Gendered Space: A New Look at Turkish Modernisation

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Dominant theories of modernisation, both Marxist and non-Marxist, have paid little attention to gender subjectivities even though the concepts such as family, marriage, reproduction and childbearing have occupied an important place in these explanations. The ‘modern’ family is usually defined as nuclear in form, isolated from work, and confined in a separate less secular world. However, such a uniform social entity has obviously been influenced and changed by social and economic forces and this abstract notion of family has rightly been seriously criticised by feminist social historians. It is a perspective that does not reflect the reality of various emerging forms of families, or of the gender and age inequalities within that unit, much less the active role of family members in shaping the processes of modernisation.

These views of the family and its role in the development of modern, national societies have affected the way academic disciplines have been structured and the categories they use. For example, historical demography, which has dominated the study of changes in the birth rate and family size, operates with a set of particular notions about what should and what should not be studied and how it is to be done. According to Alison Mackinnon, in standard explanations of fertility decline the different and often contradictory voices of historical demographers and feminist historians can be heard. While the former focus is on the study of reproduction and regards women as one of a number of variables, the latter emphasises the meaning of love, sexuality and childbearing for both men and women.

Nevertheless, the approach of historical demography, despite a somewhat mechanical explanation of social and cultural events, alerts social historians to the importance of social context. The concentration of historical demographers on issues around reproduction and mortality, issues which inevitably lead to considering gender relations in some form, has meant that mainstream historians could neglect, or even deny their historical relevance. For example, in his Inaugural Lecture as Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge in 1984, G. R. Elton continued to maintain ‘doubts about much of [that] work on children, women and marriage;
sometimes it does not seem overwhelmingly central to one's concerns ... much social history has a charming quality of timelessness. The facts of birth, copulation and death do not alter that much through the ages'.

This splitting off of a crucial element in major historical change has had political and social consequences for many non-Western societies, a way of thinking which can be traced back to the way gender relations, particularly their power dimension, have been silenced within academic disciplines as well as the wider culture. However, in the last decade or so, there have been new insights into issues around the modernisation of non-Western societies which raise more general questions about how gender has operated. Deniz Kandiyoti has made the point that, despite the omission of the gender dimension of modernity within academic disciplines, sexuality, family relations and gender identities were used in local discourses both as products and signifiers of modernity and nationalism in Turkey. Movements for women's emancipation which were often part of or at least linked to both emerging nationalism and modernisation, had to work with whatever categories and understandings were available at the time. In particular there was a certain predetermined view of the division of the public and the private, and the place of the family within this was dominant.

The following empirical case of twentieth-century urban Turkey will try to overcome some of the deficiencies resulting from such a narrow focus by concentrating on changes in daily life throughout the period of modernisation. These changes incorporate the decisive decline in the number of children born and raised by each woman as well as the move to a more urban and industrial environment, both of which were entwined with a cultural turning to a Western model.

In Turkey, the ongoing modernisation process had begun in the late nineteenth century and spread throughout the country after World War II. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of a new nation state in 1923, which marked the foundation of the Turkish Republic, provided further ideological and legal bases for this process. Concern with the family was a central theme of both Ottoman and Republican modernists, although discourses on modernity among all persuasions tended to ignore the importance of gender and class differences. A series of reforms adopted among the urban middle classes were considered the most important factors in the Turkish experience of modernisation. These reforms did include rights for women in terms of formal equality in education, work and political participation with men. These rights have been the focus of gender studies of modernity, which privilege the public domain. The more private experiences around issues such as childbirth and family life have been tucked under the rubric of medical history or, as we have seen above, been left to the historical demographers.

