

**OSMANLI İMPARATORLUĞU'NDAN
TÜRKİYE CUMHURİYETİ'NE KALAN BİR MESELE: KADINLARIN KONUMU
AN ISSUE FROM THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE TO THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY:
THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**ПРОБЛЕМА ЖЕНЩИНЫ ОТ НАЧАЛА ОСМАНСКОЙ ИМПЕРИИ ДО
ТУРЕЦКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ.¹**

Betül Karagöz*

ABSTRACT

This study analyses the specific set of gender relationships that the modernization processes commenced under the Ottoman Empire, which passed on to the Turkish Republic, with particular attention to elements of citizenship and power sharing. The Women's Movement dating from the beginning of the 19th century under the Ottoman Empire was an aspect of a national process of modernization. This period, often referred to as the "First Wave" of the struggle for women's rights in Turkey, can be regarded as a manifestation of the need for reform in the structure of Ottoman society and state. The founders of the Republic aimed to follow through the reformist enterprise initiated in the Ottoman world, which was comprised of a quite clearly defined bundle of demands. However, despite the promises of the Republican vanguard, the process of turning women's demands into authentically experienced rights was a much more difficult and much longer process than might have been expected. This article provides an evaluation of this process and re-focuses on the status of women and the inequality between women and men in Turkey.

Keywords: Ottoman Women, Women Rights, Status of Turkish Women, Demands of Women, Gender Unequal

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ndeki modernleşme sürecinin, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndan devraldığı cinsiyet ilişkileri, "yurttaşlık" ve "iktidar paylaşımı" ekseninde analiz edilmektedir. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu altında 19. Yüzyılın başlarına dayanan Kadın Hareketi, ulusal modernleşme sürecinin bir görünümü idi. Kadın hakları için yapılan mücadelede "Birinci Dalga" olarak adlandırılan bu dönem, Osmanlı toplum ve devlet yapısında reforma duyulan gereksinimi ifade eder. Cumhuriyetin kurucuları da, Osmanlı dünyasında başlayıp kadınların taleplerinin oldukça açık bir şekilde tanımlandığı reformist girişimleri izlemeyi amaçladılar. Ancak, Cumhuriyet'in başlangıçtaki vaatlerine rağmen, yaşanan dönüşüm sürecinde, kadın talepleri beklenenden daha zor ve daha uzun sürede gerçekleşmekteydi. Bu çerçevede makalede, yaşanan bu sürecin analizi yapılarak

¹ . DOI : 10.17498/kdeniz.875

* . Doç. Dr. ,Giresun Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fak. Öğretim Üyesi.
drbetulkaragoz@gmail.com

kadınların konumu ve kadınlar ile erkekler arasındaki eşitsizlik durumu üzerine yeniden odaklanmayı sağlayan bir değerlendirme sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler:Osmanlı Kadınları, Türkiye’de Kadın Hakları, Kadınların Konumu, Kadınların Talepleri, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitsizliği

АННОТАЦИЯ

В данном исследовании дается анализ процесса модернизации в Республике Турции, гендерные отношения, вопросы «гражданство» и «разделения власти», унаследованные Османской империей. В начале 19-го века начинаются изменения в женском движении. Период борьбы женщин за свои права и попытки реформирования структуры османского общества и государства был назван «Первая волна». Несмотря на то, что было первоначальное обещание со стороны Республики требований женщин в отношении преобразования, затянулось на длительное время. Это еще раз доказало о неравенстве между мужчинами и женщинами. В работе мы попытались дать повторную оценку данной проблемы.

Ключевые слова: Женщины Османской государства, права женщин в Турции, проблема женщин, требования женщин, гендерные отношения.

