

The Girls' Institutes in the Early Period of the Turkish Republic

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In the past, our schools did not place an emphasis on the training of housewives, which constitutes the essential foundation of a home. Because of that, most of our educated girls remained uninterested in carrying out household duties. Today, with the opening of the Girls' Institutes and technical schools, this deficiency has been overcome. Those parents desiring to raise their children as housewives are applying to these institutes. A lot of parents I have talked to have joyfully stated that their daughters have acquired many fundamental skills in these institutions. (*Hayat Magazine*, 1934).

During times of transformation, education is given a critical role in shaping the new society. In Turkey, much importance was attributed to education after the establishment of the Republic. During this period of transformation from a traditional society dominated by Islamic values (also taking into consideration that there were many significant ethnic and cultural groups in the Empire, most of which were non-Muslim) into a 'modern' 'Westernised' one, a number of social, economic, political and cultural changes took place which rendered education an indispensable change agent. The meaning for women of these educational reforms and social transformations can only be understood by analysing whether they were aimed at women's liberation.

In the history of Turkish education, two of the significant attempts at reform involved schools called Institutes. These no longer exist. The well-known and much-studied ones are the Village Institutes, whose students were predominantly male; the less well known and less studied are, on the other hand, the Girls' Institutes. This essay deals with the Girls' Institutes, established in the late 1920s during the formative years of the Turkish Republic, which was itself founded in 1923 after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.¹

Before looking at the Girls' Institutes, however, it is helpful to say a few things about the Village Institutes. Village Institutes were established in 1937 to transform the then economically underdeveloped and poverty-stricken Turkish countryside by mobilising the children of villagers. Although these schools and

¹ It is only very recently that the Girls' Institutes have attracted scholarly attention in Turkey. The study by Elif Ekin Akşit is highly referable.

the movement created around them, known as the Village Institute Movement, were abolished at the beginning of the multi-party period in the late 1940's, they became the focus of attention of intellectuals in Turkey, and there has been considerable international interest in the formation and the role of these schools. By 1946, 16,000 boys and girls had been educated at the Village Institutes and were appointed to villages in the countryside as teachers and social change agents. My father is one of them. Being the daughter of a graduate of the Pazarören Village Institute, I am very much aware of the mission of the Village Institutes. My father worked as a teacher and a community development agent in villages in Central Anatolia. The Institutes were terminated formally, not for educational or pedagogical reasons, but because they turned out to be more radical than the state would tolerate at that point in Turkish history. They were accused of inculcating 'undesirable ideologies', namely communism, socialism, and anti-Islamism. The Democrat Party government, which was elected in 1950 transformed the Village Institutes into regular teacher-training schools as a concession to the anti-secularist groups. The legacy of the Village Institutes is quite important in our understanding of Turkish society, especially in terms of their early framework. The impact of the movement is still being passionately debated. Much literature can be found on the subject, even in English (Türkoğlu 1998).

The Girls' Institutes that are the subject of this chapter have not enjoyed comparable public or intellectual attention until recently (Akşit 2005, Türkyılmaz 2002, Yeşil 2003, Navaro-Yasin 2002). They are not generally considered to be schools that have participated in the 'development' of Turkish society. They became invisible vocational schools for girls; as invisible as the domestic labour of women, something they intended to qualify according to the needs of modern capitalist society. It is not unusual that, wherever there are women, they are invisible. In fact, the name of the most important song of the post-1980s feminist awakening era is 'Women do exist' ("kadınlar vardır").

It should be added here that the traditional patriarchal controls to which women are subjected are gradually worn away by processes of socio-economic change. The dynamics of the development of Turkish capitalism gained new phases in the 1960s. Therefore, it is not coincidental that Girls' Institutes were transformed into a somewhat different kind of schools, much more geared to the economic life outside the family. In the 1960s, Girls' Institutes were transformed into technical high schools for girls.²

In this essay, a brief historical background will first be provided, and then, based on interviews with early graduates of the Girls' Institutes, an attempt will be made to describe the significance of these Institutes for the understanding of the formation of a new women's identity in Turkey.

A brief historical background

Girls' Institutes were established at the beginning of the Turkish Republic as secondary-level vocational schools as part of the public educational system.

² However, women's vocational schools continued training women in the modernised version of women's traditional duties, such as natal care, home economics, cooking, etc.

