



THE COMMUNICATION OF TURKISH FEMINISTS WITH SOCIETY IN THE YEARS OF TRANSITION FROM THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE TO THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

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ABSTRACT: Women, who had an important power and respected status in state administration in pre-Islamic Turkish states, were later excluded from social life in Ottoman society. Especially after the Tanzimat Edict, the daughters of elite families began to take a prominent role in the defense of women's rights. Women's associations and feminist newspapers established in the Ottoman Empire, brought the women's movement and women's demands to the agenda of social life. After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey significant efforts were made to ensure that women could receive the same education as men and participate in the social life on an equal basis with men. With the adoption of the Turkish Civil Code in 1926, significant progress was made in terms of equality between women and men in the family and social life. In 1934, Turkish women became legally equal to men in politics, even before many European countries.

KEYWORDS: Communication, feminism, women's movements in Turkey, politics, equality between women and men



INTRODUCTION

Conceptual Analysis of Feminism

The meaning of the word feminism, which is used in many different ways, is open to debate. In its simplest form, feminism is a general name for the struggles of women that began when they realized that they belonged to a group that was not equal to men and that they were being treated unfairly. Feminism, derived from the Latin word 'femine' meaning woman (Raina, 2017), is often used in conjunction with the women's rights movement. In theoretical terms, the feminist movement criticizes and questions all approaches that show or try to show men as superior to women in society and strives to eliminate this inequality. In this context, women's rights politics, which thinks that liberal rights can play an important role, does not have an explicit goal of eliminating male domination, but indirectly aims to regress male domination from its current position (Kanadoğlu, 2021).

Feminism as a word entered French after 1837. It is thought that feminism as a term was first used by the French socialist Charles Fourier, who interpreted the term as the emancipation of women from legal and economic dependence on men (Offen, 1988). Fourier, the founder of a feminist tradition in French socialism, criticized the injustices of contemporary society and the subjugation of women to them. In his idealized world, women's freedom should be guaranteed and they should live and work equally and independently with men in all areas (Grogan, 1992).

According to Michel, from the day the concept of feminism emerged in France, many actions were taken to expand the role and rights of women in society. Therefore, the definition of feminism must include not only doctrine but also actions (Michel, 1993).

Some authors have used the term feminism to describe a historically specific political movement in the US and Europe, while others have used it to draw attention to injustices against women (Haslanger & Tuana, 2003).

Bell Hooks defined feminism as a movement that seeks to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression (Hooks, 2000). Within the feminist approach, there are goals such as the emancipation of women, prevention of oppression against women, legitimization of women's rights, and ensuring that women have equal rights with men in all kinds of activities in public or private spheres (Taş, 2016). The feminist problem is not only a women's problem but also the causes of sexual inequality between men and women and the domination of men over women (Hartman, 2006).

According to the accepted general approach, the idea of feminism, which means women becoming aware of their unequal position and struggling to change it, was born after the French Revolution. The phenomena that the Enlightenment philosophy introduced to the universal culture and that concerned all humanity, such as equality and freedom and the political transformation that took place as a result of the revolution inspired women. Concepts such as fraternity, equality, citizenship, and freedom, which flourished with Enlightenment thought, paved the way for the emergence of the idea of feminism just like the French Revolution (Doğancı & Tuncay, 2020).



Feminism in the Historical Process

Feminism is an idea movement that first emerged in Europe. The most important factor in the emergence of feminism in Europe is the injustices that men have done to women throughout history. During the Enlightenment period, which included free thinkers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Marquis de Condorcet, who defended women's right to education, the women's movement began to make itself felt as a philosophy in the modern sense. Marie de Gournay and Poullain de la Barre wrote books that can be considered the first in the field of feminism (Yükselbaba, 2016).

According to Berktaý, throughout history women have not always been able to systematically oppose the oppression of women by men. This is because the emergence of a developed feminist consciousness depends on women having an economic alternative to marriage and the existence of a group of women who earn their own money. It is only possible for women to form intellectual and social alternatives to the patriarchal system if such preconditions exist. Although these prerequisites began to emerge in the West in the 17th century, the birth of a systematic feminist theory dates back to the 18th and 19th centuries (Berktaý, 2004).

The first scientific institution for women was established in 1785 in Middelburg in the south of the Dutch Republic. British woman writer Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792) is one of the first feminist works. Four months before this work, a pamphlet entitled "The Rights of Woman" was published in France. In the late 18th century, these works in the field of feminism show that the Enlightenment period remained under the influence of the revolutionary wave and evolved into the idea that people have innate, inalienable rights (Dođan & Toraman, 2021).

