



Bozok Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi

Yıl/Year: 2026 Cilt/Volume: 4 Sayı/Issue: 1
Sayfa/Page: 133-136
ISSN: 2980-3322

Makale Geliş | Received: 18 Mart 2026
Makale Kabul | Accepted: 2 Nisan 2026

A Critical Analysis of Serpil Çakır's *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Ottoman Women's Movement): Claiming a Voice and the Quest for Political Agency in the Late Ottoman Era

Serpil Çakır'ın Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi Eseri Üzerine Eleştirel Bir Analiz: Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Sesini Duyurmak ve Siyasi Varlık Arayışı


Berfin TAŞDEMİR*

Özet: Bu çalışma, Serpil Çakır'ın Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet çalışmaları ve kadın tarihi yazımının temel taşlarından biri kabul edilen *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* adlı eserini kapsamlı bir akademik perspektifle analiz etmektedir. Çakır, bu öncü çalışmasında geleneksel, devlet merkezli ve eril baskı altındaki ana akım tarih yazımına metodolojik bir başkaldırı sergileyerek Osmanlı kadınının modernleşme sürecindeki pasif bir figür değil, aktif bir özne olma çabasını birincil kaynaklar üzerinden incelemektedir. Kitabın merkezinde yer alan metodolojik yenilikler, özellikle *Kadınlar Dünyası* gibi dönemin radikal, süreli yayınlarının sadece birer basın materyali değil, aynı zamanda kadınların kolektif bilincinin inşa edildiği alternatif kamusal alanlar ve ses duyurma araçları olarak nasıl değerlendirildiği üzerinde durulmaktadır. İnceleme kapsamında, Osmanlı kadınlarının eğitim hakkından çalışma hayatına, aile hukukundan siyasi temsil taleplerine kadar uzanan mücadelesi ve bu süreçte karşılaştıkları çeşitli engeller detaylandırılmaktadır. 1994 yılındaki ilk basımından bu yana bir yapı taşı haline gelen çalışma, sadece geçmişteki kadınların yazılarını belgelemekle kalmayıp, günümüz sosyal bilimler literatürüne patriyarka, ataerkil devlet ve kadın kimliği arasındaki karmaşık ilişkileri anlamlandırmak adına önemli bir teorik zemin sunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu değerlendirme Çakır'ın eserinin Türkiye'deki feminizm ile siyaset bilimi araştırmaları için neden hâlâ vazgeçilmez bir kaynak olduğunu ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Abstract: This study provides a detailed academic analysis of Serpil Çakır's work *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Ottoman Women's Movement) which is regarded as one of the cornerstones of gender studies and the writing of women's history in Turkey. In this pioneering work, Çakır challenges the mainstream historical narrative which is traditional, state-centred and dominated by male authority by examining, through primary sources, the efforts of Ottoman women to become active agents rather than passive figures in the process of modernisation. The methodological innovations at the heart of the book focus particularly on how radical periodicals of the era, such as *Women's World* are assessed not merely as press materials, but as alternative public spaces and vehicles for voicing opinions where women's collective consciousness was constructed. The study details the struggles of Ottoman women ranging from the right to education to working life, from family law to demands for political representation and the various barriers they encountered during this process. Having become a cornerstone since its first publication in 1994, this work not only documents the writings of women from the past but also provides a significant theoretical foundation for understanding the complex relationships between patriarchy, the patriarchal state and women's identity within contemporary social science literature. In conclusion, this review aims to demonstrate why Çakır's work remains an essential resource for research on feminism and political science in Turkey.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi, Serpil Çakır, Kadın Yazımı, Feminist Edebiyat, Siyasal

Keywords: The Ottoman Women's Movement, Serpil Çakır, Women's Writing, Feminist Literature, Political

* Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi, İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, Siyaset Çalışmaları Bölümü.  0009-0004-5857-1364 | berfintasdemir33@gmail.com

Öznelik

Subjectivity

Serpil Çakır's book *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Ottoman Women's Movement) was first published in 1994 by Metis. The book has become one of the most significant works in its field by offering a comprehensive and academic perspective on women's studies and women's movements as undertaken by women from various social classes within the Ottoman Empire. Drawing on an analysis of Ottoman archival documents and women's journals, the book looks at the efforts made by women in the final years of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Republic to unite in political and cultural fields and achieve an equal standing with men. In this work, Çakır highlights the just struggle of Ottoman women and reinforces this struggle through a feminist perspective. This study aims to outline the main themes of the book *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* and provide a general critique. In addition, the study will focus on evaluating the significant contributions this work makes to Turkish women's literature and history.

The author Prof. Dr. Serpil Çakır is a notable Turkish feminist academic whose work focuses on gender, history, and politics. By giving voice to the neglected Ottoman women who sought social and political influence, Çakır draws parallels with contemporary global women's movements. By personally translating and analysing many Ottoman Turkish women's journals from Ottoman Turkish into modern Turkish, she delves deeply into primary sources, thereby bringing these forgotten women's voices into modern literature. The significance of this work lies not only in historical documentation but also in her analyses of how feminism emerged and organised itself through the press and early civil society movements. Consequently, Çakır's work stands out as one of the foundational texts that has influenced the course of women's studies and historical writing in Turkey.

