



Visions of Raising the Republic in the Province: A Discursive Reading of Childhood, Motherhood, and National Ideals in the *Gediz* Journal of Early Republican Manisa

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Abstract

Childhood, as a socially constructed category, is shaped by specific cultural, political, and historical contexts, and is neither static nor universal. In many nation-building efforts, including that of early Republican Turkey, it has been redefined as a discursive tool to serve the needs of the regime. This study focuses on how childhood was constructed and what values were ascribed to children in the Western Anatolian town of Manisa. Using thematic and discourse analysis and adopting a micro-historical lens, it examines how the *Gediz Journal of the Manisa People's House* (1937–1950) engaged with dominant narratives of childhood. The main findings of the study are as follows: 1) the issue of children in *Gediz* intersected with broader ideological goals of modernization, nation-building, population politics, and gender roles, and it was articulated in ways that reflected these agendas; 2) Children were depicted as vital assets to the nation-state and imagined as future citizens entrusted with ensuring its continuity; 3) The family and the school emerged as the two primary institutions tasked with this mission, with mothers positioned as the principal nurturers expected to raise the future of the Republic; 4) While the journal localized many topics—such as Manisa's history, folklore, urban development, and socio-

Taşrada Cumhuriyeti Yetiştirme Tahayyülleri: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Manisa'sında Yayımlanan *Gediz* Dergisinde Çocukluk, Annelik ve Ulusal İdealler Üzerine Söylemsel Bir Okuma

Öz

Çocukluk, toplumsal olarak inşa edilmiş bir kategori olarak, belirli kültürel, sosyal, politik ve tarihsel bağlamlar tarafından şekillendirilir; bu nedenle ne durağan ne de evrenseldir. Çocukluğun, yeni bir rejimin ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak üzere işlevsel bir söylemsel araca dönüştürülmesi, ulus inşa süreçlerinin tekrar eden bir özelliği olmuştur. Bu çerçevede, bu çalışma Erken Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sine odaklanmakta; Batı Anadolu'da yer alan Manisa'da çocukluğun nasıl tanımlandığını ve çocuklara hangi değerlerin atfedildiğini incelemektedir. Tematik ve söylem analizine dayanan ve mikro-tarihsel bir bakış açısı benimseyen bu çalışma, 1937 ile 1950 yılları arasında Manisa Halkevi tarafından yayınlanan *Gediz* dergisinin çocuklukla ilgili egemen anlatılarla nasıl ilişkilendiğini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın başlıca bulguları şunlardır: 1) *Gediz* dergisinde çocuk meselesi, modernleşme, ulus inşası, nüfus politikaları ve toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri gibi daha geniş ideolojik hedeflerle kesişmekte ve bu ajandaları yansıtabilecek şekilde tartışılmaktadır; 2) Çocuklar, ulus-devletin hayati unsurları olarak tasvir edilmiş ve ulusun sürekliliğini sağlamakla görevli geleceğin yurttaşları olarak kurgulanmıştır; 3) Aile ve okul, bu misyonla görevlendirilmiş iki temel kurum olarak öne çıkarken, anneler Cumhuriyet'in

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economic concerns—its treatment of children reflected a top-down, state-driven narrative. Emphasis was placed on children's physical, mental, and moral development to safeguard the Republic's ideological continuity through the combined efforts of the family, especially mothers, and the state. By centering its analysis on childhood, this article questions the descriptive tendency prevalent in existing scholarship on People's House publications by focusing specifically on the Gediz journal. It underscores the need for critically engaged and localized readings to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how nation-building, modernity, and gender norms were constructed and disseminated in the early Republican period.

Keywords: *Childhood, Motherhood, Nation-building, Early Republican Turkey, Manisa.*

geleceğini yetiştirmesi beklenen başlıca bakım vericiler olarak konumlandırılmıştır; (4) Dergi Manisa'nın tarihi, folkloru, kentsel gelişimi ve sosyo-ekonomik meseleleri gibi pek çok konuyu yerelleştirerek ele alırken, çocuklara dair söylemi büyük ölçüde yarıktan aşağıya işleyen, devlet merkezli bir anlatıyı yansıtmaktadır. Çocukların fiziksel, zihinsel ve ahlaki gelişimlerine yapılan vurgu, Cumhuriyet'in ideolojik sürekliliğinin özellikle anneler olmak üzere aile ve devletin ortak çabalarıyla sağlanması amacıyla öne çıkarılmıştır. Bu makale, analizini çocuklar merkezinde kurgulayarak, Halkevi yayınları üzerine yapılan mevcut literatürdeki betimleyici yaklaşımı Gediz dergisine odaklanarak sorgulamakta ve erken Cumhuriyet dönemi ulus inşası, modernlik ve toplumsal cinsiyet normlarının nasıl kurgulandığını ve yaygınlaştırıldığını bütünsel olarak anlayabilmek için daha eleştirel ve yerele odaklanan çalışmalara duyulan ihtiyacı vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Çocukluk, Annelik, Ulus İnşası, Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye'si, Manisa.*

Introduction

During the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic, children were given unprecedented attention in numerous books, treatises, popular periodicals, and newspaper articles. Within these genres, as the current study underlines, discussions around children were deeply intertwined with broader ideological frameworks of modernization, nation-state building, population politics and social welfare practices (Libal, 2000; Onur, 2009; Öztan, 2011; Öztan, 2013; Gencer, 2012; Çiçek, 2012; Çiçek, 2016; Çiçek, 2020; Tunç, 2016; Başboğa, 2018; Yolcu Yavuz, 2019). In publications from this period, children's issues intersected with public discourses on the institution of family and the gender roles envisioned by the early Republican intelligentsia (Öztamur, 2004; Öztan, 2011; Öztan, 2013; Çakır, 2019). These works, produced primarily in urban centers like Istanbul and Ankara, framed healthy, well-educated, and disciplined children as indispensable for building a robust population capable of carrying the Republic into the future. Conceptualized as symbols of progress, children were portrayed not only as key indicators of the success of Republican reforms but also as essential resources for the survival and strength of the nation-state. Texts repeatedly promoted "modern techniques" in child rearing, emphasizing the importance of

strong families and educating mothers about childcare. This focus, evident in the existing literature, reflects the early Republican state's pronatalist population policies and its efforts to expand its biopolitical technologies of power in the Foucauldian sense (Toprak, 2017; Çiçek, 2012).