Even within demographic studies of this period there are differing interpretations depending on the orientation of the commentators and the methods they use, an often-unacknowledged difficulty, which has also
plagued attempts to introduce the gender dimension. For example, at the turn of the century Istanbul was a city of about one million inhabitants which, by the time of the first Republican census in 1927, had fallen to 691,000, of which 448,000 were Muslims. The majority of non-Muslims were merchants, bankers or artisans, groups who had relatively more contact with European cultures and hence have been seen as pioneers of westernisation in Istanbul. Considering only Muslim households, we would expect to see the most conservative elements in family life. Yet, contrary to expectations, the 1907 census of Istanbul’s Muslim population shows a pattern of late marriage for both men and women, relatively low fertility and nuclear family households as prevalent. Only a negligible 2.2 per cent of households were polygamous. Despite these census data, the image of Muslim Istanbul families in newspapers and journals of that time stressed ‘orientalist’ features, complaining of early marriages, polygamy and high fertility and advocated late marriage and small numbers of children. Deniz Kandiyoti interprets this contradiction as the desire of modernisers to distance themselves from what was seen as traditional, to create a concept of the ‘other’. ‘They could formulate their vision of the modern family only with reference to an assumed prior state that was defective and in need of reform, regardless of whether the patterns in question actually obtained in their society’. This puzzling contradiction also stems from approaches and sources used by both contemporary commentators and subsequent historians, especially the use of either quantitative or qualitative sources. In Turkish fiction as well as studies of Ottoman everyday life, large extended households living in konaks (mansions) were described as archetypal of Istanbul home life. Yet extended households such as these among the elite and middle class constituted less than one third of the total in the city. The majority at this time were already living in nuclear family set-ups or in what were described as ‘non-family’ households (a telling choice of name in itself), the relatively large size of the latter being due to a high rate of widowhood. Thus the average household size in 1907 was 4.2 people and the total fertility rate 3.85 children.

It is true that in the first half of the twentieth century Istanbul, and perhaps a few other port cities such as Izmir, exhibited radically different social, cultural and demographic patterns from the hinterland. In 1940, for example, while the total fertility rate in Istanbul had declined to 2.4 children, it was around 7.0 children for the whole country. The main shift in childbearing practice, which accompanied rapid urban development, rural transformation and industrialisation, took place only after 1950, and by the late 1990s the fertility rate for the whole of Turkey averages 2.6 children. Although Istanbul’s population has now reached nine million, the average household size in the city is about the same as at the turn of the century. Yet during this period, idealised home life has gradually been transformed from the konak (mansion) type of elite house to the white-collar, middle-class flat. Today throughout Turkey as well as in Istanbul
only a modest proportion of multiple family households is found. These are no longer among wealthy, elite groups, but among lower-middle classes or the poor living in shantytowns. But these, too, consider this as a temporary state, a household strategy made necessary by relative poverty.

Examining changes in the form and interior use of household space together with the interaction of an ideal and daily family life can illuminate the meaning of the family for individuals and its relation to the wider society and state, and avoid the limitations of a narrow focus on birth, marriage and death. Divisions between husbands and wives, children, ‘blood’ relations, servants and others who were included in definitions of family are understood in their literal places. Different disciplines have preferences about using the concepts of family and household. However, neither of these terms have clear definitions in terms of their boundaries. In this study these terms are used interchangeably and it is hoped that the spatial analysis which follows reduces the tension and confusion between the concepts. The form and internal use of household space may include both kin and non-kin members, yet at the same time such an analysis gives important clues about differentiation of members by blood or marriage relations, gender, age and class.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ottoman urban houses had multi-functional rooms based on gender segregation. The living room where ‘back-stage’ living was carried out was called the harem and was also used for sleeping, eating and cooking. Female guests were entertained in these rooms, for the harem was a women’s space and these quarters were closed to male guests. Men of the family could enter this room to rest, eat or be with their women in the family, but only when there were no other women present. Men’s living space was the selamlık, a room where they ate their food apart from women and children and where they entertained male visitors. At night, the selamlık would also be used as a sleeping room. This room was better furnished than others in the house and was always kept in order. Women were not allowed in this room when the men were at home except to carry out domestic services. Boys up to age twelve lived together with women in the harem but then acquired rights to move into the selamlık, which became a sign of their manhood, while girls remained in the harem. Note that circumcision ceremonies for the boys were organised around this age as a requirement of Islam and afterwards they could no longer go to the public baths with their mothers. These spatial demarcations symbolise the way gender segregation was based on unequal rights, a clear material marker of men’s dominant position.

