

Institutional Process of Women's Movement in Turkey: Turkish Republic Prime Ministry Directorate General on the Status of Women (KSGM)¹

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Abstract

This study covers the research on the present situation of the women's studies in Turkey which has become an important issue in recent years. The whole study is a wide-ranging work, resulting from a two year-anthropological fieldwork. KSGM (*Directorate General on the Status of Women*) as an official institution, and its activities are thoroughly evaluated. This study examines women's movement based on KSGM. In the research, interviews have been made with women in different institutions (universities and non-governmental organizations, etc.). Even though comparisons have been made in the study, results of the interviews which have been made with eight women who work as experts, civil servants and manager at KSGM is evaluated within the framework of the process of institutionalization of Turkish women's movement. The article is a summary of the developments concerning women's rights starting with a brief assessment of what happened in the Ottoman period and after the Republic. The essay evaluates the process of women's movement in Turkey by studying KSGM as an example of official institutionalization.

Key Words: *Women's Movement, Institutional Process of Feminism, KSGM* Türkiye'de Kadın Hareketinin Kuruluş Süreci: Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü (KSGM).

Öz

Türkiye'de Kadın Hareketinin Kurumsallaşma Süreci: Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de son yıllarda önem kazanan kadın çalışmaları alanının, resmi bir kurum örneği olan KSGM'den (Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü) yola çıkılarak, günümüzdeki durumunun araştırılmasını kapsamaktadır. Seçmiş olduğumuz kurumda çalışanlarla farklı görünümlere bürünen "kadın çalışmaları" alanı, iki yıl süreyle üniversite ve gönüllü kuruluşlar da dahil farklı kurumlarda yapılan görüşmeler ve gözlemlerle antropolojik alan araştırmasına dayanarak değerlendirilmiştir. Bu nedenle çalışmada zaman zaman karşılaştırmalar yapılsa da, bu yazı kapsamında KSGM'de uzman, memur ve genel müdür statüsünde çalışan toplam sekiz kadınla yapılan görüşme sonuçları Türkiye'de kadın hareketinin kurumsallaşma süreci çerçevesinde değerlendirilmiştir. Makale, Osmanlı döneminde kadın konusunda yaşanan gelişmelerin özetiyle başlayarak, Cumhuriyet sonrası yaşananların kısa bir değerlendirmesini sunmaktadır. Çalışma, günümüzde resmi kurumsallaşma örneği olan KSGM'den yola çıkarak Türkiye'de kadın hareketi sürecini ve bugün geldiği noktayı değerlendirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kadın Hareketi, Feminizmin Kurumsallaşma Süreci, KSGM.*

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1. Introduction:

1.1. Subject and Scope

The basic purpose of the research is to look at the studies prepared from a feminist point of view and by the people with an anthropological perspective. Women's studies appeared in different aspects due to the working people in the institution we have chosen. We have tried to comparatively analyze the observations and conversations with institution workers and authorities on behalf of the institution.

The questions that have constituted the focal point of this study are:

- What problems appeared during the institutional process initiated with the entrance of the women's movement into different institutions?
- What are the reasons for the restricted aspects in this field at present day?
- What is the relationship between the different institutions and how do the working people in these institutions evaluate this topic?

Based on the basic questions mentioned above, interviews have been made with women working at KSGM (*Directorate General on the Status of Women,*) data have been collected by observations and interviews participating in meetings for 2 years period since September 2001. In the research, interviews have been made with women in different institutions (universities and non-governmental organizations, etc.). Even though comparisons have been made in the study, results of the interviews which have been made with eight women who work as experts, civil servants and manager at KSGM is evaluated within the framework of the process of institutionalization of Turkish women's movement. The article is a summary

of the developments concerning women's rights starting with a brief assessment of what happened in the Ottoman period and after the Republic. The essay evaluates the process of women's movement in Turkey by studying KSGM as an example of official institutionalization.

1.2. Method

The fieldwork was prepared with the data collected by personal interviews with the working people in the chosen institution, with notes taken in the conferences and panels summoned, in the internal meetings, and with our observations during a two-year period.

The method of the questionnaire was not applied and numerical data was not used. A tape recorder was used in the personal interviews, mostly for a two hour period, with semi-structured questions. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed; sometimes a tape recorder was not used, just notes were taken. The names of some interviewees were hidden due to respect for their personal rights.