As the historiography of childhood in contemporary Turkish history demonstrates, childhood within this discourse was constructed through two competing lenses: On the one hand, childhood was conceptualized as a distinct phase of life, separate from adulthood and characterized by innocence, vulnerability, and the need for nurturing by both the state and the family, a view deeply influenced by Western discourses on childhood that emerged in the seventeenth century and crystallized in the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, children were burdened with significant responsibilities, unrealistic expectations of maturity, and profound comprehension far beyond the typical norm for their age. These assumptions were shaped within the founding elites' historical and ideological frameworks. Resulting from these two competing notions, during the first few decades of the newly established Turkish Republic, "....the notion of modern childhood was selectively instrumentalized in line with the regime's specific needs. The modern Turkish child was expected, for the time being, to forgo the right to remain a child - a privilege granted to their Western contemporaries - and instead experience a modified version of the "miniature adulthood" that Ariès¹ attributes to the pre-modern period, at the beginning of the twentieth century" (Çiçek, 2012: 95).

Against this background, this study examines how the *Gediz Journal*, published from 1937 to 1950 by the People's House of Manisa², engaged

¹ Research on the history of childhood gained momentum with Philippe Ariès' seminal work, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (1960), later translated as *Centuries of Childhood* (1962). Ariès sparked discussion on history of children by claiming that medieval Western civilization did not recognize a distinct transitional phase between infancy and adulthood. Instead, children were thrust into adult roles as soon as they could support themselves. To Ariès, the Western conceptualization of children as a unique group separate from adults, deserving of special care and treatment, began to develop from the seventeenth century onward. Since the publication of Ariès's celebrated work, historical childhood studies have been shaped by contested debates and several shifts that reflect the field's growing complexity (Morrison, 2012:1-8).

² Established in the foothills of Mount Spil, Manisa's development was significantly shaped by its strategic location along major trade routes and its position on the edge of the Gediz Plain, one of Western Anatolia's most fertile agricultural regions. During the Ottoman Period, Manisa was one of the key administrative centers where Ottoman princes gained governmental experience until the late 16th century. Until İzmir's rise in the 17th century as an open port city and its transformation into a cosmopolitan center, Manisa retained its status as the region's leading commercial hub. However, from the seventeenth

with the dominant narratives of childhood constructed by the ruling elite of the early Republican era. It aims to contribute insights on how provincial publications understood and disseminated dominant Republican ideals. It investigates how this provincial journal constructed and understood childhood, focusing on the issues it addressed and the messages it conveyed specific to children. Using thematic and discourse analysis, the study explores whether the journal diverged from or reinforced the discourse on childhood promoted by central authorities. By situating the portrayal of children within the journal's broader thematic and discursive framework, this study aims to determine whether the journal integrated local particularities into its narratives about children or adhered predominantly to top-down, state-driven ideological priorities.

I would argue that the localization of themes in the *Gediz Journal* is selective. It offers, for instance, detailed and localized exploration of Manisa's historical significance under various regimes; its rich folkloric traditions; challenges faced in realizing its agricultural and tourism potential; obstacles to urban development; and the formation of a distinctive urban identity, as well as Manisa's pressing infrastructural and public service needs. While these themes are rooted in the city's specific socio-economic and cultural context, the issue of children offers a sharp contrast. Rather than being contextualized within the local realities of Manisa, the journal's treatment of children reflects a predominantly top-down narrative closely aligned with the broader ideological agenda of modernization and nation-building, with little attention paid to the actual condition or needs of Manisa's children except occasional references to the significance of helping those children who are in need. Within the discursive world of *Gediz*, children are conceptualized primarily as symbols of the Republican future rather than as subjects situated within the city's landscape. My analysis explores how discussions that positioned children as objects of national concern enabled the provincial Republican intelligentsia to disseminate intersecting discourses on progress, population politics, and gender roles, particularly the roles of mothers, formulated by the founding elite of the Republic during the nation-

enth century onwards, Manisa gradually receded into the background, becoming mainly a hinterland depot for collecting agricultural products for İzmir. Manisa's trajectory shifted dramatically during the Republican period. Following a three-year Greek occupation (1919–1922), the city suffered extensive destruction in a fire set by retreating forces, which consumed three-quarters of its urban core. The occupation and subsequent devastation brought profound physical, economic, and demographic transformations to Manisa. Hence, rebuilding the city became one of the central agendas of the Republican government (Emecen, 2003; Çetin, 2012; Bilgi, 2022).

building process. By doing so, this study aims to contribute to the literature on childhood and gender in early Republican Turkey by underlying the provincial articulation of these discourses.

A Historiographical Analysis of the *Gediz* Journal

Despite its rich content, which was recognized by the ruling elite of the time and later by the historians of contemporary Turkey (Şen, 1992:36; Şakiroğlu, 1996:132), the *Gediz* Journal has not been thoroughly explored in modern Turkish historiography. Furthermore, the few existing studies on the *Gediz* journal (Şen, 1992; 1996; Türkçapar, 1999; Güneş & Güneş, 2007; Çetinalp, 2019), do not focus children and the discourses surrounding them as the main object of analysis. Moreover, the existing literature on the People's House of Manisa and its *Gediz* journal is primarily descriptive, a type of scholarship criticized by Alexandros Lamprou, since it prioritizes "the state" over "the society" and by extension, institutional outlook over people's agency. This often highlights "the 'textbook' version of the Houses" - it studies the regime's aim to establish them, the historical and political conditions before their creation, their organizational structure, and explores their activities through the center's visions, policies and discourses (Lamprou, 2009:27).

Given this top-down narrative, even those studies that do focus on individual People's Houses, appear to mimic each other without offering substantive analysis on "local specificities" of modernity (Kandiyoti, 1997: 113). For example, most existing studies on the People's House of Manisa give an overview of the Kemalist regime's reforms, followed by the rationale behind establishing the People's Houses and their organizational structure, including the committee members. They then merely *list* the activities of the People's House and its various sections (courses, fine arts, social assistance, sports, etc.) - much as the *Gediz* journal recounted in its monthly activities section. Similarly, studies on the *Gediz* journal itself often reproduce its contents, offering little insight into the journal's primary themes or underlying discourse.

This study seeks to advance beyond the existing scholarship on the *Gediz* journal (1937-1950), through an analysis of its primary themes and discourses, with a particular focus on how the issue of children was conceptualized. Hence, it integrates the discussions around children with the journal's broader thematic and discursive landscape. Discussions around children were used to advance state ideologies on the family, gender roles, and national progress at the provincial level. This contextualized analysis reveals that issues related to Manisa's history, folklore, agricultural and tourism potential, intracultural advancements, and needs were deployed to construct local identity formation in the

midst of the nation-building process. Adopting a micro-historical lens, this study attempts to reveal how the journal negotiated between national policies and regional concerns, highlighting the interplay between state-driven modernization projects and local identity formation. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of how national ideologies were adapted and reframed at the provincial level.

