



NARRATING TURKISH WOMEN'S PAST: INTERSECTIONS OF NATIONALISM, GENDER AND MODERNISATION

Elif GÖZDAŞOĞLU KÜÇÜKALIOĞLU*

ABSTRACT

The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 was followed by the introduction of several measures, legal and constitutional changes which aimed to eliminate the Islamic basis of the state and to emphasize the development of a secular ideology. Among these reforms, the adoption of the Swiss code in 1926, the enfranchisement of women to local elections in 1930 and to the national elections in 1934 were important steps in recognizing women as individuals. Although all these reforms prepared the ground for Turkish women to participate in the political and economic realms as 'citizens', none of them brought equality to women. This means that even though some legal measures facilitating the access of women into the public realm were taken, these reforms did not change the position of women in the private realm where women remained subjugated to men. In the new state, women continued to be described according to their traditional female roles and this prevented the perception of women as being equal partners of men. The objective of this article is to trace the historical trajectory of women's movement and to focus on the historical roots of women's involvement into the social life in the Ottoman Empire starting from the Tanzimat period, which signifies an important starting point for the analysis of the woman question. The drive for modernization in the Ottoman Empire is closely connected with the Tanzimat Period and all the developments from 1839 clarify how the woman issue lied at the core of modernization and how woman's visibility was connected with the perception of women as the instruments of modernization.

Keywords: Gender, Modernisation, Nationalism, Turkish Women's Movement.

* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Ufuk Üniversitesi İİBF, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü.

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MİLLİYETÇİLİK, TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET VE MODERNLEŞME EKSENLERİ ÜZERİNDEN TÜRK KADIN HAREKETİNE TARİHSEL BİR BAKIŞ

ÖZ

1923 yılında Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kurulmasını, devletin İslami temellerini ortadan kaldırmayı ve laik bir ideolojinin gelişimini vurgulamayı amaçlayan çeşitli reformlar, yasal ve anayasal değişiklikler izledi. Bu reformlar arasında, 1926'da İsviçre Kanununun kabul edilmesi, kadınların 1930'da yerel seçimlere ve 1934'teki genel seçimlere katılma hakkının verilmesi kadınların birey olarak tanınmasında önemli adımları ifade etti. Bütün bu reformlar Türk kadınlarının siyasal ve ekonomik alanlara "vatandaş" olarak katılmaları için yasal zemin hazırlamış olsa da kadınlara eşitlik sağlamakta çok yeterli olmadı. Bir diğer deyişle, kadınların kamusal alana erişimini kolaylaştıran bazı yasal tedbirler alınmasına rağmen, bu reformların kadınların erkeklere maruz kaldığı özel alanda konumunu değiştirmediğini söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Yeni durumda, kadınlar geleneksel kadın rollerine göre tanımlanmaya devam ettiler ve bu da kadınların erkeklerin eşit partnerleri olarak algılanmasını engelledi. Bu makalenin amacı, kadın hareketi için önemli bir başlangıç noktası olan Tanzimat döneminden başlayarak, kadınların Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki sosyal yaşama katılımının tarihsel köklerini ele almak ve kadın hareketinin tarihsel yörüngesine odaklanmaktır. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki modernleşme eğilimi Tanzimat Dönemi ile yakından bağlantılıdır ve 1839'dan itibaren tüm gelişmeler kadın meselesinin nasıl modernleşmenin merkezinde kaldığını ve kadın görünürlüğünün, kadınların modernleşme araçları olarak algılanması ile nasıl bağlantılı olduğunu açıklamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Modernleşme, Milliyetçilik, Türk Kadın Hareketi.

1. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 was followed by the introduction of several measures, legal and constitutional changes which aimed to eliminate the Islamic basis of the state and to emphasize the development of a secular ideology. Among these reforms, the adoption of the Swiss code in 1926, the enfranchisement of women to local elections in 1930 and to the national elections in 1934 were important steps in recognizing women as individuals. Although all these reforms prepared the ground for Turkish women to participate in the political and economic realms as ‘citizens’, none of them brought equality to women. This means that even though some legal measures facilitating the access of women into the public realm were taken, these reforms did not change the position of women in the private realm where women remained subjugated to men. In the new state, women continued to be described according to their traditional female roles and this prevented the perception of women as being equal partners of men (Kandiyoti, 1987; Arat, 1997; Arat, 2000 ; Tekeli, 1981; Arat 1994).

The objective of this article is to trace the historical trajectory of women’s movement and to focus on the historical roots of women's involvement into the social life in the Ottoman Empire starting from the Tanzimat period, which signifies an important starting point for the analysis of the woman question. The drive for modernization in the Ottoman Empire is closely connected with the Tanzimat Period and all the developments from 1839 clarify how the woman issue lied at the core of modernization and how woman’s visibility was connected with the perception of women as the instruments of modernization.