In addition to the many books written during the period when feminism emerged with the French Revolution, women's movements also increased in the following years. The term women's movement means the mobilization of women to change and improve their position in society. The women's movement is used interchangeably with the Women's Liberation movement to describe the second wave of feminism after the 1970s (the first wave is the feminism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, culminating in women's suffrage struggles) (Marshall, 1999). The first wave of Feminist actions mainly contributed to the popularization of women's suffrage. In the so-called second wave of the movement, feminists fought for the elimination of gender discrimination.

During World War II, the fact that men were at war gave women a chance to prove themselves in the workplace. But after the war ended, men who returned home wanted to return to their old jobs. This caused women to lose their jobs and become unemployed. Even the closure of day-care centers was tried to make working conditions more difficult for women so that they could return home.

In developed capitalist countries after 1945, even though women's level of education increased compared to the past, discrimination between men and women continued to exist. For example, women were forced to work in more strenuous and labor-intensive jobs while being paid less than men.



Development of Feminism

The book *Le Deuxieme Sexe (Le Deuxieme Sexe)* by Simone de Beauvoir, one of the pioneering leaders of feminism, published in France in 1949, aroused great interest and drew public attention to the feminist movement. In her book, Simone de Beauvoir analyzed the historical, psychological, and philosophical dimensions of being a woman in a world dominated by men, arguing that women should be independent, free, and treated equally to men. According to her, a person is not "born a woman" but becomes a "woman" as a result of various social influences and pressures (Beauvoir, 1993).

At the end of the 1960s, the public was confronted with a mass of educated and conscious women who were protesting against the Vietnam War and taking part in the 1968 student protests. And these enlightened women had begun to question the injustices women were facing, to react, and to speak out. By the 1970s, women still had to work for much lower wages than men in many workplaces. The law on equal pay for equal work was still not in force in many workplaces. In universities, female students made up a quarter of the student body. Women were accepted only as housewives and were made the subject of the act of consumption. The social structure wanted to confine women within the boundaries of "female and mother" identity. But by the 1960s, some women were no longer resigned to their fate, but on the contrary, fought against this fate in a conscious, systematic, and organized manner. And feminism was the most important road map in this counter-action of women. During and after this period when feminism was reorganized, feminists' struggle aimed to fight against the domination of men and to put an end to this domination. And feminism, as a way of life, could have as many forms and definitions as the number of women in the world (Hooks, 2014).

TURKEY AND FEMINISM

Social Status of Turkish Women in Ancient Turkish States

In the social and administrative structures of ancient Turkish societies, such as the Gokturk, Uighur, and Hun states, there was no inequality between men and women in the social or public sphere. In fact, according to Gökalp, the ancient Turkish tribes constituted the most democratic and feminist society in the world (Gökalp, 1968). The woman, who had a highly respected social status in the ancient Turkish states that were established and lived before Islam, had freedom arising from the nomadic culture and social order (Roux, 2008). The country was run by the joint responsibility of husband and wife. The sovereigns who ruled the Turkish states shared the authority of power, which they believed was given to them by God, with their wives. Women could directly become rulers, castle guards, governors, and ambassadors (Gökalp, 1968). Women were powerful, privileged, and very influential in state administration. Foreign diplomatic couriers were admitted only in the presence of the khan and the khan's wife. In war, political meetings, and social relations, women were always with their husbands (Seven & Engin, 2007).

After the adoption of Islam, women began to fall rapidly from the advantageous position they held in the old Turkish states. The change in social relations and the establishment of the Islamic lifestyle caused Turkish women to lose many of their rights vis-à-vis men, first in urban centers and then in the countryside (Kırkpınar, 1999). Especially the reflection of the Arab society's viewpoint that did not value girls in Turkish society after the adoption of Islam caused



Turkish women to fall into a very passive situation. The fact that the Ottoman state administration maintained the same approach towards women caused women to withdraw from social life and be confined to their homes (Doğramacı, 1992). After the conquest of Arabia and Egypt, the influence of the rules and traditions of Arab society on Ottoman society increased. The status of women had regressed, especially in the cities.

Women's Movement in the Ottoman Empire

In the Ottoman period, the discussion of women's rights and women's struggle in this regard came to the agenda during the period when the empire saw revision as the only salvation, especially with the Tanzimat Edict (Konan, 2011). Although the Ottoman state turned its face to the West to stop the downward trend and renew itself, it did not make radical changes to improve the position of women and strengthen the status of women in European countries. Since Ottoman society was still an agrarian society at that time, there was no such thing as a working class that emerged as a result of industrialization in the West, and therefore there was no such phenomenon as working women (Sevim, 2005). With the Tanzimat Edict, the way was paved for women to participate in social life, albeit in a limited way. In this process, the intellectuals of the period, who questioned the reasons for the Ottoman Empire's weakness in the face of European states, emphasized the importance of better education for women, who constituted half of the empire's population. As a matter of fact, in those years, institutions such as girls' secondary schools, girls' art schools, and teachers' schools were included in the Ottoman education system (Özer, 2013). Also during this period, some laws were amended in favor of women, some prohibitions were softened, and voices demanding new rights for women began to be heard and articles were written.

