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Book Review

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Women Politicians of İzmir from Republic to Present Day
Edited by Gülnur Erciyes
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In most of the countries in the world and in Turkey as well, gender equality is recognized as a fundamental development objective and as one of the key principles underlying the democratization processes. In Turkey, women gained the right to vote in local elections in 1930. On the other hand, women's suffrage in Turkish national elections was granted in 1934 earlier than most of their European counterparts. Despite to their acquired rights, today women experience a representation crisis in Turkey. According to 2015 Global Gender Gap Index of World Economic Forum, rated as the 130th among 145 countries, Turkey with 14% of women's representation in the Parliament and %2.86 in local governments remains below the average European, American, Pacific, African countries and is close to the average of the Middle East and Arabic Countries.

In this context, the book "Women Politicians of İzmir from Republic to Present Day" is a product of a qualitative research on the gendered experiences of women politicians of İzmir throughout the history of Turkish Republic. The scope of questions involves; which women do enter politics, the challenges they face both in private and public sphere during this process; and how/do they engender the political agenda in local and national political sphere from a gender sensitive perspective. This study is distinguishing for two reasons; the research technique and the research sample.

Firstly, this research employs qualitative techniques. Specifically, oral history technique is the most proper technique for obtaining undistorted and first hand data, which cannot be found in written resources. In this context semi structured interviews conducted with women who has performed or is still performing actively in national or local level politics as mayors or parliament members.



Secondly, the sample, İzmir being the third most populous metropolitan city after İstanbul and Ankara situated on the Aegean Coast is called most modern and “European style” city of Turkey. In terms of gender equality in public sphere, with the level of schooling and employment İzmir has relatively higher ratios in comparison to Eastern parts of Turkey. However, the results of this research confirm once again that the women’s presence in public sphere is conditioned by their experiences in private sphere, namely traditional/ patriarchal culture.

Accordingly, traditional/patriarchal approach of gender-division of labor is existent in Turkey and therefore this socially given gender roles of women obstruct their political participation. The family, that is taken as the ‘main living field of women’ is considered to be outside politics. The role relegated to women or her social responsibility has always been confined to private sphere or namely to the household in Turkey.

On the other hand findings of the research show that even though the political criteria for political participation of women and men seem equal, the qualities expected for women remain higher than men. Having higher education, knowing at least two languages, coming from a ‘known’ or a “wealthy” family are some informal criteria for women’s involvement in politics.