2. Development of the Women's Movement in Turkey:

2.1. Ottoman Period

The women's movement is a freedom and equality movement by origin. Its beginning in Turkey was assumed to be the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century because women's rights were first started to be mentioned in these times. It is a common view that feminism became visible as a movement in 1980s² (Abadan-Unat, 1998; Tekeli, 1995; Berktaş, 1994; Berktaş vd. 2004).

2 for comparison, vide: Tekeli, 1995: 29.

The Ottoman Empire was not incurious with the developments in western countries with the administrative reforms period. The intellectuals who were familiar with western countries were trying to find a solution to this problem on the one hand; and on the other hand they started to make an effort to change the position of women in society.

In the Ottoman period, the discussions related to the women's rights were initiated with the "*Tanzimat*" [political and administrative reforms]. Social transformation process was initiated with the *Tanzimat* declaration in 1839. The Ottoman Empire experienced a structural transformation resulted in changes on political, social, economical, educational, judicial and intellectual fields; Ottoman women were also affected by this transformation. During the 2nd Constitutional Period (*II. Meşrutiyet*) the years (1908-1918) in which the women's movement reached its peak; women expressed their desire to join the social life with many publications and many associations they established (Tekeli, 1995: 30, 31).

2.2. After the Republican Developments

Many important processes occurred in the period from *Tanzimat* to the early years of the proclamation of the Republic (*Cumhuriyet*). Feminism in Turkey did not appear for the first time until the 1980s. The women's movement in our country has a historical background starting from the end of the 19th century. Tekeli (1995: 30-35) discusses the women's movement in Turkey in three main parts. First was in the magazines published and associations established by the women in the 2nd Constitutional Period, and the second was the state feminism period. This period covers the *Kadınlar Birliği* [Women Association] which was established in 1924, and closed in 1935, and the right to vote and be voted were given in 1934. And the third

period was 1980 and after the 1980's. However, according to Tekeli, the discovery and Turkey's expression of feminism were after the 1980 military coup.

According to some researchers the period is named as "neo-feminist movement" or the "second wave women's movement" in Turkey started in the 1970s. Many researchers assume that the 1980s as a strong initial date of the women's movement in Turkey because it was the decade in which women started to question their oppression and identities in "a stronger and deeper voice" than they had done before. Although the interest in women studies in Turkey is recent, the questioning of the woman's position in Turkey and the background of the women's movement are much older.

2.3. Developments After 1990: Institutional Process of Women's Movement in Turkey

Directorate General on the Status of Women was established in 1990 with the name of "Prime Ministry, Status and Problems of Woman Administration" in order to stop all kinds of discrimination against women, improve human rights, help women to be effective on economical, social and cultural fields, give support to all kinds of studies to raise up the educational level of women, develop strategies about this topic, constitute plans and programs, contribute to determination of basic policies, etc. Institution became "General Directorate" six months later. KSGM, established with the efforts of the state minister İmren Aykut in Motherland Party (*ANAP*) period which was the 47th government of Turkish Republic, was the first official organization in the stage of institutionalization of the women's movement. The institution was restructured in 2004 with the *Teşkilat Kanunu* [paramount law]. Acuner (1999: 138), specifies that the

institutions are established to find solutions to the problems that cannot be solved by personal efforts and these problems as various as the ones troubling individuals. She continues to say that the KSGM was established in order to find solutions to women's problems in an organized way (ibid). According to Acuner, by creating policies to the governments and making these policies rule, the KSGM constitute one part of the process of behavioral organization.

Researchers, who express that the KSGM lacks enough human resources, say that the number of projects increased in order to solve financial problems emerged. Currently with the increase of funds on the international level, "feminist projection" has come to the forefront. However feminism which moves with projects has caused various handicaps along with it. KSGM, has become an institution that oversees projects. The fact that fewer people have been studying feminism, and in the course of time, the number of volunteers has begun to decrease has affected the institution work in negative way.

