

THE FORMATION OF FEMINIST IDENTITY: FEMINISM IN THE 1930'S TURKEY AND BRITAIN

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Abstract

This article focuses on the improvement of Turkish women's rights pursuant to reforms made by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkey, in constructing a modern Turkish nation, and discusses 1930's women's movements in Britain. Women's suffrage in Turkey emerged as a part of a modernization process, during which Atatürk instituted equal rights before most Western countries had done so. He improved women's status through his innovations thus building the most modern, democratic and secular Muslim state. Still, feminists of the 1980s question the Kemalist project of modernity in search of "liberation beyond emancipation". Women's rights in England emerged by women standing up for their rights, whereas those rights in Turkey emerged as a nationalistic policy by Atatürk.

Keywords: Turkish feminism, Atatürk and his reforms, westernization, women's emancipation, domesticity, women's movement in Britain.

FEMİNİST KİMLİĞİN OLUŞUMU: 1930'LAR TÜRKİYE VE İNGİLTERE'SİNDE KADIN HAKLARI

Özet

Bu makale, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti kurucusu olan Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'ün modern bir Türk toplumunu oluşturma aşamasında yaptığı reformlardan biri olan Türk kadın haklarının elde edilmesi ve 1930'lar İngiltere'sinde kadın haklarının durumu konusunu tartışır. Türkiye'deki kadınların seçme hakkı, modernleşme sürecinin bir parçası olarak birçok Batılı ülkelerden daha önce kurumlaştırılmıştır. Atatürk, kadın haklarını en ileri modern, demokratik ve laik bir Müslüman devlet kurma amacı ile devrimleştirmiştir. Halen, "kurtuluşun ötesinde özgürlük" arayışı içinde olan 1980'lerin feministleri, ülkenin modernleşme aşaması olarak görülen Kemalist devrimlerini sorgular. İngiltere'deki kadın hakları, kendi haklarını savunan kadınlar tarafından ortaya çıkartılırken, Türkiye'deki aynı haklar Atatürk'ün ulusal politikası olarak ortaya çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk feminizmi, Atatürk ve onun devrimleri, batılılaşma, kadınların özgürlüğü, aile yaşamı, İngiltere'deki kadın hakları.

1. Introduction

While the 1920s and 1930s was an important time for the establishment of women's rights in Turkey, a few developments in feminist issue were being observed in Britain during that era. Women in Britain struggled with the domestic ideology that most affected their lives in the 1930s. The cover of the Fiona Montgomery's (2006) book titled *Women's Rights: Struggles and Feminism in Britain c. 1770-1970* inspired me to focus on the situation of British women and Turkish women of the same period. The striking cover included the British women who were holding many placards, one of them reading: "Are British women worth less than Turkish women?" This aroused a question and curiosity about what were the political and social conditions of the British women which made them hold such a sign? Were Atatürk's revolutions on Turkish women's right well known enough to be appreciated by women of the most modern countries of that era? Did it reinforce British women's rights as well in the 1930s, when most of the laws were established on women's right in Turkey? Movement towards equal rights in the 1930's Britain was generated by British women's political action. This action inevitably appeared as a grass-root movement. On the other hand, women's suffrage in Turkey emerged as a part of modernization process, which was a state-organized feminism supported by elite and governmental initiatives. I will discuss women's movements in Britain and later in Turkey, because British feminism embraces Turkey to look critically at feminism in Turkey.

The ideas behind feminism in both countries may seem the same; however the nature and function of its practice and goals differed. I examined how the women's movements emerged, how this affected the lives of women and the development of these movements in both culture, especially considering the diversity in the nature of feminism, due to cultural background and social disparity. First, I examined the struggles of British women to break the boundaries of domesticity and their efforts to place themselves in both social and political arena. British women fought for their rights against patriarchal governmental laws, because the law did not accept British women as full citizens. Besides, they were depended on their husbands, or if not married on fathers, in legal arena. Then, I investigated the emergence, development, and transformations of Turkish women's right in the modernization project. I focused on Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, his reforms to improve the status of Turkish women, and his marriage as a symbol of his feminist reforms. Turkish women defended Atatürk and his Westernization project to maintain and improve their rights. Women, as Yaprak Zihnioğlu (2003:56) emphasizes, from the first days of II. Meşrutiyet (II. Constitutional Monarchy) were willing to be treated as humans: have position, participate in social and political life, to work, to receive education, and to get rid of polygamy. There was a great awakening in Ottoman women by Tanzimat Fermanı (Administrative reforms in Ottoman Empire) in 1839. Improvements in Inheritance Law in 1847, and opening maiden teachers' schools in 1870 prepared the way for a radical modernization project in the establishment of Turkish Republic.