However, it should be kept in mind that these were the households of the elite with hierarchies of status as well as gender and age. They were always staffed with a retinue of servants, paid and unpaid. No detailed statistics about the servants in Ottoman households exist although fiction writers and historians discussed their abundance. Ubucini claimed that there were one and a half million servants in the country in 1851. According to
him, in Istanbul alone there were 52,000 domestic slaves and the number of free servants was not less than 40,000; altogether they constituted about one third of the Muslim population living in the town. It was the privilege of Ottoman Muslim households to use both black and white slaves in domestic work, whereas non-Muslims could only use free servants. Successive attempts to ban the slave trade were effective in reducing the number of slaves by the end of the nineteenth century. Orphan and/or poor peasant girls who were taken into urban middle-class households in the name of ‘protection’ and ‘goodwill’ gradually replaced the former domestic slaves. The young women were called evlatlıks, which literally means ‘adopted daughters’. During the years of successive wars and political turmoil (1911–22), many orphans were used as evlatlıks, and in later years this practice became institutionalised through the illegal purchase of peasant girls among middle-class households. This practice was banned, along with a general anti-slavery law, only in 1964. In fact, the use of residential servants began to fade away during these years as well. Living-in waged servants had higher status than evlatlıks since the former often had an urban background. European servants and, to some extent, native non-Muslims such as Greeks, Armenians and Jews as servants, were genuine status symbols in elite households. The combination of slaves, wage servants and evlatlıks would be found in these households, each having a different function, not only in terms of service but also as indicators of the household’s social rank.

In such a situation, the mistress of the house did not actually participate in housework but was in charge of managing the establishment generally and directing the actual housework. Male servants acted as cooks, gardeners or coachmen. But those in charge of cleaning, washing and caring were women. The use of space in these houses was arranged to minimise contact between male servants and female members of the household. For example, male servants slept and took their free time in the basement or in a detached building in the garden. Food was delivered on ‘dumb waiter’ elevators or served only by women servants. But the servants themselves were divided by status levels. Experienced slaves were the most trusted and often had power over the other servants, that is young slaves, evlatlıks or waged servants. The spread of evlatlık practice among the middle-class households effected the decline of their status. After all, they were young peasant girls and either free or cheaper than any other type of servant labour.

Domestic work in this period, even within living memory, was hard, labour intensive and unrelenting. Technological developments in home appliances and housing were primitive in the early twentieth century. Running water and electricity were rare, central heating systems even more so. Under these circumstances, domestic help was vital in maintaining comfort as well as social standing. Ideally the harem, or separate kitchen if there was one, would be large enough to let more than one woman work at the same time. In households where there were no domestic servants,
female family members shared domestic responsibilities. Daughters were extensively involved in housework, while close or even distant female relatives either stayed with the family or regularly came to visit to help in domestic work and childcare.

Under these circumstances, a division of labour accompanied by status differentiation among the women in the household was inevitable. This was reflected in the spatial use of the house. There were set rules about who was allowed to do what and who was working, resting or sleeping where, who could go out, and who controlled supplies of food and cleaning materials, through devices such as keeping the keys to the cellar or store cupboards. The use of time also denoted status, for housework was an unending activity throughout the day, and time to spend outside the house was limited for both mistress and servants. Above all, women’s place was seen as at the heart of the house. This meant that despite the dominant position of men, women’s labour was both visible and important. Such unremitting bustle of housework indirectly limited the time adult men spent at home. Much of their daily lives was spent outside, at work, with friends in coffee-houses, or somewhere else, even after their formal work was over.

