

ON THE MODERNIZATION PROCESS OF TURKISH WOMEN: A SYMBOL, LATİFE HANOUM

Elçin YILMAZ*

Abstract

The Lausanne Peace Treaty was signed in 24 July 1923, after the War of Independence. Turkey began to recover quickly; a new country and state structure was born, based on contemporary, democratic, social and secular foundations, which affected fields ranging from education, law, social innovation to politics. However, Turkey was late to begin to modernize, and was unfortunately far behind the political, social and economic developments of the West. Thus, a wide-ranging effort was made in every field in order to develop economically, and to reach the level of the civilized nations. The struggle, under the leadership of Mustapha Kemal Atatürk, this time was not against a human enemy, but against ignorance and backwardness. This arguably involved a much greater effort than fighting the enemy at the front, as it is undoubtedly very difficult to overcome conventions, prejudices and stereotypes which evolved over centuries. However, Mustapha Kemal Atatürk perfectly understood the Turkish people, their needs and characteristics, and always took these as a starting point for his revolutions. With patience and determination, he was able achieved the modernization of Turkish society through constant revolutions. While trying to realize democracy and national sovereignty in the political field, he also attempted to apply his principles of freedom, justice, equality and respect for human rights in all other fields. Thus, the one-person rule of the Sultan was ended, the sultanate was abolished, and the republic was declared. The new understanding in the political field that put the individual at the centre of the society and led to many long-awaited gains for Turkish women. The idea of the Republic, which considers men and women as equal individuals forming society, had liberated Turkish women in every aspect of art, culture, and economy, social and political life. Undoubtedly, valuable gains were made by the republic in terms of women's rights, building on the innovations brought by the change in mentality of the Tanzimat and Constitutional periods, and education reforms for girls, which had been extremely effective in making cultural and social progress. This study sets out to compare the place of Turkish women in social life during the Ottoman state period with the progress brought by Atatürk's revolutions. Another important purpose of our study is to reveal how the British press perceived this process, and their role in promoting the position of Turkish women in the civilized

* Asst. Prof., İzmir University of Economics, Department of Common Courses, İzmir.
E-mail: elcin.yilmaz@ieu.edu.tr ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6385-8504
(Makale Gönderim Tarihi: 10.05.2022 - Makale Kabul Tarihi: 11.11.2022)

world. In addition, we aimed to emphasize the importance of Latife Hanoum's contemporary education and skills as an example for Turkish women. During this research, contemporary first-hand sources and memories, and the relevant literature were examined.

Keywords: *Turkish women, Latife Hanoum, Modernization, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, British Press*

Öz

Türk Kadınının Modernleşme Sürecinde Bir Sembol Olarak Latife Hanım

Lozan Barış Antlaşması, Kurtuluş Savaşı'ndan sonra 24 Temmuz 1923'te imzalandı. Türkiye nihai barış antlaşması sonrası hızla yeniden inşa edilmeye başlandı; çağdaş, demokratik, sosyal ve seküler temellere dayalı, eğitimden hukuka, sosyal inovasyondan siyasal hayata kadar pek çok alanı etkileyen yeni bir ülke ve devlet yapısı oluşturuldu. Ancak ülkeyi modernize etmeye başlamak için geç kalınmıştı çünkü Türkiye ne yazık ki Batı'nın siyasi, sosyal ve ekonomik gelişmelerinin çok gerisinde kalmıştı. Böylece ekonomik olarak gelişmek ve uygar milletler düzeyine ulaşmak için her alanda topyekûn bir mücadele başladı. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk liderliğindeki bu mücadele bu kez düşman devletlerle değil, ama cehalet ve geriliğe karşı gerçekleştirildi. Belki de bu, cephede düşmanla savaşmaktan çok daha büyük ve çetin bir çabayı gerektiriyordu. Yüzyılların geleneklerini, önyargılarını ve tutuculuğunu yıkmak kuşkusuz çok daha zor olacaktı. Ancak Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Türk halkını, ihtiyaçlarını ve özelliklerini çok iyi anlayan bir lider olarak, bu ihtiyaç ve özellikleri her zaman devrimlerin çıkış noktası olarak belirleyerek, sabır ve kararlılıkla, aralıksız devrimlerle Türk toplumunun çağdaşlaşmasını sağladı. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, siyasi alanda demokrasiyi ve ulusal egemenliği gerçekleştirmeye çalışırken, özgürlük, adalet, eşitlik ve insan haklarına saygı ilkelerini diğer tüm alanlarda uygulamaya çalışmıştır. Böylece tek kişi egemenliği sona erdi, saltanat kaldırıldı ve cumhuriyet ilan edildi. Bireyi toplumun merkezine koyan siyasal ve toplumsal alandaki yeni anlayış, Türk kadınları için uzun zamandır hak ettiği pek çok kazanıma yol açtı. Erkekleri ve kadınları toplumu oluşturan eşit bireyler olarak gören cumhuriyet fikri, Türk kadınının sanatta, kültürde, ekonomide, sosyal ve siyasi hayatta her açıdan özgürleştirdi. Hiç şüphesiz kadın hakları açısından cumhuriyet tarafından çok değerli başarılar elde edildi; ancak Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet dönemlerindeki ıslahatların getirdiği yenilikler ve özellikle kız çocuklarına yönelik gerçekleştirilen eğitim reformları bu alandaki kültürel ve sosyal birikimin oluşmasında son derece etkili olmuştu. Bu çalışma, Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyete Türk kadınının sosyal ve siyasal hayattaki yerini, Atatürk devrimleri ile kazandıkları ilerlemelerle karşılaştırarak değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Türk kadının medeni dünyada hak ettiği yeri alırken bu sürecin İngiliz basını tarafından nasıl algılandığını ortaya koymak çalışmamızın önemli bir diğer amacını oluşturmaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra, Latife Hanım'ın eğitiminin ve becerilerinin modern Türk kadınına nasıl örnek olduğu da çalışmamızda belirtilmiştir. İngiliz basınının Türk kadınının modernleşmesinde rol model olan Latife Hanım'a ve yeni Türk kadınının özgürleşmesine bakışı ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu çalışmaya kaynaklık eden temel eserler, konuyla ilgili arşiv belgeleri, yerli ve yabancı gazete haberleri ve tetkik eserler olmuştur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Türk Kadınları, Latife Hanım, Çağdaşlaşma, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, İngiliz Basını*