Atatürk and his wife Latife Hanım played a crucial role in establishing women's rights in Turkey before most Western countries. As Bozdağ (2002) states, "Turkey is one of the first countries among the European states that gave women the right to elect and be elected" (126, 159). Furthermore, women in most European and other countries, namely Finland, Norway, Soviet Union, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Latvia, Poland, Holland, Belgium, Mongolia, Albania, Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, New Zealand, and U.S.A. took their political rights; could vote and become representative in the Parliament (Çalışlar 2006: 196). Still, there was no legal improvement on the social and political lives of British women.

British-Turkish relationship was at its peak especially during the First World War, because they were allied during the war. The visit of King Edward in 1936 affected the relation between the two countries in a positive way and the British Press was alert to the recent news in Turkey. Not only the British Press but also the world media was interested in the radical developments that took place in Turkey. Çalışlar (2006) emphasizes the rise of women under the name Latife Hanım that kept the world media busy between the years 1923-1930. *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, *The Times*, *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi*, *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, *Toronto Daily Star*, *Washington Post*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *The Current Opinion* (1924), *The Literary Digest* (1923), *Milîyet Newspaper*, *Vakit*, *İkdam*, *Gündem Newspapers*, and as well as journals like *The Nation* (1923), *Time*, *Resimli Ay Dergisi*, *Türk Yurdu Dergisi* (1924) wrote about the recent developments of Turkish feminism. By then, British women as well as many other European women were aware of the recent developments and legitimisation of Turkish women's rights.

I assume that the news in the world media stating the development and legitimization of women's right in Turkey was the last straw for British women. England, where the "sun never set", colonizer, the most civilized and developed country of the world in that era still did not have women's legal and political rights. Besides, British political leaders and statesmen did not endeavour to legitimise women's right until strong protests had been made by British suffragettes. According to Britain even in an "undeveloped" and "oriental" country like Turkey legalised women's rights, which seemingly put women of an Islamic-traditional country ahead of the most civilized country. This surprised me so much that it made me think about the conditions of women in both countries.

This study points out how the representation of Turkish conditions in respect of women was viewed and acted upon by the British feminists, because the idea of taking both cases in this study derived from the reaction of 1930s British feminists. How could it be possible that a British subject would be in a worse situation than that of "heathen" Turkey? It is important to note that the image of Turkish women as "liberated" and "emancipated" used by British suffragettes needs to be looked from the other side. In fact, the Turkish emblem is connected to Orientalism placing Turks as "the other" in Western hegemony.

Women's Movements in Britain in the 1930s

Domesticity, as a matter of fact, emerged not only as a negative factor in women's lives, but also as a significant force which contributed to the changes in the public and political status of women for centuries. Sociology Professor June Purvis (1995: 5) has noted that there was a lack of women's history since history was largely written by men and consisted of men's activities in war, politics, business, and administration. Women's history was mostly invisible, and, if represented, belittled in some way. Yet, this did not prevent women standing up for their rights, which led to movement for women's suffrage. There was an improvement in the situation of women by feminist writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in the eighteenth century, later in 1929, when Virginia Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own*. Many feminist writers contributed much in flaming the desire for women's rights.

The National Union of Women's Suffrage Society (NUWSS) grew into a mass movement with over 50,000 members after 1909. Important figures in women's history such as Alice Clark and Ivy Pinchbeck wrote books on women's history and joined NUWSS in 1912. Women's changing role in the economic life of the nation, particularly with industrialization, was significant. Furthermore, the interwar economic depression was not a sufficient explanation for the decline of feminism after 1930. In fact, it was a new feminism, which emphasized birth control and family allowances rather than employment issues. The new ideologies of maternity within the family focused on family privacy. For Shani D'Cruze (1995) the codes of domesticity meant, "a heavier emotional and financial investment in parenting and education, initially for the middle and upper-classes" (56). People gave importance to "more companionship and closeness between husband and wife" even when a couple could afford paid domestic help (56).

