

Crisis of Women's Rights in Turkey during the AKP regime

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Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 23 April 1923, Turkey gave a struggle to emancipate women. Especially in the early years of the Republic a reconstruction of the newly formed Turkish society was also a fight to liberate women and open them new spheres and opportunities of modern life. With the adaptation of the Civilian law of the Swiss Code in 1926 equal citizenship was defined. In 1934, Turkey was one of the first countries who gave the right to vote to women. This was the important step towards a new image of women regarding their status in the society. In December 1985 the UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women was signed and it was another milestone in the emancipation of Turkish women. The negotiations with the European Union and therewith the possibility of being a candidate member of the EU made Turkey also to reform and expand and implement women's rights. The pre-candidate conditions of being EU member is a long road which can be used as a frame to reorganize reshape and redefine the social, political and economical conditions and opportunities of women.

Until now the picture looks very nice and shows rather an optimistic view of Turkish reality. What needs to be done is look at the medals other side and see what trend of women's rights is seen in the last decade and why women's presence in the Gezi movement was significant. During the AKP government period which started in 2002, the role of the women changed dramatically. Not only the number of working women decreased within this decade but also the number of women murderers' tortures rose. The acts of violence against women officially declared in October 2012 show that the number of cases raised to 1400% during the AKP office¹. These acts of violence include torture, murder, physical and psychological violence and forceful marriage.

The growing interference into women's right and their body's was regulated through a set of new regulations. A hot discussion about abolishing abortion was debated heavily. Erdogan in his appeal to women he warned: "Abortion is a murder"². The initial plan of AKP was to forbid abortion, due to the reason that even the fetus is a human and has right to live. Strong opposition from the Women Rights and Human Rights Organization could prevent this intervention into women's body. Nevertheless AKP was pushing against the idea of conscientious objection of women by giving doctors the responsibility and decision making power when it comes to abortion. In this case it means that solely state owned hospitals are allowed to make abortion and this only when the doctors find it necessary. This means that private hospitals should not have the license to make abortion. Therewith women would have no longer control or say about their bodies. This proposals however went under pressure through the "my body my decision campaign" and it was not adopted. Another topic was the ceaserian birth issue. The regulation foresaw that each woman was able to decide either on ceaserian or natural birth. Since ceaserian birth is an surgency and is linked to complications and limits the fertily of women. What lies behind this can be easily unstood

¹ Tezcan, S. (2013, March 12) Pavay: Kadina Şiddet yüzde 1400 arttı. Hürriyet.com. Retrieved Agust 22, 2013 from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/22796645.asp>

² Kürtaj Cinayettir. (2012). Retrieved Agust 22, 2013 from <http://www.haberturk.com/polemik/haber/746314-kurtaj-cinayettir>

with Erdogan's words: "With caesarian no more than two children are possible"³. This crucial decision is no longer let to women. Ceaserian birth is only possible when a complication to natural birth occurs. A women has not the chance to choose but soley the doctors are the ones to decide on the way of birth. The pressure of the chancellor Erdogan on women to follow a (atleast) three child policy changes the image of women in the society. " One child means bankruptcy; two children mean bankruptcy three children mean keeping the status quo"⁴ Later Erdogan corrected himself and announced that five children is a good number.

Erdogan again and again repeats the importance of young demograpgy and underline the importance of motherhood. Erdogan: "Women status rise by being mother and heaven is only one step away from them". The status of women is being transformed. In June 2011 Prime Minister Erdoğan announced that the Ministry for Women Statue will be changed to the Ministry of Women and Family. In reality it is not only a change of the name for a ministry but also a sign of reducing women only to a statue that is valuable in combination with family. This change of the government is a step backward in its struggle to combat gender inequality.

In terms of gender equality and political participations Turkey still lacks behind the OECD norms. The World Bank and the State Planning Organization shared report published in 2009 outlines that the average women workforce in the OECD countries is about 62% . Countries with similar economic profiles as Turkey are about 33% whereas Turkish women workforce is below 22% since 2008. The report also highlights the fact that 3 out of 4 women do not work or search for a job. A hindrance may be the child care which needs to be paid when women work. Most of the women will not spend a big portion of their money for this care. Besides this the growing population, the patriarchal structure, education levels and the cutting of formal education, the movement from rural to urban areas and informal labor are other factor why women's percentage as workforce cannot reach OECD standards. The author and journalist Meral Tamer reported on the International Women's Day in 2013 that Turkish women were and are still underrepresented in politics. According to her findings:

Political Position	Total	Women
Ministers	26	1
Provincial governors	81	1
Mayors	2.950	26
Village Heads	34.275	65
Ambassadors	196	21
Ministry Undersecretaries	26	0

The positive image of women's emancipations during the AKP governance is also shadowed by international reports. According to the Gender Gap Index 2013, Turkey still lacks to impose gender equality in the fields of economics, politics, health and education and therefore ranked 129 out of 134 countries. A similar negative evaluation of the same situation is documented by Gender Equity Index 2012 where Turkey failed to reach a good score (0,45/1,0) in terms of education, economic activity and women empowerment. In the Education at Glance 2012 Report of OECD, Turkey's portrait looked not very bright. According to the findings of this report women aged between 15-29 years spend the shortest period time in education, at an average 4.3 years for women and 5 years for men. 52% of women between 15-29 years neither work nor attend school.

³ Erdogan: Sezaryan ile iki cocuktan fazla olmaz. (2012). Retrieved Agust 18, 2013 from <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25353517/>

⁴ Erdoğan Aile zirvesinde konuştu. (2013). Retrieved Agust,22, 2013 from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/22277775.asp>

The paternalistic structure of the AKP government melts into the private spheres of women and public areas. Here a deep crisis can be detected. The set to proposals and reforms made by the conservatives against the emancipation of women pushed many of them to the streets in the Gezi movement. According to the numbers nearly 51%⁵ of the demonstrators were women. It is also striking that the composition of the women in the movement was very diverse. The profiles of women in the movement varied from young to old, from less educated to graduates, from workers to academicians, doctors, journalists and many more. This variety is a clear hint that the women from all layers of the society demonstrated against the transformation of women's role and their rights. Gezi is also an indicator for the massive reaction against the idea that women should be regarded as producers of labor power and the image that women should be regarded as 2nd class citizens who have not the chance to take responsibility in everyday life concerning their own bodies, their professional life either with political engagement or as workers. This thesis is supported by the symbol of the Gezi movement who is the Lady in Red. Ceyda Sungur is an assistant at Istanbul Technical University at the Department of City Planning. She is the face of the movement because she showed no reaction besides standing still when she was attacked by the police with pepper gas. She has not only the key figure because of her courage but also due her symbolic meaning as women standing against a growing discriminative system against women.

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⁵ Kongar, Küçükaya, (2013), Türkiye'yi sarsan otuz gün Gezi Direniş., Cumhuriyet Kitapları, İstanbul

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