My main concern is twofold: to analyze women’s activities and early ‘feminist’ struggles and to examine the intersections of nationalism, gender and modernization in order to identify some aspects of the production of gendered nationhood. My main argument in this paper is that although some ‘feminist aspirations’ or a kind of ‘feminism’ appeared especially after the Inauguration of the Second Constitution in 1908, it is possible to suggest a historical continuity regarding the status of women before and after the establishment of the Republic in 1923. The movement of Ottoman women cannot be regarded as an independent movement against the patriarchal order or as a revolt against the societal structure. On the contrary, it was shaped by male-dominated modernizing state policies. The women’s activities and their ‘feminist’ claims were shaped within the existing patriarchal structure and within the limits prescribed by men. This characteristic of the women’s movement did not change after the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The modernization process did not change the traditional roles of women who remained ever and forever-good mothers, wives and ‘demi-citizens’. I am using the word ‘demi-citizen’ to connote that the full citizenship of women has not been realized after the establishment of the Republic because although they represented a new type of women, the limits of their citizenship and their political and social involvement have been described by men.

2. EFFECTS OF TANZIMAT REFORMS ON WOMEN

The modernization in the Ottoman Empire was the result of a necessity to find out radical measures for the decline of the Empire signaled by military defeat and territorial losses. The Tanzimat Edict inaugurated a number of reforms in the fields of legislation, administration and education. All these reforms from 1839 marked a significant change in the political and social life but at the same time, they provoked the debates for the reasons lying behind the decline of the Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, there were people who favored the ideas introduced by the French revolution such as freedom, equality emphasized the importance of modernization for the creation of a secular state. On the other hand, some others found the

abandonment of Islamic rules and the adoption of materialistic values of the West as the main causes for the decline of the Ottoman Empire. To put it differently, the reforms initiated by Tanzimat brought a cleavage between these two ideological positions. (Kandiyoti 1991; Kandiyoti 1988).

From the early stage of the Tanzimat period, the issue of women was debated within the context of modernization. Women's status became an important criterion of a society's modernity. The conditions of women were taken into consideration as reflections of backwardness. The emancipation of women would represent symbolically a solution to get rid off the backwardness (Erol 1992; Durakbaşı 1998). Between 1839 and 1876, different reforms, concerning the status of women were undertaken. In 1858, the Land Law extended and consolidated women's rights of inheritance. The Imperial decrees issued in 1854 and 1857 banned female slavery (Taskiran 1973; Kurnaz 1996). These were important steps concerning the status of women but the most important ones were taken in the educational field. Since the subordinate role of women was treated as a cause of societal backwardness, women had to be educated in order to be modern wives and good mothers. Women needed education because as mothers, they were responsible for shaping their children's mind and the future generations of the nation. (Meriwether and E. Tucker 1999: 100).

3. WOMEN IN THE SECOND CONSTITUTIONAL PERIOD

After the Inauguration of the Second Constitution in 1908, the social position and emancipation of women began to be addressed as main components of three ideological positions. As Göle mentions, the three ideological outlooks of the period, Westernist, Islamic and Turkist which all defined their ideological bases for the re-establishment of the empire differed from each other for their approaches about women's rights. (Göle 1996). The question of women remained powerful in determining the limits of the orientation towards the modernism set by the ideological movements of this period.

For the Westernists, the status of women was a symbol for the development of the society. In this respect, women should be educated and enlightened for the betterment of future generations. Arranged marriages, polygamy, the segregation of sexes were seen as constituting the major obstacles obstructing the liberation of women. (Asim 1989) Contrary to Westernists, Islamists underlined the importance of religious laws for the protection of moral purity of women, which symbolized the ethical values of the society (Kazim 1997). The Islamists attacked several innovations of the westernization process; especially they were against the participation of women into the public life because women were representing the health and the honor of the society. For that reason, they were completely against the idea of being visible in the society. It is possible to say that for Westernists, the social participation of women and their unveiling were important indicators and prerequisites of a civilized life, however, the Islamists defended the idea that only the virtues of women could guarantee the preservation of traditions, thus the morality of the society (Göle 1996:43-44). The Turkist movement, however, started during the Second Constitutional Period continued to be influential in the Republican period and it tried to be establish a link between Western civilization and national culture. Ziya Gökalp contributed a lot to the formation of the main characteristics of the Turkist movement. Gökalp's distinction between the concepts of civilization and culture necessitated that women should be on the one hand the carriers and protectors of culture; but on the other hand, they should be transmitters of civilization. Fleming points out that Gökalp's interest in women stemmed from his objective to (re)discover the original ethnic foundations of Turkish culture. This was in line with his main concern to address the question of how the Western civilization should be adopted while

synthesizing it with the Turkish culture. For that reason, Gökalp's interest in women was based on his idea that they were repositories and guarantors of the past (Fleming 1998: 128).