Although the 1930s saw depression and unemployment in the areas of industry, it provided an alternative employment in domestic service for young-working class women. Particularly, live-in domestic servants were less available, because middle-class families depended on daily help. Middle-class wives took up domestic tasks, assisted by increasing numbers of domestic devices such as irons, vacuum cleaners, toasters, cookers, and washing machines that recently came to the market. In contrast, the most common machinery in the working-class homes was the sewing machine (Roberts 1984: 161). The electrical appliance reduced middle-class dependence on servants, instead the middle-class housewife cope with cooking and cleaning carpets, which turned them into domestic servants. Still, household management and mother craft were presented as career occupations for women below upper middle class in 1930s.

There were several popular women's magazines, which reflected women's domestic concerns. The emergence of the new wave of magazines in the 1930s was best represented by *Woman's Own* (1932), *Woman's Illustrated* (1936), and *Woman* (1937).

With colour illustrations and circulation in the millions, these magazines were not merely a blend of fiction, recipes, and dress patterns; they also promulgated the ideology of domesticity. For instance, *Woman's Own* which presented the belief that marriage was the best job for a woman and it would be folly to divorce to rid themselves of unfaithful husbands (*Women's Own*: 381). This warned women against the reform of divorce laws. The aim of the ideas presented in that magazine was to emphasize the domestic issues of women and to prevent the uprising of women for their rights in order to preserve the patriarchal social order. They referred to flirtatious girls as 'vamps'. This supported the idea that, "a bad husband is better than no husband" (*Women's Own*: 381). The words of the popular song in the 1930s expressed it: "Keep young and beautiful; it's your duty to be beautiful, keep young and beautiful if you want to be loved" (*Women's Own*: 449). The magazine exhorted women to "Dress for your husband. After all he pays the bill, and he is one to please!" (*Women's Own*: 449). The topics which reflected the paper's philosophy that women should learn how to be a good housewife appeared as follows: household tips 35 %, Fiction 28 %, babies and children 10%, dress 8 %, cookery 4%, film and radio 4%, editorial/gossip 4 %, personal problems 4 % (Pugh 1992: 212).

There was a decline in the birth rate, especially among the middle class. Birth control information was widely circulated by the early 1930s. Not only birth control, but abortion served as a means of family planning. In fact, abortion was essentially a woman's decision; it failed to have impact on working-class men's attitudes towards sexuality. Working-class women frequently used it to reduce the burden of frequent births and large families. As a matter of fact, Women's Co-operative Guild led the way in advocating birth control information.¹ The Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921, which supplied funds for maternal and child health clinics, represented the only legislative accomplishment of the suffrage movement. In the 1930s, the British Medical association accepted that the information on birth control was justified for women whose health was threatened by further pregnancies. The Church of England also dropped its opposition, and after 1929 the Local Government Act led a way to open clinics and use existing hospitals to give advice to woman and family planning. (Pugh 1992: 256)

The passage of equal franchise in 1928 was not only a reason for the formal decline of feminist organizations, but it resulted in less influential positions for women activists in politics. Clearly, a few women pursued their political careers by the 1930s. Between sixty and seventy women stood in the general elections of 1929, 1931, and 1935 with fourteen, fifteen, and nine elected, respectively. Pugh (1992) noted that in the parliament, Eleanor Rathbone was elected as an independent for the university constituencies in 1929.

It is not surprising that during the 1930s women's organizations had little input

1. NUSEC followed it in 1924, the Labour Party Women's Organisation and the newly formed Workers Birth Control Group. Conventional organizations joined them especially Women's National Liberal association in 1927 and the National Council of Women in 1929 (Pugh, 1992: 259).

into parliamentary legislation. Edith Picton-Turbervill's 1931 Bill prohibited the death sentence for expectant mothers, and the Inheritance Act prevented a husband from disinheriting his wife and children. Neville Chamberlain appointed a committee to enquire into maternal mortality and pursued the Midwives Act in 1928. 1937 brought A.P. Herbert's divorce reform which extended the grounds for divorce from desertion for three years, to cruelty, insanity, rape and sodomy. Nancy Astor was an important figure between the wars who brought a large measure of social status and respectability to the women's cause. She was the leader of the women's movement who devoted much of her energy and time in parliament to women's issues during the 1930s and 1940s (Pugh 1992: 244-249).