Ottoman Feminism

Compared to European countries, Ottoman society maintained its traditional structure for a longer period and the process of modernization started quite late in the Ottoman Empire. The education of women began to bear fruit during the reign of Abdülhamit II. Scientific education, especially in the fields of medicine and engineering, helped to raise a new generation of modernists. The establishment of women's associations immediately after the declaration of the Second Constitutional Monarchy laid the foundation for women's participation in the public sphere. A total of 103 women's associations were established between 1908 and 1920. 9 associations were established in 1908, 6 in 1909, 7 in 1913, 4 in 1914, 4 in 1917, 4 in 1917, 18 in 1918, 4 in 1919, and 14 in 1920. Of these non-governmental organizations established by women, 77 were founded by Muslim women, 20 by non-Muslim communities, and six by foreigners (Aydın, 2015). Although Muslim Turkish women also started to participate in charity societies, the real organizing accelerated with the Second Constitutional Monarchy period (Kartal, 2011). However, it should be noted that the feminism experienced in Ottoman geography during the 2nd Constitutional Monarchy and the feminist movement in Europe during the same period were not the same in terms of their goals. The feminist movements in Europe aimed for the right to vote, that is, the demand for political rights. In Ottoman society, on the other hand, women's struggle focused on finding a place in working life, equality in education, and equal treatment under the law, rather than political freedoms (Demir, 1999).



The Impact of Feminist Press

Attempts towards modernization in social life made themselves felt mostly through newspapers and novels that began to be published especially after the 1860s. In the same period, women's rights and women's problems began to be covered in the press. The emergence of women writers in the press was one of the important factors in the emergence of the women's movement in the Ottoman Empire (Polat & Derer 2016). In the late 19th century, Ottoman society became acquainted with some women poets as well as women thinkers such as Fatma Aliye and Emine Semiye.

Fatma Aliye was the first Muslim Turkish woman novelist in the Ottoman Empire to discuss the "women's issue" in her novels. Fatma Aliye, who started to appear in literary life before the Second Constitutional Monarchy and continued her activities until the Republic, was a pioneer who thought about the women's issue, which became the symbol of Turkish modernization, and expressed her thoughts in her novels and various articles (Karaca, 2011). Fatma Aliye announced women's problems in her articles published both in "Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete" and in other women's magazines, argued that women and men were ultimately human, that is, equal, and argued that women, who were previously considered introverts and losers, could only participate in social life through education (Özkan, 2017).

"Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete" (Newspaper for Ladies)

Women who were the opinion leaders of the women of the period demanded that Ottoman women be recognized as human beings, be included in public life, have a profession, and be respected in society. One of the indicators of the spread of women's movements during the Second Constitutional Monarchy is the considerable increase in the number of women's magazines. Women published nearly 40 magazines during the Constitutional Monarchy. The common goal of all these journals was to make women's voices heard. The most common demand in the journals was for women's education. These publications raised awareness about women's issues and criticized the classical expectations of society from women, limited by their gender. The fact that some of the editors-in-chief and editors of the magazines published in that period were women can be considered one of the most important achievements of women in the struggle for equality. The pioneering and leading women of the women's movement also aimed to reach women through their articles in various newspapers and magazines and to organize the women of the period.

Although some of these journals did not have a long-lasting publishing life, especially Kadınlara Mahsus Gazete, which was one of the most influential media organs at the time, was published for 13 years between 1895-1908 for a total of 604 issues and became longest-published women's magazine (Polat & Derer 2016). This publication had a very important place in the Turkish feminist movement. It was the first publication in which the women's movement of the period made its voice heard and expressed its reaction for the first time. The newspaper aimed to raise women's awareness and publish the works of women poets and writers. Moreover, the activities of this publication gave great support to Ottoman feminism to make its presence felt ideologically and intellectually. Famous male writers of the period also wrote articles, but the main staff of the newspaper consisted of women. And women were able to freely express their thoughts under their real names without hiding their identities and without feeling the need to use pseudonyms in their writings.



