolic elements such as the veil (çar) and the rainbow, Seyfettin critiques patriarchal structures and gender norms that confine women to passive, domestic roles. The figure of Kurt Hodja, the village imam, emerges as a symbol of institutionalized patriarchy and religious oppression, further reinforcing Ayşe's internalized inferiority. Although Ayşe momentarily transcends her gendered reality in a dream, her awakening reaffirms the unyielding nature of these roles, culminating in a profound sense of disillusionment and resignation. By highlighting a young girl's gendered awakening within a deeply patriarchal system, this paper discusses how Seyfettin's *Eleğimsağma* constitutes a bold, proto-feminist critique of traditional gender ideology in Ottoman culture, uncommonly by the pen of a man, and challenges the gendered expectations that continue to shape identities today.

**Keywords:** Ömer Seyfettin, gender roles, gender discrimination, patriarchy, masculinity-femininity

---

[1] **Statement (Thesis / Paper):** It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation process of this study and all the studies utilised are indicated in the bibliography.
**Conflict of Interest:** No conflict of interest is declared.
**Funding:** No external funding was used to support this research.

**Source:** It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation of this study and all the studies used are stated in the bibliography.
**Similarity Report:** Received – Turnitin Rate: 3%
**Ethics Complaint:** editor@rumelide.com
**Article Type:** Research article, **Article Registration Date:** 22.11.2025 **Acceptance Date:** 27.02.2026-**Publication Date:** 28.02.2026; **DOI:** https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18802700
**Peer Review:** Two External Referees / Double Blind

[2] Öğr.Gör., Atatürk Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, Yabancı Diller Bölümü, Yabancı Diller Anabilim Dalı / Lecturer, Atatürk University, School of Foreign Languages, Department of Foreign Languages, Division of Foreign Languages (Erzurum, Türkiye) **eposta:** f.kalkan@atauni.edu.tr **ORCID ID:** https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8030-6610 **ROR ID:** https://ror.org/03je5c526 **ISNI:** 0000 0001 0775 759X **Crossreff Funder ID:** 501100004951

# Ömer Seyfettin'in *Eleğimsağması* (Gökkuşağı): Erkek Yazarı Safına Alan Küçük Bir Kız [3]

## Öz

Bu makale, Ömer Seyfettin'in 1917 tarihli *Eleğimsağma* (Gökkuşağı) adlı öyküsünü toplumsal cinsiyet çalışmaları ekseninde toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri açısından inceleyerek, erkek bir yazarın Osmanlı toplumunda kadınlara dayatılan baskıcı sosyal yapıları nasıl eleştirdiğini analiz etmektedir. Makale, öykünün on yaşındaki kahramanı Ayşe'ye odaklanarak, kadınlığın biyolojik bir kader değil, kültürel olarak dayatılan bir kimlik olduğunu tartışmaktadır. Ayşe'nin sihirli bir gökkuşağının altından geçmeye çalışmasıyla sembolize edilen erkek olma arzusu, toplumsal kısıtlamalardan kaçmak ve erkeklere özgü olan irade, özgürlük ve gücü elde etmek için bir araç olarak tasvir edilmektedir. Seyfettin, çarşaf ve gökkuşağı gibi güçlü imgeler ve sembolik unsurlar aracılığıyla, kadınları pasif, ev içi rollere hapseden ataerkil yapıları ve cinsiyet normlarını eleştirmektedir. Kurumsallaşmış ataerkil ve dini baskının sembolü olan köy imamı Kurt Hoca figürü, Ayşe'nin içselleştirilmiş aşağılık duygusunu daha da pekiştirmektedir. Ayşe, rüyasında cinsiyete dayalı gerçekliğini bir an için aşsa da uyanması bu rollerin değişmez doğasını yeniden teyit etmekte ve derin bir hayal kırıklığı ve boyun eğme duygusuyla sonuçlanmaktadır. Derin bir ataerkil sistem içinde genç bir kızın cinsiyet uyanışını vurgulayan bu makale, Seyfettin'in *Eleğimsağma*'nın nadir görülen bir şekilde erkek kaleminden çıkan Osmanlı kültüründeki geleneksel cinsiyet ideolojisine yönelik cesur proto-feminist bir eleştirisi olduğunu ve bugün de kimlikleri şekillendirmeye devam eden cinsiyet rollerine meydan okuduğunu tartışmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Ömer Seyfettin, toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri, toplumsal cinsiyet ayrımcılığı, ataerkillik, erkeklik-kadınlık

[3] **Beyan (Tez/ Bildiri):** Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.
**Çıkar Çatışması:** Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.
**Finansman:** Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.