Situating the Gediz Journal within the Activities of the People's House of Manisa

The Manisa People's House was established in February 1933, a year after the first fourteen People's Houses opened across Turkey. Founded in 1932, they were central to the state's attempt to construct a modern Turkish nation and inspired by similar European organizations, such as the Dopolavoros in Italy and the Sokols in Czechoslovakia. By 1950, 478 People's Houses and 4322 smaller People's Rooms were active in Turkey. Numerous studies have analyzed the People's Houses from various theoretical perspectives in the historiography of modern Turkey. A detailed review of this literature is beyond the scope of this work, but it is worth highlighting points of convergence. The literature consistently emphasizes that the Houses were intended to educate individuals on the positivist ideology of Kemalism; to propagate the reforms and principles of the Republican People's Party (RPP) among the populace; to facilitate the cultural modernization of the nation; and to forge a new national identity through organizing various teaching and leisure activities and promoting active engagement in local folkloric and historical research (Karpas, 1963; 1974; Çeçen, 1990; Öztürkmen, 1994; Karaömerlioğlu, 1998; Şimşek, 2005; Lamprou, 2009; Lamprou, 2015). Hence, it can be argued that the People's Houses were established not only to indoctrinate the masses with Kemalist ideology but also to organize leisure, to alter the aesthetic taste of the citizens, and to build knowledge repositories on the periphery's history and culture to (re)construct the nation-state.

Until its closure in 1951, the Manisa People's House, like other People's Houses operating across Turkey, adhered to the founding objectives outlined in the bylaw of the People's Houses of the Republican People's Party (*Halkevleri Talimatnamesi*). This bylaw stipulated that a fully functional House be composed of the following nine branches: Language, Literature, and History; Fine Arts; Theatre; Sports; Social Assistance; Public Classrooms and Courses; Library and Publication; Village Studies; and Museum and Exhibition branches. The bylaw detailed the activities and responsibilities of each branch. These responsibilities included promoting Turkish language, literature, and history among the local

population; encouraging participation in fine arts such as painting, sculpture, and theatre; fostering sports activities and physical education; offering financial aid and healthcare to the poor and sick; conducting and publishing ethnographic research on nearby villages and their inhabitants; educating and enlightening peasants; and preserving historical artifacts in museums. All People's Houses were required to submit detailed quarterly activity reports and membership records to the central authority. While all citizens were encouraged to join the Houses and participate in their activities, management roles were restricted to party members. Functioning as cultural branches of the Republican People's Party (RPP), the Houses did not have their legal personality. The party maintained strict control over the Houses, closely monitoring their operations. Ultimately, this strong dependence on and affiliation with the RPP led to the closure of the People's Houses by the Democrat Party in 1951 (Kılınç, 2017:24-34).

By 1937, the Manisa People's House had 1,022 members, comprising 286 women and 736 men; though "male-dominated, a notable number of women actively participated" (Güneş and Güneş, 2007:59). The Manisa People's House's contribution to educating citizens on Kemalist principles and Manisa's history and culture extend well beyond organizing national holidays, commemorative ceremonies, conferences, seminars, exhibitions, excursions, and theatrical performances. The periodicals and books they published also played a pivotal role in fostering the Republic's ideal societal vision and in unveiling local cultural elements. *Gediz*, a journal first published in April 1937, represents a significant milestone in the cultural history of Manisa. It stands out for its rich content and its extended publication period of nearly thirteen years, albeit with occasional interruptions.

Gediz was published in 104 issues from 1937 to 1950. Until May 1946, the journal was printed monthly, after which it was published at irregular intervals due to "the economic circumstances, the global crisis, the shortage of paper, and the conscription of its staff for military service" (Önakin, 1943:1). Currently, there is no solid data regarding either the pricing or the subscription numbers of *Gediz* Journal throughout its publication years. However, it is known that when first published in 1937, the price was 10 kuruş, and by 1945, its subscription numbers had reached 600 (Şen, 1992:36). This is relatively low, given that Çetin (2012) estimates Manisa's population during World War II at approximately 32,000. The journal was typically sixteen pages long, although some issues were longer. The proprietor of *Gediz* Journal was Azmi Önakin, who also served as president of the Manisa People's House until 1946 (Önakin, 1946:1), whereafter Vahit Armağan assumed the propri-

etor's role. Over the years, the magazine had several editors-in-chief, including Mustafa Dümer, Çağatay Uluçay, Kemal Danişman, and Sadi Sunam.

Gediz Journal emphasized that article submissions were open to all Manisa residents, but an analysis of its contributors reveals that most were public officials, with teachers and doctors predominant. The content was predominantly written by men, with women contributors being notably rare. Even articles addressing issues related to women's status were exclusively authored by men. Contributors Çağatay Uluçay, İbrahim Gökçen, Kamil Su, and Bahri Oskay were the most prolific writers. All were history teachers in Manisa who regularly published articles on the city's Ottoman past, often utilizing archival sources.

The Gediz Journal: Thematic Insights and Underlying Discourses

The article "Why Gediz?" in the inaugural issue, explains that Gediz derives its name from the Gediz River. Just as the river reflects vitality and fertility, the journal aspired to embody the same vigor, drawing its energy from "the foaming and dynamic springs of the revolution" (Gediz, 1937a: 1). The editorial board of Gediz articulated that their primary objective in publishing the journal was to reflect their "distinctive characteristics" while steadfastly adhering to "the grand principles of Atatürk's democracy." (Gediz, 1937a: 2)

This objective becomes clear upon examining the content of the Gediz journal. On the one hand, it featured works by some of the most prominent intellectuals of the time, including Ziya Gökalp, Fuat Köprülü, Şükrü Kaya, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, and Falih Rıfkı Atay, who explored the foundational principles of Kemalism. Among these intellectuals, Ziya Gökalp's contributions are particularly prominent - his essays on secularism, populism, etatism, nationalism, the underpinning of the national economy, the Turkification of law, and the role of women in Turkish society, appear across various issues of the journal. Alongside these nationally-renowned intellectuals, local Gediz authors also engaged with these principles, contributing essays that further elaborated on the core tenets of Kemalism. On the other hand, Gediz also showcased extensive research on Manisa's folklore, history, geography, economy, agriculture, and tourism potential, thereby bridging national ideals with local identity and development.

In an article titled "The Needs of Manisa," published in the first issue of Gediz, Çağatay Uluçay declared that "Manisa is paralyzed by the affliction of being unknown, both in terms of its history and its beauty" (Uluçay, 1937a: 6). He argued that Manisa merits scholarly attention not only for its rich history as the cradle of numerous civilizations, but also

for its geographical features, natural beauty, and economic potential. Yet, despite these attributes, Manisa remains unrecognized and understudied, a city that has become "weak amidst abundance, barren in its fertility." (Uluçay, 1937a: 6). Uluçay attributed this neglect to Manisa's residents, who failed to appreciate, promote, and introduce their city to the wider world. Uluçay's rhetorical questions underscore his frustration: "Why should Manisa's grapes, Kula's, Gördes's, and Eşme's carpets, Kırkağaç's melons, and Akhisar's tobacco not bear the mark of Manisa across the country, just like Aydın's figs, Bafra's tobacco, or Isparta and Burdur's roses?" (Uluçay, 1937a:6). He called upon both the youth and the intellectuals of Manisa to engage in studies reflecting the city's history, geography, agriculture, and tourism potential. For Uluçay, failure to act on these opportunities would leave Manisa vulnerable to being assimilated by neighboring provinces, particularly by Izmir (Uluçay, 1937a: 6 -7).