In the discussion of national culture, Gökalp (1959) mentioned the necessity to return to the original sources of culture and to return to the pre-Islamic societies where he argued that women and men were in equal. He suggested that the history of pre-Islamic Turkish societies offered evidence to support the existence of egalitarian families, and monogamous marriages. He defended the idea that in the primitive societies, two different types of religious practices existed. There were magic and religion, which had the same importance for the society. Among early Turks, women dominated the world of magic while religion was the domain of men. The equal value assigned to each system led to the legal recognition of equality between men and women (Gökalp 1959:254). In order to harmonize the Western civilization with the Turkish past, Gökalp argued that the magic reappeared under another name, civilization, during the Tanzimat period that women began to gain higher status. In Gökalp's thinking, family was taken into account as one of the main foundations of the society and in this respect women were distinguished as forming the basis of the family. (Gökalp 1959: 247-255).

These three ideological positions took women's issue as a component of their ideological bases in support of the restoration of the Empire. They did not consider the issue of women as the emancipation of women but on the contrary, women were taken into the consideration as 'materials' of their ideological debates. To put it differently, they regarded the position of women as a vehicle for the expression of their ideological views. As Kadioğlu mentions, they had two features in common. Firstly, all of them regarded women as 'objects' of their projects. Secondly, although they motivated women to be visible in the public life, they all defined women within the sphere of family (Kadioğlu 1998:89-100).

4. WOMEN'S PERIODICALS AND ASSOCIATIONS

While these ideological debates were going on, another important characteristic of the Second Constitutional Period concerning women was the appearance of several publications. Starting from 1868, several newspapers and periodicals, which were oriented toward women, appeared in the Ottoman Empire. Demirdirek mentions that for the period prior to the establishment of the Republic, it is possible to identify forty publications. Most of these journals were owned and published by men. Some of them had male owners but women were publishing them (Demirdirek 1996: 32). In most of these periodicals and journals, the main topics were responsibilities of women as mother and wives, domestic work, childcare, cooking, familial problems, the need of education and the position of women in the society.

Mahasin (Beauties) which started to be published in 1908 is an example of women's periodicals. The periodical published by Asaf Muammer and Mehmet Rauf defends the idea that the position of women within a society should be strengthened by education. At the same time, it gives information about home decoration, health and hair treatment. (Davut-Akpolat 1995: 42). The most significant name in this periodical is Zöhre Hanım who for the first time, speaks of an ideal Ottomanism. Accordingly, she holds the view that each nation should create its own woman specific to itself through the educational means. In this respect, the most important duty that an Ottoman man expects from woman is the ability to cook and the most significant social responsibility is motherhood. Women should be educated with regard to these responsibilities. (Davut-Akpolat: 43-44).

Although in most of the periodicals and journals, the articles were written on the subjects, which were assumed of being women's interests, there were also a few publications which aimed at questioning the status of women within the society and at demanding some rights in

order for women to participate in the public life (Çakır 1996, Demirdirek 1993). In 1895, the first Turkish women's periodical *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (Newspaper Special to Women) began to be published. All its contributors were women and among the different publications, it activated for a long time (Karakoç 2003, Yaraman-Basbuğu 1999, Çakır 1996). Fatma Aliye, a well-known Ottoman female novelist, was one of the main contributors of this publication and she was an important figure in elaborating on different women's issues such as the role of women in society, the importance of education, women's position in family, marriage and the issue of veiling in her writings. Fatma Aliye argued as early as 1895 that it is men who prevented women's access to education, enlightened thought and faculties that were given on all humanity by God (Sirman 1989: 7). For her, education was of crucial importance for women in order to train children and to grow future generations. She held the idea that women should participate into the labor force and they should be equal in the family. According to her, Islam as a religion was not an obstacle for all these (Esen 2000; Zihnioglu 1999).

After a novel *Muhazarat* (Womanhood) written in 1892 which was about a talented young woman who was prevented from realizing her fully potential backward traditions and laws, Fatma Aliye wrote *Nisvan-ı İslam* (Islamic Women) which was composed of three parts. *Nisvan-ı İslam* is a book where Fatma Aliye attempts to correct the insufficient and false information of the European women about Ottoman society and the position of women in the Empire. In each part of the book, she elaborates on important issues concerning Ottoman women such as concubinage, polygamy, marriage and veiling. In general, she held the view that women should be educated and allowed to participate in society (Fatma Aliye 1993).