**Kaynak:** Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.
**Benzerlik Raporu:** Alındı – Turnitin Oranı: %3
**Etik Şikayeti:** editor@rumelide.com
**Makale Türü:** Araştırma makalesi, **Makale Kayıt Tarihi:** 22.11.2025 **Kabul Tarihi:** 27.02.2026 **Yayın Tarihi:** 28.02.2026; **DOI:** https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18802700
**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körleme

"Ah, erkek olsaydım…" (Seyfettin, 2005:24)
(Oh, if I were a man[4])

**Introduction: Being A Male or A Female: That is the Question**

The traits that people are expected to have in direct proportion to the society and culture in which they were raised are referred to as gender roles, a largely debated issue in society and literature since the dawn of civilization. The customs of a civilization are directly proportionate to the gender roles that are shaped by that culture. Eleğimsağma (*The Rainbow*-1917) is about a little girl who is about to enter puberty and the crisis caused by the oppression of being a woman or a "female", even as a child, due to the acknowledged gender roles by society. Thus, in the story, the subjugation of being a woman is seen through a little girl, Ayşe. Before analysing the story in the context of gender roles, it is important to touch upon what gender roles are. Mandy Boehnke (2011) defines gender roles as follows: "Gender roles are understood as shared expectations that apply to individuals based on their socially identified gender, and attitudes towards gender roles-individual's view of appropriate roles for women and men […]" (p.58). In this frame, sex refers to the biological characteristics of a person, and gender refers to the socially constructed structure, but one's sex determines the characteristics and rules of gender. In line with gender roles, people are compelled by society to fulfil specific responsibilities. As stated by Raewyn W. Connell (1987), with the rise of the idea of social role in the 1930s, the general body of scholarly thinking on gender took a different approach. It was simple to apply the idea of a socially constructed scenario for individual behaviour that is first acquired and then applied to gender. The phrases "male role" and "female role" started to be used in the 1940s (pp. 29-32). The synonym of gender roles is patriarchal gender roles, and in this respect, it has a stereotypical structure. Although gender roles vary from society to society due to different types of religion, culture, and politics, and so on, gender roles are generally stereotyped, so women are inherently weak, emotional, and maternal, while men are strong, logical, and providers. Since gender is solely a cultural construct, it is flexible and interpreted differently by different civilizations. In the context of *Eleğimsağma*, Ayşe is oppressed for being a woman under the name of Islam because gender is not simply a reflection of biological sex, but rather a set of socially constructed roles that individuals are expected to perform. According to Judith Butler (1999)

> If one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. (p.6)

Butler's statement aptly applies to Ayşe, whose behaviour as a girl is not inherently feminine but shaped by what her culture defines as appropriate for a female. In this sense, gender is a performance, an identity constantly produced by societal expectations. From early childhood, individuals internalize these norms through language, religion, family, and media, which act as tools of ideological control. In *Eleğimsağma*, Ayşe's experiences exemplify how deeply ingrained gender roles are enforced even in seemingly mundane daily interactions. Her identity is constructed not by who she is, but by what she is expected to be: obedient, modest, and silent. As Simone de Beauvoir (1949) famously stated, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (p.14). This statement encapsulates the idea that womanhood is not a biological destiny but a role imposed by society. This theoretical framework becomes particularly meaningful when situated within the late Ottoman sociopolitical context. During the Tanzimat and II. Constitutional periods and modernization efforts coexisted with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms.

4 All translations from Turkish to English were done by the author of this article.

Women's participation in the public sphere began to expand; however, traditional religious and cultural codes continued to regulate female modesty, mobility, and visibility. Thus, gender identity in the Ottoman Empire was shaped by both reformist discourse and conservative patriarchal structures. It is within this historical tension that Ömer Seyfettin wrote Eleğimsağma (1917). This study conducts a close reading of *Eleğimsağma* through the lens of feminist literary criticism and gender studies. Rather than offering a comprehensive socio-historical account of Ottoman womanhood, the article focuses on how femininity is narratively constructed and symbolically negotiated within the text. The analysis aims to demonstrate that Ayşe's crisis is not biological but sociocultural, shaped by patriarchal power relations embedded in daily life.