The Place of Turkish Women in Society from the Ottoman to the Turkish Republic

In the Ottoman Empire, which had a theocratic structure, the principles of Islam dominated social life, state order and law. As a result, the place of women in the family and in the society was determined according to religious principles, as well as all rules, from personal appearance to the conduct of family life. Social life between men and

women did not develop among Muslims in Ottoman cities.¹ For example, a woman in Istanbul could not sit side by side in the car with a man, even her husband. A woman and her husband could not attend the same meeting. Curtains on trains and ferries separated men and women, and women were not allowed to be out in the evening, even with their husbands.²

Turkish women were financially dependent on men, and were practically never able to participate in the economic activity of the country.³ In social life, women faced many prohibitions and restrictions, especially regarding dress; for example, they were forbidden to wear clothes made of thin fabric.⁴

In theatres, female roles were played either by men or by Christian women.⁵ Even after women were allowed to go to the theatre, it was only on special days. Due to all these prohibitions, it was not possible to remove the veil, even in the early 20th century. In social life, women were locked away, excluded from social life, and not even mentioned in official records.⁶ Practices such as the prohibition of women from commercial activities, regulation of their dress, and even the restrictions on going out on certain days excluded women from economic and social life.⁷ There were similar restrictions and barriers in education. Although girls could access primary education, this provided only religious education, and there was no opportunity to attend higher education.⁸

The first discussions about women's rights regarding education in the Ottoman Empire took place during the Tanzimat period. In order to make women more visible in society, intellectuals especially focused on the issue of education, and made an effort to grant Ottoman women the same rights as those given to European women. They published newspaper articles about improving the situation of women during this period. Intellectuals argued that Islam gives Muslim women more rights than in the West, but this was not reflected in the roles assigned to them in society. Conservatives opposed the participation of women in political life; they believed that Turkish women should interest themselves only in homes and families, and this attitude delayed social and political rights.⁹ Although the education of women was deemed necessary with the Tanzimat reforms, it was not envisaged that they should have the education and training opportunities of men. In the Ottoman mentality, the woman's place is the home, and her main role was as the woman of her house, responsible for housework. Therefore, the

¹ T.C. BOA, DH.MUİ-109/29, H-24-06-1328.

² T.C. BOA, İ.ZB., 2/15, H-18.03.1317.

³ Tanör 1999, p. 150.

⁴ T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, Yayın No:137, İstanbul, 2015, p. 86.

⁵ T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, ibid, p. 110, "Turkish Innovation", *Belfast News Letter*, 25 Aralık 1925, p. 10

⁶ Karpat, 2010, pp.104-105, Maden 2012, pp. 99-127

⁷ Tekeli 1996, p. 1192.

⁸ Caporal 1999, p.103.

⁹ Konan 2011, p. 162.

public sphere remained under the monopoly of men in the Ottoman Empire until the Constitutional Monarchy.¹⁰

During the Tanzimat period, important reforms were made regarding education, and although schools for young women opened in 1876, a large part of the population continued to attend Koranic schools. It would take a longer time to break the conservative and traditional social structure. However, despite opposition, the process of development and change had been set in motion and the number of girls graduating from modern schools began to increase.¹¹ After the education opportunities at secondary and high school level, the first university lectures for young women began in 1914, covering topics such as women's rights, cosmology, scientific concepts, general and in particular, women's health, history, home knowledge, and pedagogy.¹² The First World War was a factor that triggered the change in the conditions of Turkish women, just as in other societies.¹³ As men were recruited, women had to fill the empty places in factories, offices, and the community.

The Ottoman Empire was among the defeated states in the First World War, and signed the Armistice Agreement on October 30, 1918. After the Mudros Armistice, Allies occupied the Ottoman lands.¹⁴ With the spread of news of the tragic events that took place during the occupation of Izmir, and then in Maras, and many other cities, the whole Anatolia rose up with a renewed national consciousness. The Turkish nation rose up under the leadership of Mustapha Kemal Atatürk to end the occupation of Anatolia by the Allies and to regain independence.

