

# Facts and Fantasies



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*Images of Istanbul Women  
in the 1920s*

By

D. Fatma Türe

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Facts and Fantasies: Images of Istanbul Women in the 1920s

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To my three nieces, Seray, Sergün and Ayris.



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## A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The stories and articles that made up the primary sources used in the book were written in Ottoman Turkish because they were published before the alphabet change. I transliterated these materials into the Latin alphabet and quoted the original texts in references when summarizing them in English in the main text. To indicate the ‘ع’ letter I used “ ’ ” in transliterations.



## A NOTE ON TURKISH PRONUNCIATION

Modern Turkish spelling has been used throughout for Turkish words and proper names like titles of books and stories as well as names of associations together with English translations in parenthesis. Turkish spelling is phonetic and words are written exactly as they are pronounced. Turkish letters that are not pronounced like their English equivalents are:

- a: a in car
- c: g in genetic
- ç: ch in chair
- e: a in sat
- g: g in give
- ğ: gh in neighbor
- İ, ı: e in dozen
- İ̇, i: i in fit
- j: as in French
- ö: as in German
- ş: sh in shut
- u: u in put
- ü: as in German



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## PREFACE

It was by no means easy to be a woman in 1920s Turkey. In the collapsed empire, women had received little regard and were kept out of sight; now they were seeking a place in society as the new citizens of a Republic that was emerging from the destruction of a series of wars. Unpracticed and uncertain of themselves, they also had to deal with society's predicaments, concerns and paranoia.

The question of women was at the heart of all these predicaments and conflicts. In popular literature, it was mostly urban Istanbul women who were scrutinized to the last detail, from their biological responsibilities to their behavior in the public arena, to their clothes and their relations with the opposite sex. It was believed that it was women above all who threatened the social order.

In this book I have sought to see what kind of images of women emerged in the ongoing debates about women in the popular literature of 1920s Turkey and how these images and debates are reflected in the obscene stories of the period.

For such a study I thought the most suitable research method would be to turn to the archives and look at popular magazines from the period. After examining sources in the libraries and archives I selected *Genç Kadın* (Young Woman, 1918-1919), *Türk Kadını* (Turkish Woman, 1918-1919), *Resimli Ay* (Illustrated Month, published with interruptions and under different management from 1924 to 1931; I only included issues from 1924), *Süs* (Ornament, 1923-1924), *Karagöz* (1908-1950, taking examples from the 1920s) for use in this book.

There were of course reasons for my choosing these magazines. I thought that for a study of the 1920s it was necessary to go back a little and look at the years 1918-1920 – if not comprehensively – in order to see the effects of the First World War. This is why *Genç Kadın* and *Türk Kadını* have been included in this book. *Süs* began publication just before the declaration of the Republic and is important as an indicator of the transition from the Ottoman to the Republican period. *Süs* is also important in that it appealed above all to educated girls and to include them in the readership, the magazine offered special terms and gifts for subscribers. Since the target audience was schoolgirls and this was emphasized by the magazine itself, I thought it necessary to see what roles

the articles in *Süs* offer to girls and women and what sort of debates they covered. The literature of that period in Turkey identified women either as “girls” or “women” according not only to their ages but also their marital status. I have therefore used these terms to reflect the distinctions of the period. *Resimli Ay* was important in that it reflected the Republican view in the early years of the Republic. As well as articles setting out “appropriate” qualities for women, the magazine offered information to help women keep up with the changing rules of social intercourse and relationships as they presented themselves in public.

Meanwhile, *Karagöz* is a humorous magazine. A large proportion of the obscene stories I examined contain comic elements, so I thought it necessary to include in the book a humorous magazine published in that period. But the most important reason for choosing *Karagöz* was the magazine’s editorials entitled “*Karagöz’s Monologue.*” These editorials dealt with relationships between men and women, Istanbul women, and concerns and fears about women. I thought that the articles, written in a comical and entirely demotic language, held up a mirror to the position of women in popular culture in the 1920s. It would prove useful to see whether there was any similarity between the articles and the narrative and ideology presented in the obscene stories.

