

DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE TURKISH REPUBLIC (LATE 20TH - EARLY 21ST CENTURY)

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Abstract: The development of the women's movement in the Turkish Republic is analyzed. The article examines Turkish feminism: secular radical and the so-called "Islamic". It characterizes different women's organizations and analyzes the existing situation of the women's movement in the country.

Keywords: Turkish Republic, Islam, women's movement, feminism, Kemalism, secularism, Refah Party, Justice and Development Party.

РАЗВИТИЕ ЖЕНСКОГО ДВИЖЕНИЯ В ТУРЕЦКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКЕ (КОНЕЦ 20-ГО - НАЧАЛО 21-ГО ВЕКА)

Аннотация: Анализируется развитие женского движения в Турецкой Республике. Статья рассматривает турецкий феминизм: светский радикальный и так называемый "исламский". Охарактеризованы различные женские организации и проанализировано существующее положение женского движения в стране.

Ключевые слова: Турецкая Республика, Ислам, женское движение, феминизм, кемализм, светский, Партия благоденствия, Партия справедливости и развития.

INTRODUCTION

Feminism emerged alongside the French and American revolutions. It can be characterized as a movement for the abolition of power distribution in society in favor of men, for the eradication of discrimination against women. Feminism, which arose in the West with demands for rights and freedoms, is now widespread around the world, with ongoing fierce struggles in different cultures demonstrating various versions depending on the cultural environment and conditions.

Feminism in Turkey, like in the West, underwent its own evolution. The women's movement in the Turkish Republic, consisting of various local women's organizations, was one of the most noticeable sources of growth in socio-political activity. Women's participation in socio-political life began with the national liberation struggle of 1918 - 1923. In the early 1920s, the first socialist parties were formed in Turkey, under which the first women's organizations were established [1, p. 161]. After the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and the adoption of new legislative acts, women began to actively participate in the social, economic, and political life of the country.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this article utilizes a systematic approach, employing observation, comparison, and the analysis of trends within the scientific research process.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Nezihe Muhiddin founded the first women's party, naming it "Women's Party," which advocated the idea of women achieving social and political rights to contribute to the development of society while remaining good mothers and wives. However, the party was not legalized because women could not yet officially engage in political activities at that time [2, p. 9].

The fate of the first women's party vividly demonstrates how women's emancipation was perceived at the beginning of the existence of the Turkish Republic. Although Turkey was the first European country where gender equality was legalized, the republican regime has not been able to fully ensure this equality in practice over the years. Even decades after the Kemalists granted women rights, very little changed in the lives of most Turkish women.

The view of women's role in society is probably one of the main dividing lines between the positions of religious and secular circles in the country. Both the secular part of society and the Islamists base their differences on women's issues on religious traditions [3, p. 309]. Representatives of secular circles believe that Islam is fundamentally hostile to women, which is why to occupy a decent position in society, a woman needs to be less religious. Conversely, Islamists are convinced that there is no women's issue in Islam; the role of mother and wife assigned to women by religion is natural.

The transformations in Turkey carried out in the 1980s, along with the rise of a new wave of feminism on one hand and the growth of Islamic fundamentalism supported by activist women on the other, paint a rather confusing picture that is difficult to understand not only for foreigners but also for Turkish women themselves. Let's try to understand the current situation.

In the wake of the military coup in 1980, all forms of public opposition were banned. In this atmosphere of fear and repression, the women's movement boldly stated its demands. Several feminist-oriented magazines began a series of publications, organizing active discussions on issues regarding women's rights and the role of the state in supporting the existing patriarchal system. Women organized several campaigns and demonstrations demanding changes in the existing situation. Notable legal successes were achieved. After numerous public protests, articles 438 and 159 of the Penal Code were repealed [4, p. 8].

The revival of the women's movement in the 1980s was also observed on the "Islamic front." The effort to protect women's equality using Islam laid the foundation for the so-called "Islamic feminism." Turkish scholars and writers Y. Arat and F. Ajar found the first mention of the term "feminism" in N. Gole's book "Modern Mahram" [5, p. 3].

Until recently, religious circles in the country exclusively attributed women's movements to Western fads, believing that they originated in Christianity and Judaism due to the blame placed on women for the fall from grace. In Islam, however, this is not the case, so most Islamic theologians believe there is no feminism.

Let's consider the manifestations of feminism in Turkey in its various directions. In the early 1990s, the women's movement split into three conflicting wings: secular or Kemalist, radical, and "Islamic" feminists.