Due to the KSGM's official relations, taking on international projects and preparing collective projects, it is observed that the institution has been studying cooperatively with academicians. Yakın Ertürk, a sociologist at METU says that:

- "Turkey's membership in CEDAW is officially important. United Nations' Woman Status Commission is political. Woman case has already been a political issue. Woman point of view is important. We come into such affairs accidentally! The preferential deals have to be ordered, then, research centers, universities and United Nations have to take into hand the issue by the agency of KSGM. Today women studies are in crisis all over the world. In the politics-application-theory triangle,

*academic work is guilty! They exited the action basis in academies and today a lot of women are studying in accordance with the academic development and career at universities. Politics-praxis-application: the combination and organization of these three is important. Conveying research to political organizations and communication is important. METU has covered much distance about this issue."*³

The KSGM and universities like METU have been working cooperatively. The KSGM studies collectively with universities, especially when the projects need an expert support.

The relations of the KSGM with other institutions and how the projects are undertaken by it are put into practice. For instance, Serpil Sancar Üşür, who is another academician from Ankara University and specifies that "the process and the system have to be known well", draws attention to the importance of the poverty research of the World Bank. Saying that the World Bank has been following a political line in that research, she emphasizes that it is not enough to study only in the universities in order to create policies, but is compulsory to cooperate all associations and institutions. Mentioning also the difficulties of studying on this issue at the universities, Üşür says "We cannot express what our complaint actually is". Üşür, who mentions the problems of theses and methodologies, assesses the format of the Institution and, adds that the periodicals like *Feminist İktisat* [Feminist Economics] have been using statistical information and this harms the studies.

A researcher who says that the Directorate General could not be institutionalized and the problems have been grown out of the "personal aspects" continues as:

3 2 Yakın Ertürk, April 1 2002, KSSGM. The meeting about the decisions United Nations took in New York

- *"It is a secret language; perhaps woman movement might be come out when is took an interest deeply. Women were frayed... Maybe I am taking it too much seriously..."*

The people, who work in the institution, think that if the problem of dialogue among different institutions is solved, and if cooperation framework is adopted in principle, they would be successful to a great extent. They also emphasize that the role of KSGM, which is the only official institution on the institutionalization process of the women's movement, should not be disregarded. The previous director general Selma Acuner says that:

- *"How do the institutions affect the women's studies? I think it is an important question. Women have firstly an equality problem among themselves. Disorder of different woman definitions is point at issue. How is the relation between woman and woman? There is not such thing as 'women discuss the woman issue'. Men discuss too. They have to. I think that the woman policies have to spread all over the place."*

Acuner's solution formula is to intensify the relationships among institutions. Acuner, who speaks about the necessity of well rounded organized work with a holistic point of view in women's studies, utters that a certain institutionalization, human resource, forensic arrangement and transformer policies are required as the parts of the solution: *"Problems are solved over long term. Firstly the demands coming from the public body should be entered the field of politics. There are intermediary institutions. One of those is KSGM. Perhaps these are dreams, yet facts could not exist without dreams!"*⁴

4 January 14 2003, ATAUM.

The researchers say that the things related to women are a part of other policies; there should be a place where only feminine issues are discussed in parliament; and this is the only way. They also emphasize the importance of the development of women's issues is taking short steps.

3. Women's Studies In The Official Institution:

Directorate General on the Status of Women (KSGM)

The founding objective of the Directorate General as determined by law is "to study for the aim of keeping and improving the human rights of women; to strengthen the social, economical, cultural and political positions of women in life; to provide equality of opportunity and right; and to arrange the elements related to organization, assignment and authority."

As in the women studies programs at universities, in the KSGM which is the only institution studying on women issues at an official level in our country, there are signs of the "problematic origin" of the women movement in Turkey and "rapid institutionalization" without any healthy discussions. The fact that the idea of official institutionalization was not developed and it had today's restrictions in the institution that it train. Together with the solidarity among women, career concerns and the issue of otherness, restrictive rules due to working conditions in an official institution has been specified as another problem which limits the areas of study for the researchers.

