

Book Presentation

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The women of Turkey are often characterized either as a secluded and inert mass oppressed by harsh patriarchal rules of Islam or as liberated citizens enjoying equal rights with men – thanks to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's modernization reforms. The latter characterization has been promoted by the state and several privileged women, including the former Prime Minister Tansu Çiller, and reinforced by the cross-national data that ranked Turkey higher on many gender development indicators than other Muslim populated countries.

Deconstructing Images of 'The Turkish Woman' is an effort to counter such oversimplifications. It problematizes the collapsing of multiples of people into a prototypical singular as a practice of domination (repeated throughout the history) by focusing on the negation of the diversity and individuality of the women of Turkey. Locating various images of uniformity, employed to define the 'ideal' Turkish woman or to describe her 'pitiful' condition, *Deconstructing Images* scrutinizes the cultural construct of 'the Turkish woman' and the imperialistic, nationalistic, religious and other currents behind it. It also shows how opposing groups have built upon and reinforced similar images and inquires into the role of women in these processes.

In an effort to illustrate the revival and reproduction of the representations of women, the volume attempts to contextualize discourses chronologically by organizing the essays into three politically distinct periods. The first section explores the late Ottoman era and begins with a chapter by Palmira Brummett, who examines the cartoon images of women in the revolutionary press of the Empire between 1908 and 1911. Depictions, though numerous and diverse, all collapse into an image of women as weak and vulnerable and therefore needing to be protected and controlled. For example, the cartoons that depict the country as a woman flirting with European men may be a warning about European imperialism but also point to the perils of women's independence or Westernization. Examining women's journals from the same era, Aynur Demirdirek shows that some urban Ottoman women were indeed demanding certain rights. Despite their relatively small number, these women had been influential in shap-

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ing the debates on the 'woman question', and their demands for education and changes in family law had some resonance in the reforms undertaken first by the Young Turks and later by the Kemalists.

Two essays by İrvin Cemil Schick and Pelin Başçı are concerned with the images created through the Western gaze. In agreement with the earlier critiques of orientalism, Schick argues that erotic literature and its claims to be the representation of reality eroticized the East, facilitated gendering, and forged a powerful colonial discourse. Another crucial function of sexuality, he adds, was allowing Europe to form a distinct identity and define its place in the world. Thus, attributing several conflicting images to Ottoman women (e.g. disgustingly filthy and obsessed with bathing) was not self-contradictory but consistent with the alteritist discourse, because each characterization contributed to Europe's self-definition through 'othering'. Başçı's analysis of the texts by American female missionaries shows strong links between missionaries' perceptions and the orientalist discourse.

Commenting on how they related to the 'other' women, she argues that by presenting the 'Ottoman woman' as both the ultimate victim and evidence of the country's backwardness and by assigning themselves the role of her saviour, missionary women were able to justify their own recent emancipation and increasing public role.

The second section focuses on the gender ideology of the early Republican era. K. E. Fleming's study of the Ottoman sociologist Ziya Gökalp's contribution to the nation-building project of the Kemalists explicates his interest in connecting the restoration of gender equality, claimed to be prevalent in pre-Islamic Turkish societies, to the revival of authentic Turkish civilization. Reviewing the roles assigned to the patriotic women of the Republic, Ayşe Durakbaşa argues that while Kemalism encouraged women's participation in the public domain, it also restricted them by imposing moral and behavioural codes that emphasized family honour. Zehra Arat analyses the educational system as a device of socialization and discusses how the gendered curricula enabled the regime to beget educated female citizens who would contribute to the modernization of the country without threatening its gender hierarchy.

The last section explores the lives of women since 1960. Işık Urla Zeytinöğlü points to women's low participation rate in gainful employment and finds the explanation both in popular cultural norms and their reinforcement in discriminatory labour laws. Emine Onaran İncirlioğlu's ethnographic study of the gender division of labour in two villages challenges the stereotypical notions of village women as ignorant, passive, and powerless. The profiles of women who have climbed the corporate ladder also challenge some common assumptions. Hayat Kabasakal reports that the chief women executives demonstrate a strong desire and ability to maintain invisibility and reject any association with feminism. Focusing on another privileged group of women, referred to as 'the elite Islamist women', Aynur İncirlioğlu argues that assuming an 'Islamist identity' and the 'new veiling' allow a group of university-educated urban women to resist Kemalist modernity, intercede Islamic patriarchy, and enter public life; they reinterpret Islam to challenge the traditional norms held by Islamist men and employ Kemalist women's language of 'serving' people to justify their claims.

Carel Bertram's review of short stories by four contemporary women writers invokes the Islamic concept of *fitne-i âlem*. Taking housework as a metaphor for chaos containment, she suggests that the female protagonists who defy their expected roles unleash *fitne* that could change the meaning of the house and threaten the social order. Thus, the house is presented as the domain where women negotiate new roles and relationships. Arzu Öztürkmen studies the contribution of a controversial women's magazine, *Kadınca*, to the development of feminist consciousness and gives it credit for engaging non-politicized women. In her brief historiography of the 'Purple Roof of Women's Shelter', Yeşim Arat examines a new wave of feminism and points to the difficulties of pursuing feminist ideals of sisterhood, solidarity, and participant democracy within an organization that has to operate

in a materialist, male-dominated, and essentially undemocratic socio-political system.

Together the essays show that improving women's lot was treated as the focal point of community interests by all competing ideological groups: advocates of Westernization, Western missionaries, defenders of Islam, Ottoman patriots, Turkish nationalists, and socialist reformists and revolutionaries. Moreover, they all manipulated the same images and metaphors within the language of their own ideology. Consequently, women and their images have served as the site of important political struggles for over a century; but what was questioned by all ideological groups was women's backwardness, not male dominance. Nevertheless, speaking of domestic life, family and household politics as public issues marked by gender, they all effectively *politicized the private* and thus contributed to the development of a new paradigm of modernity. While the male-led modernization projects have treated women as targets rather than participants, they have also created some opportunities. Although most women have demanded or embraced these opportunities to 'serve the country', increasingly more women and women's groups, however different (e.g. Islamist, Kemalist, Socialist, or Radical), seek financial independence, demand equality at home, and strive for an independent identity. ◆

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