Fatma Aliye concentrated on different issues in her articles published in different journals and periodicals but most importantly, she wrote on women's education, the status of women in the society and also women's position in the family. It is important that *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* to which Fatma Aliye was an important contributor underlined its mission on its title page as serving three principles: being a good mother, a good wife and a good Muslim (Kandiyoti 1991:27). All these examples can be regarded as indicators revealing how the woman's question was understood and perceived at the time.

Among the periodicals, another example, *Kadınlar Dünyası* (Women's World) tended to describe itself as a feminist publication and to define feminism by its own terms. The view that women in the Ottoman Empire had important problems, lied at the core of all the articles published in the journal (Çakır 1996; Demirdirek 1993). Women questioned their situation in the society by criticizing the traditional structures and rules. Ulviye Mevlan, the editor of *Kadınlar Dünyası* and the founder of *Osmanlı Müdafaa-i Hukuk Cemiyeti* (Defense of Ottoman Women's Rights Association) was an important personality in defending women's rights in this period (Çakır 1996). In many articles, she argued that men regarded women not as women but as female creatures who were subject to humiliation and that they were disregarded not only in the family but everywhere in public; tramway, theater and restaurants. She emphasized that the main objective of publishing the periodical and of founding the association was to make women more conscious about their interests and their rights. According to Mevlan, this could be achieved only with the realization of the equality between man and woman (Çakır 1998). This marks an important stage for women's emancipation because this can be regarded as a struggle against the traditions and the limitations that made women inferior and as an attempt for the liberation of women.

It is possible to argue that after the inauguration of the Second Constitution, some women from urban and upper class backgrounds started to call into the question the situation of

women and the problems they were experiencing. I am not sure if this movement can be described as a feminist movement or as “early feminism” as some scholars do (Zihnioğlu 2001:27) but it is important to note that a female voice started to be heard which marked really an important turning point in Ottoman women’s lives. I think this can be best defined as “feminist aspirations shared among urban Ottoman women” (Arat 1998).

In these feminist aspirations, one of the most dramatic women’s activities in the analysis of women’s movement in the Ottoman Empire is ‘White Conferences’. ‘White Conferences’ is a series of meetings held by women in Istanbul in 1911, where they exchanged views on different issues concerning the emancipation of women and they tried to examine their status (Sirman 1998:8-9; Demirdirek 1993:93-104; Çakır 1991:150-151). Fatma Nesibe Hanim who was the lecturer of these conferences, defended the idea that women were the oppressed sex and the conditions of women should be developed for the (well-being) of the society. In one of the meetings, she stated, “*We should look for the causes of our disasters in our stupid mothers. They had pity, they were tender and peaceful, and they did not like noise. Such a blind politics is this!*” She continued arguing that women were nothing more than “*a tool of pleasure*”, “*a machine producing child*” and “*a sweet meat*” (Çakır 1991: 151). It seems that the argument is quite radical when the period is concerned because she did not only accuse women, especially mothers, of being passive and responsible for their inferior position, she also formulated policies exclusively for women.

The most remarkable characteristic of this women’s movement is the fact that it was held by a small number of educated women who were coming from middle or upper class and the perception of problems concerning women was not understood in the same way by all the women in the society. Nezihe Muhiddin, the founder of *Kadınlar Halk Fırkası* (Women’s People Party) founded in 1923, resembled the existence of women after the Second Constitution to stones thrown away disorderly by a piece of glacier. She said, “*the women’s activities became visible in the Second Constitutional Period but when we look at the origin and development of these movements, it is impossible to find out a definite, precise objective concerning women*” (Muhiddin 1999: 109). She defended the idea that the Ottoman women had to establish a common platform in order to discuss women’s needs and to investigate solutions to different problems that they faced. What she defended was the need for the unification of women to protect their rights (Zihnioğlu 1993).

The appearance of different periodicals and journals was followed by the emergence of different women’s associations. Although a few number of organizations were founded after the inauguration of the First Constitution, it was after 1908 that many women’s associations ranging from philanthropic to those committed to struggle for women’ rights were organized. It is possible to emphasize two common points with regard to women’s associations of the time. It is obvious that these organizations are important associations interested in different concerns of women if the conditions of the time are considered. This can be an indicator for us showing that women began to become visible in social life and to join the public sphere but on the other hand, it should be also emphasized that apart from a few ones, the traditional female roles such as being good wife and good mother were never questioned.