In *Eleğimsağma*, the reader observes that Ayşe is gradually shaped into a woman's role through societal pressure, religious expectations, and cultural norms, long before she fully understands what it means to be female. Her gender identity is not something innate but constructed and enforced, much like de Beauvoir describes. Historically, gender roles have been used as tools of social control. In pre-modern societies, these roles were often rooted in religious doctrine and traditional customs that dictated clear, rigid expectations for men and women. For centuries, as in Ottoman society, women were confined to the private sphere associated with domesticity, motherhood, and morality while men occupied the public sphere, where leadership, rationality, and strength were celebrated. What Ayşe goes through in *Eleğimsağma* reflects this historical burden; even as a child, she is conditioned to internalize shame, modesty, and obedience, all qualities expected from a proper woman in a patriarchal society. Moreover, gender roles do not operate in isolation; they are continuously reinforced through cultural, political, and institutional power structures that benefit from the preservation of patriarchal norms. These roles are learned rather than inherited, and they function as a system of control that prescribes what is considered acceptable for each gender. In Ayşe's case, her longing to be a man, "Oh, if I were a man" (Seyfettin, 2005:24), does not stem merely from biological envy but from the recognition that masculinity is associated with freedom, agency, and power while femininity is equated with restriction and silence. Thus, her gendered experience is a reflection of a broader sociocultural system that assigns value based not on individual identity, but on conforming to rigid gender norms. Her story becomes not just a personal crisis, but a commentary on the oppressive power of socially constructed gender roles.

## Ömer Seyfettin and His Very Short Story: *Eleğimsağma*

From the time he wrote his first story in 1902 until today, Ömer Seyfettin (1884-1920), one of the pioneers of Turkish literature, has been credited with founding the modern Turkish short story. Seyfettin drew inspiration from society for his works and sought to transform Turkish literature with the *Yeni Lisan* movement in order to reestablish national identity in language and literature. As he did so, he was unreserved in his criticism of society in his works and driven to address all facets of society, including religion, morals, education, and history, alongside Turkish customs and traditions. His being a commander in the Balkan Wars, being captured by the Greeks for a year, being a teacher in various parts of the country, and his talent for literature, together with his power of observation, enabled him to reflect on people and society in his works in various ways. Duran C. Gazioğlu (2011) expresses that "[t]he reason why Seyfettin reflects Turkish beliefs and ways of life in his works is his commitment to the idea of nationalism and national culture" (p.427). Different from his delineation of national identity and traditions, *Eleğimsağma* is a short story about gender roles and being a woman, which were primarily portrayed by female authors of the era, such as Fatma Aliye Topuz (1862-1936), Selma Rıza Feraceli (1872-1931), and Halide Edip Adıvar (1884-1964). This paper explores Seyfettin's critique of gender norms as a male author through the perspective of ten-year-old Ayşe in *Eleğimsağma*, a short story that

ushered in a new era in Turkish short stories. Underlining gender roles with this story, Seyfettin takes a step beyond his time. Nazan Yıldız (2022) designates *Eleğimsağma* and Seyfettin as follows;

> In the story *Eleğimsağma*, Seyfettin broke new ground. Through the child character Ayşe, he criticized the roles assigned to men and women by society and questioned the concept of gender roles. With the story *Eleğimsağma*, Seyfettin shows that he has a lot to say about gender roles not only to children but also to adults through the mouths of children. (pp.225-226)

The position of women in the Ottoman Empire was similar to that in the rest of the world, but remained oppressive and restricted due to the influence of Islam. Only with the Tanzimat Edict and later the Constitutional Monarchy II did women in the Ottoman Empire slowly gain rights. Vesile Şemşek (2020) states that "[w]ith the Tanzimat Edict, some restrictions on women were lifted. Women's participation in the public sphere was one of the many developments dating back to the Tanzimat period" (p.198). The still dominant influence of Islam continued to keep women away from society, and it was only with the proclamation of the Republic that Turkish women gained their freedom in the modern sense. It is in this atmosphere that Seyfettin focused on women and their place and delineated the concept of gender and woman with various female characters. In *Ömer Seyfettin'in Hikayelerinde Kadınlar Dünyası* (*The World of Women in Ömer Seyfettin's Stories*), Ramis Karabulut (2017) demonstrates women in Seyfettin's stories as such

> All women in [Seyfettin]'s stories are in a passive position and are usually under an influence. Through this influence, (Seyfettin) gives some messages to the reader through women. For example, these women are usually the ones who want to go outside their boundaries, but are told where to stand by the author at the end of the story. In fact, these women were figures who had to conform to the roles assigned to them, not the ones they wanted. (p.88)

The case Karabulut italicizes also applies to Eleğimsağma, as the main character, Ayşe, realizes at the end that the only place where she can transcend the boundaries of the male-dominated world and move freely is in her dreams. However, until she reaches this realization, Seyfettin, through Ayşe's story, clearly demonstrates to the reader the place of women in society and the extent of their oppression by foregrounding gender roles. As a young girl, Ayşe has no chance to do what she wants, but if she were a man, her wishes would come true:

