The Metamorphosis of Turkish Gender Roles: From *The Book of Dede Korkut* to a Girl's Dream in *The Rainbow*

Nazan Yıldız
Department of English Language and Literature, Karadeniz Technical University
Kanuni Campus, Trabzon, 61080, Türkiye
Email: nyildiz@ktu.edu.tr

Abstract Masculinity and femininity are unremitting subjects of literature from Plato's *Symposium* to the present. Embracing diverse gender roles by individuals in line with their sex, masculinity and femininity are a part of the cultural accumulation of societies and their concomitant traditions. These roles, which particularly catch the interest of sociologists, psychologists, feminist authors, and cultural scientists, play a crucial role in the cultural memory of societies. Femininity and masculinity regulate the behaviour of all individuals and their accompanying demeanours are acknowledged as behavioural patterns in society which place gender roles at the centre. Despite the growth of academic interest in gender culture in Turkey, the perusal of the transformation of gender roles delineated in literary texts remains largely ignored. This study examines two Turkish cult classic texts, *The Book of Dede Korkut*- redounding the ancient Turkish society before the advent of Islam- and Ömer Seyfettin's *The Rainbow*—sketching contemporary Turkish society just before the establishment of the Republic— to throw light on the radical transformation of gender roles by specifically centring on the change of Turkish masculinity from a shared sphere welcoming women to its realm to a private domain having almost no room for women mainly due to religious values and nation-building process.

Keywords masculinity; femininity; Turkish gender roles; *The Book of Dede Korkut; The Rainbow*.

Author **Nazan Yıldız** received her Ph.D. degree with her thesis entitled "Hybridity in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*: Reconstructing the Estate Boundaries" from the English Language and Literature Department at Hacettepe University, Türkiye, in 2015. She holds a certificate in critical thinking skills from the American

English Institute, University of Oregon. She has national and international publications and papers. Her main areas of interest are Medieval English Literature, Chaucer, Old English Literature, the English Novel, Gender and Women's Studies, Colonial-Postcolonial English Literature, and Critical Thinking and Literature. She is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Karadeniz Technical University, Türkiye.

Introduction

Laying eyes on Turkish society from the past to the present, it is observed that the roles of males and females have changed. These roles, whose paths once crossed, later opened up to two different worlds that were almost completely separated. The position attributed to women in society, and the perspective on gender difference are at the forefront of this root-and-branch change. The notion of femininity and masculinity has been largely examined by scholars encompassing studies on Muslim men and women which predominantly cradle Arab cultures, South Asia, and the Middle East involving Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, India, and Iran, among other countries.[1] Turkey occupied a small place in these studies. Turkey, as a Muslim democratic country spreading between Europe and the Middle East, possesses a peerless position regarding gender roles that entails a special study apart from other Muslim countries. In the Turkish context, it can be easily argued that academic studies on gender focus on femininity and women's studies rather than masculinity, a relatively new research field in Turkey.[2] In this study, the transformation of Turkish femininity in relation to masculinity is scrutinised to offer a new point of view on gender studies and the relationship between masculinity and femininity, specific to Turkish gender roles. By doing so, this study aims twofold: first, to contribute to gender studies in Turkey; and second, to increase the visibility of Turkish gender studies on international grounds. In order to feature the transfiguration of gender roles in Turkey, two Turkish cult classic texts, *The Book of Dede Korkut* (*Dede Korkut Hikâyeleri*) (written down in the 15th century) which depicts the ancient Turkish

1 See, among others, Soha Abdel Kader, *Egyptian Women in a Changing Society, 1899-1987* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 1987) and Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

2 Among a small number of works, compared to women's studies, on masculinity studies in Turkey, there are Serpil Sancar's *Erkeklik: İmkansız İktidar: Ailede, Piyasada ve Sokakta Erkekler* (*Domination and Masculinity: Men in Families, Market and Streets*) İstanbul: Metis Publishing, 2009; the special issue "Masculinity" of *Toplum ve Bilim Dergisi* (*The Journal of Society and Science*) vol. 11, Fall 2004. *Masculinities: A Journal of Culture and Society* should be also mentioned.

society before Islam, and *The Rainbow* (*Eleğimsağma*) by Ömer Seyfettin (1917) which paints modern Turkish society right before the proclamation of the Republic, are analysed respectively. The study discloses how Turkish masculinity switches from a shared sphere encircling women to a private domain, not including them chiefly on account of the religious values and nation-building process. The study displays how male and female gender roles, whose paths crossed in ancient Turkish society, have evolved in almost different directions in modern Turkey in the recent Republican era as shown in the literary realm.