The first women’s associations were charity organizations whose main objectives were described as helping people who needed help and who were in a difficult situation. In addition to philanthropic associations, there was an extensive increase in the number of associations concerned with the education of women because the enlightenment of women became an important concern of the reformists, the members of the Committee of Union and Progress after 1908. Women had to be scientifically trained to learn how to be modern wives and

mothers. As Jayawardena points out, “*the new bourgeois man, himself a product of Western education or missionary influence, needed as his partner, a new woman [...] who was ‘presentable’ [...] yet whose role was primarily in the home*” (Jayawardena 1986: 12). Several associations appeared in order to give education to young girls, to organize Turkish, English, French and German courses, to teach how to play instruments and to give conferences on different issues concerning women (Çakır 1996). Although it was not the first one but *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti* (The Society for the Elevation of Women) founded in 1909 by Halide Edip was one of the important ones. The aim of this association was described to enlighten and elevate women by respecting national culture and protecting cultural values (Adıvar 1996; Kurnaz 1991:78-79).

It is possible to say that the involvement of women in the social and political life was realized to some extent through the means of different periodicals and associations. The integration of women should be in harmony with their role of motherhood and their domestic duties but at the same time, they should take part in the society. For that reason, another important association, *Osmanlı Müdafaa-i Hukuk-i Nisvan Cemiyeti* (The Society for the Defense of Ottoman Women’s Rights) was established in 1913 with the objective of forming women as wives and as mothers but at the same, it targeted to emancipate and motivate them as citizens (Çakır, 1996:57). The foundation had different objectives such as improving the rules of marriage, consolidating the domestic situation of women, making mothers capable of training their children according to modern pedagogy and encouraging them to earn their lives. All of the objectives were oriented towards the emancipation of women but as it was reflected in its program, there was not any attempt to struggle in order to gain some political rights. In the program of the association, it was stated that women could not yet understand politics of men or get involved in the politics but by the unification, they could arrange their lives as well as increase their knowledge (Çakır 1996:58).

The common point concerning all these women activities, is the fact that although there was a willing and an attempt to change the situation and the problems of women, the solution was defined within the existing patriarchal structure, without questioning the power relations in the society. In other words, women perceived their emancipation in the same way men did. They could not bring any challenge to the existing gender configuration.

When the Committee of Union and Progress came into the power in 1908, the modernization and westernization became the dominant ideology. The reformers of the time underlined the necessity of women’s integration into public life, which would signify a break from the *ancien régime*, but at the same time, women’s bodies would represent their ideological position. The creation of a ‘national fashion’, which meant the way of clothing of Ottoman women in a civilized way, became one of the main concerns of women of that time. As Şeni points out, after the Tanzimat where the drive to modernization got started, women’s dress, was used as an emblem or symbol to indicate a position for and against modernization and to signify a societal choice that goes way beyond the issue of the condition of women (Şeni 1991: 27). The association *Sade Giyinen Hanımlar Cemiyeti* (Association of Women Wearing in a Simple Manner) was founded in 1918 with the aim of creating national clothing for women. The search for a national fashion is a significant example, which indicates how women’s bodies become the material for the symbolic construction of the nation and its boundaries and why the control of women and especially their sexuality is strategic in the maintenance and reproduction of identity and difference. In this context, a particular ideological weight is given to women’s appearance and sexual purity. (Şeni, 1991)

In addition to the creation of a ‘national fashion’, the importance of the formation of a ‘national family’ was also stressed. Since the Second Constitution, the institution of the family was taken into consideration as part of the reforms. It was believed that the radical reforms should also include some regulations aiming at protecting the family as the most important social institution and at creating the notion of a national family. For this purpose, for the first time, *Osmanlı Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyet-i İslamiyesi* (The Islamic Association for the Employment of the Ottoman Women) was founded in 1916 with the aim of finding out employment for women and providing working conditions under which women could earn their lives in an honest way (Toprak 1982: 316-319; Toprak 1988: 34-38).

The Islamic Association for the Employment of the Ottoman Women did not only make possible the militarization of women although they took part in the battalion, it took also the responsibility of protecting the family, which was regarded as the fundamental unit of the society. For that reason, the association made the marriage obligatory for its employees. Accordingly, marriage was mandatory for women by the age of 20 and for men by 25. The association gave incentives for the married couples and different encouragements were done for the birth of each child. The members, who passed the marriage age, were taken away from the membership (Toprak 1988a: 36-38). This effort of establishing a new type of family as a part of the reforms in the society was followed by the 1917 Family Code, which was an expression of these policies and the first penetration of the state into the realm of the family.