The first vocational school for girls during the Ottoman period (Islahane) was established in 1864 in Ruscuk to make the uniforms for the Ottoman Army. Another vocational school for girls was established in Istanbul in 1869 to produce underwear and bandages for the army (Ergin 1941: 578). These schools were designed to serve concrete purposes. It is interesting that women's labour was appropriated for military purposes; something essentially patriarchal in itself. It should be remembered that the Ottoman Empire was established in the 13th century and disintegrated in 1922. The Turkish Republic was founded in 1923 after a successful war of liberation against the Western powers. During the Tanzimat era covering the years 1839–76, a period of political and social institutional restructuring of Ottoman society, a number of women's industrial schools were established, but were eliminated later apart from two, which, after the establishment of the Republic, were converted into Girls' Institutes.³

Another interesting historical fact that needs to be mentioned is that the establishment of the Girls' Institutes was inspired by a Belgian thinker, Dr. Omar Buyse, one of a group of educational specialists invited by the newly established Turkish Republic to help set up a modern educational system. Among these specialists was also the well-known progressive philosopher John Dewey, who visited Turkey in 1925 and prepared a report on Turkish education making recommendations on many aspects of educational policy.

The first Girls' Institute founded was the outstanding İsmet Paşa Girls' Institute in Ankara, the capital of Turkey, named after the second most important statesman of the Republic, İsmet İnönü. İsmet Paşa Girls' Institute was established in 1928, earlier than some other educational institutions, including Village Institutes established in 1937, and People's Houses established in 1932. Over the years, the government was able to found at least one Girls' Institute in every city throughout the country.

Dynamic forces of social change: Women and education

It is important to note that the first 30 years of the Turkish Republic were the formative period marked by the 'Westernisation' policies of the founder of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. From 1923 until the end of World War II, Kemalism was the unchallenged ideology of the Turkish state. Its philosophical roots lay in the 18th-century Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and positivism. The pronounced aspiration was 'to attain the civilisation of the 'Western World'. The new regime set about transforming the traditional Islamic theocratic state into a secular constitutional Republic. Kemalist reforms replaced the religious law of the Shari'a with a civil code adopted from the Swiss, which outlawed polygyny and granted women equal rights to divorce, among other emancipatory measures – changes, which were experienced mainly by the women of the urban upper classes. These radical transformations were instituted in an authoritarian and paternalistic manner. During this period

³ Here it is important to note that one might well wonder about women's schools/institutes for Armenian, Jewish, Greek, or Assyrian women. The education of women of different ethnic minorities is an important area to be studied.

of nation-building, a new reformist, yet authoritarian, secular political framework was established (Kaplan 1999).

From the point of view of the political elite, education was considered very important not only for becoming a legitimate member of the 'Western World', but at the same time for the state's own legitimisation. It was within this kind of ideological framework that women were encouraged to attend all levels of schooling. Specifically, three kinds of educational policies can be detected regarding women's education. Firstly, urban women were strongly encouraged to take part in every level of the educational system so that they might become successful professionals in the newly-built Turkey. To a substantial degree this goal was realised. Many upper-class and middle-class women began to attend and graduate from high schools and universities. The number of women in well-paid professions in Turkey has historically been relatively high; in 1979, Turkey boasted a higher percentage of women in the professions than the US, France and many other European countries. For example, 20 per cent of the lawyers and 17 per cent of the doctors were women (Öncü 1981: 13-14), compared with the rates in America of 3 and 6 per cent respectively. Secondly, policies regarding rural women urged them to attend primary school, work hard, produce more, raise more children, etc. In other words, in this part of the traditional section of society, women's lives were confined to the values of the traditional patriarchal framework, except that they had the opportunity to attend secular primary school for five years, which became compulsory after the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Thirdly, a special line of schools was designed to ensure that the new modern state had the proper type of woman, a kind of role model consistent with the state's Westernised, secular self-image. That is the conception of the Girls' Institutes. I would argue that the creation of these schools carried exceptionally significant implications for, first, the formation of a new women's identity, and second, the legitimisation and support of new forms of state power.

As is the case in most of the post-colonial societies, with the process of creating a modern nation-state new ideologies emerge to legitimise and support new forms of state power. Although Turkey was never colonised, 'Emancipation of women was part of a larger struggle to dismantle the theocratic institutions of the Ottoman Empire and to formulate a new legitimising state ideology' (Kandiyoti 1991: 43). 'Westernisation', including the Westernisation of women and women's roles, became part of the Kemalist state's new ideology. In what ways, then, were these women equipped with the necessary socialisation and education to perform this ideological mission?