As a result, full enfranchisement for women was secured in 1928 for women aged 21 and over. As Pugh (1990) stated with the law, the great symbol of women's inequality came to an end; so by the 1930s, the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) membership had declined (147). In 1937, the Divorce Act enabled women to sue for divorce on the grounds of desertion or insanity. The Equal Citizenship Act was pursued only in 1944. Not all the women's rights were secured solely by the activity of British women themselves, for instance the equal rights legislation of the 1970s was due to the European Union.

Women in Britain struggled for centuries to establish their rights in every area. The Suffragettes seized on the legalisation of women's rights in Turkey, though they were misreading what was happening there and their attitudes may well have been coloured by orientalism. Edward Said (1978), in *Orientalism*, argued that the "Orient" and the "Occident" - a term for the developed West, England, France and U.S.A. - worked as oppositional terms. Therefore, the orient was seen as a negative inversion of western culture. Said (1978) explains the implication and the difference between the two terms as follows: "the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (42). The West saw the Islamic Orient, as Said (1976) proposed, "with its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability. . ." (112) and he also stated that the Orient was as a place "requiring Western reconstruction, even redemption" (112). Therefore, I propose to look at the historical and cultural developments that took place in Turkey to explain and illustrate how British feminism embraced Turkey.

Atatürk, Reforms, and the Position of Women in Turkish Society

The women's rights movement in Turkey gained impetus during the Reform period by breaking the tradition of men in Islam. Atatürk made great improvements for Turkish women by extracting them from behind the closed doors of harem² and placing them at the core of the society. In a speech in İzmir in 1923 Atatürk declared;

if a society does not march towards its goal with all its women and men together, it is scientifically impossible for it to progress and to become civilized.

2. Seclusion of women from the social life in Islam; especially in the era of Ottoman Empire.

Everything we see on Earth is the product of women.

Eğer bir toplum idealleri uğruna kadın ve erkekle birlikte ilerlemiyorsa, imlen ilerlemek ve medenileşmek mümkün olmayacaktır. Dünya yüzünde gördüğümüz herşey kadının eseridir. (*Atatürk'ün Söylev* 1952: 82)

After the War of Independence, Atatürk instituted the Turkish Republic in which social, political, legal, educational, and economical reforms set up a new secular country. Central to the reforms was a drive to Westernize Turkish society both politically and culturally in order to be a more modern nation (Eisenstadt 1984: 8-10). Atatürk legitimized women's equal status in both social (by instituting monogamy, reorganizing civil marriage, right to divorce, accepting egalitarian inheritance law and discouraging veil) and political (active voting rights to elect and to be elected) realms, to demonstrate that Turkey was ultimately a fully democratic and secular nation. Yeşim Arat (1989) described the nature of Atatürk's reforms for women:

the enfranchisement of women was part of an attempt to improve women's status, . . . was a means of westernizing, not merely democratizing the country. The Westernization, defined by Atatürk as the process of belonging to the ranks of civilized countries, required the establishment of a secular, national, as well as democratic, state. (30)

Islamists objected to the modernization process in the status of women, as well as in politics. Şirin Tekeli (1982) argued women's imprisonment in the shadows of tradition: traditional arranged marriages, divorce laws leading to the easy repudiation of wives, polygamy and segregation of the sexes, were obstacles preventing the education and liberation of women (196-199). Atatürk made sure that Muslim Turkish women were not subjugated by Islamic law and could participate equally in public life.³ Atatürk's made a speech in İzmir;

our enemies accuse us of being slaves of religion and attribute our decline and degradation to it. This is a mistake. Our religion never decreed women to be lower than men. God decreed that Muslims, men and women, pursue knowledge together.

düşmanlarımız bizi dinin kölesi olmakla suçluyorlar ve ona karşı eğilimimizin olduğunu söylüyorlar. Bu bir yanıltır. Bizim dinimiz hiçbir vakit kadınların erkeklerden geri kalmasını talep etmemiştir. Allah'ın emrettiği şey, müslim ve müslimenin beraber olarak ilmu irfan eylemesidir. (*Atatürk'ün Söylev*, 1952: 85)

3. *Before and after the reign of Ottoman Sultan Abdül Hamit, women were subject to the laws of Islam. As Kinross (1964) states, no woman could be seen walking in the street or in a carriage with a man in İstanbul even if he were her husband. If they went out together, the man walked ahead of the woman. A woman did not appear with her husband in social gatherings; there was a curtain that divided women from men which was known as 'haremlık' and 'selamlık' (418-419).*

Atatürk was not only troubled by the charges of Islamist groups but also by those of Westerners. After changing family laws, Atatürk gave women full rights of citizenship, a final blow to the Islamist opposition. Such developments would fire the West to accept the Turkish Republic as a civilized and secular country. Atatürk did not change nor abolish Islam; he believed some values of society would prevent development. For this reason, as Bozdağ (2002) declared, he “started a movement for the reform of Islam . . . to accept secularism and separate religious affairs and the affairs of the state from each other” (126).