INTRODUCTION

In Turkey, the history of the women’s movement and feminism is contemporaneous with nationalism, and therefore, stretches back to the closing years of the late 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. It is no surprise, therefore, that the women’s movement in Turkey tends to be studied in parallel with processes of Westernization and modernization. Women’s issues and women’s rights, summarized as “the status of women,” were a highly contentious element within the modernizing initiatives, which urged forward the transformation of the nation. The status of women was also one of the main spheres of action of reform movements immediately after the foundation of the Republic. For women, who had previously only held a status as “mother” or “wife”, the granting of formal civil status was certainly a giant step towards becoming an autonomous agent, who could contribute to the decision-making processes of the new social and political order. It is striking that, in spite of this, nearly a century later, women’s issues and controversies around the status of women stand out in young Republic of Turkey as a significant locus of unresolved problems.

Initially, women were encouraged to exercise all their legal rights in their new capacity as “citizens” and to raise their status in society as part of a process of “state-sponsored feminism.” For example, the compulsory primary education of girls, which was established in the final years of the Ottoman Empire and, in fact, only implemented in Istanbul, was applied generally throughout the country in the early years of the Republic. The removal of gender separation in education, the introduction of rules which permitted women to enter the workforce, and the recognition of women’s right to vote and to run in elections are other examples of steps which were strikingly advanced for that context, and which could only be described as revolutionary for that particular time and place. However, since male dominance had not been effectively challenged, this did not bring about success in extending equality and improving the position of women.

As it turned out, women were unable to turn the principle of equality, promised by their new civil rights and granted to them as citizens, into a social reality. Unequal patriarchal power relationships persistently presented the image of woman as a “complementary” figure, or as a figure “needing to be complemented,” and women were never recognized as autonomous individuals or permitted to take control of decision-making processes as equal citizens. Women have certainly been effective in the public sphere in Turkey, but from the foundation of the Republic until very recently, they were not able to achieve real potency within the power structure, beyond a certain limited degree of admission granted on the basis of their legal rights. There has been a woman prime minister and some female ministers and senior managers, but the place of women in power and in power relationships has remained limited and symbolic.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

The first modernizing reforms required the introduction of new civil and political institutions but should not be viewed as a process of mere imitation since these were changes demanded by the historical circumstances confronting the Ottoman Empire and emerged from the level of consciousness and the sum of national experience attained at the time. Among the various other advances towards national modernization during the push to transform the nation, women’s rights, women’s issues and the status of women appeared on the agenda from the 19th century onwards. In fact, at this stage there was a focus on the issue of women, which became the most debated issue within the reform movements (Kadiođlu, 1998: 91). As has been accepted, the 19th century brought about a decisive turning point in political, social, economic and cultural fields within the Ottoman Empire. It was the start of structural transformations in almost every area, from education to finance, and from law to social life. These changes influenced women profoundly, and were manifested in the simultaneous appearance of “the women’s movement” and “the question of the status of women.”

Careful study of this first process reveals that the structural changes which pioneered modernization of the highly conservative Ottoman Empire were proposed during the Tanzimat Declaration (administrative reforms - 1839), when modernization became decisive not just in the political and administrative sphere, but as part of a wholesale restructuring of society. The transformative character of modernization led to very substantial changes in the position of women and in their social life during this period (Çakır, 1996: 22). These changes were certainly the first steps in the process by which women would achieve “status” in society, but the increase in social value and social importance accorded to women that started with the Tanzimat Declaration was never entirely independent from women’s role as “mother”. Another remarkable change observable in this period was an increased readiness to view women as social beings rather than as sexual objects. This was the main point on which both progressive and conservative men agreed in their attempts to formulate their views of women within their respective western modernist and Islamic modernist paradigms (Durakbaşı, 2002: 68).

The process following the Second Constitutional Monarchy (*İkinci Meşrutiyet*), 1908-1920, not only affected men’s view of women, but also sparked women’s awareness of their own problems and responsibilities, prompting them to step forward as “social actors.” There was nothing relating to the legal status of women in any of the legislative changes coming after the Tanzimat Declaration, and therefore, the changes for women were limited solely to “a revolution of ideas.” Though the philosophical foundations of the women’s movement in Turkey were laid down during the experience of a modernization process

adopted by the elite primarily as a survival strategy for the declining Ottoman Empire, women who understood that the new rights brought by the Ottoman law would not assist them in the personal and gender-based injustices, to which they remained exposed, nonetheless focused on exercising as broadly as possible the positive equality granted by the newly recognized human rights and the rule of law. They realized that these positive rights could be used by women on an equal basis (not the least of which was the right to meet and publish), and these areas formed the focus of their efforts. Legal changes foreshadowing the modern civil code were among the fruits of this process of the recognition of the rule of law.

