

# Family as the Micro-Power Domain of Ottoman-Turkish Modernization

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The hypothesis that micro structures are inextricably intertwined in a reciprocal relationship with the macro structures of nation-building forms the basis for utilizing the family as a starting point for examining modernization in Ottoman and Turkish society. The mutual dynamics between micro and macro spheres and power structures underlie the approach advanced by the major theorists of the Frankfurt School<sup>1</sup> as well as by Michel Foucault.<sup>2</sup> When one analyzes changes in family structures as a way to gain further insight into the establishment of power and its legitimization, one should not view the family as a simple reflection of society as conceived of in classical sociology, but rather as an agent within a dynamic social nexus.<sup>3</sup>

Tracing the changes and continuities in family structure offers fresh perspectives for understanding the diverse challenges presented by the modernization project. The family has served as a symbol of continuity as well as an institution of socialization both in the traditional and modern contexts. Nationalist ideology provides a sense of continuity in the face of the uncertainty and ambiguity introduced by the process of modernization. Presenting the new as tradition and the rupture as continuity, nationalism becomes the dominant code that seeps into every part of the modernization process.<sup>4</sup> Nationalism's emphasis on continuity predominates within the family. By presenting the nation as an inclusive family, Turkish primary school textbooks impart an illusion of an of naturalness and immutability to both the nation and the family. The nationalistic discourse, which de-historicizes and fixes the family, either ignores changes sustained by the family or presents them as deviations from its essential characteristics and necessitates intervention allowing the society/nation/family to find its true self. This

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Adorno's *Authoritarian Personality*.

<sup>2</sup> In his major works such as *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault gives us examples of how micro and macro powers are established in their relationships with each other.

<sup>3</sup> For an article that places family and in general the social sexual relations as a variable that forms and is formed by power in the process of modernization, refer to Nükhet Sirman "Kadınların Milliyeti" (*The Nationality of Women*). In *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce, Milliyetçilik*, vol. 4. İletişim Yay.: 226-244.

<sup>4</sup> For the theoretical approach to nationalism that is employed here cf. İnci Özkan Kerestecioğlu, "Söylem ve Olgu Olarak Milliyetçilik," unpublished PhD thesis İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1998.

article explores the transformation of family in the modernization process and its accompanying difficulties and challenges through a variety of literary texts. Moreover, the function of nationalism in this process is defined by referral to the mutual links between gender relationships and the establishment of national identity. The second part of this article evaluates, within the framework of family relations, novels published since the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century.

### *Social Change and Family: Theoretical Analyses*

Traditionally, the family, the neighborhood and the religious institutions of the mosque and madrasah comprised a complementary tripartite structure of socialization by which modes of social behavior were taught and reinforced. Ottoman morality tracts provide insight into the ideology of socialization within the tripartite structure as seen in their constant reference to “compliance,” “waiting one’s turn” and “treating others as one has observed in one’s elders” (Ayni 1939). Modernization, and the consequences of urbanization, industrialization and social mobilization brought about transformations and ruptures in traditional social structures and required the development of the new institutions of socialization. Chief among these developments were schools as the carrier of secular and pragmatic values and the main provider of literacy. With the rise of literacy and education, the press, popular novels, the theatre, and later, the cinema were more effective in conveying different messages and values. It was no longer possible to speak of a single, holistic, non-contradictory discourse and, accordingly, an authority in and of itself. Hannah Arendt’s article in which she suggests that one must not ask what authority is but what it was, is an important text that sheds light on this subject (Arendt 1991: 91-141). Through the fragmentation of the self, the individual is confronted with conflicting pressures, contradictory messages and diverse authorities which compromise the status of the family as an exclusive power center, resulting in changes to the family structure. The literature on modernization defines this change as a transition from the large patriarchal family to the egalitarian nuclear family. This discourse hides patriarchy in modernity and defines the new family as being in harmony with the modern values and opposed to traditionality. Yet, not only is it impossible to speak of an unchanging family, as claimed by nationalists, it is also not possible to refer to a radical change in traditional structures. Patriarchy continues to exist under different forms and motives; the transition from the large family to the nuclear family does not take place automatically nor in a straightforward manner. When viewing Ottoman-Turkish modernization through the lens of the family, one should not assume that it was uniform in its structures, and solely present in the form of the “traditional family,” with its many members, dependency on agrarian structures as a subsistence unit, and conformity to local customs. In fact