5. WOMEN AND THE WAR OF NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War and the occupation of the country by the Allied Forces made the visibility of women apparent and accelerated the mass participation of women into the national struggle. When the War of Independence started in 1919, women took very active roles in the war. Indeed, wars changed the women’s emancipation movement more than any reforms. Women, along with men, became ardent nationalists and actively participated in a series of activities outside their traditional roles. One of the most dramatic manifestations of women’s national activity was the large-scale meetings where women addressed the masses. For example, in the meeting of Sultan Ahmet held on the 23 of May of 1919, Halide Edip made a very enthusiastic speech to many people and in her speech, she declared that the Turkish nation had a spiritual power that nobody could dissolve and that the fight would result in the victory of the Turks (Adivar 1994: 31-34). Grace Ellison, in her book, *Ankara’da Bir İngiliz Kadını* (An English Woman in Angora) spoke of Halide Edip as an example of the involvement of women in the nationalist movement and of their courage, strength and ability. She said: “*we are facing the photographs of Halide Edip at every place of the Anatolia. Turks regard her as their ‘Jean d’Arc’ among the other heroines of the Revolution*” (Ellison 1999: 245).

Halide Edip was an important figure in the War of Independence but at the same time, she is one of the most remarkable personalities in the history of women and of feminism in the Turkish history. For that reason, I find her description of feminism very illustrative in understanding how the nationalist requirements predominated the feminist demands of women. Halide Edip regarded feminism less important than the struggle men and women waged for a nationalist cause. According to Halide Edip, the most distinguishing dimension of women’s liberation movement in Turkey was that it was inseparable from the national independence movement (Durakbaşı 2000). Apart from the example of Halide Edip, many women took part in the nationalist struggle in different ways. They not only participated actively in the meetings but they struggled against the Allied Forces and they fought actively in the war (Tekeli 1986: 183).

6. THE EARLY REPUBLICAN PERIOD

The War of Independence resulted in the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk effected important transformations in all domains of society. One of the first of numerous laws enacted by the new Republic was the abolition of the Islamic caliphate. The adoption of the Swiss Civil Code in 1926 was an important step for women because it encouraged their recognition as individuals within the polity and the family Law, composing an important part of the Swiss Civil Code, abolished polygamy, identified women as legal equals in courts, in inheriting and maintaining property. It also granted women the right to choose their spouses and to divorce.

All these can be regarded as important transformations affecting the lives and the position of women within the society but the woman question as it has been suggested was a “pawn” in Atatürk’s struggle to establish a republican notion of citizenship through the modernization, secularization and westernization (Kandiyoti 1991:38). The participation of women into the political and economic realms became possible through different reforms undertaken after the establishment of the Republic but the main/real intention was not to emancipate women or to bring them in an equal position with men. This became very apparent when the first women’s party was established.

7. WOMEN’S PEOPLE PARTY

After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the first organization of women in political terms was realized through the establishment of *Kadınlar Halk Fırkası* (Women’s People Party) in 1923 by Nezihe Muhiddin (Zihnioğlu 1999b). The main motive behind the establishment was the belief on women as an important social force having the potential to contribute to the welfare and the betterment of the society. Although Women’s People Party was described as being a party, the main objectives of the organization were not recognized in political terms. It was stated that the party would work for the enlightenment of women to facilitate their integration into the public life and to prepare them to their traditional roles of motherhood and to their familial duties. The aim of getting political rights was one of the long-terms objectives of the party (Çakır 1993: 279-280).

Nezihe Muhiddin, in her book *Türk Kadını* (Turkish Women) published in 1931, elaborated on women’s movement starting from the Second Constitution until the establishment of the Republic and at the same time, she explained the foundation and the objectives of the Women People Party. What remains crucial in her book for this study is her understanding of feminism (Muhiddin 1999:69-75). She held the view that there was no point to suggest that women and men did not have physical differences. The differences between men and women made the harmony possible in the society. She pointed out that women and men had to take part in the social life for the betterment of the society. The ‘new woman’ was expected not to live like the ‘old woman’ who was a *belle au bois dormant* but this does not mean that she encouraged women to be independent individuals. On the contrary, she completely refused any individualistic interpretation of feminism. She defended the idea that women should get some social and political rights in order to have new roles in the public life but at the same time they should contribute to the society by being good mothers and good housewives.

Accordingly, in her writing “Why did I establish the Women People Party?”, she noted, “one of the most important points behind this idea was the fear that Turkish women would lose their enthusiasm and would become indifferent after having taken part actively in the national struggle. The second one was the decision to fight against the backward traditions” (Muhiddin 1999:116). It was suggested that the political rights would be achieved sooner or later but

what was of crucial importance was the socialization and the education of women especially of the Anatolian women. For this purpose, the members of the party would struggle against the ignorance by enlightening Anatolian women. In addition, the duties and responsibilities as being mothers and wives were also regarded by the organization as the most important roles of women (Toprak 1988: 158-159).

The establishment of the party was not welcomed in an excited manner by women. Muhittin spoke of her disappointment by saying that she was expecting the unification of all the intellectuals and talented women around this organization but unfortunately, her dreams did not come through (Muhiddin 1999: 118). Only 500 women registered to the party. The men of the time, however, found the unification of women under a party meaningless. They considered the party as an obstacle to the emancipation of women and they defended the idea that they would be able to express themselves easily without a party (Toprak 1988b:159).

