Chapter 3


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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to explore the ways women are represented in the context of 20th century Turkey by analyzing four poems, namely “Türk Kadını” (Turkish Woman), “Anadolu Kadını” (Anatolian Woman), “Kadın–Ana” (Woman-Mother), and “Ayşe,” published in the Türk Kadını magazine in the 1960s. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of the poems, which were later interpreted with the strategies of descriptive content analysis. In these poems, the Turkish woman is being represented and celebrated in at least the following four ways: (1) by being celebrated for combining heroism, goodness, and naturalness; (2) by having her struggle with primitive conditions of life celebrated as yet another form of heroism; (3) by being celebrated as a creative mother of the nation, charged with finding solutions to the problems of the country; (4) by being celebrated as a hardworking daughter of the nation to whom the country owes recognition and support.

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INTRODUCTION

The Türk Kadını (Turkish Woman) was a monthly magazine of opinion, art and education, published in Turkey between 1966 and 1974. This chapter explores how Turkish women are represented in the 1960s’ Turkey by a detailed study of four poems published in this magazine. The present study departs from the following idea: Although researchers have paid attention to the history of Turkish women and developed general themes and conceptual approaches to them, detailed and vivid historical representations of Turkish women and Anatolian women are still missing. The author of this chapter believes that rich and vivid representations of Turkish women could be fruitfully uncovered from literary sources, such as poetry. Thus, the primary aim of this chapter is to provide and analyse examples of politico-poetic conceptualizations of Turkish women. A secondary aim is to show how literature can contribute to the field of Turkish women’s studies and political theory.

BACKGROUND

In political poetry, politics and poetry can be connected in various ways. One such relation was defined by Percy Bysshe Shelley. In his A Defence of Poetry (1840), Shelley argues not only that poetry is “divine”, but that it “is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought”, and he asks, rhetorically, “What were virtue, love, patriotism, friendship … if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar?” (Shelley, 1840, p. 47). Here poetry is superior to both political and moral beliefs in that it makes these beliefs vivid and relevant to people in a way that purely factual accounts cannot achieve. According to the more contemporary view of David Orr, political poetry is “concerned with a specific political situation; rooted in an identifiable political philosophy; addressing a particular political actor; written in language that can be understood and appreciated by its intended audience; and finally, offered in a public forum where it can have a maximum persuasive effect” (Orr, 2008, p. 415). What both Shelley and Orr have in common is the idea that political poetry works persuasively, bringing “light and fire” to political beliefs. In this chapter, this motivating function of political poetry will be studied and analysed from the point of view of Turkish nationalist ideas concerning the role of Turkish woman.

The poetry of nationalism is a specific form of political poetry, born out of the nationalist ideologies that were born in the aftermaths of the French Revolution. The poets of nationalist movements aim to catch what they believe to be the “spirit” of their nation: “They use its own language to describe its landscape, customs, past,
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