*Genç Kadın, Türk Kadını, Süs, Resimli Ay* and *Karagöz* were all printed and published in Istanbul. Bearing in mind that the seat of government shifted to Ankara in the 1920s it was necessary to add a magazine based in Ankara. I thought that *Hayat* (Life, 1926-1930) would be useful to reflect the Republican ideology. *Hayat* mainly covered literature, art and philosophy and it presented itself as a “Literary Magazine of Opinion.” It was therefore different from the other popular magazines used in this book, but it did issue a special women’s edition and the fact that it contained articles about the new moral understanding, citizenship and nationalism and that it was published from 1926 to 1930, makes it interesting in observing the ideology of the early years of the Republic.

I scoured the magazines and researched which subjects in the 1920s most occupied the debates about women. I decided to treat the 1920s in two sections. The first section is the very last part of the Ottoman period covering the First World War, including the occupation of Istanbul until the declaration of the Republic. This is best defined as the years of transition to the Republic. The second section covers the years 1923-1929 and can be designated as the early Republican Period. By examining the changes in the lives of women inside and outside the home, without ignoring the economic and social conditions of the two periods, I aimed to

see whether there was continuity in the typology of women throughout the 1920s and what changes it had undergone.

While examining magazines as primary sources I also began collating obscene stories. This was not as easy or quick as I had anticipated. Most libraries did not give space to “these kinds” of publications, on the grounds that they were not literary material. The results showed that I would have to turn to private collections.

Prof. Dr. Zafer Toprak, Sabri Koz, Turgut Kut, Nedret İşli and Gökhan Akçura opened up their own collections for this study; some books of obscene stories I acquired from second-hand bookshops and by auction. Apart from the *One Thousand and One Kisses*, I was unfortunately unable to acquire a complete set of most of the other series, although I did access most of the issues. In total, I examined 95 stories.

As I analyzed the obscene stories I focused on women’s typologies, on the one hand and the changing social values, sexuality, love and morals on the other. In a sense I was looking at what kind of ideal respectable female qualities were presented to women, both in the family and in the public arena, by the debates in the popular press, and which kinds of behavior were deemed by society as excessive, unnecessary or harmful. At the same time I examined the obscene stories to see which of these qualities were contained within the stories – by means of subject matter or by the types of women depicted.

I was aware of the nationalist woman and the *à la franca* women types that featured as opposing characters in the plots of literary works – especially novels – of the period, and I knew about the arguments made through these characters. My aim was to concentrate on the types of women featured in the obscene stories of popular literature that fell outside the canon and to make sense of the reasons for those characters to feature in the plot within the social context and the context of the women question.

I left out of this book the women’s movements in Europe, and indeed the women’s movements in the Ottoman Empire and in Turkey. This is because my central question was not so much what women were resisting and what they were trying to change, but rather how they were scrutinized and also what was understood by the 1920s phenomenon of the “new woman.” For this literature I sought to conduct a general survey of Britain, France, Germany and the US. Were the topics of discussion concerning women, sexuality and relationships similar or different to those in Turkey? I thought it necessary to conduct such a study in order to capture the general atmosphere of the 1920s. After all, it would have been an omission to look at the “new woman” in Turkey without being aware of the new

types of the 1920s, like the new woman “flapper” of the US or “garçonne” of France.

A general response was needed to the question of women’s lives in other countries at that time, before turning to the debates about Turkish women in the popular press in the 1920s. It was appropriate to look broadly at the changes awaiting women at the end of the war, on a European and American axis in the first chapter. I sought to see how women in Germany, France, Britain and the US were affected by the changes brought about by the war and to see how these were reflected in domestic and work life and in the family structure and ideas about marriage, and even clothing. I wanted to see how women’s sexuality was perceived, whether they had control over their own bodies and what kinds of innovations were brought to relationships by all these changes. All these developments of course differed from country to country, but the similarities should not be overlooked either. If we can speak of a new post-war generation in Europe and U.S.A, a “new woman” with different sets of values compared the previous generation, then it is necessary to touch on the characteristics of this new woman, how society sees her, and to what restrictions and judgments she was subject to, if any.

Looking at all these changes in Europe and America from a perspective encompassing the traditional and the modern and aspects from sexuality to fashion was helpful before turning to Turkey in bringing sense to the debates seen in the popular press of the period. In the second chapter I examine the changes from the end of the war until the declaration of the Republic, taking occupied Istanbul and Istanbul women as my centre. Occupied Istanbul was significant for many reasons. It is crucial to understand Istanbul of the occupation period in order to be able to trace both the effects of the war and the changes in the last years of the Ottoman Empire in the lives of urban middle-upper class women. Apart from one magazine (*Hayat*), all the magazines used in this book were published in Istanbul and they targeted Istanbul women in their content about education, family life, working life, marriage, etiquette and fashion. The female identities on which these articles were based cannot be disentangled from Istanbul’s political, economic and social problems.