When the initial stages of the institutionalization process were thought, wringing water from a flint was expected with the organization structure of the institution. The working people in the institution say that the problems in the beginning are continuing now too. A researcher working in

KSGM expresses her reasons for studying women issues as:

- *"I have chosen this field because I think it's a political issue. In accordance with the feminist point of view, I am talking about a point of view which consists asking questions of feminism, taking back an answer and association of these two. It is a challenging trip. Discussing the methodological problems is also a wide discussion. Ankara University – KASAUM arranged a meeting. The questions of what the methodological issues basically are and how a network structure we can constitute with the people studying this issue came to order."*

The difference between "being voluntary" and "being professional" is a serious matter. When the specialization in the projects of NGOs (non-governmental organization) is a case in point, this has had damaging effects on feminism and women's movement:

- *"feminism was not like that. The choice of professionalism instead of volunteerism! 'Livelihood feminists', in other words there are people picking up a livelihood from this. Since there are few people working on this issue, number of NGOs increased, especially in Ankara. The fact that the structures of the institutions and working people change with the changing governments is very important. I am really wondering where the supports of KSGM go. The project will finish at the end of March. The link between thinking and behaving is too much far away from each other both in KSGM and in women studies. Being interested is also important as for me."*

Many researchers' state, "We have changed with joining KSGM" express their ideas related to the institution and their identity as:

- *"Sometimes I say myself that how I am doing an unneeded mockery. Building power against an-*

other power will not be a solution. However you should constitute the superstructure. I am more realistic because when I came here I was experienced. And here is the effect of the institutions. Institutions limit this exciting, radical position. Because you see that the things are not go like the way you suppose or imagine. Something like you behave like the way of the management of the affairs there! Institutions are blocks! Entering the institutions means becoming blocks! Because talking about the institutions means talking about certain block ideas. Power of lying outside the sphere of this is great! However this does not bring an offer. That is to say it is not a solution."

- *"Most of the women studying women issues –but we cannot generalize- come into play saying that 'I have something, I assume the chair'. Even the professors are abstaining from talking about the woman issue. However the women's studies departments and woman centers in universities are very important for training human sources. Increase of knowledge is ok but cannot be spreading over politics, it is very difficult. There are problems even in the international politics. Woman is standing at the same place; the field of problem is the same."*

Therefore it is observed that there are 'abrasive' career concerns and a 'competition process' grown out of these concerns as well as the solidarity among women.

Member of the parliament Oya Akgönenç thinks that the politicians' lack of gracefulness affect women negatively:

- *"Is behaving of woman like a man a necessity of politics? It seems politics requires harshness! This may be discussed. A vision is compulsory in politics. Ethical values should be honored. Women may equal to men only by the equality of opportu-*

nity... *We cannot be like a man, if we were wanted to be like a man, a man would be chosen. KSGM is very successful, I am proud of it. Even the Civil Law is a 'silent revolution'!*"⁵

It has been observed that there are 'traumatic separations' in the women's studies field. It can be claimed that answers to the questions as to why they separated, and the messages of the women who separated with soreness, are the key points of the problems in the field. In any case the history of the women movement is full of such separations. Perhaps it is necessary to get at the bottom of this matter. There may be both psychological and political reasons. A researcher in the institution says related to this issue that:

- *"We are powerless! Most of our dreams came to nothing! Well, the external effects (politics, the difficulty of the system, being inexperienced) are important but the most serious problem and the separation are experienced as a result of the relations among women themselves: Elitism, career desire, not being radical adequately, doing this as a hobby, ethnical issues (ethnical discrimination), class distinction and etc."*

The working people in the institution specifying that the general problems of the women's studies especially in the KSGM are 'organization', 'education' and 'lack of communication among women', think that the fact that new people in this field are unexcited and the institutionalization of the movement caused a 'stagnancy'. As emphasizing the education, they specify that universities have different position among the institutions studying women's issues.

Now, it can be said that the women's studies at universities are at the center. Universities have

special position among other fields of the women's movement. This position is different from NGOs or government agencies. In universities there is the factor of education and human resources. At this point we may evaluate the women's studies in two groups: one is the research centers, the other is the programs training specialists (universities). Especially the master theses are very important, because they question the issues from the view point of gender.

It is possible to say that (it cannot be considered that) the hopeless speeches related to the women's movement are not peculiar to Turkey, and the movement is an obstruction all over the world.