Turkish women also played an active role in this struggle, both at the front and behind it. During the War of Independence, Turkish women made great efforts not only at the front, but also in working life, and in raising awareness and calling the nation to resistance. During this period, Turkish women attended rallies and meetings in occupied Istanbul, and even addressed the public from the podium. Women contributed aid to the front through the national societies they established, called on the masses to help, provided soldiers with clothing, and they supported national independence efforts by working in the army medical corps. Thus, they made a great contribution to the national struggle.

In the War of Independence, women like Halide Edip in Istanbul contributed at least as much as men at the front, and behind the front, important contributions were made by women like Kara Fatma in Erzurum, Makbule Hanoum in Gordes, Tayyar Rahmiye Hanoum, Nezaket Hanoum and others.¹⁵ Despite this struggle shoulder to shoulder with

¹⁰ Toprak 2017, p.41.

¹¹ Akyüz 2001, p. 159., Caporal 1999, p.103, Unat 1964, p. 38.

¹² Caporal 1999, p. 114.

¹³ Uzun 2017, p. 74.

¹⁴ Shaw, 1983, p. 392.

¹⁵ Tansel 1991, pp. 25-54. Newspaper News Regarding the Protest Meetings in Istanbul with the Participation of Halide Edip (Adivar) Hanoum on the Occupation of Izmir, Vakit, 22 Mayıs 1919, No: 565, s.1., Zaman, 24 Mayıs 1919, No: 376, p.2., Vakit, 31 Mayıs 1919, No: 572, p.1.

men, in the laws enacted during the War of Independence, women were denied the right to vote, and thus, any real political benefits.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk praised the struggle of Turkish women in the War of Independence at every opportunity. He stated that, “*nowhere in the world, not in any nation, can they say, ‘I worked more than Anatolian women; I made as much effort as Anatolian women to lead my nation to salvation and victory’*”.¹⁶

Turkish Women on the Modernization Process

Every time the issue of women’s rights came on the agenda in the First Assembly, voices were raised against it. On April 3, 1923, Tunalı Hilmi, the deputy of Bolu, rejected this reactionary view in the assembly and he emphasized it was wrong to ignore women in social and political life.¹⁷ The Second Assembly succeeded in carrying out radical changes in the legal status of women, after the dissolution of the opposition.

Even in the 1924 Constitution, however, in terms of political rights, men and women were still not equal.¹⁸ The right to participate in parliamentary elections was granted to men over the age of 18, and men of 30 years of age could be elected as a deputy.¹⁹ In the 1924 constitution, the right to vote and to be elected was granted to “*male Turkish*” citizens but not women.²⁰ Atatürk's belief in the abilities of Turkish nation was great. He did not want to directly enforce the revolution for women through the law and prohibition through the executive organs of the government; however, during his presidency, he ensured the recognition of women's civil and political rights. He first decided to familiarise the nation with the idea of civilization; according to him, reforms could not be made without preparing the social ground.²¹ Some examples of his speeches to explain the necessity of contemporary reforms are given below: On January 31, 1923, he stated:

“*Our enemies accuse us of being under the throne of religion. They attribute our backwardness to this. This is a mistake. Our religion has never demanded that women stay behind men. What Allah commands is that men and women gain knowledge and wisdom together. Men and women should be able to adopt science wherever they can find it.*”²²

In his speech to women in Konya on March 21, 1923, he emphasized the contribution of Turkish women to society and the economy and said:

“*Our enemies and the superficial views that do not understand the spirit of the Turkish woman make some assumptions about our women. Some say that our women live apart from life, have no relationship with science, are not concerned with civic life that our women are deprived of everything, and Turkish men keep them away from life, the*

¹⁶ Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri 1961, p. 136.

¹⁷ TBMM Zabıt Cerideleri, D.1, C.28, İ.4, 17.İçtima, 3.4.1923, p. 326-329

¹⁸ Mumcu and Küzeci 2019, p.186.

¹⁹ TBMM Zabıt Cerideleri, D.2, C.7-1, İ.2, 13 İçtima, 16.3.1924, p.540-543

²⁰ Konan 2011, p. 167.

²¹ İnan 2014, p.359.

²² Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri 1961, p.87.

world and humanity. However, is this the truth? Seeing Turkish Women in this way undoubtedly means not seeing Turkish women properly."²³

According to Atatürk, one day, all Turkish women would live in conditions of equality with men. They would become clearly visible in social, political and economic life.²⁴

In line with all these opinions, Turkish Grand National Assembly adopted a new law, which made men and women equal. The Turkish Civil Code, based on the example of the Swiss Civil Code, was enacted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on February 17, 1926. With the Civil Code, modern and secular legal principles that determined the status of women in Western societies replaced the religious principles that kept women in an inferior status under the Ottoman order. Although the code covered many areas of modern living, the most important articles dealt with women's rights. For the first time, women and men were acknowledged equal. Under the prior legal system, women's share in the inheritance, and the weight of women's testimony in the courts, was only half of that of the men. Under the Code, men and women were made equal with regard to inheritance and testimony. In addition, legal marriage was made compulsory, and polygamy was banned. Women were given the right to choose any profession, and gained full universal suffrage, on December 5, 1934.²⁵ The greatest shock for conservative Muslims was that it became legally possible for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man, and that all adults had the right to change their religion by law if they so wished.²⁶