Secular or state feminism is associated with the activities of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his supporters. For Kemalists, the woman has been and remains a symbol of the new state. It was assumed that the new Turkish woman—enlightened, educated—could on one hand contribute to the development of the country and the improvement of the nation, while on the other,

remain a good mother and wife [2, p. 11]. Despite all the transformations regarding the resolution of the women's issue, it can be asserted that women were merely a tool in the fight against old orders for the Kemalists. Although many rights were guaranteed to women on paper, mechanisms for their realization were not created; these rights could only be used by a small number of representatives of Turkish society. Additionally, besides the strong influence of traditional and familial roles of women, which is very important when analyzing women's emancipation after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, it is necessary to note that women became a symbol of the new nation and their style of dress, beauty, and health became symbols of Westernization. As the Turkish researcher D. Kandiyoti asserts, Turkish women were emancipated but not free [2, p. 10].

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In the 1990s, against the backdrop of questions and disputes about women's essence, the magazine "Mektup" ("Letter") [5, p. 5] began to be published, discussing issues of understanding women's essence and their sexual nature, and the transformation of their bodies into commodities, the right of women to elect and be elected. All these discussions laid the groundwork for what is known as Islamic feminism.

In the Turkish Republic, the most intense debates have been provoked by the issue of wearing the hijab in public places and institutions. One way or another, restrictions by the authorities on the socialization of religious women enabled the Islamist movement to provide them with specific forms of participation in public life. Mainly, this refers to the creation of various political associations.

From the mid-1980s, wishing to improve its image, appear more modern, and attract women to public activity, the Refah Party began forming women's committees, which later played a key role in the party's victories in 1994-1995. According to the former head of the Istanbul women's committee, S. Eraslan, the reason for the success of the women's committees lay in a particular tactic, namely, conducting propaganda "from below" through organizing meetings with voters, personal conversations [3, p. 311]. This tactic was very effective given that most of the party's supporters were rural immigrants. After the Kemalist revolution, as a result of developments in agriculture and its mechanization, industrialization, many rural residents began moving to cities. The main result of migration for women was that they left the agricultural sector and became housewives or started working in marginal production sectors without any social security. According to American researcher J. White, relationships of mutual aid (imede), patronage for the weak, the younger, and the less well-off (himaye) are characteristic of rural immigrants, who make up a large part of the electorate of Islamist parties [3, p. 312].

Thus, the activity of the women's committees of the Refah Party opened the way for religious women into politics. Nevertheless, despite the effectiveness of the women's wing of the party, men still play the leading role in it. During the time of the Virtue Party's rule, there was not a single woman deputy. This is another interesting phenomenon of Islamist parties—they try to show their "liberal" image in resolving the women's issue, including access for women to power. But the elections of 1994-1995 clearly showed the true face of the party; there was not a single woman on the party's list of candidates. According to S. Eraslan, the almost complete absence of women deputies in Refah and Virtue is due to the fact that Islamist activists themselves supposedly did not strive for publicity [4, p. 12]. It can also be noted that when the nomination of women to public positions was desirable from the party's image perspective,

preference was given not so much to religious as to civic activists and journalists distant from Islam.

As for the spread of radical feminism, it appeared relatively recently, in the 1990s, and is represented in Turkey by a small group of women, mainly journalists. Radical feminists are generally perceived as those who dare to criticize the existing status of women in the country, while their criticism does not touch on the issue of liberalism promised by the Kemalists. Most of the women of this direction are involved in campaigns against domestic and workplace violence.

As we can see, the women's movement in Turkey is represented by several directions within which various organizations, associations, committees operate, in turn, divided into governmental and non-governmental.

At the dawn of the republican regime, the activity of the most influential women's organizations, such as the Women's Party, was aimed against religious customs [1, p. 162]. They demanded the abolition of women's isolation from society, the unrestricted power of men over women, and much more.

In 1975, under the leadership of public activist, sociologist from Ankara University, B. Onger, the Organization of Progressive Women of Turkey was created, the main goal of which was to fight for the implementation of socio-economic and democratic rights for women. In the pages of print media, the Organization calls to speak out against the difficult situation of women. Thus, in the article B. Onger "Address to Istanbul Mothers," ideas are presented that despite the opportunities provided by law, "women are one of the most oppressed classes of society," the reason for which is the prevailing belief in society regarding women's inferiority. That is, in its speeches, the Organization emphasizes that one of the main problems facing women is the need to overcome the conservative influence on them by religion. Activists of these organizations express the idea that the women's issue needs to be considered within the framework of the entire public system and political course, which implies the introduction of corresponding economic, social, and political changes.

