

ERKEN DÖNEM CUMHURİYET DÖNEMİ ÖNCESİ VE SONRASINDA TÜRK KADINI TURKISH WOMEN AND THE EARLY REPUBLIC: BEFORE AND AFTER

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ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı; Türk kadınının Cumhuriyet döneminden önceki ve sonraki değişen toplumsal konumunu araştırmaktır. Ek olarak, Türk kadınına erken Cumhuriyet döneminde sağlanan haklar ve yeni rejimin ideal Türk kadınına bakış açısına dair görüşler ele alınacaktır. Genç Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ni modern-Batılı bir ülkeye dönüştürmek yolunda Türk kadınının sosyal statüsünü kökten değiştirmenin ve kadınlarımızı kendine güvenen, sorumluluk sahibi vatandaşlar yapmanın Kemalist rejimin en temel hedeflerinden olduğu inkar edilemez bir gerçektir. Bununla ilgili birçok iddia ortaya atılmıştır. Bunlardan bir tanesi; Türk kadınının, haklarını yeni rejim sayesinde, hiçbir emek göstermeksizin, tepeden inme bir şekilde elde ettiğidir. Bir diğeri; Türk kadınının, siyasal haklarına diğer milletlerin kadınlarından daha önce kavuşması nedeniyle onlardan daha önde olduğu savıdır. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin erken dönemlerine dair diğer bir iddia ise, Türk kadınının yeni imajının bir modernleşme ve Batılılaşma göstergesi olarak kullanıldığına dairdir. Bu iddiayı doğrulayan veya çürüten başka argümanlar mevcuttur. Bu bağlamda, yeni rejimin, dönemin kadın hareketlerine ve örgütlenmelerine karşı aldığı tavır da birçok yönden tartışma konusu olmuştur. Atatürk reformlarının Türk kadınına güçlendirdiği ortadadır; ancak genç Cumhuriyet rejiminin kadınlara yönelik izlediği politikalar kendi içinde çelişkiler taşımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Türk kadın hakları; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti dönemi; genç Cumhuriyetin kadınları; Mustafa Kemal ve kadın hakları; Türk Kadın Birliği; Nezihe Muhiddin; Türk kadınının politik hakları*

ABSTRACT

In this study, it is aimed to research the changing situation of Turkish women before and after the republic. Also, this paper takes a brief look at the most common argument about the rights of Turkish women granted by the early republican regime and its ideal womanhood image. It is undeniable that one of the main goals of the Kemalist regime was to radically change the status of Turkish women and transform them into responsible, self-confident citizens on the way of making the young Turkish republic a modern and Westernized country. As regards to this, some assumptions are put forward. One of these is that Turkish women acquired their rights without any struggle thanks to the new regime. The other one is that they were ahead of many European women as they received their political rights earlier. Another assumption is that Turkish women's new image was used as an indicator of the modernization and Westernization. There are some arguments both refuting and supporting this view. The stance of the new regime to the women movements and unions of the period is also controversial in terms of reflecting its point of view. It is highly evident that Atatürk's reforms empowered Turkish women; nevertheless, the policies of the early republic related to women had still some contradictions in it.

Keywords: *Turkish women rights; Turkish republican period; women of the young republic; Mustafa Kemal and women rights ; Turkish Women's Union ; Nezihe Muhiddin ; Turkish women's suffrage*

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Introduction

The developments in the status of the Turkish women can be studied according to the social developments, which marked their status. The scope of this paper is to briefly assess some details of Turkish women's participation in political life and their new social status determined by the new regime.

The essays in this thesis have been divided into four sections. The first chapter presents a historical background of the women movements especially during the Tanzimat and Constitutional periods in the Ottoman State.

This is followed by the second section in which what Turkish women attained following the declaration of the republic is discussed. In its sub- sections, the advantages and the disadvantages of the Civil Code along with the other social reforms regarding to women's status in early republic are mentioned.

In the third chapter, both the activities of the Turkish women's union and who Nezihe Muhiddin is talked about. Its other sub-section deals with the enfranchisement of Turkish women and the dissolution of the union.

The last section is devoted to the presenting a comprehensive analysis of the new Turkish woman image from the republican regime and Mustafa Kemal's point of view. In this chapter, some arguments about the connection between the Kemalist reforms and the Turkish women are also dealt with.

In conclusion, in this report, the well-known assumptions suggesting that Turkish women had passed beyond Western women through their suffrage and they achieved it without a considerable effort thanks to the Kemalist reforms are enlightened. Furthermore, the debate on whether Turkish women were used as an instrument of Westernization or another concept is discussed. Moreover, whether republican reforms had been able to remove essentially wide national disparities or not is briefly discussed.

1. THE SITUATION OF THE WOMEN BEFORE THE TURKISH REPUBLIC DAYS

1.1. The Tanzimat Era

To understand the status of Turkish women today, it is crucial to look over what their role in social and private life was in ancient Turkish states. The practices of the ancient Turkish states on the women life differed from the ones in the period followed by the adoption of Islam. To illustrate; polygamy was in practice in the former as well as including some restrictions. In addition, women were granted the right of ownership only when there was no male heir. Another practice that interested the women life was the tradition of leviratus, which means marrying the stepmother or the wife of the brother who died. Its main goal was to keep both the widow woman and the family possessions. Men were forced to treat his wives equally according to the rules of polygamy. With the adoption of Islam, the polygamy practice was permitted only if woman had an illness or she was not childbearing. Furthermore, women were granted the right of ownership in spite of having only 1/3.²

When it comes to the situation of Ottoman women before the Tanzimat era, it would not be wrong to claim almost every Ottoman sultan had a decree organizing and determining the borders of women's life-style. Generally, these firmans were under three headings as the ones organizing their appearance, their relation with men and their public visibility. It must be noted that the Ottoman woman was both economically and socially active. They were interested in not only trade activities but also social ones thereby taking place almshouse, hospitals, bridges, fountains construction.³

Besides, it must be told that with the conquest of Byzantium, women's place in society changed considerably as a result of contact between the Ottoman and Byzantium structures. The Byzantine Empire as a class-society consisted of two groups namely slaves and ruling classes. And the "harem", the practice basing on the seclusion of women who were from the ruling class and lived in the cities was also adopted by Ottoman Empire. But it can be said that the women in Ottoman's harem were also slaves, the socially slaves whose role was limited to reproduction and domestic labour.⁴ It is known in the declining period of the empire, the conditions of the women deteriorated through the adverse regulations especially concerning the women's marriage and divorce rights. To make it clear, the firman of Osman III suggesting that women could go out only four days in a week and some other firmans forbidding women to walk in the streets even with their brothers or fathers were the consequences of this declining era.⁵

The patriarchal structure of the Ottoman legal system had an impact even on domestic architecture. Ottoman women and men used to sit separately inside their home.⁶ In fact, the Ottoman Empire had not a concrete legal system and it was directly affecting the situation of the women. The identity of the Ottoman women was being determined by their Muslim identity under the guidance of Quran.

²Şefika Kurnaz, *Cumhuriyet Öncesinde Türk Kadını(1839-1923)*, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, İstanbul 1992, 10-11.

³Hale Biricikoğlu, "Türk Modernleşmesinde Kadın", *Second International Conference on Women's Studies (EMU-CWS, 2006)*, 2-3.

⁴Nermin Abadan Unat, *Women in Turkish Society*, Leiden, Brill 1981, 293-294.

⁵Emel Doğramacı, *Türkiye'de Kadının Dünyü ve Bugünü*, Ankara, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları 1989, 134.