there was a great diversity in family structures which generate different results when viewed from the perspective of the effects of modernization. Variables based on regional factors, ethnicity, religion or class give rise to differences in modernization practices. Standing out among these differences is the Ottoman dichotomy of elite family versus that of the commoner. The elite family consisted of a household closely connected with Ottoman officialdom. The typical Ottoman elite family resided in a mansion (*konak*), accommodating servants, female slaves (*hâlayık*) and concubines, the number of which sometimes outnumbered family members by a ratio of three to one. The Ottoman elite were concentrated in urban centers such as Istanbul, Izmir, Thessalonica, Monastir, Trabzon, Diyarbakır, and on a smaller scale, in Kütahya and Konya. Moreover, because of reasons emanating from its religious traditions and local customs, the Muslim Ottoman elite family type was structurally different from that of the elite among Jewish, Armenian and Rum (as in Romaioi/Greek) communities. Since this article looks at changes in the family by referring to the Turkish novel that emerged during the Tanzimat period, the primary concern here will be the transformations of the mansion-type family of Istanbul. Although the mansions which served as the residences of the bureaucrats who put their mark on Ottoman modernization, and Istanbul, the center of the empire and its modernization project, function as an ideal type which allows us to trace this change, they also hinder a deeper and multidimensional analysis of the same phenomenon. Furthermore, the reliability of novels as sources in sociological analyses is open to discussion. With increasing frequency one comes upon studies which attempt to cast light on social and political history through reference to literary texts. This is seen as the most effective way to reach the history of the invisible ones, the subalterns.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, postmodern theory, which emphasizes that reality is a construct and that a single reality discourse is not possible, has turned the social sciences into intertextual relations. I would like to state that I do not necessarily agree with this judgment; on the other hand, I think it is not possible to establish a determinist connection between facts and ideas. However, we can derive conclusions about social developments, through the study of the novels discussed in this paper, since they reveal the world of their authors, who happen to have been the actors in the new socialization process of the second half of the nineteenth century.

### *Some Examples from Ottoman and Turkish Stories*

In the novels appearing in the Tanzimat period, we read about the nation's birth pangs of a new man, a new woman and a new family, the metaphorical dis-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. e. g. Mardin 1974. The works of Jale Parla, *Babalar ve Oğullar* and *Efendilik, Şarkiyatçılık ve Kölelik* can serve as other outstanding examples here.

placement of the traditional with reflecting modern adaptations. In his *Üç Nesil Üç Hayat* (Three Generations, Three Lives), Refik Halit dynamically conveys the transformations taking place in nineteenth-century Ottoman society. In his text we find practical answers to questions regarding the evolution of traditional society, how the new institutions entered Ottoman life and their effects were. As Jale Parla emphasizes in the framework of father-son-house triangle, one finds the stories of how the son, deprived of the absolute authority of his father's guidance, drags himself and the whole house to destruction (Parla 1990). With the "wrong" and "essenceless" modernization, the son, deprived of the communal principles and the guidance of the father, is especially susceptible to its dangers. Foremost among these dangers is his female counterpart: the wrongly modernized woman. What captures one's attention here is that while a man is victimized by wrong modernization, women are presented as perpetrators. In the social practice of gender segregation, where the world of men and women remain separate, encounters between the sexes is characterized by fear, manifested as the fear of women. The partial loss of control over women and the subsequent disintegration of the absolute father's authority turned the woman into a threat within the family. In fact, in most of the important classical Ottoman texts, one finds the interference of the "taife-i nisa"<sup>6</sup> in palace affairs as one of the causes of the Ottoman decline.<sup>7</sup> In a way, being distrustful of women, as seen in the Tanzimat period, had actually been present all along. We could say that with the Tanzimat period, anxiety regarding women left the palaces and the big mansions and spread to the other layers of society. The absence of the authority of the father in the novels from the Tanzimat and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional periods is usually reflected in the absence of the father figure. Families are frequently incomplete; generally the father, but occasionally the mother is missing. The absence of the mother is indicative of the absence of the traditional woman. The girlfriends and mistresses replacing the mother are the main actors in the disintegration of the family, for the father is either a passive puppet without initiative or an irresponsible pleasure-seeker, completely unaware of his duties. Ahmet Mithat Efendi's Felatun Bey and Rakım Efendi, characters in a novel written in 1875, were constructed as the representatives of the modern and the traditional, the West and the East, respectively, and the author left no doubt that his choice was tradition. Felatun Bey was characterized by snobbery, laziness, and wastefulness; at the root of these flaws lay Felatun Bey and his father's extreme admiration for the West, otherwise known as the "passion for the European style." On the other hand, hardworking, frugal and moderate Rakım Efendi, a product of Turkish-Muslim culture (although this did not prevent him from translating French), became rich through the fruits of his own labor. What is interesting here is that

<sup>6</sup> "Taife-i nisa" refers to women, but this term generally has a pejorative meaning.