In addition, it is important to underline the importance of the Unification of Education Law and the Clothing Law, described as the women's revolution, enacted even before the Republic's main legislative amendments, the Civil Code in 1926. Unification of Education Law was enacted in 1924 to ensure the secularization of education, and which gave women and men equal education rights. The Clothing Law enacted in 1925 eliminated the obligation to wear veils and chador. In addition to all these, Mustafa Kemal made many statements regarding the political rights of Turkish women. For example, in his speech at the Girls' teacher training school in 1931, he stated:

*"The Turkish woman should be the most enlightened, virtuous and dignified woman in the world... there must be a woman of dignity, stressing morality and virtue. The duty of the Turkish woman is to raise generations sufficient to protect and defend the Turk using her mentality, physical strength, and determination. ...Turkish women need never feel that they will be excluded from any of the duties that the nation imposes on citizens and are free to join the political community that rules the country's destiny on behalf of the nation."*²⁷

The Republic of Turkey, from the first years of existence, took a very positive attitude towards the contemporary sense of gender equality in that period; it carried out

²³ Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri 1961, p.151.

²⁴ 6 Mart 1923, İkdâm, p.1.

²⁵ Elgin 1985, p.10-15

²⁶ Lewis 1997, p. 365.

²⁷ Turhan, 1995, p. 337.

practices and regulations more radical than in many Western countries. One of the best-known examples is the recognition of women's right to vote and be elected in 1930, 1933 and 1934 gradually.²⁸ At an earlier date than in many European countries, women in Turkey obtained the right to vote and to be elected in the municipal elections (in 1930), in elections held for village councils (in 1933) and in the parliamentary elections (in 1934). On March 20, 1930, the Municipal Law began to be discussed in the parliament. On April 4, 1930, women's right to vote and be elected in municipal elections was recognized by law. In the positive atmosphere in the parliament about women getting their new rights, Mustafa Kemal made a great impression.²⁹

Considering the conditions of the period, another radical change was the republic reforms eliminating polygamy and promoting gender equality in the context of marriage, as mentioned below. This policy was adopted in order to raise to the level of contemporary civilization in the Republic, and radically changed the position of women in society in Turkey.³⁰ Turkish newspapers celebrated the emancipation of Turkish women, and stated that Mustapha Kemal Pasha had saved women from living in darkness. They noted that with the republic, Turkish women gained their rights.³¹

The declaration of the republic in Turkey and the emancipation of women, together with their efforts to take their rightful place in society were widely covered in the British press. In particular, there were comparisons of the appearance and image of Turkish women under the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. The press announced that the "harem life of women" was outdated, that the Turkish women no longer desired the veil, and that women were gradually uncovering their faces, and started to leave the chador. It was also noted that Turkish women worked, freeing the men to fight during the War of Independence.³² For example, in an article published in 1922, alongside photographs of veiled Turkish women, it was explained that woman no longer hid in social life, as this, and that were changes in women's dress.³³ On May 22, 1922, one of the most important British newspapers, "The Courier" published the following remarkable article about Turkish women:

*"Significant strides about the emancipation initiatives taking place in Turkey. According to the news from Istanbul, the Faculty of Medicine of the university decided to take a female student. Daughter of a Turkish poet, Agaoglu became the first female student to be accepted."*³⁴

These changes were described as "incredible" in the British press, and it was emphasized that Mustapha Kemal took the leading role in giving Turkish women their

²⁸ TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, D.4, C.25, İçtima 4, 5.12.1934

²⁹ İnan, 1968, p.128-129

³⁰ Acar 2010, p. 15-16.

³¹ "Türk Kadını Büyük Millet Meclisi'nde", Cumhuriyet, 07.12.1934, "Türk Kadını Sevin ve Kıvanç Duy", Cumhuriyet, 07.02.1935, "Cumhuriyet Devrinde Kadın", Cumhuriyet, 10.10.1933, "Türk Kadını", Ulus, 14.02.1937

³² "The Turkish Woman Of To-Day", *The Sphere*, 30.12.1922, p.334.

³³ "Common Impressions Regarding Turkish Women Corrected", *The Graphic*, 4.11.1922, p.674.

³⁴ "Turkish Women", *The Courier*, 22.05.1922, p.7.

freedom that had only been dreamt about previously. The British press also underlined that Mustapha Kemal, Turkey's victorious commander, made a radical change in women's life by abolishing the harem in Turkey. For example, Mustapha Kemal stated that he attaches importance to the organized power of women, and an exact translation of this statement was printed, as follows:

"Turkish harems are over. The traditional way of life of women was regulated beyond that required by religious rules and their rights were denied. Our women should not hide themselves, if they separate themselves from society, social life will suffer, society will progress, but it cannot be perfect."