Girls' Institutes: A 'modern' institution to 'train housewives'

As was indicated earlier, Girls' Institutes were set up as a part of the public educational system. Gradually in every city one Institute was established, and in big metropolitan cities more than one was opened. In the 1939-40 school year the number of Girls' Institutes was 14. This increased to 33 in 1944 and to 40 in 1947, at which time the number of students had reached 7,389 (Ministry of National Education, 1947). Students were admitted to these schools either immediately after the five years of elementary education for five years or after the three years of secondary school for two years.

The curriculum of the institutes reflects the skills considered most essential for the training of the exemplary women of the new nation-state. Selçuk Girls' Institute's 1932–33 curriculum included separate courses on sewing, tailoring, embroidery for white fabric, embroidery for coloured fabric, fashion-design, clothing repair, ironing and starching, cooking, child care, household management, hat making, hygiene, underwear making, flower making, drawing and music. Besides these, the regular high school programme was also carried out (Gök 1999: 245).

Table 1. Curriculum of Selçuk Girls' Institute (1932–33)

General					
Courses	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Turkish	X	X	X	X	X
Civics				X	
Geography	X	X	X		X
History	X	X	X		X
Husbandry, Botany	X				
Mathematics	X	X	X	X	X
Physics		X	X		
Chemistry		X	X		
Physiology		X	X		
French	X	X	X	X	X
Physical Education	X	X	X	X	
Music	X	X	X	X	
Vocational					
Courses	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Cutting-Sewing		X	X	X	X
Fashion Design		X	X	X	X
Tailoring	X				
Embroidery (White Linen)	X	X	X		X
Coloured Embroidery	X	X	X	X	
Embroidery					X
Repair	X	X	X	X	
Ironing-Starching	X	X	X	X	
Cooking	X	X	X	X	
Child care				X	X
House Management					X
Hat Making					X
Hygiene				X	
Technology			X		

Source: Gök (1999).

Table 2. Curriculum (1947)

General					
Courses	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Turkish	X	X	X	X	X
Handwriting	X				
Geography	X	X			
History	X	X	X	X	
Mathematics		X	X		
Physics			X		
Chemistry	X	X			
Natural science	X	X	X	X	X
Gymnastics	X	X	X	X	X
Foreign Language	X	X	X	X	X
Music					
Vocational					
Courses	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Cutting-Sewing	X	X	X	X	X
Fashion Design		X	X	X	X
Flower Making			X	X	X
Underwear	X	X	X	X	X
Embroidery	X	X	X	X	X
Painting	X	X	X	X	X
House Management		X	X	X	X
Cooking		X	X	X	X
Child care			X	X	X
Hygiene				X	X

Notes: In the 1937-38 school year a military education course became compulsory and remained so until the 1947-48 school year.

Fashion design as a specialisation course was discontinued.

Source: Gök (1999).

At the Third Meeting of the National Education Council in 1946, the basic principles to be followed in the Girls' Institutes were stated as follows: (1) 'The principle of work (İş ilkesi)' was that each course should be given in an applied manner. Observations and experimentations were vital. (2) "Creativity" meant that each student should be encouraged to try to reflect new ways of doing things. (3) 'Social and Economic Environmental Consideration (yakın yurt ilkesi)' necessitated that the social and economic environment from which the students came should be taken into consideration. This was a duty given to Girls' Institutes. (4) 'Principle of Health' meant that instruction at the institutes should avoid emotional and physical strain for students. (5) 'The Principle of Frugality' dictated that time and materials should be used economically during work. (National Education Council, 1946.) Indeed, this programme reflects the aspirations of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founding father of the Republic, who in a speech in 1923 declared: 'It is necessary that our women be even more enlightened, knowledgeable and munificent (feyzli) than men if they want to be the true mothers of the nation' (Gök 1999: 241).

In order to analyse the social and ideological functions of the Girls' Institutes in the early period of the Turkish Republic, I interviewed twenty-five of the early graduates of the schools. Some of the women I interviewed also worked as teachers in the Girls' Institutes or the Higher Technical Women Teachers' School, which trained teachers for the Girls' Institutes.