The principal aim of Mustafa Reşit Pasha, who, as grand vizier/chief minister of Sultan Abdulmecit from 1848-1858, personally read out the Tanzimat Declaration, was to transform society and state structure through education by founding a system of general and formal education. This was expected to create a radical transformation in the traditional life of girls and women in particular. Once this consciousness had taken root, there was the possibility of the growth of a future struggle for social rights. Thus, it was that an intellectual transformation conducted largely at the level of public and official history significantly impacted the personal and private history of individual women. The Ottoman apparatus had launched itself into a process to eradicate what was traditional and to seize hold of what was contemporary, and it was in this context that the doors of the Turkish Republic were opened (Yaraman, 2001: 18).

Despite the prevailing discourse of patriarchy in Turkey, the new tendency (modernization, nationalization, industrialization and democratization) did secure some improvements in the life of women even prior to the Republican period. In the immediate Tanzimat and especially the post-Tanzimat periods (1876-1920), the impact of the West was making itself felt in all areas of life, and therefore also, inevitably, in the lives of women. In fact, the Industrial Revolution, a landmark factor in the 19th century, was a common turning point in the life of women all over the world. Women were beginning to work in factories, and it was thought that they should receive at least a certain level of education. The idea that women deserved “equal rights” emerged in the West with the American and French Revolutions, developed with the women’s movement in the West, and this body of ideas continued later to raise issues of women’s rights and education in the world at large. Structural changes leading to the modernization of the highly conservative Ottoman Empire became a lively issue during the 19th century, when the Ottoman state structure entered a process of change, centralization, secularization and liberalization.

Ottoman modernization arose as a political movement, but it extended beyond the political structure to bring about renewal in every field of society, and the status of Ottoman women began to change in parallel with these broader transformations. However, the new order also inherited a social structure based on the (patriarchal) political system. The most important source available for those who want to understand these changes, and women’s struggles, actions and demands in this period, is the wealth of women’s journals, and records relating to the foundation and development of women’s associations. They were striving to shape their society, and to shape their fellow women in preparation for the coming changes. These pioneering Ottoman women organized public meetings and undertook duties in their associations.²

²Associations formed by women in this early period included:

1. *Cemiyet-i Hayriye-i Nisvaniye* [The Women’s Charitable Association]

At this time when eastern and western cultures were mingling in Istanbul, and when this process was being reflected in legislative change, women writers were asserting their own identity and attempting to give direction to the development of the state and the structure of society. In this, women led the way in seeking to classify what in Turkish culture deserved to be discarded, and what deserved to be preserved. This comprehensive questioning by Ottoman women led to the issue of the status of women being acknowledged at high levels of the state bureaucracy. In a speech on 26 April 1870 the Minister of Education, Saffet Pasha, stated: Women are deserving of all manner of respect from the moment of their birth; their wishes deserve to be respected, but their education is also a matter that requires care and attention (see also: Temelkuran, 1970: 65).

More than forty women's journals were published between 1869 (when the first women's journal was published *Terakk-i Muhedderat* [Ladies' Progress]) and 1928 (when the first journal was published using the new alphabet, Roman script). The primary function of these journals produced or published by women was to provide a network for the exchange of information between women. *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* [Ladies' Own Gazette] was an eight-page newspaper published by women, appearing every Monday and Thursday from 1895 to 1908. *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* was influential in taking women out of the narrow confines of the home, enabling them to become conscious of themselves as social individuals, and initiating solidarity between women. It also provided information about the status of women in other countries and established a link between Turkish women and women throughout the world. This forum produced women, who were leading literary figures such as the poets Nigâr Hanım and Makbule Leman, and the novelist Fatma Aliye (Akşit, 2010: 207-18). The newspaper's style was moderate, but it gradually evolved toward an interest in economic independence, intellectual enlightenment for women, and the pursuit of their rights.