⁶Afet İnan, *Tarih Boyunca Türk Kadınının Hak ve Görevleri*, İstanbul, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 1975,

Quran was acknowledged as a rule maker in many areas of the social life. In the Ottoman society, a marriage did not require except for a man and a woman who expressed their desire of marry each other in front of two attestors. In other words, a marriage did not have legal base. Nevertheless, the right to divorce as well as the parental rights only belonged to the men. What is more, the testimony of the women and men were not equal in the court. The testimony of two women was equivalent to one man thus leading the testimony of a woman to be accepted as invalid. In terms of the Tanzimat reforms relating to legal order, it can be said women could not take the advantage of them as much as possible. More precisely, they were underutilized. For example, Mecelle created between 1868 and 1888 did not have any article that interested the development of women. Even so, there were a few favorable attempts. 1858 Ottoman Land Code which brought about equality in terms of heritage was one of them. Besides, that women were officially recorded in the general census of 1882 was also remarkable. Additionally, with the amendment in 1911 in the Criminal Code, the article dictating the men committing the offence of adultery would be punished in the same way as women were punished was highly noteworthy. Also in the last place, the promulgation 1917 The Decree of Family Law that laid a legal base for marriages was important.⁷ In the Ottoman society, the life of men were public in contrast to women whose life were restrained to households. From where women could pray to what parts of the public transport vehicles they could travel in were determined by the state.⁸ Ottoman women's appearances were being constrained by veiling and 'ferace' with the intention of distinguishing them from Christian women. There were so many rules regulating their dressings that they sometimes were in contradiction themselves.⁹

When the situation of Ottoman women is analyzed, the influences of the Declaration of Tanzimat Edict are undeniable. Many reforms regarding the improvement of women status in society were made in this era. It was a modernization process and the women question became the main subject of the debates. Before the Tanzimat, women's right to education was limited to Enderun and Ottoman primary schools called 'Sıbyan' with the exception for the daughters of ulama and ruling class. After the Tanzimat, women were able to attain the chance of higher education. Apart from this, thanks to the 1869 General Education Regulations, sıbyan schools which were highly insufficient in terms of many aspects were reorganized and the number of the ones relating to girls' education scaled up. However, that the parents were enforced to meet the expenses of these schools when it is required turned into an excuse to have their daughters drop out of school. As a result, this factor played a significant role in precluding the expanding of Sıbyan schools.¹⁰

Another improvement which stemmed from the Tanzimat era was the opening of Ottoman secondary schools called Rüştiye for girls' education. The first one was opened in Sultanahmet, İstanbul in 1859. Despite the fact that 1869 Regulations offered Rüştiye schools for girls would be opened in other cities along with İstanbul, it could not come true until the period of Abdülhamid.¹¹ In 1915 girls could have high education in Darülfünun under the same roof with boys. But still, the bigotry could be seen in many fields of the life. For example, Afife Jale was not allowed to appear at the theatre stage by the government with the reason that she was a Muslim woman.¹²

⁷Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi, İstanbul, Metis Yayınları 1993, 136-140.*

⁸age, 158-159.

⁹age, 176.

¹⁰Şefika Kurnaz, *age, 17-19.*

¹¹age, 24.

¹²Afet İnan, *age, 96.*

Additionally, the schools for training girls in the fields of midwifery, tutoring with the names of Darülmüallimat and the fine arts were also opened in Tanzimat era for the first time. Darülmüallimat opened in 1870 was considerable on the grounds that it paved the way of career life for Ottoman women. The reason is that parents were not in favor of sending their daughters to the schools where there were male, non-Muslim teachers. Darülmüallimat would train and appoint women teachers for girls' schools including itself. Consequently, the number of the male and non-Muslim teachers in Darülmüallimat and other schools would decrease. What is more, Ottoman women would start their work life in this way.¹³ It must be emphasized that Ottoman women appeared in work life not only at schools. It is also known that in 1897 more than fifty percent of the İstanbul Match Factory workers were Ottoman women themselves.¹⁴

Why the Tanzimat era put such an emphasize on women education was related to the idea that there was a direct link between uneducated women and the emergence of undeveloped societies. This is because they were the mothers who would bring up the next generations and the future was in their hands.¹⁵

The reforms as regards Ottoman women brought about by Tanzimat were not restricted to the educational ones. It also led to some legal and social reforms such as the abolition of concubinage, the right of the ½ land possession and amendments in dressing. The abolition of concubinage could not be put into practice until 1922 when the Sultanate was also abolished as it would conflict with the interests of a certain group.¹⁶ That gave the equal land possession right to women was The Ottoman Land Code of 1858.¹⁷ Moreover, Tanzimat era brought about a change in marriage life and it made their legality compulsory under municipal supervisions. It meant an obstacle on the way women were abused by their spouses due to being lack of legal matrimonial rights.¹⁸ Additionally, in this period, the first women association of the Tanzimat was "Cemiyet-i İmdadiye" established by Fatma Aliye to support the wounded soldiers of Rumeli in 1867.¹⁹ Then, Halide Edip founded the Ottoman Association for the Defense of Women's Rights in 1908.

The influence of Ottoman intellectuals in Tanzimat era was also outstanding on women's struggle. These intellectuals who dealt with the women problems within the frame of governmental approach asserted their opinions only about certain issues such as polygamy, women-dressing and education. Additionally, their being in favor of women's education was closely related to the desire of having an educated wife and mother in their family rather than living in a developed society. They also argued that the efforts for women liberation and modernity must have been made with the intention of not providing them with political or any other crucial rights but making them more visible in public life. Involving in political life would be the last phase of the process according to them. An important reason for emphasizing the polygamy, dressing and concubinage issues was that non-Muslims in the Ottoman society associated these practices with Islamic values. Therefore, the Ottoman intellectuals like Fatma Aliye were striving to correct this view thereby publishing the texts mentioning about how much the Islam care about women. This is because Tanzimat intellectuals advocated keeping the balance between modernity and the traditionality. They often highlighted the necessity of adhering to the cultural values and but not turning back to Europe in the pursuit of modernization.

As a conclusion; the women themes of Tanzimat era were limited but the situation would have been improved in the Second Constitutional period during which numerous women newspapers and magazines would be published.²⁰

¹³Şefika Kurnaz, *age*, 39, 177, 44, 48

¹⁴Hale Biricikoğlu, *agm*, 4.

¹⁵Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler, İstanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yayınları* 1998, 71.

¹⁶Şefika Kurnaz, *age*, 51, 52, 53.

¹⁷Hale Biricikoğlu, *agm*, 4.

¹⁸Yasemin Avcı, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde Tanzimat Döneminde Otoriter Modernleşme ve Kadının Özgürleşmesi Meselesi", *Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, 2009, s. 5

¹⁹Burhan Göksel, *Çağlar Boyunca Türk Kadını ve Atatürk*, Ankara, Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları 1993, 136-137.

²⁰Şefika Kurnaz, *age*, 124-134.

1.2. Constitutional Period

The Second Constitutional period from 1908 to 1918 was a time, which was considered to lay the bases of Republic in that it led parliament to be opened again. There were main two grounds of why it was acknowledged as the declaration of liberties by Ottoman women. In the first place, Constitutional period put a greater emphasis than Tanzimat did on women education. The women magazines and newspapers increased in number and women activities became much more appreciable. Ottoman women attained the higher education in this era for the first time and they could study at Darülfünun beginning from 1914. The fact that girls were sent abroad for education again for the first time also demonstrates how important the women education was. It must be indicated that which made women hopeful about their future was the manner of members of the Committee of Union and Progress itself. They were following a policy basing on making women more socialize by liberating them from their traditional roles.²¹ Along with these, there were diverse views about how women education must be. For instance, Edhem Nejat was asserting that girls who would take the same education with boys would not be an ideal housewife and not get on with their husbands. Another intellectual, Halide Edip Adıvar had the view that only primary schools must be national while the education of subsequent years were required to be given in the foreign schools. Because she thought the national schools were imposing certain cultural and religious values to the students.²² The ideal image of the Constitution women was defined as the one both educated and leading her life according to the Islamic rules. This woman was supposed to be suitable for motherhood and obedient to her husband in addition to being a good- Muslim.²³

Another development of the period was the enacting of 1917 Law of The Domestic Relations which regulated some issues such as the minimum marriage age of girls, the right of divorce and conditional polygamy. According to it, only girls over 17 ages could marry and polygamy could be possible only if the spouses agreed. Besides, women could have the right of divorce with this enactment.²⁴ But it could not stand for a long time and it was turned to Mecelle which did not include any regulations related to critical issues.