The journal frequently contrasts Manisa with Izmir, often arguing that Manisa's proximity to Izmir hinders its urban development and access to services. For instance, an article by Cemal Sezgin in 1940 noted that Manisa, despite having a population of 35,000 in its city center - a figure the author considers a remarkable blessing for a provincial capital - did not have a single bookstore. According to Sezgin, the absence of a bookstore in Manisa is directly tied to its proximity to Izmir. He explained that residents, including himself, either preferred or were compelled to purchase their books from Izmir. Sezgin furthered his argument, stating: "Just as Manisa's proximity to Izmir has left it behind in many fields, it has also caused it to lag in the realm of bookselling" (Sezgin, 1941:12).

Gediz not only encouraged scholarly work on Manisa's history, geography, folklore, tourism and economic potential to foster a sense of urban identity and belonging among its residents, but also highlighted the city's pressing developmental needs, often appealing to the central government for support. For instance, in an article titled "Ah, If Only a High School," Mustafa Dümer conveys these concerns in a tone of grievance, underscoring Manisa's urgent need for a high school. Comparisons are drawn with Istanbul, Ankara, and İzmir to illustrate the disparity in educational opportunities (Dümer, 1937). Similarly, Manisa's critical need for clean water and electricity is raised by Kazım Özses, who adopted a notably critical tone toward the municipal administration (Özses, 1945; Özses, 1946). Özses evaluated inadequacies in Manisa's municipal lighting infrastructure during the late 1930s, particularly highlighting the inefficiencies of the newly rebuilt electricity plant and its inability to meet the city's growing needs. While acknowledging the municipality's

efforts to improve lighting in central areas, such as installing new poles and partially upgrading the electrical network, he underscored the persistent neglect of peripheral neighborhoods and the overall insufficiency of electricity supply.

In the inaugural issue of *Gediz*, Dr. Semih Sümerman's article, "As *Gediz* Makes Its Debut," introduced an additional dimension to the publication's purpose, positing that *Gediz*'s "primary aim is to work tirelessly- within the bounds of its resources and capacity- for the cultural and moral education of the youth" (Sümerman, 1937a: 11). Sümerman warned that "citizens whose minds are enriched but whose souls remain self-centered and confined, like a narrow corridor, will quickly falter amidst the symphony of health and harmony that defines the national trajectory" (Sümerman, 1937a: 11). *Gediz* aimed to cultivate a sense of national discipline, to infuse the new generation with national culture aligned with the country's progress. On its first anniversary, Mustafa Dümer, managing editor of the journal, reiterated this mission to instill national culture in the youth. He underlined that *Gediz* prioritized history and language studies, since these are the domains where "national culture most prominently manifests" (Dümer, 1938, p.1). Thus, *Gediz* seeks to "imbue the youth of the Republic with a robust sense of national culture and to underscore the truth that this nation's existence is not confined to a brief six-century past" (Dümer, 1938:1), reflecting the hegemonic discourse of the period that positioned Turkish history as extending far beyond the Ottoman era.

This emphasis on historical research distinguishes *Gediz* from its predecessors and, arguably, its contemporaries. The historical narrative presented in *Gediz* exposed readers to key periods in Manisa's history, emphasizing its development across various civilizations and empires. It is not uncommon to find remarks that degrade the Ottoman period while celebrating the cultural values and lifestyles of pre-Islamic Turkish civilizations. This discourse is particularly evident in discussions on women's social status during the early Republican period. For instance, in an article on Ottoman divorce practices, based on the Manisa Sharia Records, Bahri Oskay argues:

The significant role of women within the family is an undeniable truth, and thus, the future of nations that fail to grant women the positions they rightfully deserve can always be viewed with concern. It is difficult to point to another nation in the world that has accorded women as elevated a status as the Turkish nation. Numerous historical documents attest that in Turkish states established in Central Asia, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia, the hakan (ruler) and the hatun (queen) possessed equal rights. Even after the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, women, particularly in our villages

and small towns, worked alongside men in the field of production and, in the struggle for the future, provided some of the most profound examples of heroism, sacrifice, and patriotism. However, during the Ottoman period, due to certain individuals' misinterpretation of Islamic principles and their selfishness, as well as their unconscious adoption of desert laws into the noble Turkish society, women were stripped of any rights or privileges in family life. Women, who were diligent, self-sacrificing, enduring, and loyal pillars of their households, lived in constant anxiety, fearing that one day, with a brief sentence uttered by their husbands, they might find themselves cast into the streets (Oskay, 1941:11-12).

The contrast drawn here between the progressive treatment of women in pre-Islamic Turkish civilizations and their diminished rights during the Ottoman era, reflects broader ideological shifts in the early Republican narrative. The reclaiming and celebration of pre-Islamic Turkish values aligns with the Republic's effort to construct a modern, secular national identity and its desire to break from the Ottoman past. Hence, Oskay's argument illustrates how historical narratives in *Gediz* were used to legitimize contemporary social reforms, particularly those aimed at improving women's status.

Among the various topics covered in *Gediz*, national holidays, commemorative ceremonies, and local festivals are prominent. The journal enthusiastically highlights significant national events such as Republic Day, Atatürk's Commemoration and Youth and Sports Day, National Sovereignty and Children's Day, and Victory Day. It also features holidays associated with the Republic's reforms, primarily celebrated in schools and relevant public institutions without state office closures, such as Red Crescent Week, Language Day, Domestic Goods Week, and the People's Houses Festival. Additionally, local holidays of national importance, such as The Liberation of Manisa, and local festivals like the Grape Festival, are presented with similar passion. Celebration of local festivals appears to remind Manisians of their socio-economic potential, thereby reinforcing their local identity, while nationally significant days serve to disseminate and promote the Republic's ideology. A key message in articles about national commemorations is the distinctiveness of the Republican regime compared to the arbitrary and unjust governance of the Ottoman Empire. For instance, in the article titled "Sacred Day," written by the *Gediz* Editorial Board for Republic Day celebrations, readers were addressed as follows:

The Republican regime is the best of all systems because sovereignty belongs to the nation under this regime. There is no absolute rule of those whose only merit is wearing a crown. During the era of the sultanate, sultans governed the country as they pleased and enslaved the people. The successes achieved at the cost of the people's lives and blood were claimed

by the sultan as his own, and he would take what the people earned through their labor and sweat, spending it as he wished without being held accountable to anyone. For this reason, during the sultanate era, the country was deprived of the fruits of civilization. The Turkish nation fell far behind other nations on the path to modernity. Today, we see that under the Republican regime, the Turkish nation has achieved astonishing progress within just fourteen years and has begun to take great strides on the path to civilization. As Atatürk said, the nation is preparing to surpass all others on this path (Gediz, 1937c:1).