The Women's People Party did not get the authorization from the government. The Republican People Party was not yet established and the organization of such a women's party was regarded divisive. After the refusal, the party was turned into an association, to the Turkish Women Association, which was banned in 1935 after having hosted the 12th International Congress of Women's Federation. (Sirman 1989) After the dissolution, Latife Bekir who was the president, explained the closure of the association by pointing out that there was not a woman's problem in Turkey, both men and women had to work together for the benefit of the country and she added that there was no necessity for the association because women had achieved full equality as a result of the constitutional guarantees.

The case of the Women's People Party demonstrates well how the emancipation of women was perceived in the early years of the Republic and how the state restricted and controlled the women's movement. The regime did not introduce emancipation with the aim of liberating women and making them 'individuals'. As Kandiyoti argues, "*Turkish women were emancipated but unliberated*".(Kandiyoti 1987). This was indeed, a fictitious emancipation constructed by men who attempted to motivate women to be a part of the society along with their men and to work together for the benefit of a newly established nation.

The participation of women in the public sphere had very symbolic connotations. The dissolution of the Turkish Women's Association after the Twelfth Congress of the International Federation of Women was not by coincidence. The visibility of women in public sphere concretized the fact that the Turkish Republic was a democratic state, if not a candidate for becoming a democratic state. This indicates that it was the state, which determined the limits of the women's emancipation with regard to modernization. It was a masculine perspective which defined the borders of women's movements and who shaped the content of the feminist movement. Any woman's movement questioning the status of women was discouraged by the state. For example, after the establishment of the Republic, there have been different attempts to differentiate Anatolian women from those in Istanbul who were heading the women's movement. Mustafa Kemal, in his speech in 1923, pointed out the sacrifices of the Anatolian women in the nation-building process and he mentioned that the nation was grateful to these women because of their endless efforts (İnan 1968: 103). In the article published in *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* published under the control of Mustafa Kemal, it was pointed out that a Turkish woman was an Anatolian woman who worked very hard in the national war. In another article published in *Tevhid*, it was declared that the women in İstanbul could never represent Turkish women because they were mainly concerned with having fun and being indifferent to the issues about the society (Toska 1998: 79-81).

This comparison between the urban and the rural women is indicative of how the liberation of women was understood. The identification of Turkish women with Anatolian women and the exclusion of women in Istanbul reflect the extent to which women were included in politics before and after the establishment of the Republic. During the War of Independence, there was not such a distinction because the ideal was to conduct a national struggle against the Allied Forces who had occupied the country. Both men and women participated into the war in different manners but when the Republic was established, the motivation was limited and women who wanted to have active roles in the political realm and who started organizing were accused of having different interests compared to those of Anatolian women who remained in silence. This was an indicator revealing the limits to any women's activism and to women's autonomy.

Women had to wait until 1930 to acquire their political rights. As Tekeli suggests (Tekeli 1981, Tekeli 1986), the process, through which women's political rights were officially recognized, has been realized in two stages. In the first stage, women were enfranchised for the local elections in 1930. The second stage was the enfranchisement of women in national elections in 1934. Tekeli (1981) points out that it was not surprising that the enfranchisement happened in a period where the Nazis were powerful in Germany. The Nazi's credo was "*Kinder*", "*Kirche*" and "*Küche*" which means child, church and kitchen. If women's full enfranchisement was recognized at a time when the Nazis were secluding German women out of political life then, this would reveal that Turkey's single party regime was different from the fascist regime. The women's suffrage was a symbolic move, which would differentiate the single party regime from Hitler's rule in Germany. This means, women's enfranchisement was used as an instrument to symbolize the image of the new regime (Tekeli 1981: 297-299). In the 1937 national elections, 18 women constituting 4.5 percent of the parliamentary seats were elected (Tekeli 1981:299) but it should be emphasized that women's enfranchisement and their inclusion into the Assembly did not result in any autonomous women's activities or any independent political acts (Arat 1994).

8. RECONSTRUCTION OF TRADITION

All these points clarify the fact that the mobilization or the emancipation of women was done for ideological purposes. The visibility of women in the public sphere and the symbolic existence of women in social, political and economic life were perceived as formal requirements of a democratic state. It was the state, which found the emancipation of women appropriate for them without questioning any traditional female characteristics attributed to them. As many scholars suggest, the political, social, economic and political rights inaugurated after the establishment of the Turkish Republic gave many opportunities to women to develop their capacities, to get professional lives and to be educated (Arat 1994, Arat 1990). Rather what I am suggesting is the fact that the emancipation of women was an artificial or manufactured process, which had important symbolic meanings. I think the word 'manufactured' fits very well to the case because on the one hand, it encouraged women to become teachers, doctors and engineers but on the other hand, as Arat mentions, it 'reconstructed traditions' by describing women as good wives or good mothers, and also as carriers of culture. (Arat 1994).