Economic activeness of Ottoman women in constitutional period was also considerable. They made up %30 of the industrial workforce. Textile, agriculture and food sectors were the ones in which women were most active. Established as a consequence of the policy of the Committee of Union and Progress towards women, women associations started to arrange conferences to enlighten each other in this period.²⁶ The unions generally focused on charity affairs and their number was nearly thirty. Cemiyet-i İmdadiye (1908) , Teali Nisvan (1908) Donanma Cemiyeti Hanımlar Şubesi (1912) , Asker Ailelerine Yardım Hanımlar Cemiyeti (1914) were only some of them.²⁷ It was a period in which even men did not have institutionally equal political rights. That is why Constitution women demanded for social equality rights with men rather than political ones. Besides, that the favorable stance of the Committee of Union and Progress leaders to the women movement was due to enhancing its legitimacy and popularity must be underlined.²⁸

The prominence of the women in this era was also relevant to the fact that they had gotten rid of the face-veils and showed their faces on the media. The first woman who showed her own was Yaşar Nezihe. It was also in the Constitutional period that women could get on the plane for the first time and the first woman to do this was Belkıs Şevket.²⁹

Between the years 1868 and 1908, women started precisely forty journals as a part of their struggle. And they were entitled to found associations in 1908.³⁰ The issues discussed in the journals such as Kadınlar

²¹Ahmet Özkiraz, M. Nazan Arslanel; "İkinci Meşrutiyet Döneminde Kadın Olmak", *Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Dergisi*, Cilt III, Sayı I, 2011, 3-4.

²²Şefika Kurnaz, age, 75.

²³Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, age, 75.

²⁴Ahmet Özkiraz, M. Nazan Arslanel; *agm*, 5.

²⁵Burhan Göksel, age, 169-170.

²⁶Ahmet Özkiraz, M. Nazan Arslanel; *agm*, 5.

²⁷Şefika Kurnaz, age, 111-122.

²⁸Ahmet Özkiraz, M. Nazan Arslanel; *agm*, 5,7.

²⁹Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, age, 75-76.

³⁰Hasan Coşar, *Tarihte ve Günümüzde Kadın*, Ankara, Sınırsız Kitap ve Yayıncılık 2013, 119.

Dünyası, Kadın, Musavver Kadın, Hanımlar Alemi, Demet, Genç Kadın, Türk Kadını were diverse and not consist of only trend, beauty, art, child care. They also mentioned about Western feminist movements as well as the status of Ottoman women in the society.³¹

Therefore, it can be said that the media of the time played a fundamental role in women struggle. All women irrespective of their age or social class could remark their opinions thanks to the women magazines which were published in the period. Nevertheless, occasionally they had to use nicknames. Terakki-i Muhadderat was the first women magazine published in 1869. Moreover, the magazines called 'Aile' published in 1880 and 'İnsaniyet'in 1883 were the ones aiming at enlightening women. The Şükufezer was the first one whose both owner and all writers were women. Another magazine, The Mürüvvet published in 1888 was supported by Abdülhamid II and it included cultural issues and the agendas of the other women worldwide. This magazine was also noteworthy in that it was the first having published the poems of Nigar Bint-i Osman. One more outstanding magazine called Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete published in 1895 was famous for having supremacy in terms of longevity. It was published until 1908, for 13 years.³² With the Second Constitution in 1908, it was seen a considerable increase in the number of the magazines intended for giving voice to women's problems. Demet, Mehasin and Kadın were the first ones and Demet which published the compositions of Halide Edip was also first in terms of mentioning political subjects.³³

Now that it served for the Ottoman Association in Defense of Women Rights which was considered as the first feminist association in the Ottoman history, Kadınlar Dünyası showed up as the most popular one among numerous women magazines. It was again Kadınlar Dünyası which initiated the women struggle.³⁴ It must be noted that some of the magazines prefer only women writers while others allow also men to write thereby informing people about what men think about the status, rights and challenges of the women. For instance, the male writers of İnci were emphasizing the importance of being a good wife and mother on their columns.³⁵ The writers of Kadınlar Dünyası were advocator of more radical reforms in the educational field and demanded for mixed education. When the educational problems were solved, the cornerstone of the social development would have been paved.³⁶ Also, they were calling for an adjustment in the conditions of working women who were underpaid when compared to male workers.³⁷

While the magazines were verbalizing the women's struggle in an individualistic way, the women associations turned these attempts into an collective endeavour. There were many associations whose objectives were different from each other. Some were focused on the charity works and some were dealing with the national problems or the national defence. There were also ones that centered on the concept of feminism.³⁸

The second half of the nineteenth century was marked by as a period in which women spoke about their demands freely. The literature had been so widely used by the women to express their claims. While Makbule Leman and Nigar Bint-i Osman were giving voice to women's demands in their poems; Fatma Aliye, Emine Semiye and Nezihe Muhiddin conveyed their thoughts through articles. In the era between 1868-1908 called as 'Early Period of Ottoman Women Movement; the activities of the women mentioned were also followed by the Western feminists in the frame of Ottoman feminism. The women magazines of the Constitution were demonstrating to the Western world how much talented the Turkish women were. They were keeping themselves at a distance from the West; because this early stage of feminism was based on the concept of superiority of Islam. The despotic regime of Abdülhamid and his censorship mechanism had also impact on this situation. The leaders of this early feminist movement were the women defined as elite not the ordinary ones. Besides, in this era, slavery and concubinage still maintained their existence in the society.

³¹Şefika Kurnaz, *age*, 124-134.

³²Serpil Çakır, *age*, 22-27.

³³*age*, 32-33.

³⁴*age*, 79, 86.

³⁵*age*, 39.

³⁶*age*, 247, 249.

³⁷*age*, 299-300.

³⁸*age*, 43.

And the leading figures of the movement strived for making the conditions of them better rather than eradicating these practices. Therefore, they can be said to have intended for a kind of Islamic reform whose bases would be shaped around 'the women.' debate.³⁹

Fatmagül Berktaş is in the opinion that some factors such as the cultural impacts of Ottomans' shariatic concept and the empire nationalism used so as to both save the empire and integrate the Islamism with civilisationism made the liberation of Muslim-Ottoman women difficult. And she adds, this was passed to the Republican era's women movement.⁴⁰

In conclusion, the claim that Ottoman women had not put up a fight for attaining some rights is wrong on the grounds that they struggled vigorously for the sake of their liberation through either magazines or associations and conferences. There are several reasons of the assumptions that they were granted some rights effortlessly. One of these is women history was made by male intellectuals rather than women themselves. Another reason is that these male writers made use of secondary sources instead of original ones. Furthermore, that Republican regime approach basing on breaking with the past played a crucial role in being neglected of the women history. When the Ottoman women emancipation struggle is studied, it can be seen that it had gone through some certain stages. The first stage was that society having transformed culturally, politically and economically had been liberated. The second one was that the liberated society could not have any reflection on the side of women. And the final stage was awaken of Ottoman women to their inferior status and understood that they could change it only through their own efforts thus taking the action. Meantime, it must be noted that however the Ottoman women struggle appeared with the ones in Europe nearly at the same time, theirs was much more challenging since the situation a women in a Muslim country is only possible with a transformation in the all state administration.

In addition, the Ottoman women struggle was not only in behalf of women liberation but also of saving the empire from falling. The reason was that it was believed there was a connection between the rising of women and the salvation of the state.

In the last place, despite all these developments of the period, women were not contented with them as they thought they could still not take the advantages of the equality and freedoms of the period as much as required. On the other hand, the Second Constitution regime had not has this kind of a plan targeting to develop women's status in society. There was no such a revolutionary atmosphere on behalf of the women and it was because of the emancipatory movements in the era that women had gained slightly more freedom. Along with these, it must be added that the leaders of the Union and Progress Committee raised the expectations by holding a conference and highlighting the social importance of women there. Also, the number of the women working in its sub-branches had an impact on women.

In the Constitutional period, there were three main point of views as the Westernist, Islamist and Turkist ones related to the women rights. According to Islamist intellectuals such as Aksekili Ahmet Hamdi ve Musa Kazım, the maintenance of the family was possible through the Sharia. And womens should have been kept away from all the threats to the family life. Also, the polygamy and one-sided divorce rights must have been considered legitimate. The underlying cause of the unilateral divorce rights was the capricious and unreliable nature of the women. On the other hand, the Westernist intellectuals such as Abdullah Cevdet and Selahattin Asım believed that the social problems were rooted in the inferior status of women. And they were against to the polygamy, concubinage and the tesettür.