Atatürk abolished the Office of Ottoman Sultanate in 1922 and proclaimed the Republic of Turkey on October 29, 1923. Closure of the Islamic courts and the abolition of Islamic canon law gave way to a more secular law by the Civil Code. In the social sphere, he changed headgear⁴ and dress⁵ in 1925; he closed religious convents and dervish lodges in 1925, brought Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu (a law for reunification of education) in 1924, and enacted surnames⁶ into law in 1934 by abolishing titles. In 1931, he introduced the metric system following the 1928 adoption of the international numeric systems. Legal equality between the sexes was instituted by changes and regulations between 1926, and 1934. The ideal of becoming a society without losing its history, culture and nationality echoed in Atatürk’s speech on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Republic ending with the words: “How happy is the one who says I am a Turk!” (“Ne mutlu Türküm diyene!”)

Atatürk and Turkish Women’s Rights

Atatürk’s social reforms were best expressed in the Turkish Civil Code adopted in 1926 from the Swiss Code. It put Turkish women on an equal footing in the area of divorce, custody, and inheritance. The right to elect members and to be elected to the municipality councils for the first time was legitimised on 3 April 1930. Finally, on 5th December 1934, the right of women to elect members and to be elected to the National Assembly was recognized.⁷ In 1935, 18 women members were elected to the National Assembly for the first time (Özertim 1966: 91).

The Kemalist reforms unquestionably improved the status of women, as Arat (1989) stated, “men, rather than women, insisted on recognizing women’s rights to

4. *The Turkish fes was introduced by Sultan Mahmut II introducing Ottoman Empire’s dress code in 1826. On 23 August 1935, Atatürk went to Kastamonu, one of the conservative provinces of the country, where he said, “Gentlemen, this is a hat”, and issued the law regarding the headgear.*

5. *While Atatürk took a tour to Anatolia, he recounted his observations on his tour in Kastamonu stating that “in some places I have seen women who put a piece of cloth or a towel or something like it over their heads to hide their faces . . . What is the meaning and sense of this behavior? Gentlemen, can the mothers and daughters of a civilized nation adopt this strange manner, this barbarous posture? . . . It must be remedied at once”. It was ‘remedied’ gradually after the reform abolishing the veil.*

6. *Mustafa Kemal took the surname Atatürk that means “father of Turks”. It is a unique surname, all but him was prohibited from taking that surname. Before that law, people were called by their fathers name and title if there was any, i.e. Hasan, son of Mehmet or Hacı Mehmet (Pilgrim Mehmet), etc.*

7. *By Teşkilat-ı Esasiye Law number 10 and 11. (Özertim 1966: 73)*

westernize the country” (33). Atatürk valued Turkish women much, because they helped men by carrying guns and ammunition, manufacturing army and medical supplies and even engaging in warfare in the War of Independence: “The Anatolian woman has her part in these sublime acts of self-sacrifice and must be remembered with gratitude” (Kandiyoti 1991: 35). The rights for women were not designed as a present, but to bring the new secular and equalitarian Turkish Republic concept in to the whole world. According to Atatürk, a social body consisted of “two kinds of human beings” and it was impossible to advance without the participation of both:

Is it possible that, while one half of a community stays chained to the ground, the other half rise to the skies? There is no question — the step of progress must be taken . . . by the two sexes together, as friends, and together they must accomplish the various stages of the journey into the land of progress and renovation. If this is done, our revolution will be successful.