In the continuation of the same article, subtitled "*A Soldier's Ideas*" describes Mustapha Kemal as follows:

*"Kemal is not a religious reformer ... He is a soldier. In the last war, Turkish women changed, Turkish women took the place of men in all kinds of work at home. Because the men went to fight."*³⁵

In the process of modernization, we see that the British press gave a special place to certain important Turkish women. At every opportunity, Turkey's rapid modernization was underlined. Most articles focused on the abolition of the caliphate, the change of form of government, the modernization of dress, rapid increase in the number of railways, and the changes in the position of women. According to the British press, the most surprising of all these was the change in the situation of Turkish women. For example, the Turkish women were denied entry to all professions just a few years ago and were veiled. Now the veil is considered an outdated garment and Turkish women legally have the opportunity to pursue a career, in medicine, economy, government office or school.³⁶

The British press not only focused on the reforms, but also the causes of the reforms in Turkey, especially among the Turkish woman's active role in the War of Independence. However, the Swiss Civil Code in Turkey had not yet been adopted in those years and the British Press had often criticized this situation. There had been comments in the press that the marital rights of women were still not developed, that polygamy was continuing, that women still did not have legal rights in divorce, and could not object when the man says "I divorce you" 3 times.³⁷

The British press' above-mentioned concerns about the freedom of Turkish women were replaced by surprise and praise after Turkish Civil Code of 1926, when Turkish women became equal with men in society and family life. The British Press emphasized that the Turkish women had the same rights as her sisters in Switzerland in marriage, divorce, inheritance and other matters.³⁸ For example, *The Times* stated that Turkish women dressed and worked like their sisters in Europe, and took their place in every field of contemporary society, saying "*The Turks Found the Leader to Make Their Dreams Real*" and underlined their support for the reforms carried out by Mustapha Kemal:

³⁵ "A Wonderful Woman And Her Campaign", *The Yorkshire Evening Post*, 6.02.1923, p. 6.

³⁶ "Turkish Women", *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 2.09.1927, p. 6.

³⁷ "The Influence Of Western Civilization", *Nottingham Evening Post*, 11.01.1924, p. 7.

³⁸ "Freedom For Turkish Women", *The Times*, 19.02.1926, p.14.

On the Modernization Process of Turkish Women: A Symbol, Latife Hanoum

“Young Turkish women are free to open up to the world, can participate in dances, work in shops and workplaces, participate in sports activities and games, and have business meals with men. They take part more and more in community life with each passing day.” in 1933.³⁹

In the process of modernization, we see that the British Press gave a special place to some important Turkish women. For example, Safiye Ali, the first Turkish Woman Doctor, Bedia Muvahhit, the first Turkish woman who appeared on the stage in Izmir, and Keriman Halis, the first Turkish Beauty Queen, were introduced to the European public through these articles. The obstacles to Turkish women’s participation in theatre art in Turkey were removed, British press reported that Bedia Muvahhit was able to take the stage with modern outfits, and audiences in Turkey accepted this, and now it was impossible to go back. In addition, Safiye Ali, the first Turkish woman doctor, discussed why Turkish women were so healthy, and this was given wide coverage in the British press.⁴⁰

Miss Grace Ellison, the author of “*An English woman in a Turkish Harem*,” spoke with Mustapha Kemal Pasha himself on the Turkish woman question, and wrote about Mustapha Kemal’s reforms as follows:

“...*The Turkish women have now saved their country in demanding their own rights during the last Grecian War. When the Turks were almost beaten, for the first time in history, the women demanded that they might be allowed to help. They organized themselves, and Mustapha Kemal, the power behind the throne, championed them. Therefore, when I arrived in Angora, I was amazed to see Turkish women walking about with perfect freedom.*”⁴¹ Thus, a Western woman writer spoke laudatory words about the modernization of Turkish women. She admired the emancipation of Turkish women. She announced that Turkish Harem was out-dated, and that Turkish women doctors, actors and officials were everywhere in the country.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as a leader of all the contemporary reforms in Turkey, had been praised in the press, which described Atatürk’s successes during and after the War of Independence and his determination to modernize Turkey.⁴²

Latife Hanoum, The Symbol of Modern Turkish Woman

Latife Hanoum is the daughter of Ushakizades, one of the oldest and richest families in Izmir. Her father, Ushakizade Muammer Bey, provided good education for his children and especially for his daughters. All six children had learned at least three foreign languages. Latife Hanoum was born in Izmir in 1898, as the eldest child of the family.⁴³ The family built a school adjacent to the garden of their Villa, and brought two female teachers from England for the education of the children. Latife Hanoum, who

³⁹ “Ten Years In Turkey”, *The Times*, 28.10.1933, p. 13.

⁴⁰ “Woman’s Sphere-From Harems to Law-Women of Young Turkey as Barristers”, *The Daily Mail*, 11.03.1925, p.6.

⁴¹ What I Saw When Alone in Angora, *The Sunday Post*, 25.02.1923, p.7.

⁴² “Kemal Atatürk”, *The Tatler*, 21.08.1940, p. 256.