Feminist ideas were first explicitly voiced by *Kadınlar Dünyası Dergisi* [Woman's World Magazine] published between 1913 and 1921. Women writers, in their articles in *Kadınlar Dünyası Dergisi*, stated that they wanted to be held "directly accountable" for their writings and attempted to attract the attention of the political elite without going so far as to break the law (Yaraman, 2001: 0-7). During this critical period, a large number of women's organizations sprang up, aiming to improve the condition of women and dealing with matters such as the education of women, the expansion of job opportunities for women, and the modernization of women's attire. Some of these organizations secured important gains for women. For example, a radical discussion in *Kadınlar Dünyası Dergisi* led to a campaign to permit women to work in the public sector.

An outcome of this campaign was that, on December 5, 1913, a number of female workers commenced employment at the Istanbul Telephone Company. In 1914, following

2. *Teali-î Vatan Osmanlı Hanımlar Cemiyeti* [The Women's Association for the Promotion of the Ottoman Nation]

3. *Osmanlı Türk Hanımları Esirgeme Derneği* [The Association for the Protection of Ottoman Turkish Women] for the Consumption of Domestically Manufactured Products]

4. *Osmanlı Müdafaa-î Hukuk-ı Nisvan Cemiyeti* [The Ottoman Association for the Legal Defence of Women]

5. *Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyet-î İslâmiyyesi* [The Islamic Association for the Employment of Women]

6. *Osmanlı Birinci Kadın İşçi Taburu* [The First Brigade of Ottoman Working Women]

7. *Kadın Birliği* [The Women's Union]

another campaign of the *Osmanlı Müdafaa-i Hukuk-ı Nisvan Cemiyeti*, Istanbul University (*Istanbul Darulfünun*) opened its doors to women for the first time, and in the same year the right of women to run commercial businesses was recognized. The women's high schools and universities established during the Ottoman Empire were instrumental in producing a significant number of well-educated women who later came to play prominent roles in the formative years of the Republic (White, May 19, 2012, <http://www.ips.siu.edu/iss/WID/project/Turkey>). It should be pointed out here that, education of girls in the Ottoman Empire was a matter of particular and critical significance in the second half of the 19th century with the *Maârif-i Umumiyye Nizamnamesi* (MUN, National Education Regulation) which was passed at the initiative of Saffet Pasha on 1 September 1869.

2. FROM THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY TO SOCIETY WITH THE DEMOCRACY 'WITHOUT WOMEN'

All over the world, feminism is thought to have a deep relationship with wars, especially World War I, when a significant portion of the male population was either at the war front or in the grave, resulting in women taking over the workforce and subsequently demanding equal pay with men. On the heels of WWI, the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 on the ashes of the Ottoman Empire and as a consequence of the War of Independence. It would not be wrong to assume that the context of the emergence of the young Republic created a similar motivation to recognize the female population. Thus, the founders of the young Republic established a new constitution in 1924 and granted new civil rights for all citizens.

In such circumstances, the 1920s brought serious initiatives to resolve the gender problem with the formal recognition of women's civil rights. In 1934, the struggle for the liberation of women moved to the political front. On December 5, 1934 the Constitution was amended to grant women the right to national vote and stand for office in parliamentary elections. After the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland (1907) and England (1929), Turkey was the first European country to grant this right to women, with immediate effect. But, all over the world Wyoming in the United States the case of woman suffrage first time when it adopted women's local voting rights in 1869. Indeed, women suffrage activists procured the right to vote in some sort of local election in over thirty states by 1917 (Banaszak, 1998: 99).