<sup>7</sup> Lütfi Paşa (a grand vizier of the 16th-century Kanuni period), *Asafname*, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara, no date.

both Rakim Efendi's father and mother were dead. His Arab nanny had raised him by working as a maid; his household also included a concubine. Family thus did not necessarily presume a blood connection; values formed the basis of family ties. Rakim Efendi created his family by clinging to these values and establishing order in his house. Here one sees traces of the belief that saving the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire from disintegration was possible by returning to the old/traditional or, at least, by maintaining the order, to avoid being transformed. In his Young Turk novel, *Jön Türk*, written in 1908, Ahmet Mithat Efendi drew the boundaries that modernization/westernization imposed upon women through his character Nurullah's description of his ideal girl: "middle-class, educated, French-speaking, musically inclined, freed of old ideas but not captivated by new ones." During the Second Constitutional period, in contrast to that of the Tanzimat, although it became accepted that the old ways were never to return, – the new remained vague and undesired.

In Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar's novels *Mürebbiye* (Nanny) and *Metres* (Mistress), written in 1899, one sees the same subject matter: the disaster caused by blind admiration for the West. In both novels, the story is the disintegration of the family, caused in *Mürebbiye* by the "prostitute" Anjel, who is hired as a nanny for the sole reason that she is French, and in *Metres* by the wastefulness and spoiled manner of Parnas' sons. What gets one's attention in these novels is that the threats to the family order (whether Muslim or non-Muslim) always come from outside. While these threats may come from complete foreigners, as in the cases of Anjel and Parnas, they may also come through those who join the family later, as with Bihter in *Ask-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love) and Meveddet Hanım in *Kırık Hayatlar* (Broken Lives) (Uşaklıgil 1900 and 1923). By approaching his subject with empathy and a depth not seen in contemporary works, Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil legitimized the fear of modern women in a very forcible manner. Even good will could not forestall the impulses emanating from woman's nature; the new woman, a danger and threat, brought unhappiness to the family.

Appearing for the first time in the first Turkish novel, *Taaşuk-ı Talat ve Fitnat* (Talat's and Fitnat's Love) (Sami 1872), the critique of the situation of women married through match-making and forced to live dependent on their husbands' will soon came to a deadlock. The search for the new family entered a deadlock crisis as a result of the ambiguity ensuing from confusion over the nature of male-female dialogue and the problem of constructing sexual identities through social roles and functions rather than on sexual relations. This crisis expresses itself in some novels as suicides of the main characters. The desire for resolution and closure results in the suicide of the man/father who lost his authority. In *Acımak* (To Feel Pity, 1928), Reşat Nuri Güntekin narrated Mürşit Efendi's powerlessness as "I was stupefied, my willpower was in a way paralyzed, I was unable to pass decisive judgment" (Güntekin 1997: 107).

How would this man get his power back, free himself from stupefaction, the condition of paralysis, without authority? According to Namık Kemal, the solution was patriotism (Kemal 1872). Advocating the idea that harmony in the family, and thus, in society, could be secured by the authority of the father, Namık Kemal nevertheless constructed this modern father as a friend, guide and teacher. As the enlightened head of the family, the modern father could both reclaim fading traditions as well as symbolize individual and social reinvigoration, thus functioning as the founding element of modern society. Through the reconstitution of paternal authority, one would salvage rapidly disappearing values; through the sentiment of nationalism, one would better control and manage changes in the outside world. In this approach one can see clearly the parallelism between the future of the family and the future of the society. Moreover, by transforming himself into a patriot, the father would realize his new identity by rediscovering and reinterpreting his traditional military virtues. At the same time, this idea of the modern father would form a paradigm for the male role in society.

*In Place of a Conclusion:  
The Alliance Between Patriarchy and Nationalism*

Ottoman patriotism turned increasingly into ethnic nationalism after the Balkan Wars. The new nationalist ideology and the social construction of femaleness and maleness mutually influenced and reinforced each other. Since the Tanzimat period, the direct interference of nationalism – which eliminates the disturbing aspects of the modernization process by making it authentic through naturalizing it – in the female and male identities served to mitigate tension, in general terms, between Westernizers and Islamists. It did this by inventing traditions appropriate for the necessities of modern life on the one hand, and on the other hand by making nationalism permanent, internalized and regenerated in various aspects of life by letting it seep into the daily practices of life beyond its function as a political ideology.