> Oh, if I were a man [...] what he wouldn't have done! First of all, he would have become not only Bozkaya's but also the district's leading wrestler. Then... a famous swashbuckler... and he would undoubtedly marry the Zaimoğulları's daughter. He would have gone to war, his chest covered in medals, crossed mountains, and spent weeks hunting bears, just like the brave village lands. (Seyfettin, 2005:24)

There is criticism of gender roles through Ayşe's mind, body, and attitudes. The story, besides Ayşe, features the characters of Kurt Hodja (the village imam), Hasan, Gülsüm, and Ayşe's parents. It begins when Ayşe, a ten-year-old girl in a village in the Ottoman Empire, looks at a rainbow and dreams of becoming a man. Ayşe is a little girl, but she looks older and stronger than her age. For this reason, the imam of the village wants Ayşe to cover herself, but Ayşe, who loves riding horses, shooting guns, and playing capture the flag, would be deprived of the things she loves to perform the roles that society has assigned to her. According to the belief, people who pass under the rainbow change gender. Ayşe excitedly runs to the rainbow and passes under it, and becomes a man. She immediately comes home, changes her clothes, puts on her brother's clothes, and goes to the wedding ceremony in the village. Gülsüm and Hassan's wedding is taking place, and Ayşe must prevent it because she plans to marry Gülsüm. To show herself at the wedding, she wrestles two by two with the wrestlers and defeats them all. The villagers are puzzled and try to find out who this strong Efe is. Ayşe tells the villagers who she is

and how she became a man by passing under the rainbow. She forces Hasan to divorce Gülsüm and she puts pressure on Kurt Hodja to marry Gülsüm and herself. Kurt Hodja refuses to perform the marriage, saying that it is not religiously proper, and starts to incite the people against Ayşe. Just as Ayşe is about to kill Kurt Hodja, she sees someone waking her up. It is her angry father who has been looking for Ayşe for three hours and cannot find her. Realizing that what she had experienced was a dream, Ayşe returns home in tears, and on her way home, Kurt Hodja once again reminds her father that he must put Ayşe in the car. With her little body and great mind, Ayşe does not want to wear a veil, to be covered like other women and big girls, to be banned from playing, or running. If she can become a man, she will be able to do all these things. To do this, she tries to pass under the rainbow and have her wish granted. That is, *Eleğimsağma* delineates the contradiction and struggle of a ten-year-old girl between the childhood she wants to live and the life she is expected to live due to gender roles.

### ***Eleğimsağma*: A Story Longing for Modernity against Traditional Gender Roles**

Eleğimsağma is a story of yearning for modernity because Ayşe, as a girl about to enter late girlhood, knows very well what she does not want in her life. In the story, the differences between being a woman and a man are conveyed to the reader through the eyes of Ayşe. The situation that Ayşe realizes at a very young age is this: women do housework, are under control, cannot choose a partner, are subjected to physical and verbal violence, and live within the boundaries set by men. Men, on the other hand, are free, can choose a wife, spend their lives in different places outside the home, ride horses, and go hunting. Therefore, for Ayşe, being free is only possible by becoming a man. Duygu Özakın (2021) claims that

> The conflict that emerges in Ayşe's story stems from the fact that the little girl internalizes the idea that masculinity is superior to femininity due to the stereotypes she adopts as a result of her experiences. Thinking that she cannot fight against the norms of the male mind, Ayşe prefers to be liberated by becoming a man. (p.105)

It is gender roles that instill the superiority of males over females in Ayşe's mind. Kurt Hodja is the very embodiment of gender roles in her mind. He constantly reminds her of what it means to be a woman in the eyes of society: "Ayşe, tell your mother to get you veiled. It is no longer appropriate for you to wander around without a headscarf" (Seyfettin, 2005:8). Ayşe is aware of her beauty, her feminized body, and while looking in the mirror, she is impressed by her eyes, her thick black hair, and she is tall, well-built, and strong compared to her peers and says: "How beautiful I am" (Seyfettin, 2005:7). However, her beauty reminds her that she has to give up what she loves, which means manly things. Merve Yılmaz (2020) points out

> Ayşe is a ten-year-old girl who looks more splendid than her peers. But more like boys than girls, she likes to ride horses, shoot guns and wrestle. However, as she grows up, she realizes that she will be separated from these favourite games only because she is a girl. Moreover, the village imam, Kurt Hodja, puts pressure on her to cover herself. The childhood that children have to give up just because they are girls is told through Ayşe. (p.206)