As this lengthy quotation and various other essays in *Gediz Journal* demonstrate, the journal aimed to reinforce, at the provincial level, a narrative of national sovereignty, progress, and modernity that aligned with the ideals of the new regime. By portraying the Ottoman past as despotic, arbitrary, and exploitative and emphasizing the transformative potential of the Republic, these writings served not only as a legitimizing tool for the new regime but also as a call for national unity around Kemalist principles. Articles published on national holidays and speeches delivered by local bureaucrats during these celebrations, particularly for National Sovereignty and Children's Day and Youth and Sports Day, often appeared verbatim in *Gediz*. Beyond reinforcing Kemalist ideology, they underscore the role of children and youth in protecting and advancing the Republic. In doing so, they remind not only children and youth of their responsibilities but also parents (particularly mothers) and the public at large. What follows is a close examination of how the *Gediz* journal envisioned childhood and children, beginning with the functions the Republican elite assigned to children, followed by their understanding of the ideal child and the institutions involved in shaping this ideal. The discussion concludes with the conceptualization of childhood itself, positioned at the end to underscore how inconsistencies within this discourse reflect broader tensions in Republican ideals.

Raising the "Ideal Child" for the Nation's Future

In the discursive world of the *Gediz* journal, children were portrayed primarily as a crucial asset to the nation-state, envisioned as the future generation of citizens entrusted with the duty of safeguarding the nation's well-being and continuity. For instance, during the Children's Week celebrations in 1940, Kazım Nami Duru (1875–1967), a prominent pedagogue and a member of parliament for Manisa, addressed *Gediz* readers as follows: "The future of our beloved Turkey belongs to our children. ... If our children are left neglected and to their own devices, if they are not prepared for the exceedingly difficult and highly significant duties of tomorrow, how can we ensure the perpetuation of our glorious history into eternity?" (Duru, K.N., 1940:1).

Aligned with this vision, children's education and both moral and physical discipline were framed as serious national concerns in the pages of *Gediz*. Readers were consistently reminded of the consequences of neglecting children, as articulated in one article: "The tragic, painful, and bloody pages of history are filled with the negligence of nations that failed to understand the national and social significance of the child" (Turanlı, 1937: 8). Furthermore, the *Gediz* authors linked the significance given to children to civilizational progress, asserting that only those "civilized nations" that recognized the critical role of children in shaping the nation's future could be considered truly advanced (Ertürk, 1941:1-2).

Besides representing children as future adults and key agents in carrying and reproducing the core values of the newly constructed social and cultural order, the qualities of what I term the "ideal child" is another dominant theme in the *Gediz* journal. A 1937 article titled "The Inspirations of Children's Day" by Dr. Semih Sümerman encapsulates the prevailing discourse of early Republican provincial intellectuals in Manisa on the subject of children. Sümerman describes children as the "builders of tomorrow" and "future pillars of national unity," emphasizing the necessity of meticulously raising them from a "national perspective," that is, with a focus on their national identity (Sümerman, 1937b:14). Nurturing children this way involves guiding them to achieve the "spiritual and physical excellence necessary to fulfill the core principles of the revolution" (Sümerman, 1937b:14). Sümerman asserts that the principles to be applied in raising children are neither "debatable nor ambiguous," claiming that all guidance in this sphere is rooted in the "crystal-clear and unambiguous foundation" of Kemalism (Sümerman, 1937b:14). Accordingly, Sümerman argues that Turkish children must be raised with an "inspirational revolutionary mindset," firmly rooted in the spirit of Kemalist ideology (Sümerman, 1937b:14).

Gediz authors frequently ascribe to this "ideal child", the quality of *terbiye*³ - encompassing discipline, good manners, and proper modes of conduct. For instance, teacher Yahya Kaynak gives the following advice to families for their children's upbringing:

Demand from your children respect for elders and affection for the young. Your child should not be selfish or jealous. They should not mock those below them. They should not be noisy, nor should they lie. They should not

³ *Terbiye*, as a concept, as already underlined by Alemdaroğlu, is difficult to translate into English because "it entails a wide range of meanings, including: upbringing, training, educating, maintenance, teaching manners, correction, punishment, culture, good manners, decency, proper way of conduct, socialization, and discipline." Following Alemdaroğlu, I choose to translate *terbiye* as "discipline". (Alemdaroğlu, 2005:74).

be disobedient but should respect the words of others. They should not take the belongings of strangers without permission, nor should they spend money unnecessarily. They should use their belongings well, not trouble guests, and greet their acquaintances. They should not borrow, but if it is necessary, they should return what they have borrowed. They should not be partisan, neglect their duties, delay today's work until tomorrow, or be indifferent toward their duties and lessons (Kaynak, 1937:16).

As the historiography of childhood in modern Turkey underlines, this focus on cultivating physically and mentally healthy children extends beyond ensuring the transmission of Republican values and safeguarding the regime's continuity. It is also closely tied to the population politics of the period, with discussions on children's health, from birth through adulthood, being prioritized in nearly all periodicals of the time (Çiçek, 2012). Gediz was no exception. Requiring a quantitatively and qualitatively strong population for the survival and development of the nation, yet confronted with a population diminished by wars, epidemics, and widespread diseases, the founding cadres of the Republic pursued a dual strategy to promote demographic growth: tackling the spreading epidemics on the one hand and removing any and all obstacles to population growth on the other (Toprak, 2017).

Aligned with this national strategy, medical doctors writing in Gediz emphasized the critical importance of population growth, framing it as a cornerstone of national strength and continuity. The emphasis on maintaining demographic balance by ensuring that births consistently outpaced deaths, reflects early Republican concerns about high infant and child mortality. They also advocated for creating conditions for newborns to thrive. For example, Dr. Orhon argued that traditional childcare practices - such as giving sugar water, herbal teas, or single-food diets like starch to newborns - were harmful to infant health. Instead, he promoted modern practices, emphasizing breastfeeding, the gradual introduction of varied, age-appropriate foods, and regular weight monitoring as effective strategies to reduce infant mortality (Orhon, 1946).

Similarly, Dr. Bayer, writing on Children's Day in 1943, categorized children by age and developmental stages as "meme çocuğu" (infant), "küçük yaş çocuğu" (young child), and "büyük tahsil çocuğu" (older student). He provided detailed guidelines on how to care for children physically and mentally at each stage. Overall, Bayer explicitly urges his readers, "Let us now break free from traditions and remain faithful to the advice that knowledge provides us" (Bayer, 1943: 3).