³⁹Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği, İstanbul, Metis Yayınları 2003, 42-53.*

⁴⁰Fatmagül Berktaş, *Tarihin Cinsiyeti, İstanbul, Metis Yayınları 2003, 96.*

The Turkist intellectual like Ziya Gökalp was pointing out the pleasant status of the women in the ancient Turks. That Islamist view came out as the most influential one among them makes the reason of lower status of Ottoman women clear. No matter what ideology they defended, all were still assessing the situation of women in the frame of their domestic roles.⁴⁶

2. THE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE STATUS OF TURKISH WOMEN FOLLOWING THE REPUBLIC

2.1. The Role of 1926 Turkish Civil Code in Turkish Women's Emancipation

The most remarkable reform which followed the proclamation of the Republic was the adoption of the Civil Code in 1926.⁴⁷ In fact, the women reforms of the republican regime can be examined under two titles as the social rights as resulting from 1926 Civil Code and the political rights which would be gained in the upcoming years; however, the issue of the Turkish women's political rights would be mentioned in the third and last sections.

Thanks to the Civil Code introduced by the rulers of the republic; it was put a ban on polygamy and women were granted equal rights in some crucial matters such as divorce, child custody and inheritance. It is undeniable that such deep and entrenching reforms paved the way for comprehensive changes in the status of its womanhood.⁴⁸ Much as the Civil Code led to crucial reforms; it could not reflect the rising women movements rooting from the previous decades and simply served the interests of patriarchal system. These women were forced to have permission of their husbands to work, that all parental rights were entitled to the men and also that women could work only so as to create supplementary budget were the typical pro-patriarchy articles.⁴⁹ Also, it forced women to take the surnames of their husbands and acknowledged man as the leader of the family. Additionally, there was a conspicuously unfair law limiting the age to remarry for women while it was not binding for men. According to the ninety fifth article of the code, widow women whose marriage was over as a consequence of her husband's death, divorce or simply annulment of the marriage could not marry before 300 days. What is more, the Civil Code opened the way for divorce to the males whose wives had lost their virginity before marrying. That a married woman was subjected to rape and her incapableness in households were accepted as grounds for divorce. It is true the legal grounds of the Kemalist reforms for women was formalised in the frame of 1926 Civil Code. Nonetheless, it had many articles which would lead Turkish women to be exposed to unfairnesses. To exemplify, although the spouses had equal responsibilities over the children, in a case of disagreement, the parental rights belonged to men. The responsibility of earning the livelihood also belonged to men. That Civil Code refused to give women having subjected to violence the right to prosecute is also discriminatory. It entitled them only the right of divorce in such a case.⁵⁰ In summary, much as the government claimed that it made the Turkish women liberated, it necessarily was in cooperation with the patriarchy. It would pave their way to be the only breadwinner at home in return of their support to the new regime.⁵¹

⁴¹Serpil Çakır, *age*, 313-321.

⁴²Şefika Kurnaz, *age*, 20.

⁴³Burhan Göksel, *age*, 136.

⁴⁴Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *age*, 54.

⁴⁵Bernard Caporal, *Kemalizmde ve Kemalizm Sonrasında Türk Kadını (1919-1970)*, Ankara, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları 1982, 77-101.

⁴⁶Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, *age*, 92.

⁴⁷Şefika Kurnaz, *age*, 139.

⁴⁸Sibel Duroğlu, *Türkiye'de İlk Kadın Milletvekilleri, Yayınlanmış Yüksek Lisans Tezi*, Ankara, Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2007, 56.

⁴⁹Hale Biricikoğlu, *agm*, 7-8.

⁵⁰Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, *age*, 56-58.

⁵¹Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *age*, 223.

Not only the Civil Code but also The Penal Code included many adjustments against the women rights. To illustrate; only one sexual relationship suffices in accusing women of committing the adultery. On the other hand, to accuse of a man for doing the same thing, he was supposed to have a similar relationship just as he had with his wife. The 468th and 469th articles of the penal code are also against the women interests in that it forbade abortion by punishing both the abortionist and the expectant mother. Similarly, the 1936 Labor Law applied a kind of gender apartheid by excluding women from the hard labour fields such as mining sites, construction areas and manufacturing industry. The reason was that these fields were risky in terms of women fertility.⁵²

2.2. Social Reforms Concerning to Women's Status of the Early Republic

That Turkish women were given the right of primary education in 1923 must be underlined as a significant development of the era in that it would lead a noticeable increase in the women employment in the subsequent years. When the statistics of the 1970s are looked through, the Turkish women employment rate comes third while the first ones were belonged to America and Canada.⁵³ In fact, there are some other reforms which indirectly paved the way of providing same educational opportunities to women with men. For example, due to the two-headed educational system, some students were going to the schools whose curriculum was based on religion while some were going to the modern ones. With the Law on Unification of Education in 1924, March 3; this system was ended. As an another example; thanks to the amendment in the 1924 Constitution, the primary school was made compulsory. The number of the girls' colleges increased as well in the republican era. Considered as connected to the low literacy rate, the Arab alphabet was replaced with the Latin one. All of these were important attempts in terms of women's education. Owing to these reforms, the number of the girls in primary schools remarkably increased as well as in the secondary schools and Darülfünun.⁵⁴ And as one of the rare advantages of the Civil Code in terms of women's status, the doors of all schools except from the war academies were opened to the women.⁵⁵

Besides, it was in this period that the practices forcing women to sit in the public transportation vehicles apart from the other people were decided to be invalid. Besides, the veil and turban dressings were banned.⁵⁶ This was a great step forward as far as women's status was concerned.

Additionally, it must be said that until the republican period, the limited educational opportunities of the Turkish women and the disbelief about the disadvantages resulted from the career life of a woman over her family life posed an obstacle in their involvement in economical life. But their visibility in social and economic life was noticeable as of 1927.⁵⁷ In 1932, Keriman Halis, the granddaughter of the Sheikh ul-Islam⁵⁸ was sent abroad to compete in the beauty contest and she came first as the Miss World. It was a notable development in that both she was supported by Mustafa Kemal himself who was sincerely believing the beauty of Turkish race.⁵⁹

With the Hat Law of 1925, as another social reform, wearing fez and turban was forbidden; but there was no concrete law concerning the women's dressing. Atatürk had already begun to prepare the society to get rid of veils and turbans. Especially in the parties held in the big cities, the women with a modern looking could be faced.⁶⁰

⁵²Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, *age*, 58-60.

⁵³Age, 51.

⁵⁴Burhan Göksel, *age*, 159-163.

⁵⁵Emel Dođramacı, *Atatürk'ten Günümüze Sosyal Deđişmede Türk Kadını*, Ankara, Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi 1993, 40.

⁵⁶Yaprak Zihniođlu, *age*, 167.

⁵⁷Emel Dođramacı, *age*, 46-47.

⁵⁸Bernard Caporal, *age*, 652.

⁵⁹Burhan Göksel, *age*, 173-174.

⁶⁰Şefika Kurnaz, *age*, 181-182.

Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to assume that all Turkish women took the advantages of these reforms. On the contrary, as Graham-Brown stated, the urbanite and modern women images of the republican reforms had nothing to do with the women images in the countryside.⁶¹ Nevertheless, making radical changes in the lives of these women were not possible through only formal regulations. There also were informal factors such as culture, economic conditions, gender roles or religious beliefs leading this transformation.⁶² Zehra Arat maintains that the main factor causing these women not to have taken the advantages of the women reforms was the traditional Islamic values. Additionally, Turkish Republic was an agricultural society without the proletariat and bourgeoisie classes and it's a politic women power could not adopt the state feminism yet.⁶³

3. THE FIRST WAVE FEMINISM THROUGH THE ACTIVITIES OF THE TURKISH WOMEN'S UNION AND ENFRANCHISEMENT OF TURKISH WOMEN

3.1. The Activities Of The Turkish Women's Union And Nezihe Muhiddin

The first wave of Turkish feminism, the period between 1868 and 1935, can be categorised under three stages. The first stage simply begins in 1868 when the Ottoman women became popular through the newspaper of "Terakki" and lasts to the second constitutional period. The second stage is marked by the women's feminist activities in the second constitution and their considerable efforts in the War of Independence. And the last stage of the first wave refers to the period from 1923 marked by the proclamation of the republic to 1935 when the Turkish Women's Union dissolved itself unanimously.