Seyfettin describes Ayşe's oppression through two symbols: the rainbow and the car. All the gender roles imposed on Ayşe and the pressures they cause are presented through these two symbols. The fact that a little girl clings to superstitious beliefs for the sake of hope is important for Seyfettin to show how oppressive gender roles are. For Ayşe, the rainbow is a representation of hope, a way out. The rainbow and the belief that it brings about change, based on a belief that dates back to the ancient Turks, is a widespread view among Turkish people. In *Kültürel Bellek Metaforu Olarak Derleme Sözlüğü'ndeki Gökkuşağı Adları* (*Rainbow Names in the Compilation Dictionary as a Metaphor of Cultural Memory-*

2018), Şermin Kalafat (2018) defines rainbow as

> The rainbow is likened to a sieve in the sense that the cataclysm sifts and separates people according to their destiny. In this respect, the rainbow is actually a symbol of the cataclysm. In the end, situations such as passing under the rainbow, changing gender, and the fulfilment of a wish are the result of the change of fortune. (p.1150)

For Ayşe, the rainbow epitomises the perfect state of being the superior (male) and the change of destiny because once Ayşe passes under the rainbow, she has the opportunity to have infinite freedom. After Ayşe passes under the rainbow and becomes a man, she has no clothes and wants to go back home and wear her brother's clothes, but even those are too tight for Ayşe. Seyfettin makes Ayşe a man beyond her dreams. Suddenly, she becomes an *efe*[5], never hesitates to use her power and strength, and even bullies people. When Ayşe becomes a man, she behaves exactly like a man; that is, she forgets her plight as a woman and behaves as if she had never been a woman. Mahmut Bektaş and Yaşar Barut (2019) maintain that

> Our protagonist Ayşe does not only want to be a man, she also wants to be known and respected by society by taking advantage of the power and social status that masculinity brings. […] The men who shape society are either men of knowledge and wisdom or men who are known and influential with their power, strength and wealth. For this reason, Ayşe did not look up to her father and brother, nor to Kurt Hodja, the imam of the village; instead, she looked up to *efes*, *pehlivans*[6] and heroes. (p.119)

Ayşe, who goes down to the village square as soon as she becomes a man, learns that it is the Zaimgiller's wedding and wants to take Gülsüm for herself with her masculine energy: "Suddenly she became angry. Now she was a man. She was going to take this little girl [Gülsüm]" (Seyfettin, 2005:27). In fact, Seyfettin goes beyond his time and represents Ayşe as an extra person with the image of the rainbow because Ayşe has become completely male, both outwardly and mentally. Ayşe continues to act like an *efe* and says: "Come to the square! Clear!" and she adds: "If anyone wants to wrestle me two by two, come out!..." (Seyfettin, 2005:27). After beating the bold boys of the village, people ask who she is, and Ayşe reveals her identity, but people do not believe her:

> The people of the village could not believe it. Ayşe shouted and shouted about how she had run, how she had passed under the rainbow, how she had become a man; finally, she asked: "Who is going to marry Gülsüm?" "Hasan, the son of the mukhtar..." they said. "Let him come to me quickly..." (Seyfettin, 2005:28)

Seyfettin does not specify the reason why Ayşe wants Gülsüm, but it is understood that Ayşe intends to use her power as a man and to enjoy in a man's body what she cannot have in real life. An interesting point in the story is that Ayse takes advantage of the opportunity when she becomes a man. She, who is oppressed by power and authority, uses the first opportunity she gets as a sign of power and violence. This is a contradiction within the story itself. New Ayşe, in a man's body and strength, rather than changing it, conforms to the order by behaving like a man. In other words, with the courage of being a man, she demonstrates power by using force, wrestling, and pressuring. Ayşe has the infinite power to exist as a man in every sense, but especially her desire to break off the marriage is her revenge against Kurt Hodja, whom she completely hates. Breaking the marriage means going against the authority of Kurt Hodja and Ayşe realizes that she can only do this as a man. Kurt Hodja, besides gender roles, is the embodiment of Islamic oppression and hatred of women, and therefore harms Ayşe in every sense. Ercan Gürova (2024) affirms that

5 The Turkish word efe means brave, heroic and strong.
6 The Turkish word pehlivan refers to someone who chooses wrestling as his profession, meaning wrestler.