The subject of the third chapter comprises the period from the declaration of the Republic to the end of the 1920s. This period coincides with the foundation of the Republic and was important to understand reforms introduced by the Ankara-based administration and the consequent social changes. Debates about women in the popular press now reflected the social changes of the period and also the duties ascribed to women as citizens of the new republic. Again focusing on urban women

from Istanbul, I discuss what continuity and change women identities underwent within these debates about family, sexuality and socialization.

The fourth chapter is about the nature of obscene popular literature, a branch of popular literature of the 1920s, and also includes general observations about the series of stories and striking features in their narratives. Did the narrative in these obscene stories undergo a change over the 1920s? Can we identify traces of a nationalist narrative? Can traces of the debates about women in the popular press be observed in some way through these stories? How were obscene stories in those days regarded in the popular press? What kind of reaction was there?

When I identified these popular debates between the lines in the stories I found two principal subjects associated with women: consumption and sexuality. I therefore allot a chapter to the analysis of these stories in the light of these topics. The question of consumption in modern times, and particularly in the 1920s, was closely linked to women. Under the heading of consumption and women, I examine women's changing fashions, urban habits, new areas of residence and entertainment preferences. As consumption in both occupied Istanbul and in the early Republican period worked to direct women towards ideal roles, it is a crucial area to be noted and defined.

Relationships between men and women, breakdowns in the family structure, the institution of marriage and new definitions of love are also covered in the same chapter under the heading of women and sexuality. How were ideas about the sexuality of females in the narrative of these stories? What kind of marriages and relationships were endorsed and which were rejected? These questions are important for illuminating opinions at the time about women.

There are no doubt things not fully covered by this study. I have not investigated the identities and lives of the writers of these obscene stories. More important for me than who wrote these stories, produced in the 1920s and mostly serialized on a weekly basis, is how much they were read and what viewpoints they revealed with regard to women and sexuality. I do not have data on how well these books sold, but I think it is enough to point out that there was enough demand for publication as frequently as once a week and that some articles in popular magazines describe how much these stories are published and read (referring by name to some of the stories I have worked on).

I know that obscene popular literature emerged in 1908 and I have accessed a large collection of stories from this period, but I have not included them in this book. The time these stories first emerged is an important period, but in a study about the 1920s referring back to 1908

would be somewhat redundant, except for emphasizing how the period was a time of transition. If this study were based only on obscene stories it would have been appropriate to investigate stories from the very earliest period. I necessarily excluded the stories from 1908 as I examined how questions about women in the popular press of the 1920s were reflected in obscene stories.

Considering that this study is based mainly on primary sources, I think it brings to light debates about women in the popular literature of the age. A large proportion of the stories and articles in Ottoman Turkish featured in the book have not – apart from the *Thousand and One Kisses* series (which is actually two series of which only one has been reprinted as a book) – previously been published in Latin characters. My belief that popular culture contains crucial resources for social historians has allowed me to advance my view of recent history through popular magazines and articles. For me, the greatest gain to emerge from looking at the 1920s through the popular press and popular obscene stories is that sources are brought to light that reflect society's common memory as well as the thoughts, fears and aspirations of the ordinary person.

## INTRODUCTION

When the time comes to attempt a formal history of the nineteen-twenties, the sensations experienced by those who lived in that decade will be no more recoverable than the scent of last year's flowers. Yet to the people of the nineteen-twenties, as to those of each generation, the sensation of living was everything, the common denominator of in fact nothing. History may say of those ten years that it was the time of the Bloodless War and of the Silent Revolution; but of what it felt like to participate in that war and that revolution, the future will know little more than we who are now alive may set down.<sup>1</sup>

This study concerns the debates on the question of women that were ongoing in the popular press of the 1920s and looks at the traces of these debates in obscene literature as a marginal branch of popular literature. The research above all concerns which subjects were the focus of discussions about women in the popular press; how these subjects were influenced by the social, economic and political conditions of the time; what kind of women identities these subjects produced and how these identities were reflected in the subjects and characterisations in obscene literature.