The Independence War offered fertile ground for the consolidation and the legitimization of these new identities. As the nationalist struggle elevated masculinity by redefining it through the soldier figure, it also constructed the boundaries and purpose of the new woman by making her belong not only to the family, but to the nation. Transformed into something that belonged to the whole nation, this woman was constructed as the antithesis of the wrongly modernized cosmopolitan Ottoman woman, the artificial woman of Istanbul, who paid a lot of attention to her looks. The new woman was identified as the Anatolian woman, imagined as simple, with “impeccable chastity” – i. e. pure according to the moral laws/customs of sexual conduct – ready to sacrifice herself for her country. These women, who, as teachers and nurses, educated the nation and alleviated its pain, deserved the right to enter public life through quiet sacrifices and humble hero-

isms. While the woman was identified with the nation, the nation was identified with the woman, and hostility toward this woman was equated with hostility toward the nation. Halide Edip's works are full of such women.<sup>8</sup> In *Vurun Kahpeye* the figure of Aliye, an idealistic teacher who leaves Istanbul to support the war of independence in Anatolia dramatically demonstrates that the enemies of the new woman and the nation were identical, as the reactionaries who were objecting to her work in the small Anatolian town in which she was teaching were the same men who were supporting the alliance of the palace and the occupational forces against the independence movement in Ankara.

Through nationalism, the inconsistent, ambiguous and community-divisive messages of modernization were constructed into a coherent, clear and holistic super-narrative. Although this construct seems convincing in times of war, like the nationalist struggle of Turkey, it is actually fragile and contradictory. One solution to overcome this fragility and contradiction was the construction of the myth of the continuity of family in Turkish modernization. In fact, countless papers submitted to the Family Councils that originated in the 1990s<sup>9</sup> aimed to homogenize the diverse messages coming from schools and mass media, intending to bring about absolute harmony. One such paper, given by Ahmet Uğur, entitled *Taribi Seyr İçinde Türk Aile Yapısından Örnekler* (Examples from the Turkish Family Structure in the Historical Course), discusses the history of Turkish family values extending into the distant past. He defined what was to be done today as "to present to the new generation the values unique to our nation" and explained that the only way to do this is through "joining hands with the mosque, the school and especially TV and the media, securing harmony by hitting the hammer in the same place" (Uğur 1990: 11).<sup>10</sup> Professor Uğur's statements seem to be an extension of the traditional world into the present because they evoke the monist concept of power that was the most common and basic practice during the traditional periods of Ottoman and Turkish society. In the course of modernization, however, this practice, that is, the monist concept of politics, changed its nature from a feature inherent in the structure of traditional society to an emphatically pursued politics that may be termed faschistic to some extent.

<sup>8</sup> Among the many novels of Halide Edip Adıvar, especially see *Raik'in Annesi*, 1910 (The Mother of Raik) *Yeni Turan*, 1912 (New Turan, where "Turan" refers to an imagined Turkish country in central Asia) and *Vurun Kahpeye*, 1923 (Beat the Bitch).

<sup>9</sup> These were official meetings organized on a regular base by the General Directorate of Family and Social Research which is under the supervision of the office of the prime minister.

<sup>10</sup> This kind of approach is not unique to Professor Uğur. While the numerous historians and sociologists who spoke in the Family Councils (the fourth and last one met in 2004) put forward "proofs" showing how the family structure in Turkish society remained unchanged, they, on the other hand, concerned themselves with taking precautionary measures against threats that might change this structure. That the basic procedure in these meetings has not changed despite the changing governments may be taken as an indication of how dominant the "conservative modernization" line has been.

In spite of all longings, searches and nostalgic feelings towards “union,” “unity,” “likeness” and “harmony,” gender identities and, in relation to this, the family structures in Turkey are changing. Since this change has not fully established its own point of view and legitimization yet, there are frequent attempts to solve the problems of modernity, nostalgically, through traditionality. However, a certain aspect of this situation not unique to Turkey but generally intrinsic to the modernization practice is a topic that deserves much more thought: namely, that modernity has been unable to develop its own ethic. If the reason for and effort in developing this ethic starts from settling scores with the dominant modernization practices, the first thing to be recognized in this beginning is that patriarchy, nationalism and militarism are processes that go hand in hand, feeding on one another.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For this topic in general cf. Enloe 2000; for the Turkish context cf. Altınay 2000.

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