The recommendations of medical doctors published in Gediz align with the early Republican discourse that sought to replace traditional

methods with medicalized childcare and scientific mothering (Öztamur, 2004: 17-33). Furthermore, interpreted through the lens of Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and governmentality, they reflect the modern state's efforts to regulate and optimize individual and collective health as part of its broader strategies for power consolidation and governance over its population (Öztamur, 2004; Çicek, 2012). Moreover, they demonstrate how power extends into intimate spaces, such as family life and the child-rearing practices of mothers, a subject that I will focus on in the following section.

Mothers as the Primary Nurturers of the Nation's Future

In *Gediz*' discursive realm, the family and school are the two key institutions responsible for inculcating discipline and morals in children. Accordingly, the articles on children repeatedly emphasize the role of the family, and particularly that of mothers. Elevating the status of the Turkish family is regarded as a "national" duty. For example, in his 1941 article titled "Old Divorces," Bahri Oskay addresses readers as follows:

The fate of the homeland and the nation can only be guaranteed by families built on solid foundations. There is no doubt that the sudden and unnecessary collapse of a family held together by fragile ties would harm not only its members but the entire nation. Under such circumstances, it is evident that children, who are the responsible citizens of tomorrow, would be deprived of the opportunity to grow into good individuals and citizens, just as it is self-evident that men and women would fail to become useful members of society. (Oskay, 1941: 11).

Although the role of the family in raising children as "good individuals and citizens" is emphasized in *Gediz* magazine, the significance of the role of mothers within the family is underscored, highlighting motherhood's elevated and sacred nature. In this regard, Dr. Sümerman declares: "The duty of parents preparing their children for the sake of Turkish society is most sacred. Being a good Turkish mother is, in this respect, the highest form of happiness and the ultimate privilege" (Sümerman, 1937b:15). As exemplified by this brief excerpt, discussions emphasizing the importance of the family in child-rearing invariably address parents together, yet the mother's role is prominently highlighted, while the father's role is scarcely mentioned. During this study, I identified approximately 40 articles concerning children in the *Gediz* Journal, and found that only one of them offered any advice directed at fathers. In this one instance, fathers were encouraged to intervene to protect young male high school students from the harmful influences of "the streets, cinema, and publications." Fathers were advised to adopt the role of a "good friend" to their sons, offering guidance, advice, and protection. Furthermore, fathers themselves were counseled to cultivate the neces-

sary skills to fulfill this advisory role. However, the responsibilities ascribed to fathers were exclusively limited to their sons; their relationships with daughters were conspicuously absent from the discourse (Bayer, 1943).

While fathers were positioned as advisors and protectors, the mother-role was construed as central to nurturing, educating, disciplining and instilling homeland love. Mothers were advised to raise mentally and physically healthy, disciplined, and patriotic children. For instance, in a series of articles titled "Türk Anası" (The Turkish Mother), published in *Gediz* in 1937, Ayhan Karasu offers the following recommendations to Turkish mothers:

A mother can instill in her child the highest emotions, ideals, and aspirations through songs, stories, rhymes, and lullabies. Moreover, a mother can take advantage of her child's boundless curiosity—manifested in a relentless stream of questions, diverse interests, and an insatiable desire to learn that encompasses everything—to provide foundational knowledge that will serve as the foundation for her child's future (Karasu, 1937a: 6).

According to Karasu, it is the mother who "lays the first cornerstone of the child's intellectual, religious, and moral education" (Karasu, 1937c: 10). The institution of family and motherhood is so deeply sanctified that individuals who choose not to marry or who voluntarily reject motherhood are subject to stigmatization in *Gediz*. Karasu perpetuates this stigmatization, primarily through a historical narrative that he constructed in reference to ancient Turkish history, claiming that:

In ancient Turks (according to the Sumerian laws), a woman who intentionally refused to bear children was punished by being drowned in water. Families without children were not viewed favorably, as they were believed to be afflicted by malevolent beings. A family without children was perceived to have committed the gravest sin and the most severe offense. Consequently, childless families would organize feasts (toy), sacrificing all their horses, oxen, and cows to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and beseech Karahan for a child. At times, to ensure the warmth and vitality of the family home, a childless wife would arrange for her husband to take a second wife. However, the husband would strive to hold the first wife in higher esteem than the second (Karasu, 1937a: 6).

In the subsequent sections of his article, Karasu intensifies his argument, asserting that the family, and particularly mothers, are the most critical actors in ensuring the survival of the nation. He reinforces this claim by referencing Raşit Galib (1883–1934), a prominent physician, politician, and supporter of Turkist ideas and the Turkish History Thesis (Barut, 1993, Ersanlı, 2018:161-167). Citing Galib, Karasu contends that women who deliberately refrain from bearing children, despite having no congenital infertility or medical condition preventing pregnancy, do

not deserve respect and, furthermore, have committed "the gravest offense" (*en büyük suç*) against their nation (Karasu, 1937c:12). This rhetoric becomes even harsher in a 1941 article titled "Çocuk" (Child), authored by Ahmet Ertürk (published under the initials A.E.). In this piece, Ertürk declares, "Women who, intentionally and willingly, avoid having children and refuse motherhood in favor of preserving their bodies, beauty, clarity of their skin, and peace of mind betray both society and their homeland (*cemiyet-i beşeriyete, vatanlarına hıyanet ederler*)" (A.E., 1941:1-2)

These long excerpts substantiate that the most significant role ascribed to women in *Gediz* is that of motherhood. However, the authors simultaneously invoke a historical narrative constructed around the roles women played in ancient Turkic societies and underscore the legal rights afforded to women by the new regime. This discourse is not only advanced by the intellectual-bureaucrats contributing to *Gediz* and serving in Republican Manisa, but also through reproducing the writings of prominent national intellectuals like Ziya Gökalp, whose famous article "The Legal and Social Status of Turkish Women in the Turkish Revolution," was reproduced in *Gediz*. Gökalp asserts: "The Turkish Revolution, with a radical perspective, has granted Turkish women complete equality in both private and public legal spheres. Through this initiative, the Revolution has demonstrated a gesture of goodwill (*cemilekârlık*) toward Turkish women. Perhaps, it has recognized and appreciated (*takdir etmiştir*) the Turkish mother, who has proven herself, more than any other nation, to be exceptionally deserving of these rights on every occasion." (Gökalp, 1941: 7).