During the Second Constitutional Monarchy period, the Committee of Union and Progress had a role in administering the Ottoman state. They observed the rapid development of the women's movement and recognized the potential of women. Taking into account the benefits this would bring to society, they took steps to include women in political life. For instance, they established the "Women's Branch of the Committee of Union and Progress" and allowed women to become members of the party (Metintaş, 2018). A group of women working under this branch wanted to take part in the parliamentary assembly established with the understanding of renewal, at least as a listener. In this period, Fatma Aliye's sister Emine Semiye, who was also an early feminist, began to signal radical movements by stating that women's progress and liberation could only be achieved through women's struggle. Emine Semiye had participated in the secret activities of the Union and Progress Party in Edirne during the governorship of Edirne by her second husband Reşit Pasha (Karaca, 2011).

Turkish Women's Movement in the Republican Period

The Ottoman women's movement, which experienced its most active days during the Constitutional Monarchy, assumed a new identity with the War of Independence and the Republic. During this period of struggle for the liberation and freedom of Turkey, women helped men in every way. Of course, since most of the men were in the army, women's labor force was also needed in working life. As the economy deteriorated worldwide due to the First World War, women in the Ottoman Empire, as in European states, took part in production, participated in working life, and started working in state institutions such as post offices, hospitals, and the army (Yeşilorman, 2010). As men lost their lives in the wars, the balance of the population, both male-female and young and old, was disrupted. In the 1927 census, four years after the proclamation of the republic, the male population was 7% less than the female population. Men of productive age were about 18% less than the required proportion. There were 82 men per 100 women (Yenal, 2010). However, after the war, women's social status declined again, and the authority to determine their rights in social and legal areas passed into the hands of men. Since Tanzimat, the westernization efforts of the state had led to partial changes in Turkish women's identity, but these changes had only been the starting point and had not led to widespread and fundamental changes in women's lives and social status.

Atatürk and Women's Rights

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and leader of the modern Republic of Turkey, considered women's rights as one of the most important elements of westernization and modernization. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who fought for women's rights with great sensitivity and determination, and who appreciated the place of women in society to the extent of saying "Everything we see on the face of the earth is the work of women", was a true reformist (Erdem, 2015).

The value and importance Atatürk gave to women are of great importance in terms of proving the existence of women in many fields and showing that they exist in social life.

We can say that after Atatürk opened the door of civilization to women, feminism made its presence felt effective in Turkey. At that time, it is possible to see many women in leading positions in the women's movement. Sabiha Sertel, who analyzed women's issues in the *Büyük Mecmua* (Big Magazine) she published with her husband Zekeriya Sertel, was one of the pioneers of Turkish feminism (Türk, 2019).



In addition to women writers such as Fatma Aliye Hanım and Emine Semiye Hanım, Halide Edip was undoubtedly one of the most prominent figures in women's rights in Turkey. Halide Edip, whose name has become synonymous with feminism, constantly questioned the oppression, repression, and helplessness of women in her works defended the equality of women and men and received great interest and support from the public. Adivar always placed women at the center of all his works and actions in social life and opened many problems related to women to the discussion. Defining a woman as a human being before being a female, Adivar emphasized the importance of women being on an equal level with men (Yılmaz, 2013). Halide Edip also took an active role in Turkey's War of Independence and represented Turkish women at home and abroad. Participating in many rallies to commemorate those who were martyred in the war and to protest the occupation of her country by Western states, Adivar became the first woman speaker to address the public at the historic Sultanahmet Rally and called on Turkish women to participate in this struggle for the independence of their homeland (Subaşı, 2018). After the establishment of the Republic, the number of women's magazines decreased between 1928 and 1940. During this period, 13 magazines were published. Factors such as the adoption of the Latin alphabet and the partial presence of women in the public sphere played a role in the decrease in the number of magazines (Malkoç & Vefikuluçay 2019).

Women's People's Party

From 1920, when the Grand National Assembly of Turkey was inaugurated, until 1934, when women were granted political rights, the issue of women's freedoms was not even considered an item on the parliamentary agenda. Although the issue was tried to be brought to the parliament once or twice, the proposers were silenced by objections and protests. The representatives of the parliament, who had different attitudes on other issues, had a common attitude on women's rights, and they thought that it was too early to grant political and citizenship rights to women and that the time had not yet come. (Balcı & Tuzak 2017)

The women who supported the soldiers in the National War of Independence, led by Nezihe Muhiddin, began to voice their views, criticisms, and demands for women's rights more boldly after 1922. In a process in which the Ottoman state was disappearing and a new political authority was being established, Muhiddin was aiming for women to take their rightful place, for women to be granted their rights, especially the right to vote, and she was trying to motivate and organize women (Balcı & Tuzak 2017).