The Turkish Republic underwent major problems with regard to the status of women bringing, what Serpil Sancar (1998: 1) has described as a new democracy 'without women,' an arrangement which was unremarkable, and indeed unremarked upon, within a resolutely non-egalitarian society. There was a huge gap in this new proto-democracy, and only much later in the history of the Republic would this become the space in which a struggle for social and political rights could take place. In Turkey, much was achieved in the opening years of the Republic: the Civil Code was passed into law, the Civil Service Law of 1926 granted women full and equal rights to state employment, and women's right to vote and be elected to public office was recognized in 1934. Nonetheless, these substantial gains failed to raise the status of women to the level which had been hoped for. The right to vote and stand for election had not resulted in any substantial participation by women in politics or government, and the rights formally accorded to women seemed to be having little impact on basic and pressing issues such as female illiteracy. Of course, the Republic unquestionably supported the women's movement which had begun generations earlier in 1839 with the Tanzimat and a number of positive measures.

Nevertheless, history also indicates that within the process of modern democratization in Turkey under the Republic, the status of gender relations inherited from the Ottoman Empire moved forward very slowly and irregularly and on highly egalitarian terms. The promotion of women's rights may have been one of the Turkish Republic's landmark projects, but the new regime was unable to break up deeply rooted historical equalities by means of legislation alone, and the result was that gender discrimination remained ingrained in the social ethos of the Republic. Until the 1980s "there was a consensus that the Kemalist reforms had emancipated women, so the issue was closed as a matter of discussion. This general opinion was shared not only by educated professional women but also by housewives, who could be confident that their daughters would benefit from the opportunities guaranteed by the reforms. But as Yeşim Arat (1998a: 91) claims, this consensus was disrupted by the objections raised by a younger generation of educated and professional women, who called themselves 'feminists' in 1980s.

Feminists questioned the authenticity of the supposed "equality" and asserted the importance of "liberation"—the liberation, which the Republic had promised to all citizens but had been unable to secure for women. Rather than the formal freedoms of the public sphere, these women's focus was now on a more profound analysis of deeper human and social relations, which provided the conditions for genuine liberation. They strongly opposed the male-dominated regime, which manifested itself in matters such as "the status of the husband" as head of the family, husbands' right to choose where a couple should live, men's right to work, women's dependence on their husband's for permission to work, and the wife's status within the family as her husband's assistant (Arat, 1998b: 94). In parallel with these struggles, women also undertook the preliminary organizational work which would be required to transform these personal demands into a society-wide institutionalized program.

Some commentators have persuasively explained the fragility of the Republican "project for women" by stating that the genuinely revolutionary character of the new republic had dissipated by the end of its first fifteen years, and that from the late-30s onwards there developed a problematic political opposition between modernity and traditionalism which blocked further progress (Berktaş, 2002: 257-61). Undoubtedly, the socio-cultural conceptualizations of women inherited by the Republic were essentially "anti-feminist". Nor can it be denied that the question of the status of women was closely identified with the success of a "strong and modern" new Republic and instrumentalized for the purpose of achieving the Republic's aims. Furthermore, this was a fundamentally anti-democratic process since the instrumentalization referred to relied on an unquestioned presumption that the "constitutive subject" of the new regime was uniquely invested with the capability to achieve the necessary transformation.

With the decline of revolutionary enthusiasm referred to above, the traditional once again supervened on the progressive. The struggle of the traditional to reassert itself has been keenly felt throughout the history of the Republic. This field of interaction related to the dynamics of nation-formation, that is, the battle between the traditional and the progressive, is not peculiar to Turkey, and was an issue common to all nations developing during this period (Berktaş, 2002: 248-85). It is a context which vastly complicates the progress of women's rights, since in the midst of such tensions; women are immediately seized upon as a "symbol" and instrumentalized by the customs and traditional values (Çınar, 2005: 51-74).

Women's formal participation in politics was an important innovation introduced by the Republic, but this was always, unfortunately, seen as a vehicle for party aims and objectives (Ayata, 1995: 311). Within the structure of Turkish democracy, women's involvement in any political party was for many years mainly restricted to activities within the "women's section" of such parties. Party managements were certainly interested in addressing women, including women who were effectively confined to the home, in their capacity as potential voters, but were very reluctant to have anything to do with women as potential candidates for party (Sancar, 1998: 531). Democracy 'without women' has been the normal state of affairs so far, and at last it is recognized that men predominantly making the decisions in matters affecting the lives of women has been strange. But today, the tiny proportion of women in political parties' on the right and left of the spectrum is now recognized as a grave problem.

