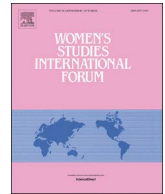


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journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/wsifGendered patterns of higher education in Turkey: Advances and challenges[☆]

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Introduction

Gender equality has been one of the major issues on the agendas of both the European Commission and many EU nation states. Since 1999 the EU has been working towards the goal of achieving equal representation of women in higher education and research (EC, 2010). Two main concerns have been especially emphasized in EU policies and actions: the first is how to improve the very low participation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), while the other is how to make it possible for women to overcome the barriers and resistance that keep them from reaching decision-making levels¹.

The European Union's commitment to achieving better gender results in science has also been demonstrated in Horizon 2020². Among the strongly endorsed measures of Horizon 2020 have been the support for the kinds of structural changes that will promote and provide equal opportunities for women's careers and efforts directed at the integration of gender dimensions in research and innovation content (Sağlamer, 2013).

In contrast with the long and persistent trends in academic gender disparities in Western countries³, Turkey has demonstrably higher

ratios of women participating in scientific research and teaching. According to *She Figures* (2012)⁴, 28% of all (Grade A) professors in Turkey are females whereas women make up only 20% of this category in EU-27. Turkey also has Europe's thinnest Glass Ceiling⁵ with an index figure of 1.1. The distinctive character of Turkey in this respect has been emphasized in a number of studies (e.g. Acar, 1991; Bradley, 2000; Healy, Ozbilgin, & Aliefendioglu, 2005; Kahn, 1994; Oncu, 1981; Ozbilgin & Healy, 2004; Ozcan & Inanc, 2015; Smith & Dengiz, 2010; Ucal, O'Neil, & Toktas, 2015) as well as in the reports published by the European Commission (*She Figures*, 2009, 2012). Cross-national research on gender disparities in tertiary education and academic careers (Bradley, 2000; Charles & Bradley, 2002; Charles & Bradley, 2009; Mason, Wolfinger, & Goulden, 2013; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008) have focused on the probable causes of lower levels of sex-segregation and higher female representation in tertiary education and scientific careers in developing and transition countries compared to more advanced economies. It has been argued that a certain combination of such macro-structural factors as post-industrialism, size of the higher education system, and access to higher education, may have contributed to selecting certain types of women into higher education

[☆] With contributions from: Özge A. Çelik, Seray Ulusoy, Ş. Gözde Yirmibeşoğlu, Meral G. Timurturkan, Tuğçe Tunca, Zahide Acar Deniz, Berrin E. Gültay, Ayşe Sağsöz, Muteber Erbay, Serpil Yazıcı Şahin, Yusuf Gürkan Şahin, Setenay Nil Doğan.

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¹ EU has taken several important steps throughout the years, such as the establishment of the Helsinki Group on Women and Science in 1999, Gender-Watch-System 1998–2002 (FP5), Science and Society Action Plan 2002–2006 (FP6), Excellence and innovation - Gender equality in science (2005), and the Gender Pact (European Council, March 2006). The EC has also been publishing such comprehensive documents on the issue such as the ETAN policy report "Promoting Excellence through Mainstreaming Gender Equality" in 2000. The Women in Science Program (FP6-FP7) has also supported a considerable number of projects on gender equality in higher education and research.

² "Horizon 2020 is the biggest EU Research and Innovation program ever with nearly €80 billion of funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020) - in addition to the private investment that this money will attract, it promises more breakthroughs, discoveries and world-firsts by taking great ideas from the lab to the market." (<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/what-horizon-2020>).

³ For a comprehensive list of citations on the topic please see Caprile et al. (2012).

⁴ *She Figures* published by DG Research and Innovation of European Commission every three years on gender statistics in European higher education and research area.

⁵ The Glass Ceiling Index (GCI) synthetically illustrates the difficulties women have in gaining access to the highest hierarchical levels... A GCI of 1 indicates that there is no difference between women and men being promoted. A score of less than 1 means that women are over-represented at grade A level and a GCI score of more than 1 points towards a Glass Ceiling Effect, meaning that women are underrepresented in grade A positions (*She Figures*, 2012).

and professional occupations (Chang, 2000, 2004; Charles & Bradley, 2009; Charles 2011 in Ozcan & Inanc, 2015). Although the favorable representation of women in higher education and research may give at first sight the impression that the universities are a place of gender equity free from discrimination, in reality academia is not a gender-neutral domain in Turkey. Women's participation, specifically, in the academic management and administrative positions is very low, which indicates the distinct dynamics of the kinds of gendered practices that cause power imbalances between men and women.

Based on a joint project (Network of Female Academics-NETFA) carried out by seven Turkish universities between 2011 and 2013, this paper aims to focus on the present status of gender equality in HE and research in Turkey with a special focus on the academics of this group of universities. The argument is explored by concentrating on barriers and obstacles that women academics face during their academic careers. Providing motivation from contradictions in terms gender equality in Turkey, the body of research data has been utilized to expand the existing knowledge on the gender (dis)parity and career patterns of female academics in various universities in Turkey⁶.