> One of the most significant social pressures comes from the village imam, who is a clear representative of patriarchy. As a religious figure and a respectable elderly, the imam ensures that the conventional norms are maintained and the heteronormative structure of societal institutions and figures is preserved. Even the name of the village imam, Kurt Hodja, which means "wolf" in Turkish, has certain connotations in relation to gender issues. (p.930)

In particular, Kurt Hodja constantly pressures Ayşe to cover up, even though she is a minor. Then, another symbol of the story, the car (the hijab, veiling), is given by Kurt Hodja. Ayşe E. Çamkara (2024) articulates that "[i]n Ömer Seyfettin's stories, black chador and thick veils are depicted as a veil of bondage in which women are imprisoned, oppressed and deprived of their freedom. This veil prevents women from participating in social life and pushes them to a passive position" (p.828). Likewise, to Yıldız Çiçekçi (2023), Ayşe sleeps in the woods and imagines herself as a stalwart boy because she is afraid of being denied to ride and wrestle, which are seen as peculiarly masculine, and of wearing the chador, which is said to represent socially acceptable female duties (p.727). The car is one of the biggest reminders for Ayşe that she is a woman; that is, it is a representation of being a woman, and this means that Ayşe has to give up what she desires or used to do and live according to what society wants. Therefore, when Ayşe asks for Gülsüm in her dream, she is actually ordering Kurt Hodja to break the marriage and intends to confront him:

> "Who officiated the wedding?"
>
> "Kurt Hodja..."
>
> "Kurt Hodja... Bring him along..."
>
> They also brought Kurt Hodja. Kurt Hodja, who had always ordered everyone, who had always sulked, who had never given face to anyone, had now softened and was standing on his hands and knees (Seyfettin, 2005:29)

Here, Ayşe achieves her main goal and puts Kurt Hodja in an unfavourable position. What Ayşe really wants to do is to show that she can defy all gender roles and oppression. However, even in the dream, Kurt Hodja does not accept Ayşe's orders and somehow continues to oppress her, and refuses to marry Ayşe and Gülsüm:

> Then he turned to Kurt Hodja,
>
> She said, "So officiate my wedding with Gülsüm!"
>
> "I won't."
>
> "Don't do it, hodja!"
>
> "I won't."
>
> "Do it."
>
> "I won't."
>
> "Why don't you?"
>
> "It's not proper. It's not proper."
>
> "It's not proper, I don't know, you'll do it."
>
> "I won't." (Seyfettin, 2005:29)

No matter how much Ayşe resists, Kurt Hodja does not officiate the wedding, which in fact reminds Ayşe of the gender roles and the oppression of being a woman that she cannot get rid of or overcome, no matter what she does. Ayşe tries to use violence against Kurt Hodja for not performing the wedding ceremony, but she is unable to lift Hodja and hit him on the ground; Hodja hangs in the air and announces to the village who Ayşe is and that she is always a woman and cannot break the taboos in

society:

> Ayşe became furious. She shook and shook and shook this cruel man she hated so much. She threw him so hard... But Hodja Kurt didn't fall to the ground! He stayed in the air. And he started shouting in the air. "Hey village... I want you to know, this is not a boy. This is a girl. She should be covered. It is not proper for her to walk around like this." (Seyfettin,2005:30)

Ayşe is once again reminded that there are rules in society that she must abide by and that no matter what she does, she will not be saved. The village people

> [...] had thick, black veils, red loincloths, and they all rushed at her to cover her, to suffocate her under the covers. Ayşe shrugged. She let out a howl. She grabbed her martini. She started swinging the stock. She drove everyone in front of her. Those he caught up with, he brought down on their waist and rolled them on the ground. (Seyfettin, 2005:30)

In this scene, Seyfettin accentuates the symbol of wearing the veil with the colours red and black, signalling the impossibility of avoiding gender roles. Once again, Ayşe cannot defeat Kurt Hodja. The scene depicting Ayşe's fragility and vulnerability continues as follows:

> In the streets of the village, he was chasing villagers in loincloths. As she passed by the mosque square, she saw Kurt Hodja landing on the minaret like a rookie. She immediately dived into the courtyard of the mosque. She slowly climbed the stairs of the minaret, saying, "Oh, if only I could catch this slovenly...". When she reached the balcony, she suddenly grabbed Kurt Hodja: "Isn't it proper?" she grabbed him by the throat. He was squeezing. The hodja stomped hard as he was going out of his mind. The cheers fell with a thunderous crash. Ayşe fell down. (Seyfettin, 2005:30)

Gradually, Ayşe realizes her nightmare; she would not be able to get rid of either Kurt Hodja or the rules of society. As discussed by Canan Albez (2009), "[t]he struggle with Kurt Hodja in the dream is actually Ayşe's struggle with the taboo she has designed in her mind" (p.111). Worse, Ayşe is woken from her dream by her father's fists. She cannot find the support and love she expects, wants, and needs: "She opened her eyes and saw her father punching her in the head. "Daughter of a pig, what were you doing here?" (Seyfettin, 2005: 31). One of the striking scenes in the story is her father's anger when he finds Ayşe, who has been searching for her for three hours. This is another indication of gender discrimination: a boy can come home late, but a girl is not allowed to come home late. There is always a conviction that a girl child needs protection, and she cannot do anything on her own.