Mümkün müdür, bir camianın yarısı topraklara zincirlerle bağlı kaldıkça, diğer kısmı gökyüzüne yükselebilirsin. Şüphe yok, gelişmenin adımları iki cins tarafından beraber arkadaşça atılmalı, gelişme ve yenilik alanında birlikte kesin bir tavır almak gereklidir. Böyle olursa inkılap başarılı olur (*Atatürk'ün Söylev*, 1952:138)

The woman question was not only taken up by men, women writers also raised their voices (Berkes 1998: 385-387). Several illustrated magazines and journals were published on women's issue, such as *Terakki* in 1868, *Kadınlar Dünyası*, *Mahasin Kadın* and *Demet* in 1908 (Türkiye'de Dergiler, 1984). Many nationalist women writers emerged then, such as Halide Edip Adivar and Afet İnan.⁸ Women speakers such as Nakiye Elgun and Münevver Saime pointed the crowds toward patriotism at several meetings in İstanbul (Taşkıran 1973: 68-73). The Anatolian Women's Association for Patriotic Defence was also established in Sivas. Its members, who were mostly wives and daughters of Kemalist followers, supported the national war by organizing meetings, writing protest letters to the wives of the invaders, raising funds and even participating in battle along with men (İnan 1975: 108-125).

Atatürk's state-oriented modernization project continued when he proceeded to İzmir in 1925. Here, he gave the first Turkish ball to which only Muslims and their wives were invited. An orchestra was playing Western music and Atatürk opened the ball by performing a foxtrot with the governor's daughter. Until that moment no Turkish woman had ever danced with a man in public (Kinross 1964: 420). Club dances on Fridays became a habitual custom in Ankara. The social ice slowly melted: women learned how to dance in public, girls were beginning to walk about the town by

8. Adivar was a famous novelist and feminist. She is one of the leaders of campaigns for women's emancipation in Turkey; Afet İnan, Atatürk's adopted daughter, became a history professor, writing about Atatürk. Sabiha Gökçen, another adopted daughter, the first women pilot in Turkish history. See Ülker ed. (2004: 85-106) for detailed information on Atatürk's adopted children who achieved much in Turkish history.

themselves, a thing never heard before. There was no longer separation of men and women in trains or public gatherings, and women were admitted to various professions and finally to politics.

Atatürk's Marriage

Atatürk gave importance to the concept of family. He believed that women should be educated and be presentable in social life, because they were the core of the family:

Anybody who could make his spouse happy should get married. . . They should have children . . . Don't take me as a model. In this respect the example is İsmet Paşa. My life has been arranged in a different way. Still, I had the experience.

Eşini mesut edebilecek herkes evlenmelidir... Çoluk çocuk sahibi olmalıdır... Bana bakmayınız. Bu meselede örnek İsmet Paşa'dır. Benim hayatım başka türlü düzenlenmiştir. Buna rağmen tecrübesini yaptım. (*Atatürk'ün Söylev* 1952: 206)

Several articles were written on Atatürk's marriage all of which emphasized that he would like to set an example for his people. As Turkish historian Necmi Ülker (2004) stated, Atatürk had chosen a wife who would represent Turkish women and he wanted to set an example with an image of respectable marital stability. Hence he married Latife Hanım⁹ on Jan 29, 1923. The ceremony took place in Western style, breaking the Islamic tradition, both of them appearing at the ceremony.¹⁰

Atatürk took his wife on a honeymoon tour to the main cities of Anatolia as a symbol of the emancipated womanhood he sought for Turkish women. Kinross (1964) pointed out that Latife was a "living symbol of those social reforms which he now intended to introduce, with her help, throughout the country" (368) and the reason why Atatürk married her had as much to do with sociological reasons as personal. Latife's upbringing and education was Western; she had modern views on the women's place in a society (Kinross 1964: 421).

As most of the critics emphasized Latife lost her temper and was uncontrollable, which made them divorced on August 5, 1925. Islamic Law that gave the husband the right to divorce his wife without question by saying "leave the house" three times was valid until 1926. Atatürk did not find this procedure proper; therefore he entrusted his aide with accompanying Latife Hanım back to İzmir. Later, he arranged a divorce document and announced that the marriage came to an end by agreement (Ülker 2004: 29). Thus, Atatürk made divorce a legal procedure for the first time.