3. THE SLOW TIMES FOR WOMEN IN THE POST-ATATÜRK PERIOD

Clearly, insofar as it led to the modernization of the nation as a whole, Ottoman modernization, and subsequent modernization in the Republic, was important for the modernization of the status of women, and for raising the importance of women in society. The Turkish Republic proposed to recognize some women rights and granted civil rights to women. At that time nationalism was the most significant ideology because the Turkish nation-state was newly established and distinct from "the collectivity system" (*Millet Sistemi*) of the Ottoman Empire. Berktaş (1998: 4) claims that the ideology of Turkish nationalism acknowledges the emancipation of women as the prerequisite of a wider social revolution, but she goes on to point out that this approach actually contributed to the replacement of Islamic patriarchy with a form of Western patriarchy. Nevertheless, in spite of all its shortcomings, the principal gain of this period was that women gained an awareness of their own identity (see also: Çağaptay, 2006 and Lewis, 2002).

It is true that any attempt by the state to elevate the status of women in society is inevitably a form of top-down interventionism. While the *Kurucu İrade* (Founding Order of the Republic) was not a totalitarian manipulation in which women and the public at large were coerced by force, there is no question that it was clearly directive in character. Despite this strong directive push, which should have promoted their inclusion, women had considerable difficulty in finding their way to power. Turkish modernization during the Republican period was planned and carried out essentially as a Kemalist enterprise. Its understanding of "modern femininity" reflected the presumptions of Kemalism: an educated professional woman, organized and participative, involved in the activities of clubs and societies, a good wife, a good mother, and a smart follower of fashion.

"The movement for women's rights in Turkey began toward the 19th century, during the Ottoman Empire. Steadily implementing the modernization policy of Turkey, Atatürk, the founder of the movement, put into action the accumulated goals of the women's movement; and mobilized mass support for the realization of these goals. Consequently, Turkish woman obtained rights far more advanced than those obtained by women in many European countries" (White, May 19, 2012, <http://www.ips.siu.edu/iss/WID/project/Turkey>). But this was a struggle to achieve active agency; in other words, for women to gain their rights as full citizens, to transform themselves into autonomous figures, and to be recognized as such. The ideology of Turkish nationalism, the struggle to make the nation captain of its own destiny, is linked to the women's struggle to achieve this active agency. The emancipation of women was seen as a prerequisite for a larger social revolution.

Though the founding spirit of the new all-encompassing middle class was male, these males adopting the founder role happened to initiate and support the women's movement; however, it is interesting to note that within this middle class, fathers, who were often keen supporters of their daughters, remained the strictest possible inhibitors of their wives' freedom of movement and action. An *ideal of tomorrow*, which might be reached by the "new generation" but would never be present in the here and now was the repository of hopes. The dream that women would one day attain their deserved rights but not right now was kept alive until the 1980s. The understanding imposed by this mentality was that the legal rights given to women were not for immediate use but were reserved for the society of the future. The structure of gender relations handed down from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic, from the imperial subjects to the democratic citizen, were reshaped under the direction of a male-dominated social and political structure.

Such patriarchy becomes more pronounced especially after the death of Atatürk. The constitutional democracy was surrounded by the new political forms and devices of a single party government without opposition in the 1940s. Şirin Tekeli suggests that any rights granted to women during the post-Atatürk period of one party rule were really only conceded in order to bring "kudos" to the one party government and its leader İsmet İnönü and to differentiate them from the rest of the crop of one party regimes of the day (1998: 25). The rights afforded to women were shaped according to male requirements for the national project, and not according to the demands of women. The result was the establishment, at a very early stage, of a democracy 'without women,' as referred to above.