Writing about 1920s Turkey is difficult mainly because the fundamental changes the country saw during that decade were very different and intricate compared to the chaos and transition experienced at the end of the First World War by other countries. Turkey entered the war as an empire and emerged defeated and occupied; forced to enter a second war, it consequently broke away from its Ottoman roots as it underwent economic, political and social mobilisation. Along with the change in the country's frontiers, its administration, economy, laws, language, alphabet and dress were transformed. New "citizen" identities started to be constructed to conform to all these changes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.C. Ward, *The Nineteen-Twenties Literature and Ideas in the Post War Decade* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1930) p.222.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Zafer Toprak, *Bir Yurtaş Yaratmak: Mûasır Bir Medeniyet İçin Seferberlik Bilgileri 1923-1950* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür San'at 1998).

This decade of transition was important for Istanbul and Istanbul women. The city had witnessed occupation, the War of Independence and the emergence of a completely new regime. As the heart of a collapsed empire, Istanbul best reflected the experience. Istanbul was the centre and the metropolis and its collaborative stance contrasted with Ankara's resistance, causing a duality. It was where signs were most evident of the tangle of refugees, occupying forces and ethnic minorities. It is all these characteristics that make 1920s Istanbul so important, but also because it was a place where the urban woman could live relatively freely, but where she could also encounter reaction for what was seen as *à la turca* behavior, where she was the subject of many stories and novels and where she was placed under the scrutiny of changing value judgments.

The 1920s witnessed the end of the Ottoman era, the vacuum of authority caused by the clash of two separate administrations in Istanbul and Ankara, and then the foundation of the Republic. 1920s Turkey can best be described as a period of transition. Examples of transition are nearly endless, but the most striking were the shift from a traditional faith-based society to a society based on modern law, the transition from empire to nation state, from the congregation to the individual, from the subject to the citizen, the move of the capital from Istanbul to Ankara, the move from the Ottoman alphabet to the Latin alphabet, from the fez to the hat, from the chador to the overcoat. The methods and timing behind these transformations have their critics and apologists. What needs to be remembered in studies of this period are the dilemmas, breakdowns, aspirations and struggles felt by the transitional society.

As society underwent a radical and swift transformation under the modernisation project designed to lift traditional structures shaped by centuries of habit up to the level of "civilized" countries, it brought with it a clash of old and new values. As the nation advanced along this path from congregation to individualisation and tried to adopt the notions of nationhood and citizenship, the population naturally created new identities as they replaced old codes with new ones. The question of women and what kind of place women would occupy in this new society as the Republic took steps towards change, modernity and modernisation emerged as a major concern at this time, as they do in all transition periods. This encompassed, on the one hand, the revolutionary actions of the social elite and reformists; and on the other hand, a general population trying to keep up the traditional social order and the placement of women at the centre of all this.

## Conceptual Framework

### Turkey in the 1920s

The life of women, who constituted more than half the country's population, started to change as a result of the rights they gained through their newly defined identities as citizens. Identities constructed through the transformations in women's life. The rights they gained have been the subjects of much research over the years. The Republican reforms are generally the starting point for this kind of research about the 1920s. Despite the shared starting point, different studies present ideological, theoretical and methodological differences. It is in the context of these differences that women's studies in Turkey can be broadly classified.

In particular, research about the Kemalist period is divided into two main groups according to ideological and theoretical differences. The first group comprises studies shaped by the Kemalist ideology, which consider the reforms as an important step in the modernisation process, commending them and seeking to demonstrate that women's rights were born with the Republic. The studies of Afet İnan,<sup>3</sup> the adopted daughter of Atatürk, and the work of T. Taşkıran<sup>4</sup> and Emel Dođramacı<sup>5</sup> fall into this group. The second group consists of research since the 1980s that address critically the problematic of women and analyze the role of women in society, their emerging new identities and gender politics from a feminist perspective. Şirin Tekeli,<sup>6</sup> Ferhunde Özbay,<sup>7</sup> Nükhet Sirman,<sup>8</sup> Yeşim