When it comes to the first wave of the Turkish feminism, Nezihe Muhiddin is considered as the key figure of the period partly because that her struggle under the frame of Turkish Women's Union between 1924 and 1927 had been suppressed by the republican regime.⁶⁴ Not having had a higher education, she can be said to have improved herself especially through private lessons for various languages such as French, German and Arabic. It is true that she acted as the leader of the group who had taken over the struggle of Ottoman women.⁶⁵ Nezihe Muhiddin was in the opinion that the women liberation of the constitutional period was closely related to the rights devoted to the non-Muslim women of Tanzimat era who could show up with men in the streets especially in Beyoğlu. This acted as a triggering factor on Turkish women's demands according to her and it was therefore their dressing turned out to be a little bit more unconstrained.⁶⁶

The thing which gave a start to the first wave was the establishment of the Turkish Women's Union in 1923 following the achievement of the War of Independence. Why Nezihe Muhiddin and her fellows waited until 1923 can be explained with the convenient atmosphere provided by the new regime. Moreover, the women struggle dating back to the early Ottoman era and having gained momentum with the constitution had already culminated in this era.⁶⁷ Except from these two factors, the facts that women began to appear in both working life and social life as a result of the decrease in male population due to the World War I and it was considered as an indicative for a possible different life style for women were also influential in the process.⁶⁸

⁶¹Deniz Kandiyoti, *Cariyeler Bacılar Yurttaşlar: Kimlikler ve Toplumsal Dönüşümler*, İstanbul, Metis Yayınları 1997, 216.

⁶²Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, *age*, 143.

⁶³*age*, 51-52.

⁶⁴Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *age* 19-21.

⁶⁵*age*, 35.

⁶⁶*age*, 109.

⁶⁷*age*, 119

⁶⁸*age*, 82.

In those times, the Turkish Grand National Assembly was providing only men over 18 years old with the political rights resulting in the representation of the women by their husbands. Between the period from 1920 in which assembly was set up and till 1934 when Turkish women were granted political rights, the issue of women's political rights was not taken into consideration by the deputies. On the grounds of a questionnaire which reveals the dimensions of the increasing women demands, Nezihe Muhiddin and thirteen women organized a conference thus declaring they would found an association whose ultimate goal is get the state to award women with political rights. Their priority was based on the achievement of the right to stand for election. The right to vote would come after. They highlighted the fact that they did not intend to be elected to the parliament and they just demanded their political rights. Consequently, at the end of the conference, the establishment of the Women's People Party was declared in 1923. It also had the media support in a short time especially of some well-known newspapers such as *İkdam* and *İleri*. The other prominent members aside from Nezihe Muhiddin were Nimet Rümeyde, Şükufe Nihal, Latife Bekir, Seniyye İzzeddin, Muhsine Salih and Matlube Ömer. Most of them both were well-educated and is not known whether their close relations with the leaders of constitution were coincidental or not.⁶⁹ In regard to the official structure of the union, the Charter of the Party was consisting of 27 articles which stressed the political rights would be gradually achieved and the process would be step by step. The first stage was making women more outstanding in social, political and business life. Also, except from the political rights, they had some other goals such as women's education and charity campaigns for the orphans and widows. The first reaction from the officials was that of İstanbul governor Ali Haydar Bey. He was implying he took neither this women party nor its Charter serious seeing that they were not well educated enough for this endeavour.⁷⁰ The party had radical views as regards to its time such as equality of women and men. Additionally, it was trying to impose that women were the most effective force of a society. Therefore, it was converted into an union and obstructed to be emerge as a political party.⁷¹ The women who had no political rights were highly unlikely to be allowed to found a political party by the state in fact.⁷² In the meantime, the Ministry of Internal Affairs did still not the give establishment license of the Women's People Party although women had been waiting for 2 months.⁷³ The Turkish Republic government's response to the application of the women was negative in addition to its being late for 8 months. The reason was also obscure. They were pointing out some articles which were approved by themselves. Furthermore, a group of women even who did not have the political rights could not form a party. Nezihe Muhiddin was in the opinion that government found their objections considerably assertive in that they were defending in the charter women would join the army in case of the need. On the other hand, Zafer Toprak attributed their preclusion to two main reasons. The first one was the Women's People Party seemed like a separatist one

⁶⁹*age*, 120-130.

⁷⁰*age*, 132-138.

⁷¹*Şefika Kurnaz, age*, 141.

⁷²*Serpil Çakır, age*, 76.

⁷³*Yaprak Zihnioğlu, age*, 142.

and contrasted with the all-embracing atmosphere of the new regime. Secondly, the name resemblances of the parties had a negative impact on the Republican People's Party. Yaprak Zihnioğlu claimed the reason was closely related to the fact that Republican People's Party was in the pursuit of taking the advantages of women reforms for their own interests. Accordingly, government would introduce the women rights as a reflection of the Republican modernization. That is why it could not allow women to determine the dimensions of the women reforms by themselves. Additionally, the article suggesting Women's Party would also be organized outside İstanbul made the government feel resent less. It might lead to a mass-movement around the country. Consequently, Nezihe Muhiddin and her friends found the solution in revising the charter and some certain articles were amended and moderated. To get the establishment license, they had to do this. The articles relating to the organizing in other cities and especially the one concerning political rights were withdrawn. In fact, they did not give up their intentions. They were striving to get the permission and gather under a single roof as soon as possible. In other words, it was a tactic and they would restart their struggle whenever the circumstances allow. At the time, the leading figures of the party were also trying to assure the government of their loyalty to both the new regime and Mustafa Kemal himself. The concept of a women's party was given up. And the new charter was approved by the government thereby leading to the establishment of Turkish Women 's Union in 1924, February 7.⁷⁴

3.2. The Enfranchisement Of Turkish Women And The Dissolvment Of The Union

The first attack of the union was to nominate Halide Edip Adivar and Nezihe Muhiddin in 1925 for replacement of a parliamentarian in İstanbul. It was a propagandist action and the main purpose was to keep the issue of women's political rights on the agenda.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, while the government was trying to cope with many difficulties like the Şeyh Said rebellion, that women were making such propagandas was highly criticised. The other attempt was again in 1925 when they started a journal entitled to "Kadın Yolu" in which there were important essays regarding to the women rights and their social status. In this journal, not only women writers but also prominent male writers such as Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar, Abdullah Cevdet, Yaşar Nabi Nayır had columns.⁷⁶

Turkish Women's Union followed a relatively moderate policy against the government. The situation of the period required to do so because of the strict measures due to the 1925 Şeyh Said rebellion, putting an end to the publishment of six newspapers, enactment of the Takrir-i Sükun Law and the foundation of the Independence Courts. Therefore, the Union maintained their activities without leading to dissensions. But in 1926, they made another endeavour thereby applying to Republican People's Party for the membership. The main reason behind this was again the demand of political rights; but they could not get a favourable result apart from bringing the issue forward one more time.⁷⁷ 1927 was the year during which women so effectively work that both in İstanbul and other cities the increase in the sub-organizations of the union was considerable.⁷⁸ In the congress whose meeting goal is to discuss the article related to the women political rights and put it on charter again⁷⁹

⁷⁴age, 147-154.

⁷⁵age, 156-158.

⁷⁶age, 163-165, 169.

⁷⁷age, 175, 177.

⁷⁸age, 188.

⁷⁹age, 196.