Not only Ayşe's father, but also her mother is very angry, and she is angry with Ayşe in her ignorant way, accepting all the rules of the society she lives in: "Angry pig, what were you doing here..." (Seyfettin, 2005:31), she repeats the father's curses and says "she would show her at home" (Seyfettin, 2005:31). The most conspicuous part of the story is at the end, when Ayşe wakes up from her dream, returns to reality and faces being a woman:

> As they approached their house, a voice came from high above:
>
> "Did you find her, Mehmet Agha?"
>
> "We found her, hodja..." Ayşe raised her eyes upwards. Kurt Hodja, barefoot, bareheaded, his sleeves rolled up, was on the high roof of his house, refreshing himself with a pewter pitcher. "Where was she?"
>
> "On the moors. She fell asleep..."
>
> "What was she doing out there in this rain..."
>
> "She won't say, pig."
>
> "Put her in the cover, in the cover... It is no longer proper for her to walk around openly." (Seyfettin, 2005: 32)

The story ends with Ayşe's tears because no one wonders what happened to Ayşe and why she is there, and once again, they try to put pressure on her. Ayşe truly realizes that she is a woman and that gender roles will not change, no matter what happens. In her dream, she dreamed of how she could show great courage in front of all the villagers. Ayşe tells them that she is a man, but this time she wants to pass under the rainbow and does not dare to tell her father what she saw in her dream because when she wakes up, she is still a girl and nothing has changed. When her father calls her 'pig', she cannot say anything out of frustration. Ayşe's silence in the face of her father's insult is not only a moment of her fear but also a symbolic surrender to the oppressive expectations imposed on her. The dream offers her a brief glimpse of transformation and rebellion, claiming masculinity as a shield from the limitations of being a woman, but the waking leaves her powerless once more. The rainbow, once a symbol of hope, change, and courage, now becomes unreachable, a lost possibility. She learns that even in imagination, her attempts to defy gender norms will be punished or erased. Her frustration, then, is not only about this single event, but a realization that her entire identity is being shaped and silenced by forces she cannot control. Her dream gives her a brief glimpse of rebellion, of growing into a man and facing the community with confidence, but reality prevents her from experiencing that change. The rainbow, which stands for liberation and change, becomes inaccessible, a hope that has been dashed. Perhaps most painfully, Ayşe chooses not to fight back because she has already realized that resistance is pointless. She sobs in the last lines due to the agonizing knowledge that she will never be able to define her own identity, in addition to the punishment she receives, yet she still keeps a male author by her side who documents her plight.

## Conclusion

The word eleğimsağma, which gives the story its name, means rainbow, and according to the belief, which is still alive, every wish of the one who passes under the rainbow will be fulfilled. In the story, Ömer Seyfettin delineates the longing of a little girl who is about to enter adolescence and starts to face pressures to wear the car and cover herself. She wants to get rid of wearing a veil by passing under the rainbow to become a man, to be able to play and move freely. The pressure and tension experienced by Ayşe in the context of gender roles are given through two symbols in the story: the rainbow and the car. In this respect, Seyfettin's Eleğimsağma offers a powerful critique of gender roles through the lens of a young girl, Ayşe, who dreams of escaping the oppressive expectations placed upon her because of her gender. Through the use of symbols of the rainbow and the car, the story illustrates how cultural and religious practices gender these roles, limiting women's freedom, wants, and aspirations. Seyfettin's depiction of Ayşe's fervent desire to transform into a man in order to enjoy independence, freedom, and adventure illuminates the larger issue of gender discrimination. Even though Ayşe's metamorphosis into a man in her dream may represent a fleeting moment of emancipation, the ultimate return to the harsh realities of her societal role highlights the significant constraints that strict gender standards put on people. Through the use of Ayşe's story, Seyfettin challenges both the particular gender roles prevalent in his day and the broader social structures that support them, ultimately advocating for re-examination of these roles and their effect on men and women.