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<sup>3</sup> For further reading, please see Afet İnan, *Tarih Boyunca Türk Kadınının Hak Ve Görevleri*, 3rd ed. (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1975); Afet İnan, *Atatürk Ve Türk Kadın Haklarının Kazanılması* (Istanbul: M.E.B. Yayınları, 1964); Afet İnan, *The Emancipation of the Turkish Woman* (Paris: UNESCO, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> Especially in T. Taşkıran, *Cumhuriyetin 50. Yılında Türk Kadın Hakları* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1973) T. Taşkıran, *Women in Turkey* (Istanbul: Redhouse Yayınevi, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> Some of the examples are: Emel Dođramacı, *Atatürkten Günümüze Sosyal Deđişmede Kadın* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1993); Emel Dođramacı, *Atatürk and the Turkish Woman Today* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1991); Emel Dođramacı, *Türkiye'de Kadının Dünü Ve Bugünü* (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1989); Emel Dođramacı, *The Status of Women in Turkey* (Ankara: Meteksan, 1984); Emel Dođramacı, *Rights of Women in Turkey* (Ankara: Universal Bookstore, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> For further reading, please see Şirin Tekeli, *Women in Modern Turkish Society* (London: Zed Books, 1995); Şirin Tekeli, *1980'ler Türkiye'sinde Kadın Bakış Açısından Kadınlar* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1995); Şirin Tekeli, *Kadınlar Ve Siyasal Toplumsal Hayat* (Istanbul: Birikim Yayınları, 1982).

Arat,<sup>9</sup> Binnaz Toprak,<sup>10</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti,<sup>11</sup> Ayşe Durakbaşı,<sup>12</sup> Zehra Arat,<sup>13</sup> and Fatmagül Berktaş<sup>14</sup> are among the most prominent of the proponents of such studies.

The common aspect of the first group, which can be categorized as efforts to validate Kemalist ideology, is examining the perceived backwardness of the social, political, economic and cultural values of the Ottoman Empire and the “positive” intervention of the Republican regime with regard to the changes in the lives of women. These studies elaborate on the assertion, in line with a nationalist ideology, that Turkish women

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<sup>7</sup> For further reading, please see Ferhunde Özbay, ed., *The Study of Women in Turkey* (Unesco and Turkish Social Science Association, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> An example of her work is Nüket Sirman, "Feminism in Turkey: A Short History" *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 1 (Fall 1989).

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion, please see Yeşim Arat, *The Patriarchal Paradox: Women Politicians in Turkey* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989); Yeşim Arat, "Women's Studies in Turkey: From Kemalism to Feminism," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 9 (Fall 1993); Yeşim Arat, "The Project of Modernity," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Bozdoğan Sibel; Kasaba Reşat (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Especially in: Binnaz Toprak, "Emancipated but Unliberated Women in Turkey: Impact of Islam" in *The Study of Women in Turkey*, ed. Ferhunde Özbay (Unesco and Turkish Social Science Association, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Please see for further reading: Deniz Kandiyoti, "The End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey" in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Deniz Kandiyoti, "Ataerkil Örüntüler: Türk Toplumunda Erkek Egemenliğinin Çözümlemesine İlişkin Notlar" in *1980'ler Türkiye'sinde Kadın Bakış Açısından Kadınlar*, ed. Şirin Tekeli (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1995); Deniz Kandiyoti, *Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1996); Deniz Kandiyoti, "Kadın, İslam Ve Devlet: Karşılaştırmalı Bir Yaklaşım," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 53 (Bahar).

<sup>12</sup> Some of the titles are: Ayşe Durakbaşı, *Hâlîde Edib Türk Modernleşmesi Ve Feminizm* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002); Ayşe Durakbaşı, "Kemalism as Identity Politics in Turkey," in *Deconstructing Images of the Turkish Woman*, ed. Zehra F Arat (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); Ayşe Durakbaşı, "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Kemalist Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşumu," *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 51 (March 1988).

<sup>13</sup> Please see, Zehra F Arat, ed., *Deconstructing Images of the Turkish Woman* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> For further reading, please see Fatmagül Berktaş, "Doğu ile Batı'nın Birleştiği Yer: Kadın İmgesinin Kuruluşu," in *Modernleşme Ve Batıcılık*, ed. Uygur Kocabaşoğlu (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002); Fatmagül Berktaş, *Kadın Olmak, Yaşamak, Yazmak* 3rd ed. (Istanbul: Pencere Yayınları, 1998); Fatmagül Berktaş, *Tektanlı Dinler Karşısında Kadın* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1996).