Gradually, the lifestyles associated with European cultures were welcomed by elite circles and among upper-middle-class, non-Muslim families, the first to make use of flats. During the Republican period in particular, officers and civil servants perceived the adoption of Western lifestyles as an indication of loyalty to the new political system. However, Istanbul households took up the use of Western furnishings in a rather eclectic and piecemeal fashion. Armchairs were the first to be adopted and were put, as might be expected, into the most public room, the masculine *selamlık*. Soon such features became widespread status symbols for upper-middle and middle-class households. However, the adoption of dining tables took longer, for the traditional order of the house did not change radically with just the adoption of armchairs in the *selamlık*. Household members did not have to sit in these armchairs, which were mainly used for guests, and it was difficult to shift dining habits, learned in childhood, which involved eating while sitting on the floor or off portable mats.

At first, too, bedsteads were put into the *selamlık* and were mainly for honorific purposes only. They were clearly meant to make public a certain status. For example, Duman mentions that he and his brother used the iron bedstead in their *selamlık* during their circumcision feast. When his mother had consumption, she was isolated from the rest of the household in the *selamlık* and, again, used the iron bedstead. Aside from such special occasions, the bedstead was used for guests. It is still possible to find iron beds in reception rooms in provincial cities or in villages in Turkey. Ultimately, the spread of iron bedsteads led to the new departure of using a specialised ‘bed room’ for husband and wife.

Such homely shifts in daily life were obvious manifestations of profound changes which came with the establishment of the Republic and increased...
contacts with the West in the 1920s and 1930s. In particular, Turkish women began to be recognised in the public sphere, a move that had been one of the deliberate aims of the reformers. New laws on education, participation in economic and political life and inheritance rights, which aimed to redress gender inequality, were some of the formal measures which had been taken. Despite these efforts, women’s participation in public activities was still limited. The educational level of women, even among the middle and upper-middle strata was low and through the 1950s their participation in the waged economy was circumscribed. There were few women to be seen on the streets, in parks or in recreation centres. Nevertheless, it should not be claimed that upper- and middle-class women were uninterested in the westernisation movement. They showed their enthusiasm about the construction of the ‘new society’ through changes in their role, through being ‘modern’ housewives and in the reordering of their houses.

One reflection of such changes was the transformation of the harem to the oturma odası or living room and the selamlık to the misafir odası or reception room. This change was not only semantic: the selamlık, which had been strictly for men only and a symbol of relations of the household with the outer world, opened its doors to women. Husband and wife together received their guests in the reception room during the evenings. During the day, when men were out at work, women regularly organised kabul günü or Reception Days in these rooms. Such Reception Days acted as schools for modernisation for middle-class women. Manners, fashion, child-rearing practices and relations among spouses were discussed at these occasions. In the first few decades of the Republican era, participation of these women in a form of public sphere was mainly limited to such Reception Days. Thus the room which had been the central masculine domain became a window opening onto the outer world and a path for middle-class women to begin moving into a species of public life.

Reception Days differed from informal and intimate neighbourhood and familial relations. They had an official atmosphere in which women often did not bring their children and dressed in their best outfits. The Western furniture, such as armchairs and occasional tables, were not yet an internalised part of their culture and seemed to be even physically uncomfortable. This gave the feeling of being in a public place where the room was a showcase for the household and family. 22 For these rooms were not open to daily use. On the contrary, they were kept clean for guests, the doors closed to daily family activities. (In those houses without central heating this had a practical as well as symbolic function.) While the existence of such mixed reception rooms led to a closer relationship between husband and wife, it tended to exclude other household members, especially children. There were also still many men to be found in coffee-houses, on the streets or in other venues, but now husbands spent more time with their wives in visiting and accepting friends as couples in their homes.
The harem, too, had been replaced by the multi-purpose living room. Here the family came together for everyday occasions, when they ate meals, or rested during the day, and children studied or played. At night children and other relatives might sleep in the living rooms. These changes also led adult men to spend more time at home and with their family; for example they no longer ate their meals apart. Brothers and sisters in the family became closer, for now girls, too, went to school and some of the blatantly unequal treatment they received was modified.