⁴³ Ülger 2009, p. 41.

graduated from primary school here, studied secondary and high school at Arnavutkoy American College in Istanbul, and took piano lessons from German pianist Anna Grosser Rilke. Latife Hanoum started her university education in 1919 at "Tudor Hall School" in Chislehurst, near London and then went to the Sorbonne University in France to study politics and law. Because of this education, she spoke good English, French, Spanish and German.⁴⁴ Latife Hanoum's family had to leave Izmir because of the illness of her youngest child, Munci Bey, during the occupation years of Izmir. They went to Switzerland then to Spain. They could not return to Izmir during the occupation and independence war; Latife Hanoum therefore divided her time between London and Paris at this time. In the autumn of 1921, she returned to Izmir, which was still in the hands of the Greeks. While abroad, she followed the progress of the War of Independence and Mustapha Kemal.

On September 9, 1922, Izmir was liberated from the Greek occupation and Mustapha Kemal Pasha entered the next day. Thus, Izmir embraced Mustapha Kemal and Mustapha Kemal embraced Izmir. The days of the occupation ended, and on September 9, 1922, not only İzmir, but also the whole country gained its freedom. Mustapha Kemal Pasha first stayed in Iplikcizade Villa in İzmir. However, since there were many Armenians and Greeks around this neighbourhood, it was not deemed appropriate in terms of security. Another, safer place was chosen, Ushakizade Villa, home to Latife Hanoum and her family.

On September 13, 1922, Mustapha Kemal Pasha and Latife Hanoum met in this Villa. Latife Hanoum personally took care of Mustapha Kemal Pasha's comfort and needs, giving them the opportunity to become familiar. They spoke about state policy, culture, literature and art. She helped Mustapha Kemal Pasha with the necessary translations, and played music from Beethoven, Mozart, Tchaikovsky, and Schubert in his free time.⁴⁵ She was a well-educated and talented young woman.⁴⁶

It is known that Mustapha Kemal Pasha admired Latife Hanoum's education and skills; he thought Latife Hanoum would be a good role model as a contemporary Turkish woman. On January 4, 1923, at a New Year's Eve dinner in Ankara, Mustapha Kemal announced that they would marry. Mustapha Kemal implied that his proposal was because of her intelligence and culture, rather than her external beauty. He told everyone that Latife knew four foreign languages, was intelligent, and had a good education.⁴⁷ All women in Mustapha Kemal's life, like Latife, had been intelligent, courageous and active. He liked women with personality, who could express an opinion in society, whether as co-workers, friends, or women with whom he had an emotional relationship. Latife Hanoum's family, manners, education, culture, poetry sessions, and philosophy discussions were symbolic of modern Turkish women. On January 29, 1923, Mustapha

⁴⁴ Gürel and Akçiçek 2018, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Aralov 1997, p.221.

⁴⁶ Turgut 2005, p.531.

⁴⁷ Sevük 2008, p.20-21

On the Modernization Process of Turkish Women: A Symbol, Latife Hanoum

Kemal and Latife Hanoum gave a tea party at the Ushakizade Villa in Izmir, at which Rahmetullah Efendi, the kadi of Izmir, married them.⁴⁸

Ghazi, as he was known, wanted his wife to be a role model in this respect. He wanted Latife Hanoum to be a role model for Turkish women with her culture and education. In 1923, Latife Hanoum wore black clothes, albeit with a headscarf, without a veil. Later, she started to dress in fashion that is more Western. She accompanied Mustapha Kemal on his civilian and military travel, and even became the first Turkish woman to enter the parliament building.⁴⁹ Thus, Latife Hanoum became the leading example of men and women acting together in social life. When a member of parliament asked him why he married, Mustapha Kemal replied that together, they would instigate many revolutions, including dress-code revolutions. They would also reject the chador of Turkish women. Pasha stated that he married Latife Hanoum as an example, to prepare for a revolution in the Turkish Grand National Assembly regarding Turkish women.⁵⁰

During this short marriage, Ghazi Mustapha Kemal's only expectation from Latife Hanoum was to provide Turkish women, whose legal rights had been trampled in the past, with a role model through her dress, knowledge, culture and education. Ghazi put forward Latife Hanoum as a warrior in the social war, as the visible example of the free Turkish woman. The truth is that he married for both personal and social reasons. However, his marriage was not successful because of the contradiction in his character, which led him to think like a Westerner but act like an Easterner.⁵¹ The marriage of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Latife was short, and he divorced her according to Mecelle, the old Sharia rules, but only because in those days, the civil law had not yet been adopted.⁵²

Mustapha Kemal Pasha, and his young bride Latife Hanoum, were frequently featured in the British press. While Mustapha Kemal's marriage with Latife Hanoum was covered in the newspapers, Latife Hanoum's upbringing and education in the Western style was also underlined.⁵³

Mustapha Kemal and Latife divorced August 5, 1925. The divorce, like their marriage, was given much space in the British press. The newspapers stated that the President decided to separate from his wife and that no reasons for this step were given. In addition, they reported that, in some quarters, it was attributed to controlling behaviour on the part of the wife, and a desire to interfere in matters outside her sphere. While the newspapers speculated on the reasons for the divorce, they also talked about Latife Hanoum's contemporary features, as she discarded veils, rode home after the wedding in masculine breeches, and was the first real suffragist in Angora, and so they underlined

⁴⁸ Akay 2005, p.82.

⁴⁹ Ülger 2009, p.169.

⁵⁰ Şapolyo 1958, p.509.

⁵¹ Kinross 2018, p.638.