were liberated by the Republican regime. This discourse centres on the pre-Islamic Turks and characterizes that period as a Golden Age, especially for women. While claiming that the conversion to Islam was a step backwards for the Turkish women, Afet İnan states that the “New Women” of the Republic attained the dignified position of their pre-Islamic ancestors.<sup>15</sup>

Ziya Gökalp also asserted that men and women in Central Asia had been equal before their conversion to Islam, unlike the already converted Ottomans. According to Gökalp, “the old Turks were both democratic and feminists. Women participated in the meetings along with men and both the Hakan and the Hatun signed each law. Women were not forced to cover up. Each man had one wife only and women could occupy significant social positions.”<sup>16</sup>

In their analysis of Turkish women, this first group discusses the life of women in three periods. The first is the pre-Islamic nomadic life, the second is the settled life under the influence of Islam, and the last is the changing lives of women thanks to the rights gained after the establishment of the Republic. According to a general assessment of these periods, women in the first period had most of the rights they have in the third, that is to say they were equal to men,<sup>17</sup> they rode horses and used swords like men, and issued laws. The facts presented in support of this hypothesis, stretches from the administrative system of the Huns of Central Asian to the *Orkhon Inscriptions* and the *Book of Dede Korkut*. The second period, which starts with the conversion to Islam, is the only period during which women’s rights were impeded. With the conversion to Islam, women were forced into passivity and became objects of love.<sup>18</sup>

The conviction that the place of women in society deteriorated after the conversion to Islam is somewhat contradictory since reference is also made to the rights given to the women with Islam. These rights lost their significance and worsened women’s condition as a result of two restrictions of Islam: women’s isolation and the right of men to marry more than one woman.<sup>19</sup> This isolation came about as a consequence of

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<sup>15</sup> İnan, *The Emancipation of the Turkish Woman*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları* (Istanbul: Varlık Yayınları, 1968) pp. 147-148.

<sup>17</sup> Nermin Abadan Unat, “Toplumsal Değişme Ve Türk Kadını,” in *Türk Toplumunda Kadın*, ed. Nermin Abadan Unat (Ankara: Araştırma, Eğitim, Ekin Yayınları ve Türk Sosyal Bilimleri Derneği, 1982), p. 7; Doğramacı, *Türkiye’de Kadının Dünü ve Bugünü*, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Doğramacı, *Türkiye’de Kadının Dünü Ve Bugünü*, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the relations Muslims established with the “older and corrupted civilisations” and caused the confinement of women to the domestic sphere to what was known as inside the cage.<sup>20</sup> This, of course, is a condition that destroys gender equality and limits women’s freedom. Polygamy is also to the disadvantage of women, yet it deserves to be taken into consideration since it reduces prostitution and legitimizes children born out of wedlock.<sup>21</sup>

The third period is the process of women winning back the rights they had in the first period before Islam. Practitioners of women’s studies from a Kemalist perspective suggest that the socio-economic and cultural rights of women were regained in the Republican period, thanks to Mustafa Kemal.

According to these Kemalist researchers, the First World War was a milestone in woman’s life. As social pressures were suspended, women fulfilled their duties, served at the front in the War of Independence and proved useful to their nation on the home front, too. Women had therefore earned equal rights with men with the establishment of the Republic and the following programme of reforms.

It may be useful at this point to examine the common discourse of the second group of studies that emerged after the 1980s. This discourse posits that the secular reforms of the Turkish Republic ultimately aimed at a series of national policies and that women were treated as part of this modernisation project in line with this political aim.

The research in this group does not deny the progressive influence of the Republican reforms on the rights of women by at least inching open a door to modernisation. But they assert that there had been an ongoing struggle for women’s rights, especially from the period of the Second Constitutional Monarchy onwards, and that women had begun to make their voices heard through their associations and magazines so it would be misleading not to mention the existence of a women’s movement during the Ottoman period. To them, the granting of women’s rights during the Kemalist period was in fact part of an even larger political project of secularisation and nation building, and was the central elements in both the liquidation of the “theocratic ruins” of the Ottoman Empire and the construction of the Republican citizen. But unfortunately the authoritarianism

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Emel Doğramacı makes reference to Hâlîde Edip’s thoughts on this area and suggests that although polygamy weakened the strength and unity of the family it also limited prostitution and ensured the legitimacy of children born. Hâlîde Edip, *The Conflict of East and West* (Lahor: Shaik Muhammed Ashraf, 1935). Cited in Doğramacı, *Türkiye’de Kadının Dünü ve Bugünü*, p. 3.