In this environment, in 1997, the women's organization "KA-MEYA" was created, the main task of which is to help women obtain education, strive for economic independence, and be liberated from violence [6, p. 32]. In its activities, the organization aims to make society agree that eradicating violence against women is a top priority. One of the problems faced by "KA-MEYA" and other human rights organizations in their activities is the reaction of society. Many members of the organization, as well as women lawyers defending women from violence, are threatened with retribution against their families. Nevertheless, women's human rights organizations strive to inform women about their rights, organize various training programs that help strengthen women's confidence in themselves.

As for Islamist organizations, they are represented both by committees that are part of government parties and by independent organizations. The latter began to be created later than party committees, somewhere from the mid-1990s, and their formation, like the creation of party committees, was associated with the problem of "turbans." These organizations include human rights societies "Mazlum-der," "Capital Women's Platform," "Ozgur-der," etc. [3, p. 312]. Islamists not affiliated with the Refah Party criticize the pseudo-politicization of religious women, which was implemented in the idea of women's committees. According to one such Islamist, F.K. Barbarosoglu, "Refah, which presents religious women as allegedly having joined

politics, has generated a series of empty sensations in the media. This is nothing more than an attempt to occupy pious women with what everyone else is doing. And the fact that every woman with a covered head walking down the street is perceived as a symbol of reaction is undoubtedly the result of the strengthening of 'Refah'. Interest in them is fueled only by the fact that secular women consider them a symbol of the Sharia threat. Meanwhile, no significant changes in political self-awareness have occurred" [3, p. 313].

Talking about the situation with the women's movement in modern Turkey, it can be concluded that the fragmentation and lack of coordination between representatives of different directions is mostly reduced to the so-called "turban problem," i.e., considering the headscarf as a symbol of women's oppression or as a manifestation of free will. Although Islamists have not achieved the acceptance of their demands by the authorities, the situation is still not hopeless if we take into account public sympathy for this issue. Various surveys show that three-quarters of Turkey's population agree that women civil servants and students can wear headscarves if they want to [3, p. 315]. After the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, this issue took on even greater proportions compared to other equally acute problems related to the existing situation of women. Statistical data show that the average age of marriage for Turkish women is 19 years, the age of first childbirth is 20 - 25 years, maternal mortality during childbirth is 30 times higher than in prosperous countries, and in rural areas, the decision on marriage is still made by parents [3, p. 316]. The problem of domestic violence, which is considered the norm for Turkish society, is acute. For example, during the time the AKP government was in power, according to the Ministry of Justice, the number of murders of women increased by 1400% from 2002 to 2009. Women become victims of murders and violence, workplace violence is increasing, and cases of sexual harassment against women are observed more often [7, p. 2].

It is indicative that after the victory in the 1994 elections, Refah practically closed all women's rehabilitation centers. Naturally, these actions of the party could not but affect its attractiveness to women, even for Islamists. According to S. Eraslan, rehabilitation centers for women who have been subjected to violence are needed, but it is useless to seek help on this issue from the supporters of the party and the movement [3, p. 316].

Returning to the issue of the participation of Turkish women in public life, it is necessary to emphasize that women are still insignificantly represented in the government and other elected bodies. In the history of the Turkish Republic, there was a short period when women were maximally represented in parliament, namely after 1935, after they were granted the right to vote. From 1935 to the early 2000s, only 6 women held the position of minister. This situation is traced not only in politics but also, for example, in the field of higher education and the scientific community.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, when considering the women's movement in the Turkish Republic, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, throughout the existence of the republic, ideologues of Westernization, secularism, nationalism, Islamism, the left and the right have traditionally used the women's issue and women themselves only as a tool in the struggle for power, while none of the representatives of these currents made it their immediate goal to fight for women's rights. Second, almost all activists of women's organizations, whether Islamists or secular feminists, mainly spend all their efforts on solving the "turban problem" instead of addressing

such pressing problems facing society as domestic violence, discrimination at work, arranged marriages, early marriage, etc. In this context, I would like to quote the Islamic activist M. Gulnaz (who, by the way, does not wear a headscarf): "As long as this problem ('turban problem') concerns pious women, a sober assessment of the relationship between men and women in the Islamic environment will not be possible soon" [3, p. 317].

Thus, the modern women's movement in Turkey is inseparably linked to religious issues. Issues of sex, criticism of the heterosexual model, redefining female sexuality are still not on the agenda of the women's movement. Another no less important problem of the women's movement in Turkey is the lack of connections and solidarity between different groups, which hinders effective lobbying of women's interests and demands in government circles.

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