⁵² Bardakçı 2021, p.134.

⁵³ *The Illustrated London News*, 29.10.1927, p. 1, Romance and Tragedy, *Weekly Telegraph Saturday*, 4.07.1928, p. 11.

her role as a model for Turkish women.⁵⁴ The press emphasized that Latife Hanoum played a leading role in the modernization of Turkish women:

*“For the first time in the history of Islam, women have appeared in public unveiled...It is a revolution, which Western minds can scarcely appreciate, for it is the end of centuries of rigid tradition- that Turkish women should go abroad only when veiled. Latife Ghazi Mustapha Kemal Hanoum, to give Madame Kemal Pasha her full name, is the woman who has played the leading role in this emancipation.”*⁵⁵

The British press emphasized that Latife Hanoum played a major role in the modernization of Turkish women, underlined by her apparent freedom in every field.⁵⁶



57

Conclusion

In the Ottoman Empire, Turkish women were excluded from social life because the Ottoman Empire had a theocratic structure, social life, state order and law, all based on the principles of Islam. Because of this, the place of women in the family and in the

⁵⁴ Kemal Divorced, *The Daily Telegraph*, 14.08.1925, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Turkish Women Without The Veil, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 29.10.1923, p.3.

⁵⁶ Turkish Women, *The Evening Telegraph*, 24.08.1927, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Leaders of Turkish Womanhood, *The Freeman's Journal*, 1.02. 1924, p.1.

On the Modernization Process of Turkish Women: A Symbol, Latife Hanoum

society was determined according to religious principles. In the Tanzimat period and after, girls had right to a modern education, limited, however to a very small number. Some families in the cities sent their daughters to modern and high-quality schools. In Anatolia, education was mainly for men, and this was an Islamic education.

With the First World War, men fighting on the front lines was a major factor in women's public presence, as they replaced men in many roles. Especially in the War of Independence, Turkish women played an active role in the front and behind, and this effort in calling the nation to resistance, and in new work roles, raised the awareness of society. During this period, Turkish women attended the rallies and meetings held in occupied Istanbul and even addressed the public from the podium. Women sent aid to the front through the national societies they established, called on the masses to help, and provided soldiers with clothing, thus helping to secure the country's freedom, and worked in the medical corps. Thus, they made a great contribution to the national struggle.

However, in 1921, conservatives held power, and even the idea that male doctor should be allowed to examine women if necessary, still caused controversy in the Grand National Assembly. This situation lasted until 1923, when there was a purge of conservative deputies who objected to Mustapha Kemal's proposed contemporary and secular revolutions. The second assembly was established, mainly consisting of with Mustapha Kemal's supporters.

At every opportunity, Mustapha Kemal, declared the importance and the value of Turkish women, and by 1934, had given women all their rights, including the right to vote and be elected.

When Mustapha Kemal abolished harems, thousands of women who had worn veils in the presence of men all their lives found themselves allowed to live as they chose. With the Civil Code (1926), men and women became equal before the law. Polygamy was prohibited. Women obtained official marriage, divorce and professional rights. While carrying out all these reforms, Mustapha Kemal married Latife Hanoum, an intelligent, well-educated woman, as a role model for Turkish women. She was always closely involved with all aspects of Mustapha Kemal's life. She was shown as an example to modern Turkish women, especially during his journeys to Anatolia. Mustapha Kemal's wife was at the forefront in the reforms planned regarding the Turkish Woman, and he constantly praised his wife's education and culture. The British Press appreciated the position that Turkish women were accorded in the republic, and praised Latife Hanoum. Thus, Mustafa Kemal gave women a position, which recognised their true worth, which became acknowledged among world civilizations. He was thus responsible for overcoming the previous prejudicial attitudes to Turkish women and their role in harem life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

a. Archival Sources

- T.C. Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi Belgeleri (BOA.)
Dahiliye Nezareti Muhaberat-I Umumiye Nezareti, DH.MUI-109/29, H-24-06-1328
İrade Zaptiye Defterleri, İ..ZB.. 2/15, H-18.03.1317
TBMM Zabıt Cerideleri
D.1, C.28, İ.4, 17.İçtima, 3.4.1923
D.2, C.7-1, İ.2, 13 İçtima, 16.3.1924

b. Newspapers and Journals

- Aberdeen Press and Journal, 29.10.1923
Vakit, 22.05.1919
Akşam, 31.05.1919
The Courier, 22.05.1922
The Graphic, 4.11.1922
The Freeman's Journal, 1.02. 1924
The Sphere, 30.12.1922
The Yorkshire Evening Post, 06.02.1923
The Sunday Post, 25.02.1923
İkdam, 06.03.1923
Nottingham Evening Post, 11.01.1924
The Daily Mail, 11.03.1925
The Daily Telegraph, 14.08.1925
Belfast News Letter, 25.12.1925
The Evening Telegraph, 24.08.1927
Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 02.09.1927
The Illustrated London News, 29.10.1927
Weekly Telegraph Saturday, 04.07.1928
Cumhuriyet, 10.10.1933
The Times, 19.02.1926, 28.10.1933
Cumhuriyet, 07.12.1934
Cumhuriyet, 07.02.1935
Ulus, 14.02.1937
The Tatler, 21.08.1940

c. Books and Articles

- Akay 2005 Oğuz Akay, *Gazi Fikriye İle Neden Evlenmedi? Latife İle Neden Evlendi?* Truva Yayınları, İstanbul.
Akyüz 2001 Yahya Akyüz, *Başlangıç'tan 2001'e Türk Eğitim Tarihi*, Alfa Yayıncılık, İstanbul.