Some members of the union argued that there was corruption in the election of the ruling committee and budget accounts of the union. The union should have dissolved itself. The accusations were not only rejected by Nezihe Muhiddin but also refuted by the investigation commission. Even though the Union firstly decided to nominate some women for 1927 elections, it turned out to be a failure. Then, they nominated Kenan Bey who was also a member of their union as a candidate; but the humiliating rumours caused him to withdraw his candidature. In other words, the political status of Turkish women was never off their agenda. They were maintaining their struggle diligently. These attempts had repercussions both in the society and the parliament. Recep Peker, the Minister of the Defence of the day, called on women to join the army if they were so interested in the governmental affairs. Besides, Falih Rıfkı Atay argued that there was not any disagreement between the regime and the Turkish women. The republican government had already made crucial women reforms but the problem was lying in that they were hard to come by all women. Therefore, the union should have dealt with this.

In a time when Mustafa Kemal came to İstanbul as a president for the first time since 1919, the union met him in a surprising way. Because a commission of the women were sent to get an appointment to talk him but they were invited to meeting. Therefore, the arrangement of the women having been planned to talk M. Kemal was called off. Despite the unlucky attempts in 1927, women were still emphasizing their demands decisively. In such a year when the union enhanced their members all over the country, that the government started its operation aiming to shut down the union thus ending its activities. According to Yaprak Zihnioğlu, the timing of the government is meaningful in that the union was in its heyday of the popularity and she asserts the power of the union made the leaders worried somehow.⁸⁰

The next step would be refusing permission requests of the union for some activities like going camping and making a voyage. In this way, the governments would make their unfavorable attitude to the union noticeable in the society. As a result, the rumours that the union would be closed spreaded. In those days, the opponent group in the union indicated that the stance of the government was caused by the ambitious image of Nezihe Muhiddin who was previously accused of corruption and illegalities so she was supposed to resign immediately. With the second official investigation in 1927, September 10; Nezihe Muhiddin was alleged to have made expense from the union budget. And on 19, September, the union was shut down by the government. Following all happenings, while Muhiddin was trying to arrange a congress to discuss what to do, the opponent women of the union met the members of Türk Ocağı and surprisingly they decided to form a new administering committee. They were also backed by the government. Although Muhiddin said she did not resign yet and she was still the director of the union, the new committee had already been assigned. Nezihe Muhittin lost her prestige due to the happenings and she criticised the new committee in that they put their emphasise on charity affairs by deviating from the founding aim of the union.⁸¹ And it was true that new committee dedicated itself to charity business and laid their hands off the issue of women's political rights until 1935 in which the union dissolved itself. When they were asked whether they would struggle for the women's political demands, their response that they would not chase rainbows as Nezihe Muhiddin did clearly demonstrated their approach.⁸²

⁸⁰age, 202-219.

⁸¹age, 234-247.

⁸²age, 250.

It is highly interesting women were granted for municipal rights nearly on that date and it had been a kind of reward in return that they kept their silence for a long time. Following this right, Nezihe Muhiddin and some other women of the previous committee applied for the membership to the Republican People's Party; but they were disapproved. Nonetheless; Latife Bekir, the new leader of the union, along with a few new members were given a seat in municipal assemblies of İstanbul and İzmir.⁸³ Serpil Çakır claims that the moderate policy of the new administration resulted in standing out among their rivals in the 1930 and 1935 elections.⁸⁴ The reaction of Latife Bekir was very considerable in that it indicated her point of view when compared to the ideology of previous committee. She interpreted this new acquisition as an extension of the traditional roles of the women by underlying that municipalism simply was an extended form of the house holding.⁸⁵ The discrepancy between the former and latter administrations of the union can also be concluded from the speech of Latife Bekir as she was announcing the decision for termination. She was stating that political rights were given to them by Mustafa Kemal himself and it was unnecessary to maintain its activities for the union. What is more, she added the women who desired to maintain their activities could work for other charity organizations. It obviously meant that Latife Bekir considered herself as the leader of the women movement of which she was never took the responsibility since the beginning. Furthermore, she was implying that the union was a charity organization by stressing 'other' word.⁸⁶

One of the main reasons leading the government to take a firm stand against the Turkish Women's Union was closely associated with its international contacts. And the last straw in this way was its being host to the 12th Congress of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship in 1935. In an unexpectedly way, the congress turned into a kind of political arena during which the issues of "peace" and "disarmament" were discussed. In such a critical period when the Second World War was about to break out, this peace propaganda put Turkey in a difficult position against the warmongering countries such as Italy and Germany.⁸⁷ The union attracted the attention of the Western international women unions because of the political rights granted in 1930. The foreign press in those days was underlying that Turkey played a leading role in terms of women rights rather than acting as a follower of the developments in other countries.⁸⁸ Yaprak Zihnioğlu also agrees with Zafer Toprak in that the international connections of the women's union might have disturbed the government since the Turkish Republic was out of the League of Nations itself.⁸⁹

The process through which Turkish women's political rights were recognized was a little long. They were given step by step. In the first place; Turkish women were enfranchised for the local elections in 1930, March 3. And then, they started to take place in the elections of village council beginning from 1933, October 26.

⁸³Ayşegül Yaraman, *Türkiye'de Kadınların Siyasal Temsili (1935-1999) Bir Demokrasi Tartışması*, İstanbul, Bağlam 1999, 48.

⁸⁴Serpil Çakır, *age*, 78.

⁸⁵Ayşegül Yaraman, *age*, 48.

⁸⁶*age*, 54-55.

⁸⁷Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Kadın Özgürlüğü ve Feminizm (1908-1935)*, İstanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları 2014, 481.

⁸⁸Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, *age*, 147, 175.

⁸⁹Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *age*, 171-173.

Finally, they got the general suffrage in 1934 and were enfranchised for the national elections.⁹⁰

Another reason having led the union to be marked as a threat was that it came out as a kind of pressure group. The members of the union were constantly putting pressure on the regime to be granted for political rights. All the activities of them were regarded as an interference by the state. It was a time some extraordinary measures of precaution such as the promulgation of the Law on the Maintenance of Order and the foundation of the Independence Courts were taken. The state was aiming at the national unity in every field. The Turkish Women's Union was a threat for this reason. It is evident that the new regime was dealing with many problems at the same time. The internal problems like Şeyh Said rebellion were much more important in that they were posing a threat to the regime itself. Therefore, the government would involve in the women's union issue once it cleared the internal threats. Besides, it is true that Nezihe Muhiddin and her fellows had disagreements with Mustafa Kemal and his party in regards to how a Turkish woman must have been and the characteristics which they were supposed to have. But the main cause of the conflict was the fact that new regime ignored the historical past of the union which dates back to the Ottomans. The new regime whose goal was to create a new Turkish woman image refused their intellectual and political bonds with the Ottoman State. Further, the new regime expected gratitude and obedience of Turkish women in return of the rights provided themselves by the state. On the other hand, the women's union did not settle for what they had and demanded more. Nevertheless, it cannot be concluded that Nezihe Muhiddin nurtured enmity towards Atatürk from all of these. It can be seen that especially after 1925, she often praised him in her writings. That she sometimes even exaggerates this can be attributed to her strive to reveal how loyal to the regime she was and her fear of being arrested. It was simply a kind of strategy.⁹¹

4. THE WOMAN IMAGE FROM THE REPUBLICAN REGIME AND MUSTAFA KEMAL ATATURK'S POINT OF VIEW

4.1. The New Turkish Woman Image Of The Early Turkish Republic

Mustafa Kemal's speeches about Turkish women had always the same message that belongs to a poem of Tevfik Fikret: "If women were made to stay under poor conditions, the all humanity certainly would decline." That he attached a particular emphasis on women rights is closely related to their contributions during the National Independence War and his gratefulness to Turkish women.⁹² He often was stressing in his speeches that they were Turkish women who carried ammunition to battle fields and arranged protest meetings to raise awareness in the public against the occupations.⁹³ Also, as regards to the role of Turkish women in the Independence War, he said: 'the speech in 1923, Konya he tells: 'Women of the any nation cannot claim their efforts were much more than the women's of Anatolia in leading their nation to the way of victory and liberation.'⁹⁴

⁹⁰Bernard Caporal, *age*, 702-703.

⁹¹Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *age*, 222-231.

⁹²Burhan Göksel, *age*, 157, 148.

⁹³Türkan Arıkan, *Atatürk'ün Türk Kadını Hakkındaki Görüşlerinden Bir Demet*, Ankara, TBMM Yayınları 1984, 7.