Research has demonstrated that, while the new regime "granted" (*takdir*) significant legal rights to Turkish women, discourses regarding women's social position during the early Republican period were fraught with tensions (Arat, 1997, Kandiyoti, 1987). As Yeşim Arat notes: "While the state encouraged increasing involvement by a group of elite women in public life, it gave a different message to a large number of 'other' women: they were expected to contribute to the process of modernization not by becoming elite women professionals but being housewives à la the West, bringing 'order', 'discipline' and 'rationality' to homemaking in the private realm" (Arat, 1997:100). These tensions are also evident within *Gediz* magazine. While the journal acknowledges the legal and political rights granted to women by the Republic in a limited number of articles addressing women's roles in the newly established regime, such references are quickly overshadowed by recurring assertions of women's domestic, maternal, and national responsibilities. For instance, Ziya Gökalp, in his aforementioned article, offers an overview

of the legal rights granted to women by the newly established Republic as a rightful restoration of gender equality rooted in pre-Islamic Turkish traditions. He affirms that, with the Turkish Revolution, women gained rights in family law—such as equality in divorce, inheritance, and property management—and in public life, including suffrage and access to professional roles. However, even in this celebratory tone, Gökalp defines Turkish women's worth through their foundational service to the family and the nation, rather than through individual autonomy or professional achievement in public sphere. In Gökalp's reading, the Turkish woman is foremost "the faithful life partner of her husband," "the merciful and nurturing mother," and "the devoted manager of the household," one who not only "endures hardship" but also "self-sacrifices for the family's interest." Furthermore, she is "a producer, not a consumer," contributing directly to her household's sustenance, and "resists vice," abstaining from gambling and alcohol. Due to these virtues, according to Gökalp, she stands as "the most patriotic mother in the world," raising future heroes and safeguarding the nation's future (Gökalp, 1941: 6-7.).

A similar tension underlines Ayhan Karasu's series *Türk Anası* (Karasu, 1937a; 1937b; 1937c). Karasu constructs a lineage of powerful Turkish mothers—from the "Bilge Hatun" of the Orkhon inscriptions to the peasant women of the Independence War—who are exalted not only for raising heroic sons but also for managing households, instilling discipline, and cultivating patriotic values in their offspring. Although his narrative occasionally refers to women's roles in political or military activities, in the end he defines motherhood as the highest form of civic and national duty. This argument culminates in his fourfold categorization of Turkish mothers on the basis of their commitment to "the nation's survival and advancement" (Karasu, 1937b: 7). He idealizes "peasant mothers" (*köylü analar*), who labor alongside men in the fields while raising children in accordance with national ideals. In contrast, "homemakers" (*ev ve çocuk işlerine bakan analar*) who live mostly in cities and do not engage in income-generating labor, are portrayed as occupying an ambiguous space: while their domestic focus is not criticized, Karasu argues that they lack the proper education and awareness necessary to raise the disciplined, rational, and patriotic children required by the new Republic. For him, this group must be urgently reformed and educated, as their detachment from both national concerns and modern pedagogical models poses a risk to the formation of the next generation (Karasu, 1937b: 7). The third category, "working mothers" (*çalışan analar*), including civil servants, artisans and workers, is critiqued for privileging career over domestic and maternal duties. Though these are few in Aksu's observation, he asserts that they eventually "realize their mis-

takes and take on their most sacred and joyful duties," or, after fulfilling their responsibilities in "the social, political, and economic spheres," they "do not devote their remaining time to entertainment and frivolous things," but instead, "like the women of their ancestry, dedicate it to motherhood and household duties" (Karasu, 1937c: 11). Finally, "parasite women" (*parazit kadınlar*), often well-educated and wealthy, choose a life centered on fashion and leisure activities. Described by Aksu as "mannequins decorating shop windows," these women equate being "modern" with frequenting cinemas, wearing the latest fashions, donning panama hats and snake-skin shoes, getting manicures, and playing poker at home or with neighbors. Hence, Aksu harshly criticizes them—not only for their "intellectual barrenness" but also for being devoid of any contribution to the family or the nation (Karasu, 1937c:12). Hence, through what I call a "normative taxonomy," Karasu constructs a hierarchy of femininity in which women are not only categorized according to their conformity to the Republican ideal of disciplined, reproductive, sacrificial and domesticated womanhood, but also reminded of their most sacred national duty: motherhood. In his reading, women who deviate from the maternal ideal are cast as parasitic figures—morally suspect, socially deviant and branded as traitors to the national cause.

As previously underlined, the responsibility for raising patriotic, disciplined children loyal to Kemalist principles, lay not only with the family, specifically with the mothers, but also with the school. The school is positioned as an extension of the family, playing a complementary role in shaping children into ideal citizens of the future. In this context, Cemal Önoğur explains the function of the school: "The school is a great institution that takes the child brought up by the family until the age of seven and prepares them as individuals for the specialized professions of mechanized civilization, shaping them according to the national educational ideals and ideology of society, while filtering them from the myriad ideologies and ideas of our century" (Önoğur, 1942a: 9). He emphasizes that the education provided in schools is based on programs grounded in the universal principles of pedagogy and tailored to the "social structure of each state." Thus, he argues that parents should adopt a "complementary" and "informed assistant" role rather than engage in unnecessary and disruptive interventions with the school. Parents are advised to maintain constant cooperation with the school, avoid criticizing teachers in front of their children, instill love for teachers in their children, and report any positive progress they observe, to demonstrate their appreciation. Crucially, parents are urged to understand that "every child can be educated according to their own abilities and inclinations, and that every child can find happiness within the scope of

their own talents" (Önoğur, 1942b:11). This final point provides insight into how Gediz authors conceptualized childhood. In the following section of this study, I will attempt to analyze how childhood was envisioned in Gediz with reference to the historiography on childhood.

The Weight of the Future: Burdening Children Under Responsibilities?

The formation of ideal citizens of the future was viewed as a shared responsibility, entrusted not only to parents - particularly mothers - but also to the state, through formal education and schooling. Yet, within this conception, children themselves were not considered responsibility-free. They were expected to carry the burden of the future, actively contributing to the realization of national ideals. Although children were considered precious to the nation, and their well-being received significant attention, the responsibilities imposed on them disregarded the pleasure and leisure that predominated Western conceptions of childhood during the second half of the nineteenth century. Instead, children were expected to be responsible, hard-working, morally upright, and mentally and physically strong. Hence, while the Republican intelligentsia appeared to embrace a modern Western understanding of childhood - focused on diligent care, nurturing, and education - they simultaneously placed heavy demands on children to advance the state's vision of progress. Furthermore, existing research on children's magazines and literature from the period reveal that children were exposed to narratives unsuitable for their age, including themes of violence, militarism, starvation, death, and prejudice—topics that crossed the boundaries of what is considered appropriate for children (Ertem, 2005: 73; Öztan, 2011: 55-70, 137-164; Çicek, 2012: 88-93). These conflicting messages led Nazan Çicek, who studied childhood during this era at the macro level, to aptly conclude that the discourse on children during the early Republican period was marked by "contradictions" and "inconsistencies" (Çicek, 2012: 93; Çicek, 2016: 42-44).