Throughout the period of insufficient democracy, which failed to satisfy the social and political necessities of the country, the political life in Turkey was the source of social discontent and political gridlock. In fact, democracy does not mean merely government by the people, majority rule, or universal suffrage. All of these political forms or devices are a part of its necessary organization, but the chief advantage such methods of organization have is their tendency to promote some salutary and formative purpose. The really formative purpose is not exclusively a matter of the provision of broadly-disseminated individual liberties. Neither is it a matter of equal rights alone although it must always cherish the social bond represented by the principle (Croly, 2004: 377).

The 1980s show that we had shifted to a challenging process. For the first time, gratitude to the national ideology and to the regime was analyzed and even open to question. Mass mobilization by women for women's rights and freedom entered the agenda, and a transformation took place in the level of consciousness of women. What is more, women's issues and the women's movement were no longer exclusively concerns of women, and became matters of general social concern in which, at least to some extent, the support of men could be counted upon. In this connection, the arguments of women played a pioneering role in the re-ordering of social models and approaches (Karagöz, 2008: 178).

As the majority of humankind, women clearly comprise the largest "group" in the world. Yet they also participate in nearly every other group within society. This simultaneous oneness and diversity has confounded almost everyone who has tried to come to grips with it. Although most anthropologists and sociologists agree that some activities and attributes are characteristic of women universally, there are obvious dangers in generalizing about people who are composed of every racial, class, ethnic, religious, and regional alignment. To make the problem even more difficult, women constitute the only group which is treated unequally as a whole, but whose members live in greater intimacy with their "oppressors" than with each other (Chafe, 1977: 3).

In Turkey, women are still the weak group within the structures of society, economy and politics. The distribution of wealth between the genders is as unequal as the distribution of power and influence, and complacency in the face of this situation is a serious problem in the struggle for equality. The general increase in the participation of professional women in the public and the private sectors has not brought a commensurate increase in the proportion of women in senior management positions, nor has it done much to improve the general standard of employment conditions for women. In Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, Kurdish and Arab women in particular have been facing old patriarchal customs, like domestic violence, forced marriages, bride wealth/price and honor killings. The Turkish government and NGOs struggle to eliminate the poor conditions and patriarchal cultural value system through educational campaigns.

Patriarchal ideology ensures that unequal power relations and resources accumulate in the hands of men as the holders of power, and that women are defined by men. In order to put an end to the patriarchal order and establish a genuinely equal society, women also need to have social, economic and cultural power. In Turkish society, women are publicly revered as “mother and sister” but in real terms they are actually mother-aunt-sister-wife in the private sphere not in the public sphere. The women’s movement in the 1980s sought, with some success, to ensure that women were perceived as autonomous agents, but it was unable to deliver this in full. The women’s movement was able to deliver women their “surname” in the 1990s when married women gained the right to use their own surname. But most Turkish women in the first century of the second millennium are still “without standing” in terms of political power, despite the fact that a few women have reached top positions in nearly all fields. Indeed, feminism has changed the everyday lives of men as well as women and signalled a victory for class power (Aronowitz, 2003. 45).

However, in Turkey, women’s struggle to achieve partnership in decision-making, in power, in all forms of prestige (status/standing), and in wealth, remains an expectation and a battle which has yet to be won. Nonetheless, the women’s movement is now viewed less as solely the preoccupation of women and increasingly as a problem of the broader society. The concept of women’s rights has been transformed into a social problem in which the limits of sexism have been dissolved. Of course, *Turkey occupies a unique position in the Muslim world because of its fully secular legal framework. Under the Turkish constitution everyone is equal before the law, irrespective of religion, race, language, or sex. Turkey remains the only Muslim country which implements a fully secular legal system. However, customs and tradition play a very important role in what is a predominantly Muslim society. Women are generally regarded as being inferior to men and inevitably their theoretical legal rights are violated* (White, May 19, 2012, <http://www.ips.siu.edu/iss/WID/project/Turkey>).