The interview form that was drawn up consisted of fifty-six questions, and was quite a comprehensive one with some open-ended questions. There were four sections in the form. Part one dealt with an extensive biography of the interviewee and her perception of Turkish women. Part two covered education and the socialisation process in the Girls' Institute. Part three dealt with matters of the interviewee's life after graduation. In part four, their general evaluation of the mission of Girls' Institutes for Turkey was requested. This section of the form focused on three significant issues that are central to any understanding of the institutes' social and ideological functions in the formation of the new Turkish society.

The first issue concerned the objective nature of the schools, and the second how these schools and their mission were perceived by society and by the students themselves. The third issue was the definition of ideal womanhood then in Turkey, and relatedly, whether the Institutes' training of students was based on such a notion of ideal women.

The nature of Girls' Institutes

The official objective of the schools was a search for a new form of family, which would produce and contribute to a 'healthier' and more viable nation. This was officially stated in the programme as 'to train the successful housewives, educate them so that they appropriate national and democratic values and become perfect house managers' (Ergin 1941: 2106). The subject matter that they studied reflected these concerns: everything from food preparation, home management, sewing underwear for both women and men, interior decoration, nutrition, child care and development to fashion design (those women who were interviewed all made Western-style hats in the 1930s and 1940s and wore them even in small Anatolian cities where they were certainly viewed as agents of modernisation), embroidery, tailoring for both ladies and men, and drawing. For those students who went to the Institute for five years there was also the general high school curriculum. However, the classes that covered the general high school curriculum were not treated as being equal in importance to the Institutes' own subject matter. It was a very strict and well-defined curriculum. And from the students' point of view, they indicated that they studied all of these subjects with great enjoyment, which brings us to the second issue of how these schools and their mission were perceived by society and the students themselves.

The perceived mission of the Girls' Institutes

The twenty-five women who were interviewed had enrolled in the Girls' Institutes between 1932 and 1956. All but three were married. Of the 22 who

were married, 12 had two children. Only two had more than two children. The remaining eight women had only one child. The norm for Turkish families was 4-5 children (Tekeli 1990: 12). But this is consistent with the pattern among professional women. Only five of the group had never worked outside the home. The rest had worked for a number of years ranging from 34 at most to two years as a minimum. One woman said that she did not work at all. Later on during the interview, it was learned that she had actually worked as a tailor in her home and earned money. But she did not consider this 'real work'.

Girls' Institutes became one of the most cherished institutions of the society during the first thirty years of the Turkish Republic. Nineteen of the women interviewed emphasised the fact that they were distinguished and respected in their communities. Twenty-five women felt very proud of themselves and the school they attended. Three commented on the fact that the Institutes limited their further education (since at that time universities only accepted regular high school graduates and did not admit vocational and technical high school graduates). However, these three women graduated in the 1950s, when social and economic realities in Turkish society were substantially different from the earlier period, and women in general had become increasingly active in every sphere of society and participated more in economic life. These women's comments on the limiting character of the Girls' Institutes can therefore be interpreted in the light of the changing national and international context regarding women's rights and women's roles and status in the society. Women, in fact, became more and more visible in Turkish society, which was experiencing rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, and internal and external migration.

Half of them indicated very frankly that they were indeed serving as role models for their communities. The overwhelming majority (21 women) thought that, in the areas involving house management, family life, dress, good manners and other related matters like child rearing and nutrition, their education distinguished them from those women who had not attended the institutes. These remarks are especially significant if we take into account the fact that these women are typically very modest and do not like to praise themselves. When I asked specifically whether the schools prepared them well as housewives or for work, 18 of the 25 women said more as housewives, while the rest indicated that they were prepared for both. They pointed out that they were not trained to become traditional women but modern women who were competent to prepare French-style dinner table settings and make fancy cakes, not baklava or tarhana, traditional Turkish foods which they thought their mother would make. Because they were going to become perfect women and housewives, they were envied and esteemed in the community in which they lived. Regarding the significance of the Institutes, they did not hesitate to point out that important families in the provinces used to choose brides for their sons from the students of the Institutes. This point was even made by the women who worked as teachers and directors of these schools. For example, I came to know well the headmistress of the Girls' Institute in Diyarbakır (a major city in south-eastern Turkey populated largely by Kurds). It was not unusual, she told me, for distinguished families from the city to come and ask her about her students in order to choose brides for their sons. It is worth noting that their high value as potential brides played a role in enabling these women to

withdraw from work in the public sphere outside the home, as their husbands were from well-off families.