⁹⁴Şefika Kurnaz, *age*, 174.

Mustafa Kemal's profundity of thoughts related to women rights was a result of his reading habit according to Leyla Kırkpınar.⁹⁵ His opinions were based on four main views. Firstly; he highlighted the necessity of equality with men in educational field. Secondly; he asserted the Turkish women should take part in every field of the society. He claimed that the most important responsibility of the women must be motherhood and to do these accurately, they should have had the knowledge and the vision in the last place.⁹⁶ The motherhood came in the first place on the grounds that he believed mothers were the first and the constant instructive of humanity.⁹⁷ Şirin Tekeli asserts this state feminism was based on excluding the women from public life by attaching the motherhood role.⁹⁸

"The new Turkish woman should be the most enlightened, most virtuous, and most reserved woman of the world. The duty of the Turkish woman is to raise generations that are capable of preserving and protecting the Turk with his mentality, strength and determination." according to the words of Atatürk. The woman who was the source and social foundation of the nation could fulfill her duty only if she was virtuous.⁹⁹ And Atatürk had attributed to the lack of success of our society to the indifference towards our women.¹⁰⁰ Relating to this, he said: "Humankind is made up of two sexes, women and men. Is it possible for humankind to grow by the improvement of only one part while the other part is ignored? Is it possible that if half of a mass is tied to earth with chains that the other half can soar into skies? The success of the reforms is only possible through the common endeavours of both women and men."¹⁰¹ Moreover, Atatürk was indicating that Turkish women had to be much more intellectual and more learned than men if they desired to be the mother of the nation actually. Besides, he was underlining the necessity that they must turn their faces towards the world.¹⁰² According to him, our women were never lower than men in any field of the life.¹⁰³

Along with these, he always highlighted that every nation should have dressed in accordance with its cultural characteristics. In this way, Turkish women's dressing style could not be in the way it excludes them from the social life. It should come to neither exaggeration nor backwardness. According to him, what the Sharia suggested in this issue was also in this way.¹⁰⁴ He argued that the Islam also ordered this and what God commands to men and women is to acquire the science and knowledge together.¹⁰⁵

4.2. Debates About The Relation Between The Women Reforms And The Improvements In The Status Of Turkish Women

There are some debates about the relation between the new regime and its political and social stance to Turkish women's status. In the first place, there are many arguments about whether women's political rights in Turkish Republic were given as a consequence of a systematic women struggle or not. Moreover, another debate is related to the new image of Turkish women from the point of view of republican regime and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Ayşe Durakbaşa agrees that the Ottoman-Turkish feminism was shaped by the republican state regime and its reforms. Additionally, Turkish women had been described as the passive figures who were considerably grateful to the regime for the reforms.¹⁰⁶ Zehra Arat maintains that in the republican regime, the Islamist style patriarchy of the Ottoman State was replaced with the Western one. The abolition of the caliphate in 1924 and adoption of secularism had the role of religious institutions serving the interests of patriarchal system minimised. Consequently, the patriarchal structure lost its religious bases. Because, women were the images of the regime both in the Ottoman State and in the new republican regime. In the former they were representing the characteristics of the Sharia while they were used as the proof of the existence of the legal

⁹⁵ Ayşe Berktaş Hacımırzaoğlu, age, 14.

⁹⁶ Burhan Göksel, age, 162.

⁹⁷ age, 158.

⁹⁸ Deniz Kandiyoti, age, 216.

⁹⁹ Sevinç Elaman, *A Feminist Dialogic Reading of The New Woman: Marriage, Female Desire and Divorce in the Works of Edith Wharton and Halide Edib Adıvar*, The University of Manchester 2012, 35.

¹⁰⁰ Türkan Arıkan, age, 23.

¹⁰¹ Ayşe Berktaş Hacımırzaoğlu, age, 71.

¹⁰² age, 41.

¹⁰³ Türkan Arıkan, age, 31.

¹⁰⁴ age, 18-21.

¹⁰⁵ age, 27.

¹⁰⁶ Ayşe Durakbaşa, *Halide Edib: Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayıncılık 2000, 29.

equality provided in the new regime.¹⁰⁷ She also claims that the driving factor that led the new regime to make women reforms was the desire of becoming Westernized and modernized. In other words, women were still considered as the second-class citizens but as the situation called for, women were given some rights which previously were not mentioned. Kemalist reforms did have the aim of neither making the Turkish women emancipated nor dignifying their identities. Their purpose was to provide women with the rights which would put them forward as the ideal mothers and spouses in the Turkish society. The mentality of the women reforms was based on the project of national unity according to which they were seen as the part of the development. They were not made so as to eradicate the gender differences in the society. To illustrate; the reforms regarding to women dressing were made not to ease the women's lives. In one speech, Mustafa Kemal himself said the Turkish women ashaming of facing with men in the street or the ones hiding their faces behind their veils in front of a man gained nothing but ridicule against the Western world. The reforms were closely relevant to how the new Turkish republic was labelled in the foreign countries.¹⁰⁸

When the relation between the new regime and the Turkish women's image is considered, it also must be pointed out that the women reforms were not made through dialoging with women themselves and they were not asked what they demanded for. The reforms were made by a group of revolutionist men. Hence, they were simply the consequence of state feminism policy.¹⁰⁹ Yaprak Zihnioğlu defines this situation as the "womanless woman reforms".¹¹⁰ Furthermore, to understand the stance of Kemalism to women more precisely, the Republican People's Party charters of 1923, 1927 and 1931 should be reviewed. The common characteristic of these three charters is that they had no article relating to Turkish women. The articles about the population and family policies had an indirect impact on them; however, they had been added only as to encourage population growth. Accordingly, the role falling to the Turkish women was giving birth. Also, despite the third article of the 1923 Charter which opened the way of political membership to the party to every Turkish citizen, female citizens could not apply for it. This was clear evidence that the republican regime did not regard women as equal with men.¹¹¹

Aside from the governmental hostility to the Turkish Women's Union mentioned above in a detailed way, the hostile attitudes of the republican regime to the founder of the union, Nezihe Muhiddin and that she was discredited in the eyes of the public were also notable.¹¹² It would not be wrong to claim the foundation of women's union defending Turkish women rights was not sincerely approved by the regime in this era. When the Turkish Women's Union dissolved itself in 1935 with the command of the government, it was not the only foundation as there were some other such as the Committee of Worker's Advancement and the Turkish Hearths. It means the women's union was not the only victim of the Turkish republic. Because in that time, the bond between the state, the government and the party was tried to be consolidated. Hence, all the institutions including sports clubs and trade bodies were supposed to be depending on the state party. All cultural endeavours and tentations not having embraced the state ideology were seen as a threat.¹¹³ The Turkish Hearths had also played a crucial role in women movement both before and after the republican regime. They struggled for basic rights such as the women participation in social life and their education. It is obvious that their involvement in women struggle was more visible after the republican regime was established. To exemplify; the conferences concerning to the municipal rights granted in 1930 to Turkish women was held in Turkish Hearths. They were encouraging the women reforms of the regime. Nonetheless, as a consequence that both their nationalist ideology contradicted with the Westernization policies of the new regime in the following years and it was involved in the activities of the Free Republican Party, they were closed in 1931.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, *age*, 4.

¹⁰⁸ *age*, 51-54.

¹⁰⁹ Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, *age*, 95-96.

¹¹⁰ Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *age*, 22.

¹¹¹ *age*, 220-221.

¹¹² Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, *age*, 39.

¹¹³ Ayşe Durakbaşa, *age*, 127, 92.

¹¹⁴ Şefika Kurnaz, *age*, 160-166.