From a proto-feminist perspective, Eleğimsağma does not offer a direct program of liberation; rather, it makes visible the injustice embedded in everyday gendered practices in late Ottoman rural life. By confining Ayşe's transformation to the realm of dreams, Seyfettin both opens a space for questioning and restores the existing order, creating an ambivalent but critical stance toward patriarchy. This ambivalence constitutes the story's originality; it gestures toward feminist consciousness before the institutionalization of feminist discourse in Turkish literature. Moreover, that such a narrative is

constructed by a male author is significant for literary history. As one of the founding figures of the modern Turkish short story, Seyfettin's engagement with a young girl's inner conflict signals an early moment in which gender becomes a subject of psychological and social inquiry within nationalist prose. His choice to articulate the constraints placed upon women through a child's voice suggests not only social criticism but also an expansion of thematic boundaries in early twentieth-century Turkish fiction. Through Ayşe's story, Seyfettin challenges the specific gender roles prevalent in his time and the broader social structures that sustain them. Ultimately, Eleğimsağma can be read as a narrative that anticipates later feminist debates by dramatizing how one "becomes" a woman through social restraint, thus reinforcing the argument that gender is historically produced, culturally regulated, and open, at least imaginatively, to reconfiguration.

## References

Albez, C. (2009). "*Türk Milli Eğitimi'nin Genel Amaçları Bağlamında Ömer Seyfettin'in Eserlerindeki Çocuk İmgesi."* Atatürk Üniversitesi, Yüksek Lisans Tezi. https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezDetay.jsp?id=vFhW-oG0JxJqLbMkb6-mAA&no=YqUmdwMEz_fgKk5pMl32Iw

Bektaş, Mahmut, & Barut, Y. (2019) "Toplumsal Cinsiyet Bağlamında Ömer Seyfettin'in Eleğimsağma Hikâyesinin İncelenmesi" Disiplinlerarası Eğitim Araştırmaları Dergisi. 3(6); 116-126

Butler, Judith P.(1999). "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity." 10th anniversary ed., Routledge, PDF file. https://selforganizedseminar.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/butler-gender_trouble.pdf

Boehnke, M. (2011). "Gender Role Attitudes around the Globe: Egalitarian vs. Traditional Views." *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 39, no. 1,pp. 57–74. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43500538.

Connell, Raewyn, W. (1987). "Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics". Cambridge, Polity Press.

Çamkara, A., E. (2024). "Kadın Hak ve Özgürlükleri Bağlamında Ömer Seyfettin'in Hikâyeleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme." Folklor Akademi Dergisi. Cilt:7, Sayı: 2, 824 – 843. 10.55666/folklor.1495534

de Beauvoir, S. (1949). " The Second Sex". Translated by H. M. Parshley, Vintage Books, 1997. Originally published. PDF file.

Gazioğlu Duran C. (2011). "Abdullah Şengül, *Ömer Seyfettin ve Millî Kültür*", Gönen Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, Balıkesir. ISBN: 978-975-01699-8-4.Orcıd ID 0000-0003-4380-5645. (Book Review)

Gürova, E. (2024). "Ömer Seyfettin's Short Story "The Rainbow": A Precursor of Transgender Narratives" Söylem Filoloji Dergisi, 9(2): 924-936

Kalafat, Ş. (2018). "Kültürel Bellek Metaforu Olarak Derleme Sözlüğü'ndeki Gökkuşağı Adları" OPUS– Uluslararası Toplum Araştırmaları Dergisi, 9(16),1143-1166. DOI: 10.26466/opus.460117

Karabulut, R. (2017). "Ömer Seyfettin'in Hikayelerinde Kadınlar Dünyası." Çukurova Üniversitesi Türkoloji Araştırmaları Dergisi, 2(2), 64-90. https://doi.org/10.32321/cutad.354303

Özakın, D. (2021). "Halk İnanışlarında Cinsiyet Değiştirme Motifi Bağlamında Ömer Seyfettin'in 'Eleğimsağma' Hikâyesi", KARE, no. 11, 94-116. ORCID ID 0000-0003-0927-1926.

Seyfettin, Ö. (2005). "*Bütün Hikayeleri 7*". İstanbul, Üç Harf Yayınları.

Şemşek, V. (2020). "Osmanlı Döneminde Kadının Yeri Üzerine." International Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences (IJSHS), 4(3), 191-200

Yıldız, N. (2022). "Hangi rol? Kadın mı? Erkek mi? Ömer Seyfettin'in Ayşesi ve Virginia Woolf'un Orlandosu üzerinden toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri." International Journal of Language Academy, 10 (3), 220-238. http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/ijla.63801

Yıldız Çiçekçi, N. (2023). "The Metamorphosis of Turkish Gender Roles: From The Book of Dede Korkut to A Girl's Dream in The Rainbow." Forum for World Literature Studies, 15 (4), 724-732.

Yılmaz, M. (2020). "Ömer Seyfettin'in "Eleğimsağma" Adlı Hikayesinde Topluma Yönelik Eleştiriler." Hars Akademi Uluslararası Hakemli Kültür Sanat-Mimarlık Dergisi. Özel sayı,203-216. ORCİD:0000-0003-2872-7271