The women interviewed clearly stated that, at the Girls' Institutes, the students learned every subject and topic that was necessary to become an effective domestic manager. Furthermore, they thought that they applied and used everything they learned in the schools (24 women out of 25) in every aspect of their daily lives. They were generally considered excellent home-makers who could bring up the new generation properly. Raising and caring for children properly were emphasised over and over again, when they were asked what they perceived as important subjects in school. To be able to work outside the home and earn money if necessary was also appreciated highly by 23 of these women. In this connection, a reiterated point was that they all wanted to contribute to the family budget.

One of the ways of understanding the effectiveness of these schools is to attempt to identify the values that were cherished, conveyed and then internalised by the students. I was not surprised by the fact that by far the most important values and matters emphasised were to be absolutely organised, clean, orderly, neat and tidy. After visiting the houses of a couple of these women, I understood the meaning of being educated in a Girls' Institute better. These houses were extremely clean, neat, and orderly. The women were very hospitable. They were much more elegant than the normal middle-class women. They were strong and articulate. Respect and good manners, modesty and frugality were the behaviors that students had to learn in the schools. They all said that the schools were highly disciplined. One of the characteristics that was strongly emphasised, when they were asked about the relationship among students and between students and teachers, was that they never experienced any competition; instead there was a total solidarity among the fellow students. In fact, all but three said that they liked their schools very much. They admired their teachers. Some of them said that they even wanted to go to school on Saturdays as well. Only one woman said she was not pleased with the school. Dexterity was another characteristic that students were encouraged to develop. Frugality, hard work and creativity were also encouraged by the teachers. For example, while they learned sewing and tailoring, they also learned to repair a tear, etc. They were expected to be polite, elegant and cultured.

Based on the interviews, it became clear that they all seemed to appreciate the fact that they learned new ways of organising a household (for instance, one of them gave an example of setting the table). One of the issues, which I was specifically interested to learn about, was whether they had experienced any conflicts of values, since almost all of what they learned and were persuaded to practise in the school challenged the ways of their parents. The answer was, consistently, 'no'. Nevertheless, all of them said that this might very well be the case with those students who were less well-to-do financially. It is indeed difficult to believe that most of them had experienced no contradictions in their day-to-day lives. This was, after all, the 1930s and the 1940s when Turkey was trying to adapt to new ways of doing things. This response can be interpreted as an unconscious reaction to their being less sympathetic to the tenets of Kemalist Republicanism and its cultural Westernism.

The women interviewed also referred to the fashion shows which took place at the end of every school year as one of the high points of their time at the Girls' Institutes. Through these shows they became known and admired by the community in which the institute was located. The shows served as a model to the community. They also served as a site where people could view the bride-to-be, especially in provincial cities.

The things that were forbidden were also looked at in order to examine further the socialisation process at Girls' Institutes. As indicated earlier, the Institutes were generally very strict places. There was a dress code, i.e., black uniform with a white collar, black stockings, and black shoes. Having a boy friend or even being seen with a boy was strictly out of the question. Make-up, smoking, wearing pants, a ponytail, silk or coloured stockings, long nails were all strictly prohibited. This kind of disciplinary socialisation at the Girls' Institutes can be explained by their being a tool for constructing the 'new women', emphasising her functions as a homemaker/nationmaker and therefore suppressing any kind of indicator of her sexuality.

The definition of ideal womanhood

The third area that was I especially interested in had to do with the definition of ideal women and whether the Girls' Institutes successfully trained their students to become such products for Turkish society. A specific question directed to the women interviewed concerned their understanding of the ideal woman. They were asked directly to describe the ideal woman for Turkish society. Most of them agreed on the following characteristics: being responsible for managing the house, and being able to work outside if the need arises, which is a quite strong indicator of seeing the home as the primary task, and outside work as a temporary engagement. Regarding the effectiveness of the Girls' Institutes in training them to be perfect women, again they unanimously said 'definitely, yes'. They thought that because of their training there they had become ideal women. They were also able to participate in the household's finances through daily management decisions and doing the dress-making, knitting, and sewing, etc. for the needs of the family members. They were considered highly desirable wives.