The Turkish context - society and academia

Given Turkey's comparatively low level of academic pay and the associated view that academic work is no longer attractive for men, it has been argued (Healy et al., 2005) that women's success in Turkish academia could be the result of the exodus of men from the profession, consistent with the interpretation by Reskin and Roos (1990) of the feminization of some North American occupations. These studies concluded, however, that Eurostat data do not support this interpretation: academic salaries in Turkey, in terms of purchasing power, are not lower than those in countries with a far lower proportion of women academics (Healy et al., 2005, p.260). It has appeared that strong historical and national forces have served as the main incentives that have led educated women to contribute to the modernization of Turkey; whereas in Europe, the major impetus has come from legislation designed to combat the negative effects of discrimination. Healy et al. (2005) concluded that, as expounded by such gender experts like Koker (1988), Oncu (1981), Acar (1991) and Kandiyoti (1987), this result has been due to the 'state feminism' that grew out of the rupture with the Ottoman Empire in 1923 and the revolutionary changes that served to transform the lives of middle-class women" (ibid. p.258).

In Turkey, women's formal participation in education and employment grew out of the nineteenth century Ottoman modernization projects. In recognition of the important roles played by women in the raising of future generations, the education of women was seen as crucial in the advancement of a modern society and in guaranteeing the kind of harmonious family that can serve as the basis for the prosperity of a nation. "Ottoman reformation projects originated from the assumption that the starting points are the schools" (Tan, 2000, p. 31). Feminists of the late nineteenth century women's movements in the Ottoman state also fought to increase women's access to education and paid work (Koksal & Falierou, 2013).

⁶ Since 2006, an Istanbul Technical University research group working on women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) has been involved as a partner in several FP6 and FP7 projects on gender equality and women in science, such as UNICAFE - Survey of the University Career of Female Scientists at Life Sciences versus Technical Universities, Meta Analysis - Meta-analysis of gender and science research, SHEMERA - Euro-Mediterranean research cooperation on gender and science: SHE Euro-Mediterranean Research Area and FESTA - Female Empowerment in Science and Technology Academia. These projects have revealed a relatively high representation of women in higher education and research in Turkey. Another important observation is related to ITU (Istanbul Technical University) in that, although ITU is a technical university, it has a high female representation among its academic staff. Based on these observations it has been decided to extend the existing research to other Turkish universities so as to draw a more comprehensive picture of gender equality in higher education in Turkey.

In the wake of the First World War, one result of which was the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the newly established (1923) state of the Turkish Republic implemented a series of reforms that prioritized the improvement of the social and political statuses of women. For example, "the adoption of the Turkish Civil Code in 1926, inspired by the Swiss Code, outlawed polygamy, provided equal divorce rights to both partners, and permitted child custody rights to both parents" (Kandiyoti, 1987, p.320). This improvement was followed by the provision of female voting rights in local and national elections, in 1930 and 1934, respectively.

Women's access to education was encouraged and strongly endorsed as a part of the Kemalist Republican Projects of the 1920s and 1930s. Secular education became a central institution of the nation building process in Turkey. With the introduction of educational reforms by the new Turkish Republic, modern, unified, secular and co-educational institutions were established in order to spread education to the masses (Toktas & Cindoglu, 2006). Compulsory primary education required all children to attend primary school (Tan, 2007). In his public speeches, the founder of the nation-state, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), frequently emphasized the importance of gender equality in education. In his words, "Circumstances today require the advancement of our women in all respects. Therefore, our women, too, will be enlightened and learned and, like men, will go through all educational stages." (Acar, 1994).

The encouragement of women coming from elite families towards higher education and professional life during this period was also associated with the need for a large specialized work force. It was argued that the elite preferred women of their class should receive higher education in order to preserve their privileges (Acar, 1991; Koker, 1988; Oncu, 1981).

The newly structured universities, which were designed to reflect the image of 'modern' Turkey in the early Republican era, opened their doors to women as much out of the need to fill the newly created positions as out of eagerness to demonstrate their loyalty to the ideals of modernization (Acar, 1991). Because up until the 1980's the higher education sector consisted entirely of public institutions, the government was able to oversee promotions and basic salaries, thus reducing chances that women would be discriminated against. Under these circumstances the daughters of middle and upper-class urban elite families who identified with Kemalist ideals benefited not only from the material advantages of their social background, which made it possible for them to receive advanced education and often facilitated their pursuit of a career by enabling them to hire household and childcare help, but also from the supportive and legitimizing values of the elite subculture in which they were raised (Acar, 1991; Erkut, 1982; Oncu, 1981).

It was these early Republican policies that supported the influx of well-qualified Turkish women into professions that women have traditionally found very hard to enter in the West. Along with this, the "un-conventional" presence of women in widely disparate fields in academia is also attributed to the early Republican policies. Republican state ideology was positivist; it glorified 'hard' sciences vis-à-vis humanities and social sciences. Women who had been socialized in the elite subculture were thus deliberately oriented towards careers in such fields as natural sciences and mathematics by the dominant ideological discourse particularly in the earlier years (Acar, 1991, p.151 also Oncu, 1981; Koker, 1988). Since the newly established universities did not have as deeply rooted traditions of male supremacy as their Western counterparts, they were much more flexible in accepting female students.

"Women were admitted to the academic professions for the first time in 1932–3, but their larger scale recruitment started in the 1940s" (Koker, 1988 in Acar, 1991, p.147). It was only after the decline in the efficacy of the Kemalist message and its political ethos in the post 1950 period that women's participation in the "non-conventional" area of natural sciences began to noticeably decrease. "Nevertheless, the relative absence of sex-typing of academic fields in Turkish society is an outcome of its heritage" (Oncu, 1981). Kandiyoti (1987) agrees that the emancipation of women was improved parallel to the goals of

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