9. *Latife Uşakızade, the wife of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was the daughter of Muammer Uşakızade later known as Uşaklıgil from İzmir. After finishing İzmir High School, she pursued a law degree at Sorbonne University in Paris.*

10. *For detailed information on Atatürk's marriage see the article "Mustafa Kemal Paşa'nın Evliliği" (Ülker 2004: 1-34).*

Atatürk was definitely influenced by Latife Hanım's personality. She was educated in the West, fluent in several European and Oriental languages and played the piano at concert level. Her never wearing the veil and her strong personality was most probably an inspiration for Atatürk's reforms on Turkish women. Critics who study Atatürk and his revolutions tend either to ignore the existence of Latife Hanım, who played a crucial role in voicing Turkish women's rights or see her as a negative example in Atatürk's life. In fact, Latife Hanım was known as a feminist, suffragist, and defender of Turkish women's right in the world media.¹¹

İpek Çalışlar's best selling biography *Latife Hanım* described the private life of Latife Hanım in a feministic perspective giving her much more credit. Çalışlar (2006) emphasized that Latife influenced Atatürk in the formation of modern Turkey than historians allowed her. Besides, the years of marriage between Atatürk and Latife Hanım were the years when Turkish women appeared on the stage and there were several improvements in women's rights and liberation in Turkey (263).

The Analysis of the History of Feminism in Turkey

Elite women were active in the public sphere by forming women's associations and issuing publications for educating women about childcare, family household, calling for women's rights. Demirdirek (1998) pointed out the existence of more than 40 women's publications before the establishment of the Republic in 1923 (69). Rural women were not as lucky as urban bourgeoisie women who benefited from Kemalist reforms. It took decades for reforms to reach the countryside. As White pointed out (2003) some villagers who lived far from administrative centres continued to marry by religious ceremony instead of civil state ceremony. They were forced into arranged marriages and produced as many children as possible, because they needed workforce in the fields.

In political arena, women were not as effective as their male peers. In 1923, authorities did not give permission to establish a Republican Woman's party, because woman's party could detract attention away from Republican People's Party (Toprak 1988: 30-31). In 1935, the Women's Conference, a gathering of women from all around the world, took place for the first time in İstanbul. They closed the Federation stating that there was no reason for women to organize (Arat 1997:101).

Contemporary feminist re-reading of Atatürk's speech recalled the lack of women's liberation. While emancipating women, Atatürk declared that, "[T]hey must be virtuous, dignified, and capable of gaining respect" and "the highest duty of women is mot-

11. Çalışlar (2006) drew attention to the news in the world media that put Latife Hanım and her efforts on women's rights in Turkey as headlines. *New York Times* dated 14 March 1923 under the heading "Mrs. Kemal's clothes are an invitation for reform" mentioned about Halide Edip and Latife as two pioneers of women's rights. *The Current Opinion*, January 1924, mentioned about removal of the veil as a fight for independence. Arthur Moss-Florence Gilliam in the journal entitled *The Nation* dated 13 June 1923 mentioned about the existence of a strong woman's party in Turkey. Latife's interest in women's rights also reached Soviet Union and The United States.

herhood” (*Atatürk’un Söylev* 1952:139-40). Delaney (1995) suggested that Atatürk’s discourse on the liberation of Turkish women was undermined by taking the motherhood as the most important duty (189). White (2003) emphasized that, “motherhood was a patriotic duty” (154). The State preserved conservative morality in the modernization project. Changes should not be an invitation to immorality, because people feared that women becoming educated and entering the public sphere would corrupt the existing values:

. . . These contradictory expectations placed a double burden on women who took advantage of new opportunities to get an education and pursue a career, since they were expected simultaneously to be attentive and well-trained mothers and to keep the household running smoothly. (White 2003:154)

A new feminist movement of the 1980s radically challenged the idea that 1920s women who, “figuratively, owed their existence to Atatürk” (Arat 1997: 96). They critically re-evaluated state-oriented feminism and strongly questioned the conditions of women who were “actors or pawns” in the republican project of modernity (Kandiyoti 1988). In the modernization project, women “became bearers of Westernization and carriers of secularism, and actresses gave testimony to the dramatic shift of civilization” (Göle 1996: 14). Male-female equality was legitimised in the public realm, but it denied the difference in the private realm, which precipitated the unspoken patriarchal hierarchy. As Kandiyoti (1987) stated women were in search of “liberation beyond emancipation” (317-19). Durakbaşa (1998) questioned if cultural norms accord with the radical changes in Turkish society:

. . . Kemalism although a progressive ideology that fostered women’s participation in education and the professions, did not alter the patriarchal norms of morality and in fact maintained the basic cultural conservatism about male/female relations, despite its radicalism in opening a space for women in the public domain. (140)