To make the issue more concrete, it may help to include an individual story here. For instance, one of these 'ideal women' whom I happened to get to know well graduated from Beyoğlu Girls' Institute in 1942. She was an exemplary student at the institute even then. I was quite fortunate to have interviewed her together with her teacher at the institute. I talked to the other women around her and her daughter. Her managing the house and raising the children was not only 'appropriate' but also profoundly pleasing in aesthetic terms. She was very aware of the importance of the education of her children; in fact, all four of them (three daughters and a son) were university graduates. Her house was neat, tidy and well-organised in a distinctive manner. Although she could be considered as belonging to a quite well-off part of society in terms of social class, she was quite frugal. As her daughters and friends said, she made all the clothes for her children and herself, and she used up the left-overs from the previous day's meals to make delicacies. They also claimed that she always

had a positive outlook on life and an interest in what was going on in the community and in national politics.

Conclusion

In her book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, feminist scholar Kumari Jayawardena concluded that ‘the example of Turkey ... in respect of women’s rights, became one of the most discussed issues in the Muslim world, and efforts were made to emulate it in Iran and Afghanistan’ (Jayawardena 1986: 42). Her analysis was based mostly on a few writings of Turkish social scientists, whose observations have usually concerned the ideological environment of the early periods of the Turkish Republic, and the legal ‘rights conferred on ...women’ by a ‘small...elite’ which were not ‘the product of large-scale demands by’ women in Turkey (Abadan-Unat 1981: 12-13). Most of these studies by Turkish social scientists, in order to substantiate their conclusion that ‘the Kemalist reforms ... [were] successful attempts at achieving women’s emancipation by decree from above’, relied heavily on legal changes like the granting of equal rights to women, and reforms in the areas of dress and social behaviour (Jayawardena 1986: 41), with many references to Atatürk’s Westernised wife and adopted daughter.

What is missing is the empirical study of concrete processes and institutions through which this modernised image was imposed on Turkish women, and gender-related hierarchies were established. Moreover, Jayawardena’s analysis lacks any discussion of Ottoman and Turkish women’s movements struggling for suffrage rights, access to education and economic rights. In general, women’s agency in these processes needs to be rethought. The new womanhood created through this very special education at the Girls’ Institutes distinguished itself not only from the traditional womanhood in Turkish society but also from the women educated in other institutions, because it was obvious that they were being equipped to become ‘the true mothers of the nation’. This essay is an attempt to understand the role of Girls’ Institutes in creating Westernised women and legitimising the new state. It should be regarded as one of the recent works that have been raising questions precisely about this missing link between ideological and legal frameworks on the one hand, and concrete processes and institutions, on the other.

The present study has found that the early graduates of the Girls’ Institutes interviewed had succeeded in becoming distinguished, accomplished, exemplary women in their communities/society, and had been role-models for other women with their characters, skills, abilities, interests and life-styles, thereby changing the image of the Turkish woman from one who is oppressed, is confined to her home and only bears children, to that of the ‘Westernised woman’ they had successfully become through the education they had received. They perceived themselves as being excellent in household management, interior decoration, tailoring, child care and nutrition, and always stated that they had been model/exemplary mothers and wives, especially proficient in parenting. They were very polite and courteous hosts to their guests. Their philosophy of life and primary aim was to have a role in family life as competent, happy and respected women.

The ‘modern woman’ image had distanced them from certain traditional values. For example, they had nuclear families and they followed the latest fashions in dress. Being a Girls’ Institute graduate had been a status symbol for these women. In society they were given an important status as the ‘modern mothers’ who would raise the new generation. All the interviewees agreed that they had acquired at school every skill that was necessary for being a competent housewife. This concept of a ‘perfect woman’ had been imposed on them in their school years. They also emphasised the fact that they were frugal, and that when necessary they were ready to use their acquired skills/arts-crafts (tailoring, flower-making, etc) to help with the household income. While it is true that these women had somewhat different roles from the so-called traditional women (they had to some extent moved away from certain traditional women’s roles), all the activities they carried out with perfection, and mostly at home, meant that they continued to assume a considerable amount of responsibility. It is profoundly interesting to observe this contradiction of ‘modern woman’ versus ‘traditional woman’, although they both have a core function of sustaining the domestic role of women.

I hope that this article will improve our understanding of how the Turkish state has shaped gender relations and women’s identity. One should bear in mind that education plays a considerable role in this. In fact, for the last two decades more and more feminist scholars have produced a considerable amount of work in many areas of gender studies.

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