The winds of freedom that spread with the proclamation of the Republic motivated women to participate in political life. On April 1, 1923, a new election decision was taken, and in this process, the issue of granting women the right to vote and be elected came to the agenda again, and this possibility led to the establishment of a women's party (Yılmaz, 2016). One of the most important attempts to demonstrate women's aspirations to be directly involved in politics in Turkey was the establishment of the "Kadınlar Halk Fırkası" (Women's People's Party) under the leadership of Nezihe Muhiddin (Bozaslan, 2020), with the participation of many women such as Nimet Ruveyda, Şükufe Nihal, Seniye İzzeddin, Matlube Ömer, Zeliha Ziya, Tuğrul Bedri and Muhsine Salih, who were among the pioneering women of the period (Arslanel, 2021)



Turkish Women's Acquisition of Political Rights

During the Republican era, thanks to Atatürk's revolutions towards modernization and his reforms in social life, Turkish women had rights that even women in western countries did not have at that time. Of course, this was the result of a process and a series of reforms. In this context, the attempts to educate women and give them the right to equal education with men, which had begun in the 2nd Constitutional Monarchy Period, were much more institutionalized, and with the 1924 Law on Tawhid-i Tedrisat, the way was paved for women to receive equal education with men, and the barrier to women's education was removed. Women's education and awareness were raised not only in urban centers but also throughout the country (Arslanel, 2021). The adoption of the Civil Code was one of the most important steps taken for Turkish women to gain their political rights. In 1926, with the Civil Code adopted from Switzerland, Turkish women gained comprehensive rights on the road to modernization. Consisting of 4 chapters and 937 articles, the Civil Code introduced many modern regulations to social life such as civil marriage, marriage to one person, family, inheritance, testimony, equality between men and women, etc. It guaranteed security and ensured that the family institution was built on much more solid foundations (Taşkıran, 2002). These may be the most basic rights today, but at the time they were a real revolution. Improving the position of women in social life through his legal reforms, Atatürk motivated women to get a good education and join the workforce as qualified professionals, and women were encouraged to pursue careers in fields such as medicine, law, and education.

After the basic freedoms were established, women needed to be politically emancipated. With the support of Atatürk, they gained the right to vote and be elected in Municipal Elections on April 3, 1930, and in Mukhtar Elections on October 26, 1933. Turkish women voted for the first time in the 1930 Municipal Elections and gained the right to be elected. In 1934, women in Turkey gained the right to participate in general elections and to stand as candidates for political office, thus becoming an individual with equal status with men in the political sphere. Turkish women gained these rights in politics before women in many Western countries. In Germany in 1919, the UK in 1929, France in 1945, Belgium in 1946, and Switzerland in 1971, women gained equal political rights with men. In the elections held on February 8, 1935, in which women ran for parliamentary seats for the first time in Turkey, the participation of women both as voters and candidates was very lively. There were 18 women deputies in the parliament, which corresponded to 4.5% of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Sezer, 1998).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There is no precise definition of feminism that everyone agrees on. This sometimes throws the concept into semantic chaos. What is feminism and what is not? Is every women's movement a feminist uprising? Does feminism refer to the equality of men and women or the superiority of women over men? What are the success criteria of feminism? To all these questions, it is possible to add the question "How have Turkish women interpreted feminism?" concerning the topic of this paper.

Feminism revises its goals and boundaries in light of different countries' different value systems, traditions, socio-cultural situations, etc. For example, women in a European country



or a Middle Eastern country want to have equal rights with men. " But the way of expressing this demand and the way of achieving this goal may differ.

Feminism in Turkey is like a process of reclaiming lost rights. Women, who enjoyed extensive rights and privileges in the ancient Turkish states but lost their advantages later on, struggled to regain their freedoms only centuries later, in the late Ottoman Empire. The first feminist movement in Turkey emerged in the Ottoman period with the Tanzimat Edict and reached its peak with the numerous associations, newspapers, and magazines established by women, especially during the Second Constitutional Monarchy. The women's movement in Turkey has shown great sensitivity to national issues as well as the demands of its gender. We can say that this self-sacrificing and patriotic attitude played a role in the fact that the demands for equality of Turkish women, who fought alongside the soldiers in Turkey's War of Independence and who were included in the labor force as the male population dwindled, did not face harsh opposition.

Indeed, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and leader of the Republic of Turkey, granted women political freedoms even before many civilized countries. Turkish women showed their interest in politics by getting 18 deputies into the parliament in their first election. Today, however, the fact that Turkey lags behind many European countries in terms of the number of women deputies in parliament and women ministers in the cabinet calls into question the determination of the women's movement to preserve and advance the rights they have won through their struggles.

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