Despite these changes, during these first decades of the Republic, although service personnel changed somewhat, the organisation of housework did not alter radically. The use of domestic slaves in elite households did disappear and paid household workers were used more widely. This was partly due to an increase in the supply of such labourers, especially in the cities. In a 1920 survey of widows in Istanbul, it was discovered that, among Muslims, almost 50 per cent said they worked as servants, cooks or laundry women, among Armenians and Jews around 50 per cent, and 75 per cent among Greeks. In this period, too, the use of evlatlıkswas still common. Army officers also benefited from having soldiers who did domestic work as orderlies. Such practices provided extra free domestic help and it may be argued that the spread of Western household practices could only have been established on the basis of such supplementary labour.

The first blocks of flats had been constructed several decades earlier at the turn of the century and among non-Muslim upper-middle-class families gave a prestigious address in offering a Western lifestyle. Then again, the house porters, which every block kept, were an additional communal, and hence cheap, form of domestic labour. But such flats were not widespread until the 1930s and the majority still lived in two-storey houses with gardens. Middle-class housewives who had already accepted a modern lifestyle with the use of reception rooms now aspired to living in a flat, for this was taken as the outstanding indicator of modern living. A flat meant the privilege of living in a modern part of the city with people of similar advanced views. At the beginning there was no possibility of owning a flat. Ownership meant having bought the whole apartment building, which cost more than having a mansion, so that renting became the only alternative for middle-class households wanting this type of accommodation. In practical terms flats made housework easier and they usually included purpose-built larger reception rooms now called salons, especially when the dining table and chairs were placed there. The typical older reception room had not been big enough for a dining set and ideally the dining area should be separated from the living space with a door or at least a folding screen.

These blocks of flats were only built gradually, spurred by laws on flat ownership and housing cooperatives. But as they became more widespread their prestige gradually eroded, for mass migration from rural to urban areas had begun in earnest from the 1950s. The housing needs of the
poorer migrants were only met through self-help in the form of shantytowns at the city’s margins. Low-quality blocks of flats were constructed by private building firms for sale or rent and began to be the prototypical middle-class home whose showcase was the salon. The remainder of the flat – two or three bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom and Turkish-style lavatory – was small and carelessly designed. Builders aimed to fit as many flats as possible onto a given parcel of land so that tiny, dark working rooms were ignored.

At the same time, the mistress of the house began to undertake most household tasks on her own. Cheap domestic labour in the form of evlatlıks was disappearing. Now only the wealthiest upper-class families could afford resident servants. This change was connected to the decrease in numbers of children per family as well as in attached relatives and others living in the household.\textsuperscript{25} Housewives were confined to spending most of their day alone in these dark, small kitchens and bathrooms, while housework began to be more time-oriented. It became important to start the work after the men left the flat and finish it before they came home. Thus domestic labour lost both its communal form and visibility.

The contrast in these women’s lives between the modernity they lived out in their large salons and the confining, unhealthy conditions of drudgery they worked under in back rooms reflects the double standards of industrial society towards women in these strata. By the end of the twentieth century some of these women have made arrangements which lessen these tensions. Changes in lifestyle, technology and architecture have reduced the time and effort of domestic work. After 1950, refrigerators and washing machines appeared in middle-class flats and houses. This has led to a moderate increase in the size of kitchens and bathrooms in new flats, while in the old, changes could be made; for example balconies were enclosed to extend kitchen or bathroom or storage spaces and the old servants’ rooms were gradually converted. Housewives had to improvise by, for example, using the old Turkish-style lavatories for storing cleaning utensils. As central heating gradually increased, fetching coal and wood, dealing with dirt and dust, decreased, and more of the existing space could be used, even in cold weather.\textsuperscript{26}