On the Modernization Process of Turkish Women: A Symbol, Latife Hanoum

- ARALOV 1997 Semyon İvonoviç, *Bir Sovyet Diplomatın Türkiye Hatıraları*, Cumhuriyet Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri* 1961 Volume: 2, Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Yayınları, Ankara.
- Bardakçı 20210 Murat Bardakçı, *Sizi Serbest Bırakmayı Muvafık Bularak Tatlık Ettim- Mustafa Kemal Paşa İle Latife Hanım'ın Boşanmalarının Belgeli Öyküsü*, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Caporal 1999 Bernard Caporal, *Kemalizm ve Kemalizm Sonrasında Türk Kadını 1 (1919-1970)*, Cumhuriyet Gazetesi Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Elgin 1985 Neriman Elgin, *Türk Kadınına Seçme ve Seçilme Hakkı Taniyan 5.12.1934 tarihli ve 2598 Sayılı Kanun ve TBMM Tutanakları*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara.
- Gürel and Akçiçek 2018 Ahmet Gürel - Eren Akçiçek, *Latife Mustafa Kemal*, İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul.
- İnan 2014 Afet İnan, *Atatürk Hakkında Hatıralar ve Belgeler*, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul.
- İnan 1968 Afet İnan, *Atatürk ve Türk Kadın Haklarının Kazanılması*, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, İstanbul.
- Karpat 2010 Kemal Karpat, *Osmanlı Nüfusu (1830-1914)*, Timaş Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Kınross 2018 Lord Kinross, *Atatürk: Bir Milletın Yeniden Doğuşu*, Altın Yayınevi, İstanbul.
- Lewis 1997 Bernard Lewis, *Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu*, Arkadaş Yayınevi, Ankara.
- Mumcu-Küzeci 2019 Ahmet Mumcu- Elif Küzeci, *İnsan Hakları ve Kamu Özgürlükleri*, Turhan Kitabevi Yayınları, Ankara.
- Şapolyo 1958 Enver Behnan Şapolyo, *Kemal Atatürk ve Milli Mücadele Tarihi*, Rafet Zaimler Yayınevi, İstanbul.
- Sevük 2008 İsmail Habib Sevük, *Atatürk'le Beraber*, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Shaw 1983 Stanford J. Shaw, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Modern Türkiye*, Volume: 2, E Yayınları Tarih Dizisi, İstanbul.
- Tanör 1999 Bülent Tanör, *Osmanlı- Türk Anayasal Gelişmeleri*, Yapı Kredi Yayıncılık, İstanbul.
- Tansel 1991 Fevziye Abdullah Tansel, *İstiklal Harbinde Mücahit Kadınlarımız*, Atatürk Kültür Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Ankara.
- T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı 2015 Yayın Nu: 137, İstanbul.
- Turgut 2005 Hulusi Turgut, *Kılıç Ali'nin Anıları*, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul.

- Turhan 1995 Seyfettin Turhan, *Atatürk'te Konular Ansiklopedisi*, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Ülger 2009 Eriş Ülger, *Zaferin Gölgesinde Latife Hanım*, Truva Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Unat 1964 Faik Reşit Unat, *Türkiye'de Eğitim Sistemi Gelişimi Tarihine Bir Bakış*, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, Ankara.
- Acar 2010 Feride Acar, *Türkiye'de Kadınların İnsan Hakları: Uluslararası Standartlar, Hukuk ve Sivil Toplum, Kadın Hakları Uluslararası Hukuk ve Uygulama*, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Güneş 2014 Mehmet Güneş, "Osmanlı Dönemi Nüfus Sayımları ve Bu Sayımları İçeren Kayıtların Tahlili", *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, Volume: 8, Issue: 15, pp.269-298.
- Konan 2011 Belkıs Konan, "Türk Kadınının Siyasi Hakları Kazanma Süreci", *Ankara Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi*, Volume 60, Issue 1, pp. 157-174
- Maden 2012 Fahri Maden, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde 1881-1882/1293 Nüfus Sayımı ve Meydana Gelen Hadiseler", *Türkiye'de İskân ve Şehirleşme Tarihi*, Editör Mehmet Ali, Beyhan Kitabevi, İstanbul, pp. 99-127.
- Tekel, 1996 Şirin Tekeli, "Kadın", *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, Volume 5, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, pp. 1190-1204
- Toprak 2017 Zafer Toprak, "Yüzüncü Yılında Hukuk-ı Aile Kararnamesi", *Toplumsal Tarih*, Volume: 288, pp.40-42
- Uzun 2017 İsmail Uzun, "Kadın Haklarının Kazanılmasında Bir Cumhuriyet Kadını: Afet İnan (1908-1985)", *Ahi Evran Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Volume: 3, Issue: 1, pp. 73-85.