As an autonomous movement independent of political parties, the women’s movement in Turkey originated in the 1980s, formed by urban, educated middle class women, and it succeeded in consolidating itself in the 1990s. Today, there are more than 450 women’s organizations in Turkey that maintain an accepted position in society. The movement received significant impetus when CEDAW (the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) was signed and ratified in 1985 (see: Uçar, 2009: 3). The position of Turkish society in the 2010s, where the existential problems of women have evolved to become problems of power, begins to approach, in matters of daily life, the feminist line and the universal vision of the women’s

movement (see: CEDAW Report in 1997: <http://www.wfirt.org/humanrts/cedaw/cedaw-turkey.htm>).

There is no question that, as a historical phenomenon, the Second Wave Women's Movement of the 1980s played a significant background role in this. It is now accepted that women will actually exercise the legal rights they hold as citizens, and indeed many of their newer demands have been met. If we look at the course of the women's movement in Turkey, the principal problem under the Ottoman Empire was the emancipation of women "within the family", while in the Republican period, the battle shifted to the struggle to liberate women "within society". Despite the considerable efforts of thirty years and some important gains, the "male-centered" perspective has yet to be fully overcome. Today, the mentality of traditional democracy, namely relative democracy 'without women' still compellingly persists.

CONCLUSION

Recently Turkey has been ranked in 16th place of the world economy. But, according to *the World Economic Forum*, "The Global Gender Gap Report" (2015), Turkey ranked 130th out of 145 countries on "gender gap" (inequality between men and women). Women are still not sufficiently effective in the decision-making process. The status of women is not relatively equal in the administrative, political, social, economical life and also in their homes. In Turkey, there were 550 MPs in Parliament (2011- on the 7th of June, 2015), only 78 MPs are women, 14 percent; and only 61 women in 53 thousand (autonomous demarche); there were 17 metropolitan mayors, none of whom were women; there were 64 provincial mayors, only 2 of these were women; there were 25 cabinet-ministers, only 1 of these was a woman, and she was responsible for women rights; there were 81 governors, but only 1 woman; there were no women among 30 undersecretaries; there were 81 provincial police chiefs, but not one of them was a woman.³ Empirical survey research has shown that, in Turkey God, government and society are still conceived as a man, and the cultural value system leads to a male vision and attitude. Unfortunately 'government of

³Under these circumstances, Turkey has been a country having a democracy 'without women'. However, the results of the previous General Elections (held on the 7th of June, 2015) has provided us a picture indicating that this trend appears to be reversing now, though in a relative way: The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) has succeeded to secure 80 seats in the Turkish Parliament and women hold 26 of these seats constituting 32,5 % of the parliamentarians of the party. On the other hand, we observe that women are represented in lower proportions in other parties: Only 39 women have achieved to enter the Parliament in The Justice and Development Party (AKP) that has turned out to be the first party in the elections with 40,9 % vote rate and 258 seats. Women are represented with 21 seats in The Republican People's Party (CHP), the second party in the elections with 25,0 % vote rate and 132 seats. There are, on the other hand, 4 women parliamentarians in the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) that has become the third party in the said elections securing 16,3 % of the votes and 80 seats.

The number of women deputies has decreased in the last General Elections (held on the 1th of the November, 2015). HDP has reached the 59 seats in the Turkish Parliament and women hold 23 of these seats constituting 38,98 % of the parliamentarians of the party. 34 women have achieved to enter the Parliament in The Justice and Development Party (AKP) that has turned out to be the first party in the elections with 317 seats. Women are still represented with 21 seats in The Republican People's Party (CHP), the second party in the elections with 134 seats. There are, on the other hand, only 3 women parliamentarians in the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) that has become the third party (according to the ratio of votes) in the said elections securing 40 seats. On the other hand, in the last Cabinet two women deputies have been ministers.

men' has not been successful on gender problem within the democracy 'without women.' Furthermore, none of NGOs and civilian organizations has reached a considerable accomplishment on the old issue yet. But the studies of women have reached an institutional character, structure and level at the universities, government, media, NGOs, and civil organizations. In this context, the efforts concentrate on enhancing the "the democracy without women" in Turkey by ensuring a better woman representation and gender fairly. But it is clear that Turkey isn't still successful in preventing the gender-based unequal and the domestic violence.

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