The discourse on children produced in Gediz reflects similar contradictions and inconsistencies, aligning with Çicek's conclusions. While the journal features articles that adopt a modern understanding of childhood, it simultaneously reinforces nationalistic expectations that burden children with responsibilities. One notable example in this regard is Önoğur's 1942 article in Gediz. Aligned with the modern Western conception of the time, Önoğur defines childhood thus:

A child is a candidate for becoming a human being, yet is not merely a miniature version of an adult. A child's emotions, actions, and thoughts are not simply smaller-scale replicas of those of an adult. ... A child, with their emotions, actions, and thoughts, is a distinct entity, an original being. The-

refore, it is incorrect to expect a child to think in ways that align with our logical perceptions or to derive pleasure from the same things that bring us joy. When a child desires things that differ greatly from what we deem appropriate, these should be regarded as the natural requirements of childhood. If we act without understanding this, we risk shattering the dreams that are awaiting development, destroying the child's originality and bold personality, and disrupting the intellectual construction of a mind eager to learn, investigate, and explore. (Önoğur, 1942a :8).

Research on historical childhood in non-Western societies reveals that non-Western societies possess distinct understandings of childhood shaped by their own historical and cultural frameworks (Morrison:2013; Stearns:2016). Nevertheless, they became significantly influenced by modern Western discourses on childhood during interactions with the Western world (Çiçek, 2012: 75). Late Ottoman and early Republican intellectuals were no exception, as exemplified in the case of Önoğur. This modern notion of childhood, which rejected the idea of children as 'miniature adults' to be disciplined into submission, and instead viewed them as subjects with their own rights to explore, learn, and grow in a protected environment, developed in the West during the seventeenth century and became dominant in the second half of the nineteenth century (Brockliss, 2016). By explicitly rejecting the view of children as 'miniature adults' and constructing childhood as a unique life stage - separate from adulthood and characterized by the need for nurturing, intellectual and emotional development, and the recognition of individuality and creativity – Önoğur adopts the fundamental principles of the contemporary Western conception of childhood of the period.

However, alongside such ideals, the *Gediz Journal* also featured articles and poems reminding children of their responsibilities, mixing modern notions of child development with the national expectations of the early Republic. One of the most notable examples in this regard can be found in a speech given by a woman teacher, Meliha Hızal, at the May 19 Youth and Sports Day celebrations in 1943. After addressing the youth and children of Manisa as “the Owners of Tomorrow,” Hızal continues her speech:

Seeing you surpass and excel beyond your older brothers and sisters is our greatest aspiration and pride. Today [May 19th Youth Day] calls you to great responsibilities and invites you to prepare for monumental successes. To become strong-bodied, mature-minded, morally upright, and individuals of character, you must develop yourselves ... under the pure air and bright sun of your homeland and in accordance with the living conditions of tomorrow. With each passing year, we expect even greater achievements from you. Consider achieving great tasks and producing significant outcomes every day as a national duty (Hızal, 1943: 2).

Hızal's speech exemplifies yet another aspect of the discourse on childhood during the early Republican era, with childhood portrayed as a phase of preparation and duty, deeply intertwined with the ideals of nation-building and progress. It diverges from more modern conceptions of childhood, which emphasize individuality, leisure, and emotional development; instead prioritizing discipline, responsibility, and service to the nation. In this way, the *Gediz Journal* serves as a microcosm of the early Republican discourse on children - characterized by contradictions between the nurturing ideals of modern childhood and the pressures of serving the national cause.

Conclusion

The focus on children in the *Gediz journal* was deeply intertwined with the broader ideological frameworks of nation, progress, family and gender roles. The journal constructed discourses around children's physical, mental, and moral development that reflected the state's aspirations for modernization, civilizational progress and the desire to have a strong population both quantitatively and qualitatively. Within the journal's discursive world, children are conceptualized as bearers and transmitters of the regime's values; and as future citizens who need to be shaped, fostered, and taught through the involvement of both the family and the state to safeguard the Republic's continuity and ideological foundations.

The "ideal child" is envisioned as one who is educated from a national perspective, disciplined, mentally and physically strong, deeply aware of Kemalist principles, and imbued with a profound love for their homeland. Shaping this "ideal child" into a citizen who internalizes and upholds the values and norms of the Republic, both through formal education and family upbringing, emerges as a central theme in the discourse surrounding children. Within the family, while both parents were acknowledged, women were considered the primary caregivers and educators. Hence, the mother role was elevated to a sacred duty, to nurture, educate, and discipline the future generation. Those women who were healthy yet preferred not to have children were shunned and stigmatized as "traitors."

The cultivation of exemplary future citizens was regarded as a collective obligation, assigned not only to parents - especially mothers - but also to the state via formal education. However, within this framework, children were not exempt from obligations. They were expected to bear the responsibility of the future, actively participating in the fulfillment of national values. Despite being regarded as invaluable to the nation and society, with their welfare prioritized as a crucial subject among the

intelligentsia of the era, the expectations placed upon children - to be accountable, industrious, ethically sound, and mentally and physically resilient - frequently ignored the childhood experiences characterized by enjoyment and recreation that are integral to contemporary notions of childhood. Consequently, although the Republican elite appeared to adopt a contemporary Western perspective on childhood, emphasizing meticulous care, nurturing, and education, they simultaneously imposed significant expectations on children to further the state's goal of progress and nation-building.

This study demonstrates that the *Gediz Journal* largely reflected the top-down, state-driven ideological priorities of the early Republican era in its approach to childhood, aligning closely with the dominant narratives of modernization, nation-building, and population politics promoted by the ruling elite of the period. While the journal localized themes related to Manisa's historical, cultural, and socio-economic context, its portrayal of children remained rooted in the Republican ideal, framing them as symbols of the nation's future rather than as "children with faces," reflecting the diversity and complexity of their experiences in early Republican Manisa. This study argues that current historiography on the *Gediz Journal* - and many other journals produced by various People's Houses across Turkey - has remained largely descriptive, emphasizing the need for more analytical and localized research. Such research is crucial for a better understanding of the complexities of modernization and nation-building projects at the local level. Furthermore, this study acknowledges its own limitations in not addressing how families, particularly mothers and children, perceived and responded to the responsibilities and ideals imposed on them by the state. Its analysis is based on the published content of the *Gediz journal*, a source that reflects institutional discourse rather than lived experience. As the study demonstrates, while the issues of children and women appear in the journal, they are not portrayed as autonomous subjects but rather as discursive instruments for promoting the national ideals and gender politics of the new regime. Hence, while they appear in the pages of *Gediz*, their voices often remain muted. Accordingly, while this article focuses on the discursive construction of childhood and womanhood, particularly motherhood, as envisioned by the Republican intelligentsia at the provincial level, future research could build on this foundation by using ego documents and oral histories to recover subjective voices and everyday experiences, thereby complicating this narrative.

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