It is possible to give several examples to understand better the picture. The example of Girls' Institutes founded by the Ministry of Education in 1928 is revealing of how the traditional female roles were reinforced by the state. According to the official statements, these schools aimed at "providing girls with theoretical and practical education that would train them in managing hygienic, orderly, economical and tasteful homes, allowing them to establish

cheerful and happy marriages and therefore making them contributors to the social development of the country” (Arat 1994). As Yeşim Arat mentions, this showed that the state encouraged a number of elite women but it sent a message to an increasing number of women that they were expected to contribute to the process of modernization by being housewives “à la West”, bringing order, discipline and rationality to homemaking and the girls’ institutes were instituted for this objective. (Arat 1990). The need to combine the “inner” and “outer domains in Chatterjee’s terms (Chatterjee 1993) or the ‘traditional’ and ‘the modern’ became the main motto of the Republican state for women. Women’s traditional roles were strengthened in the early years of the Republic. The new woman was expected to be an enlightened, educated and social woman who was expected to contribute to the development of the country and to the betterment of the nation, but at the same time, she had to be a good mother taking care of her children and a good wife.

In addition to the strong emphasis on the traditional and domestic roles of women, what remains important in the analysis of women’s emancipation after the establishment of the Republic, as it happened after the Second constitutional period, is the fact women’s bodies became the material for the symbolic construction of the nation and its boundaries. In this sense, their way of clothing, their beauty and their health became symbolic representations of westernization. In the photographs which appeared in government sponsored publications and in Western newspapers from the 1920s to 1930s, we come across the visual images of the ‘new Turkish woman’ as being capable of physical courage and endurance like men, as being involved in activities confined to men; and the improvements in their lives (Graham-Brown 1988: 218-221).

All these photographs are good proofs of showing the symbolization of the new dynamism and modernism of Turkey as a new secular nation through women’s bodies. Connectedly, the example of Sabiha Gökçen, the first Turkish woman pilot, can be another important point to study with for a better understanding of this issue. In one of his conversation with Sabiha Gökçen, Atatürk said, “*The burden of being civilized is on your shoulders. The daughter of Atatürk will be also the daughter of the sky.*” (Gökçen 1994: 98) and he declared, “*you will be the first military woman pilot in the world and could you imagine how prideful is the event that a Turkish girl is the first woman pilot*” (Gökçen 1994: 109). It is possible to argue that women, before and after the establishment of the Republic were used as symbols for concepts, which are not, related to their identity as women or as individuals.

9. CONCLUSION

There is a historical continuity with regard to women’s involvement into the social and political life in the Ottoman Empire and in the early years of the Republic. Women always appeared as objects of male discourse; and to be serving as powerful symbols. Although starting from the Tanzimat, some ‘feminist aspirations’ appeared; the woman’s question has never been an independent issue from the power struggle among males. Even women who acted for the emancipation of women could not go beyond the limits put by men and they were not able to question the patriarchal structure, the traditional and domestic roles attributed to them. On the contrary, apart from a few examples, most of them underlined the importance of the traditional female roles such as motherhood and in a sense; they helped in Arat’s terms, to the reconstruction of tradition by reinforcing the gender roles.

After the establishment of the Republic, not much changed. Although some women from urban and middle-class benefited from the legal forms such as from education and from employment opportunities, women could never take the initiatives and women were conceived as instruments to be used for political ends. The symbolic value of women’s

emancipation was more important than the substance since suffrage or the political participation and visibility of women in public life supported the external images of the Turkish state as ‘a modern nation’. Since women were defined as part of the collectivity and of the new nation, women’s rights were not understood as part of individual rights but rather they were formulated within the framework of policies that aimed to serve the social good. Connectedly, as it happened in the case of the Women’s People Party, any independent organization or any individualistic attempt was regarded as against the interests of the collectivity and at the end, they were discouraged.

The new Republic granted some rights and gave some opportunities for the development of women but it never questioned the gender roles and the male dominance. In this context, it is possible to conclude that women were seen in Cynthia Enloe’s formulation, as the community’s , or the nation’s most valuable possessions; as those responsible for transmitting the nation’s values and through this its political identity; as the bearers of the community’s future generations (Enloe 1990: 50). Since women become the nation’s possessions, they loose their identity, which is constructed as a marker for the representation of the nation; and their status is closely connected for the progress of the nation. In this sense, as Eisenstein suggests, “women become a metaphor for what they present rather than what they are” (Eisenstein, 2000:43).

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