Ayşe Karaduman from State Institute of Statistics, mentioned in a seminar related to gender statistics that the determination of the issues that have to be researched could not be separated from the international stage. For instance, for Turkey sanitary arrangements should be primary and living standards should be secondary issue. International institutions ask for the population and labor data every year. The education of girls is one of those. An information network has been constituted for the data related to the woman issue. State Institute of Statistics has an important role especially on the organization and collecting the data.

Karaduman specifies that the statistics in Turkey are made in respect of sexuality and the participant methods are applied mostly by feminists says that they provide technical information for studies in State Institute of Statistics, but there are problems in the application of quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Yıldız Ecevit, academician at METU, says that "I feel the existence of women's unemployment and wage inequality but I cannot prove them" and

5 March 8, 2002, "Woman Rights and Politics in Turkey", Başkent University.

adds the requirement for focusing on the research related to wage inequality.

4. Conclusion and Evaluation

The KSGM, which conducts research on women's issues and collective studies with international institutions such as the UN, UNICEF and UNDP, is a governmental institution. One of the objectives of this study is to compare the women's point of views working in an official institution which studies women's issues. We have tried to evaluate universities' studies, volunteer organizations' studies, official institutions' studies and their conceptions, together with our observations and conversations we had with the working people in sample chosen institutions.

Besides the academicians assuming the existence of a hierarchy among women and taking this into account as a problem, the number of women emphasizing that the hierarchy is not something done in a calculated manner and it is very difficult to transform a confirmed structure is not inconsiderable.

Here is the question that we have to ask: What is the origin of the problems of career, authority, otherness, hierarchy, elitism, etc. that the people fighting against all kind of discriminations such as sex, class, ethnical origin, race, religion, language, experience among themselves? As we emphasized at the study, as an observer looking at 'inside' from 'outside', we can say that the problems arising out of the reflection of basic humanitarian characteristics to relations should be passed.

It is mandatory that the women who are, set out for finding a solution to the woman issue, have to evaluate how they apply the values they stand for. For instance, the first thing to do is to understand clearly what the patriarchy is, and to revise how

much the women have overcome their patriarchal concerns in real life in order to fight against the patriarchal system. As expressed by an academician; "authority and hierarchy are caused by patriarchy; the hierarchy we have faced even in the meetings of women's studies is the patriarchy". The conscious level hidden in these words is the striking evidence of the awareness of the problem.⁶

The connection between the KSGM we discussed and the universities is remarkable. It seems that the problems arose in the initial state of establishment and in every change of administrative board, of KSGM which was established to find a solution in national level to the problems of women have also affected the working people in the institution. The researchers, seems to be labored under a 'burden' due to working in an official women's institution emphasizes that working 'voluntarily' and working 'professionally' are too different from each other. As far as the *Kadın Danışma Merkezi* [Women Consultation Center] is concerned it is important to emphasize that working voluntarily represents a different position. Despite the problems, the KSGM's leadership on having official character of women's movement makes it inevitable to be evaluated in a different manner from other institutions.

It has been understood that the structural problems arising out of being included in state, has been dramatically interfered with the women's movement as seen in the examples from the choice of the studying topic to the results of the study. For getting over the problems in KSGM, promoting relations among institutions may be thought as a formula.

Despite all its problems, treated within the context of this study, the KSGM has tried to find

6 for comparison about patriarchy in Turkey, vide: Kandiyoti, 1995.

solutions to the problems of women, like all other woman institutions. As thought independently from the institutions, the difference between the 'men-tion' and the 'action' is generally seen as one of the reasons for the obstruction in this field. How could it be possible that the working people in the women's field are not affected from the culture they were born in and the society they live in? As individuals, how much are they able to constitute the values they stand for in their own lives? If they are not able to do this, how will they modify the system and be successful in contributing to the solutions of the women's problems?

The 'feminists', - with whom I have been working them for two years, - are also aware of the

questions which are the key points of this study. However all of the questions are unanswered. These are the questions insinuated even in their own meetings. Today, the women's movement in Turkey has been said to come to an appropriate level. Despite all the problems experienced in the institutions, certainly no steps could be taken without the studies made by them.

In the evaluation of the present situation, one should take into account the neglect which is deliberate, or not deliberate for the basic problems which are responsible for the powerlessness of the women's movement. With the help of this study, we expect that the problems will be more visible, or the solution process will be accelerated.

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