Today it is rare to find closed-door reception rooms or salons in middle- and upper-middle-class houses or flats. There is much less distinction between front- and back-stage activities. With fewer children in a family, there has been more concern for their overall well-being as well as education, which has been reflected in their use of household space. Giving separate rooms for each child started to be seen as important for personality development and individuality, so that keeping the salon only for visitors began to seem irrational and back-stage living rooms began to be converted to children’s rooms. These changes in use of space both reflected and were incentives to the markedly lower birth rate in this generation. The emergence of TV sets as a central item in family life in the 1970s was
also effective in opening the door of salons for daily use by all. This change also indicated a more complete adoption of Western furnishings as the pretentious but uncomfortable furniture of the previous era was replaced.

The significance for women of the new salons was changing. They no longer functioned as a ‘school for modernisation’, a kind of women’s public space. For now there were more women going outside the home, onto the streets and with various contacts in public life. Women had become almost totally responsible for daily shopping and they took an active role in voluntary associations. They had begun to make regular contact with educational and health institutions for their children and other family members. Above all, more urban middle-class women were employed in the formal economy.27

Such increased contact with the outer world has lessened the significance of the former ‘Reception Day’, which gradually changed its form and name. Women now have ‘meetings’ which are informal and friendly. But evening entertainment has also altered. In the past people used to send messages to their neighbours, friends or relatives when they wanted to pay a visit. A child, acting as messenger, would trot round to the designated person’s home and announce ‘my parents would like to visit this evening if it is convenient’. Now the mistress of the house decides when and who may visit the family and then the salons can be prepared for guests.

Spatial indicators of masculine hegemony still exist in many homes, but the power of the selamlık has transmuted to dad’s chair in the salon, although in upper-middle-class homes a study room for his use may be annexed to this main living room. Often the home life of the male household head is limited to the salon, the master bedroom and, if there is one, his study, and these rooms are decorated with great care. While there is thus still a modified form of the husband/father’s prerogatives, the hierarchy between generations is now less than in the immediate past. Nevertheless, the largest room in the flat is no longer the back-stage ‘living room’ but the parental bedroom which often is the setting for an impressive bedroom suite. Others in the household, notably children, have very small rooms but these are now seen as their own space where they study and play as well as sleep. In this way they now have less contact with the adult family members in the salons. A woman who was recently asked about the use of household space recounted the transition from having a closed-door reception room to a salon:

When we were living in a two story wooden house I used to feel guilty that I could not give separate rooms to my children. I wanted to move to a flat for that reason. I hoped that all the family would gather in the salon and watch TV together. The day we moved to our new flat the children retired to their rooms. My husband and I were so lonely in the big salon. I was so sorry that I cried.28
As far as domestic labour goes, the main source now is hiring cleaning women by the day or hour. A 1990 survey of Istanbul reveals that at least half of middle- and upper-middle-class families use such help. Moreover they often also have modern household appliances. Yet women are still responsible for the management of the housework and are still often alone in their kitchen. Undoubtedly this development of household technology, accompanied by shifts in the design of new flats, has gradually benefited women’s lives. Usually the kitchen will now be put adjacent to the salon, for example. Until recently, another common complaint had been the cramped dimensions of the kitchen. The size did increase with the widespread use of refrigerators and modern ovens but there was no space available for dishwashers, which came into use in the 1980s. Dishwashers were the new status symbols of that period, but at the same time their contribution to lessening housework was revolutionary and they also helped to keep the kitchen clean and orderly.