There are some other points required to be underlined in the women's suffrage issue. First of all; Turkish women were enfranchised at a time when even their being acknowledged as a citizen was controversial. As a delegate from Bolu, Tunalı Hilmi Bey, suggested making an amendment in the constitution which dictated to be elected one representative in the parliament corresponding to 20. 000 male population. According to his suggestion, this figure would also include the female population on the grounds that most of the male population were at war. Even this suggestion led to many conflicts although it was not related to the women's political rights at all. He just proposed Turkish women were officially recognized as the citizens. This was one of the striking events of the period.¹¹⁵ And it was a clear indicator of the fact that in the parliament of the early republic, there was still doubt about the intellectual maturity of the women. Therefore, it was still assumed that the voting right of the women was being represented through that of their husbands in the elections. In the same way, while the same amendment mentioned in 1924 Constitution was being discussed, the delegate of Afyonkarahisar, İzzet Ulvi Bey, asked whether the related article suggesting that every Turk has the right of vote and stand for the elections included the women or not. And Celal Nuri responded that when it is said Turk, just men were supposed to be understood. It was also Celal Nuri who tried to affect Turkish women through its writings in a newspaper called *Ati*. In these articles written with the Afife Fikret nickname, he was advising the women to be a good mothers and spouses and putting engaging in political life aside. The reason for this he thought only the women who worked in battlefield deserved the political rights not the women in İstanbul.¹¹⁶ As an other event of the period was the legislative proposal of a delegate who suggested that women were supposed to be gone through the medical examination to avoid from the pox. Then, a group of representative strictly opposed now that it would be against the Sheria.¹¹⁷

It is true that the new Turkish republican regime was known for earlier enfranchising its women and in many countries with democratic regimes the political rights were not granted to women before the Turkish women.¹¹⁸ The right to vote of women had been granted at various times in the Western countries. To make precise; it was achieved in 1944 in France while Italy gave it in 1945 and Canada in 1948. However, to what extent they were active in the parliament is controversial. Eighteen Turkish women were elected to the parliament in the 1935 elections following their being granted. According to Şirin Tekeli, this figure was closely associated with the symbolic use of the women by the government. It was because it had been a gradual decrease in the number of the women parliamentarians in the subsequent elections after the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.¹¹⁹ Especially following the multi-party system after the World War II, their number decreased remarkably. In the 1983 elections, there were 12 women parliamentarian while there were only 8 in 1991 elections.¹²⁰ These women first elected to the parliament had different professions such as farming, doctor ship and tutorage. It was the Atatürk's aspiration that the women from all social classes were in the parliament.¹²¹ While Mustafa Kemal was talking about the women's political rights, he said this right which still was denied to women in many countries would be used by Turkish women in the most influential way.¹²² Turkish women's enfranchisement was crucial; but the obstacles to achieve this supposed not to be underestimated. For instance, in voting for the amendment in 1934 which opened the way of political rights to Turkish women, 258 representatives voted for the benefit of women while 53 representatives abstained from the vote. Another important matter was that this new legal equality had still have the traces of patriarchalism. The women's application for the Republican People's Party membership was only possible through the proposal of two males in the assembly. Therefore,

¹¹⁵Burhan Göksel, *age*, 135.

¹¹⁶Serpil Sançar, *Türk Modernleşmesinin Zihniyeti: Erkekler Devlet, Kadınlar Aile Kurar, İstanbul, İletişim 2012*, 159-162.

¹¹⁷Bernard Caporal, *age*, 637-651.

¹¹⁸Türkan Arıkan, *age*, 7.

¹¹⁹Ayşe Berktaş Hacımırzaoğlu, *age*, 237.

¹²⁰Emel Doğramacı, *Atatürk'ten Günümüze Sosyal Değişmede Türk Kadını, Ankara, Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi 1993*, 22.

¹²¹Ayşe Berktaş Hacımırzaoğlu, *age*, 23-24.

¹²²Türkan Arıkan, *age*, 17.

new situation still had contradictions in itself.¹²³ Şirin Tekeli asserts that the enfranchisement of Turkish women in 1930 was a consequence of the state policy to prove how democratic it was on the contrary of the fascist Italy and Germany. The instrumentalization of women by the regime can also be observed through their passivity in the times when they were granted and from then on.¹²⁴

Concerning with why these developments occurred many years later the proclamation of the republic, Şefika Kurnaz argues Turkish public was not mentally ready for them yet. And she clarifies it with a striking event. In the era mentioned, Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, the Minister of Education, was forced to resign just because he gathered schoolmasters and mistresses at the same conference.¹²⁵ However, Hale Biricikoğlu relates this to women's being used as modernization images. If Atatürk really wanted to reward them in return of their role in the liberation war, it would have been earlier according to Biricikoğlu's claim.¹²⁶

One of the important arguments is related to the timing of the government to give political rights to women. Turkish women were relatively less involved in the political life in this era. At first, the leaders of the Turkish Women's Union had been compelled to give up the idea to found a political party by the regime in 1923. Then, they were enforced to withdraw their candidate in the 1927 elections. And it was followed by the disapproval of the membership application to Republican Party in 1930s. Turkish women were enfranchised at such a time strengthens the assumption of Şirin Tekeli that it was due to leaving a Western impression on European states. And she ascribes this to Mustafa Kemal's zeal for showing the difference of the democratic Turkish republic from the fascist regimes of the era like that of Hitler. He would have pointed to early Turkish republic was not a dictatorship. That the women in the parliament were elected by Mustafa Kemal himself and they had remained passive during the time they were present also testifies this.¹²⁷ Their stance lacking of self-confident and diffidence as making speeches in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey were also the indicators that they had some doubts about their roles in the parliament. As an instance, one of the women parliamentarians of the era, Benal Arıman was defining her desire to tell something about the straits question as other delegates did as boldness. Turkish women had been given the right to speak in the assembly; but she was in the opinion that speaking after the male representatives required courage.¹²⁸

In conclusion, all these were reflecting the mentality of the period unambiguously. Basing on this information, what Atatürk did in this era was remarkable. In fact, Atatürk wanted to put the social and educational equality of women in to practice as soon as the Independence War ended. However; the oppositions in the parliament came out as an impediment.¹²⁹ Even though, considering all of these, it must be emphasized that using the women as an image of the Westernization and modernization was applied by not only the republican regime but also the rulers of the Ottoman Empire through the 1808 Deed of Agreement, 1839 Tanzimat Edict, 1856 Edict of Reform according to which the modernization movements had a reflection on the women identity.¹³⁰

Nermin Abadan objects to the argument of Tekeli asserting the lines of the Turkish women's status were drawn through Kemalist reforms. Also, she notes that in this process, the women's non-governmental organizations were excluded thus ignoring the women's demands. On the other hand, Abadan notes that the women's enfranchisement in 1930 and 1934 could not be only a part of the international policies and these claims require concrete evidence. Further, she opposes to some feminists' suggestion telling if the women unions and non-governmental organizations had not been closed, Turkish women could have earned their political rights much more easily. According to Abadan, unless there had been Kemalist views on modernization and

¹²³ Ayşegül Yaraman, *age*, 50-51.

¹²⁴ Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *age*, 11, 18.

¹²⁵ Şefika Kurnaz, *age*, 176.

¹²⁶ Hale Biricikoğlu, *agm*, 8.

¹²⁷ Ayşe Berktaş Hacımırzaoğlu, *age*, 58-63.

¹²⁸ *age*, 256-257.

¹²⁹ *age*, 18.

¹³⁰ Hale Biricikoğlu, *agm*, 3-4.

Westernization, the conditions of the era mentioned would have met the demands of neither the women unions nor organizations.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the views asserting that women's enfranchisement was a valuable instrument crucial for the image of new regime and the rulers were killing two birds with one stone with the intelligent timing of recognition of women's political rights can still be not easily refuted.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I tried to review the changing situation of Turkish women in the early republican period. Before the new regime, Ottoman women' life was hampered by many numerous restrictions. Following the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, women were given both social and political rights. Being historically connected to Ottoman women's emancipation movements, the initiatives of Turkish women to be granted some basic rights gained momentum in the republican era. Some endeavours were supported by the new regime while some were neglected. It was a process of which cornerstones were marked by the government itself with the aim of modernization and Westernization. The women rights would be act as the reflection of the reforms. Therefore, Turkish woman had to be recreated by determining their status in the society through Kemalist reforms. It is controversial to what extent reforms carried out under the leadership of M.Kemal is adequate for Turkish women. But it can be understood from their dynamic struggle for much more that they were not content with what they were given.

¹³¹*Ayşe Berktaş Hacımırzaoğlu, age, 329.*

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