Durakbaşa (1998) drew attention to de-feminized identity because a segregated Muslim society that underwent secularisation and reforms would not handle with the concept of ‘liberal’ feminine woman. Kemalist women developed professional identities rather than expressing their sexuality and individuality. They presented, as Durakbaşa (1998) has noted, “a sexually modest and respectable picture that would not threaten the patriarchal morality” (148). Thus, women had to be strictly self-disciplined and keep the traditional patriarchal values like honor and family reputation:

. . . the notion of female modesty – that is, the traditional values of virginity before marriage, fidelity of the wife, and a particular public comportment and dress – was carried over with an even heavier emotional load to the new generations of Kemalist women. . . . (Durakbaşa 1998:148)

I agree with Durakbaşa’s ideas, because the position and representation of women

in today's Turkey still did not change much. Modernization brought new conflicts, because Turkey was coming from an Oriental cultural background. After all, emancipation was not liberation. Consequently, the Islamist movement emerged as a protest against state-feminism supporting an Islamic dress (tesettür)¹² and behavior. Tesettür started in the 1980s as a political symbol against modernity, still creating polemics in mass media.

2. Conclusion

Social and cultural defined roles for women affected their position, pushing them back into domesticity and thus preventing them from having equal rights with men. In order to protest, women campaigned to get their rights and be identified as citizens. As I tried to discuss throughout the article, the nature of women's rights in Turkey is completely different than that of in Britain. Further, turn to the women's movement in 1930's Britain to illuminate the difference between a state-organized feminism and one generated by emerging women's political action.

British feminism emerged from women's oppression because of their sex. Besides, it had a long history dating back to 1600s and 1708s --the time of a significant early feminist-- Mary Wollstonecraft. It consisted of both an ideology and a reform movement seeking to improve the status of women. British women of the 1930s were trying to break the boundaries of domesticity with their effort to place themselves both in the social and political arena.

The status of Turkish women in both social and political ground changed rapidly in 1930s. In contrast, the search for British women's rights took place over decades. Turkish feminism began with elite and governmental initiatives and not as a grassroot movement. Halide Edip, as Lewis (2004) declared, objected to "British suffragists and their noisy tactics, regarding the campaign for equality with men for its own sake as tantamount to the revolt of one sex against the other's domination" (119). Women's emancipation in Turkey was more moderate on gender relations, because of the nationalist, self-sacrificing, "comrade-women" who shared the struggles of their male peers in the War of Independence.

Women's suffrage in Turkey emerged as a part of modernization process. It is important to note that the central to the reforms was to westernize Turkish society both in political and cultural arenas. For this reason, Atatürk, legitimised equal status for women in social realm by instituting monogamy, reorganizing civil marriage, giving right to divorce, accepting egalitarian inheritance law, and discouraging the veil. In addition to his social reforms, Atatürk legitimised equal status for women in political realm by adopting the Civil Code that gave women equal status with men in 1926 and giving active voting rights to elect and to be elected in National Assembly in 1934. Turkish women were given equal rights to vote as men years before most Western

12. *An oversized headscarf with matching coat or suit.*

countries. The idea of an Islamic nation trying to reach “the level of contemporary civilization” by establishing women’s rights before the most “contemporary civilization” made British suffragettes furious, because even in a non-European, fragmented, dislocated, and “the other” country, according to the Western hegemony, legalised women’s rights. Still, this did not prevent the political imperialism of Europe in the East, because Turkey was still being perceived as the weak partner of the West.

Although supporters of emancipation of women both in Turkey and Britain fought for the same idea, the success and outcome in the levels of modernity blatantly differed. In the British case, although the women’s recognition in public sphere was late, it was a success because theirs was a grass-root movement. In the case of Turkey, there has been a steady decline in women’s participation in politics, private life, and public arena. As Delaney (1995) stated, there was a “lack of theorization and implementation what is necessary to make women’s full participation possible” and “imagery and symbolic associations of the nation and citizenship continue to undermine the democratic intentions” (189). Emancipation, and democracy enacted during Atatürk’s Westernization project contained conflicts within itself: Some Western liberals backing Atatürk’s modernization process questioned women’s “freedom”, on the other hand, radical Islamists were against Atatürk’s westernized reforms defending the Muslim tradition against modernization since they saw it as moral decay. In either case women in Turkey, as in every other nation are still not liberated.

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