In new blocks of flats the deployment of kitchen and bathroom furniture is an important selling point used by builders. New kitchens are elegant and large enough for even a dining table to be placed. Such rooms have gained new functions as places to eat and even chat. In small older flats, the wall between the kitchen and salon may be demolished and the so-called ‘American type’ salons with kitchen included are formed. In such rooms family members share more housework tasks and once again women’s domestic labour becomes more visible. While women are working in the kitchen they can talk with their husbands and children or watch television. The menu, too, has changed in these open-plan kitchens. Traditional Turkish food, which requires much time and expertise to prepare and in the frying creates smells and the mess of spitting fat, is no longer as popular. Easy to prepare, ready-made meals, and for some people the search for ‘healthy food’, have come to be preferred by many. These changes mean that other family members can take over at least parts of meal preparation. While status and health reasons combined with the decline in supplies of cheap labour have contributed to the new patterns, the main impetus has come from women who are working in paid employment. Working women tend to use modern household appliances and like open-plan houses more than women who are full-time housewives. It may be claimed that working outside of the home has legitimised these women’s efforts to alleviate the tensions in their lives between front-stage middle-class lady and back-stage household drudge.

Another and related dimension of contemporary, more informal, upper-middle-class culture is the way visitors are now allowed to see various parts of the flat or house. In the Ottoman period, male and female visitors could only see the selamlık and harem respectively, while in the first decades of the Republican period both men and women guests were invited into the reception room. Today visitors can go from kitchen, bathroom and children’s rooms to almost every corner of the house. Indeed, giving a house
tour to newcomers is customary. It may be argued that opening both the living space and the lifestyle of the family to general view can have a positive effect on a woman’s position in both her family and society at large.

The relationship of women, men and children to living space in flat or house has changed along with basic shifts in social structure and culture. But such a relationship is complicated and the changes are by no means linear. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the characteristics of a house or flat may have positive or negative impact on women’s identity and differ markedly according to class position. Here the direction of change has been reviewed in connection with the urban middle- and upper-middle-class use of household space, for these were the groups which controlled general taste and set standards, particularly through advertising and the press. Rural houses which showed great variations by geographical location as well as socio-economic factors are not studied here.

The general separation of public and private domains characteristic of a society shifting to an industrial and urban base did not necessarily help women to develop their identity. But it has led to the elimination of much gender segregation in the spatial use of housing and has been intimately linked to reforms in the name of women’s emancipation, not least the substantial gain in health, energy and time as a result of the decline in the birth rate. Nevertheless, the double standard of modern society that expects a woman to be a ‘lady’ outside the home and still something of a servant within it remains.

Even such a brief excursion into the daily lives and use of space in a specific, local setting can give insights into much wider questions which are often lumped together under the rubric of modernisation. It also takes on board a particular facet of this process; that is, the narrower aim of demographic historians’ efforts to explain the fall in the birth rate, which has so often been based solely on quantitative measures. Both of these endeavours have been seriously flawed in their neglect of gender relations. Going to the level of such a ‘microcase’, which can then be recontextualised to build up a larger picture, gives a novel perspective on gender relationships themselves. When combined with a variety of other such studies, the single case may be woven into a more convincing picture, one which is genuinely inclusive.

While women played the main part in this drama of household transformation, the ideas and practices around men’s expectations were always the foil against which the drama was played. The households examined here were lived in by men as well as women. Their changing configurations had as much to do with interpretations of masculinity as of femininity. For, from the modern transformation of a non-Western society and the building of a nation state, to the deepest level of reproductive beliefs and behaviour, to major shifts in the meaning of work and composition of the labour force, admitting the powerful role of gender construction and identity confronts historians in coming to grips with major changes on a world-wide scale.

Notes

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2. Davidoff et al., The Family Story.


8. Duben and Behar, Istanbul Households.


10. Duben and Behar, Istanbul Households.


15. This rather late circumcision tradition which is used as a passage to manhood for boys may have been inspired by the age of menarche of girls.


17. Duben and Behar, İstanbul Households.


25. Özbaγ, ‘Türkiye’de Aile ve Hane Yapısı’.