of the single-party administration and its exploitation of the emerging image of the “New Women” for the creation of a stereotypical woman citizen destroyed the possibility of an autonomous and independent women’s movement.<sup>22</sup>

This group argues that the imagined, or constructed, new woman was not only expected to be a “good wife” and a “good mother,” but also to endorse unhesitatingly the newly formed values of the Republic and at the same time be a well educated professional.<sup>23</sup> The “virtues of motherhood,” childbearing and fulfilling responsibilities as a wife were emphasized in the newspapers and the magazines as national duties especially in the first ten years of the Republic and the new woman was described as a housewife, attentive to the needs of the Republic, consuming only domestic goods, engaged only in heterosexual relations with her husband, virtuous as in the myth of the pre-Islamic Turkish woman chaste and not superfluously westernized.

Kandiyoti describes this prevalent image of woman the period within the framework of feminist criticism, as a chaste, virtuous, “citizen-woman and sexless sister” freed from her sexuality, who does not balk at any effort to glorify her nation and to ensure its independence. Kandiyoti suggests that this description of women in the nationalist and Islamist discourses aimed at controlling women’s sexuality in concordance with the real identity of the religious community.<sup>24</sup>

Yeşim Arat claims that the new rights of the Republican women were provided under the supervision of the Republican reformists, but only as far as they were deemed appropriate and that while gender equality was created in the public sphere and women’s pursuit of careers was supported, in the private sphere patriarchal values were protected. Arat asserts that the primary goal of the women’s movement, realized as part of the Kemalist modernisation project and under certain limitations, was to be of a “benefit to the country.”<sup>25</sup>

Fatmagül Berktaş asserts that the Turkish intellectual in search of a new identity, aimed at creating a “new woman” image that could be controlled, just like his modernising brothers did in the West. This was in order to cope with the fact that he felt like a migrant as a consequence of the transformations in his environment, and coped with the loss of a safe

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<sup>22</sup> Kandiyoti, "The End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey," p.50.

<sup>23</sup> Durakbaşa, "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Kemalist Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşumu," pp. 39-40.

<sup>24</sup> Kandiyoti, *Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar*, p. 33

<sup>25</sup> Yeşim Arat, "The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey," pp. 102-103.

haven in the father that represented the force of tradition. His goal was to reproduce the old patriarchal ideology according to the new conditions in order to prove that there were some unchanging certainties even in changing times.<sup>26</sup>

Berktaş draws special attention to the nationalist/modernising discourse that represents the country as a female body, within the scope of the nation-state building and modernisation project. She also stresses that a national identity based on men's unity and solidarity is formed in a nation composed of brothers only and that behaviour patterns deemed appropriate for women are determined not by religion or traditions, but by the nation-state.<sup>27</sup> This study has adopted the approach of the feminist researchers of the post-1980 period. The innovations and advances introduced to women's lives by the Republic have not been denied, but equally it has not been forgotten that these changes were part of a modernisation project that aimed to create a nation state. It is in my view important to examine the popular press and popular literature of a period in which there were ongoing debates aimed at integrating women as individuals fitting the new social structure, bearing in mind that the traditional faith-based Ottoman social system began to disintegrate after the First World War to be replaced by a nationalist, modern and patriarchal structure.

Understanding the popular memory and popular perception of the period is necessary to determine the criteria that were put forward as womanly qualities were placed in the new social structure. The popular press and popular literature form the basis of this study because they reflect society's perceptions with regard to the women question.

Looking at the existent research and books about the 1920s, it is seen that scholars have given different names to the decade. A.C. Wards, who wrote *The Nineteen Twenties, Literature and Ideas in the Post-War*, designates those years as "a decade of despair."<sup>28</sup> He looks at the transition years under the light of the masterpieces of the literature of the 1920s. Although his book is based on England it is an important source for social historians, especially those who work on literary texts. In the first chapter of his book, Ward mentions the difficulties writing about the specific era although he himself lived in it.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Berktaş, "Doğu ile Batı'nın Birleştiği Yer: Kadın İmgesinin Kuruluşu," p. 275.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>28</sup> A.C. Ward, *The Nineteen-Twenties Literature and Ideas in the Post War Decade*, p. 222.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.2.