In her book *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, Çakır carefully documents women's visibility and their struggles for rights during the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Republic. The book begins with a theoretical critique in the chapter titled *Erkeklerin Tarihi*. In this chapter, Çakır critiques the male-centred structure of traditional historiography. She argues that traditional historiography disregards women's experiences and condemns their social, political, and intellectual existence to invisibility.

In line with this theoretical framework, the study proceeds to a detailed analysis of various women's magazines, primarily *Mehasin* and *Kadınlar Dünyası*. By translating word-for-word excerpts from these journals, Çakır makes a significant academic contribution as offering a window into the period's daily life, the social pressures and impositions, and the emerging feminist movement. These women's publications are analysed not simply as media sources, but as discursive spaces where Ottoman women could voice their justified resistance against the pressures of daily life and the patriarchal structure.

In the following chapters, the process of institutionalisation of this women's movement through various organisations, such as the Teali-i Nisvan Society (Society for the Elevation of Women), is analysed. By examining various collective efforts, the author reveals how women's demands were transformed from individual grievances into political and social issues. The book concludes with a detailed examination of fundamental issues such as the right to education, marriage, and participation in the workforce. In conclusion, Çakır's work brings to light the forgotten and suppressed voices of Ottoman women, examining their struggle within a broad context encompassing modernisation, family dynamics, and social inequality.

Serpil Çakır's work, drawing on carefully selected archival sources to shed light on the life experiences and subjectivity of Ottoman women, has established itself as a fundamental classic in the field of Turkish gender studies. The academic significance of this work lies in its methodological shift; it transforms women from passive subjects within a male-dominated narrative of modernisation into active actors in their own empowerment. By treating women's struggles not as a historical detail but as a central political movement, Çakır provides a strong theoretical foundation for re-reading late Ottoman history.

One of the book's key strengths is the attention it pays to primary sources, particularly the journal *Kadınlar Dünyası*. Çakır's efforts in translating and interpreting these texts enable the modern reader to hear the voices of women who spoke out about their own concerns. The focus on ordinary women from the lower classes, rather than the often-studied popular figures such as the women of the harem, is significant for Ottoman historiography. By focusing on the relationship between nationalist and feminist themes, the book presents a significant portrait of Ottoman women's activism.

Furthermore, the understandable style Çakır uses throughout the book reflects the democratic nature of the publications she examines. Like the Ottoman women who aimed to reach a wide audience, Çakır

employs a clear and accessible language that bridges the gap between academic scholarship and the general public. In this way, she succeeds in presenting the problems and voices of ordinary women directly to other ordinary women, without resorting to fancy language.

While this study primarily focuses on the Istanbul-based section, which is representative of the concentrated distribution of the Ottoman press and literacy at the time, it invites subsequent researchers to extend this work to include more provincial and rural areas. Ultimately in her book, Çakır does not simply write about history, she brings to light a resistance movement that was in danger of being forgotten and transforms the Ottoman women's movement into a precious guide for understanding the foundations of modern Turkish feminism.

This critical analysis shows that Serpil Çakır's work *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, plays a pioneering role in the historiography of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods. By bringing the suppressed and forgotten narratives of Ottoman women out from the shadow of traditional male-dominated history and re-presenting them through a significant feminist perspective, Çakır makes a crucial academic contribution. Çakır's work successfully highlights the passionate struggle of women who challenged traditional gender roles and fought to secure their rightful place in the fields of education, marriage, labour and political participation. In this respect, the work stands out not only as a scholarly feminist historical study but also as one of the foundational texts defining the concept of social transformation and modernisation in Turkey.

While the study's accessibility and clear style are among its key strengths, this research inevitably reflects the socio-geographical realities of its primary sources. Furthermore, the comprehensive and exhaustive reliance on the *Kadınlar Dünyası* journal adds a unique depth to the analysis while inviting future researchers to undertake broader studies across various regional and linguistic archives. Rather than being viewed as limitations, these focal points outline the boundaries of an emerging field, one to which Çakır herself has contributed.

In conclusion, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* is a bold feminist challenge to male-centred historical narratives. The book does more than simply document the past: it sets a future research agenda for social history and political science and plays a pioneering role in shaping new research in these fields. Decades after its initial publication, Çakır's work remains a key guide for academics and serves as a reminder that the quest for equality is a long-standing intellectual tradition. By bringing the historical lives and voices of Ottoman women to light, Serpil Çakır has not only rescued a heritage on the verge of being lost for literature and academia but has also provided the fundamental theoretical tools upon which contemporary feminist academia can build.

Bibliography

Çakır, S. (2016). *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (5. Baskı). Metis Yayınları.