Masculinity Sphere as A Shared Space in Ancient Turkish Society

The origins of the masculine role are grounded on a scientific doctrine of innate gender difference taking a stance against women's emancipation. In the nineteenth century, the exclusion of women from universities and the assertions that the female mind was too sensitive to handle the difficulties of academic work emerged in this context, Raewyn, W. Connell argues (Masculinities 21).[1] The mainstream of academic thought on gender took a newfangled route with the escalation of the concept of social role in the 1930s. The notion of a socially provided scenario for individual behaviour first learned and then played out was easily applied to gender. By the 1940s, the terms "male role" and "female role" began to be used (Connell, *Gender and Power* 29–32). Notwithstanding the radical changes in the position of Turkish women especially on legal, political, and economic grounds owing to the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, Turkey can be still recognised as a male-dominated country adhering to the gender roles which foreground patriarchal norms placing women in the domestic sphere, justifying Deniz A. Kandiyoti's renowned claim: Turkish women are set free but unliberated (317).[2] Turkish culture today promotes traditional gender roles[3] assigning males an active public space as breadwinners whereas attributing females a passive private space as caretakers of home and family. Through imitation, boys and girls learn to live in those spaces since, Harris points out, they come "to acquire, to value, and to adopt gender-appropriate behaviour patterns" (37). This imitation takes us to the constant construction of gender roles underscoring that being a male or a woman is not a fixed condition, echoed in the revolutionary French feminist Simone de Beauvoir's

1 See also Connell's article "Theorizing Gender," *Sociology,* vol. 12, 1985, pp. 260–272.

2 All Turkish sources used in the article were translated by the author.

3 Ayşe Gül Altınay and Yeşim Arat, *Violence against Women in Turkey: A Nationwide Survey* (Istanbul: Punto, 2009); Saniye Dedeoğlu and Adem Yavuz Elveren, *Türkiye'de Refah Devleti ve Kadın* (*Welfare State and Women in Turkey*) (İstanbul: İletişim Publications, 2012).

well-received phrase: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (273) As Cornell puts it, even though women's and men's positions are not basically similar, "the principle is also true for men: one is not born masculine, but has to become a man" (*Gender in World Perspective* 6). The behaviour patterns of these constructed roles point to patriarchal social values as well as hegemonic masculinity, a term of Connell, which comprises men's dominance over women alongside the power of some men over other men[1], designating gender inequality as an unrelenting concern. However, an exploration of ancient Turkish society specifies that women were together with men in almost every field away from the polarization of men and women in completely distinct spheres.

The never-ending woman question that cannot be deciphered even today was not an issue in ancient Turkish societies, which can be deduced from Turkish mythology, too. The women were the major figures, blessed beings with supernatural powers in Turkish mythological stories and embodiments of fire, water, light, earth, and tree as the springs of existence. To exemplify, in the Turkish "Creation Myth," the White Mother, who lives in water, takes her head out of the water and says to God Ulgen, "If you want to create, say this holy word as a creator, say 'I did it, it's done'. Don't say anything else, don't say 'I did it, it didn't work" (Ögel 433) and disappears in the waters. In traditional Turkish belief, it is a woman who inspired God Ulgen to create. Accordingly, in ancient Turkish societies, women were respected individuals treated equally with men in every sense.[2] They shared similar roles with men and took on the responsibilities associated with the masculine/public sphere today. As an illustration, women took part in state affairs

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1 Similarly, Denton, in *Feminism and Gender Equality*, states that gender roles are formed by the patriarchal structure but negatively affect men as well as women. Within the framework of these roles, men, who are expected to be dominant and not show their emotions, may have mental disorders and be prone to domestic violence and even suicidal tendencies (2021, 6). That is, gender roles and related issues are as relevant to men as to women. Thereby, extensive research is carried out on masculinities, fatherhood, men's movements, male violence, education of boys, men's health, and the contribution of men to gender equality. These studies include, among others, *Feminism and Men: Reconstructing Gender Relations* (1998) by Steven Schacht and Doris Ewing, New York: New York University Press; *Masculinities* (2005) by Robert W. Connell, California: University of California Press; *Masculinities and Place* (2014) edited by Andrew Gorman-Murray and Peter Hopkins, Burlington: Ashgate; *Language and Masculinities: Performances, Intersections, Dislocations* (2015) by Tommaso M. Milani, New York: Routledge, and *Working with Men for Gender Equality* (2019) by Caroline Sweetman, Rugby: Practical Action Publishing.

2 Mehmet Akif Aydın, *Türk Hukuku Tarihi* (*The History of Turkish Law*) (İstanbul: Beta Publications, 2009).

alongside men, and orders were signed in the name of Khatun, the wife of Khan, as well as Khan (Şimşek 17-18). Ziya Gökalp states that in ancient Turkish society, women had a political influence as well as participated in wars. According to Turkish custom, when an order was to be declared, if it was announced as the Khan was commanding, this order would have no effect. For the orders to be valid, it was essential to declare that the Khan and the Khatun were commanding. What is more, ambassadors could come to visit the Khan when the Khan and the Khatun were together which means that in ancient Turkish society, the state revealed its authority when the Khan and the Khatun were together (46).

The reputation of ancient Turkish women in society is documented by foreign scholars, too. Franz Altheim, to name a few, remarks that women in the ancient Turkish community were free, and since the Asian Huns, they rode horses and shot arrows, played heavy sports such as ball playing and wrestling, and participated in wars (41). In his memoirs, Ibn-i Batuta notes: "Among the behaviours I have seen in this country, which has surprised me, is the extreme respect that men show to women. Turkish women walk around with their faces uncovered, they do not shy away from men, they shop in the markets. When you see ladies with their men, sometimes you assume men are their servants" (qtd. in Gömeç 73). The fact that women shot arrows, used swords, and rode horses like men is an indication of their presence in the male domain. Parallel to this fact, examining male and female roles in *The Book of Dede Korkut*, it is grasped that women share gender roles with men in ancient Turkish society, which turns Turkish masculinity into a joint sphere apportioned to females.

Turkish Gender Roles in A Joint Sphere in *The Book of Dede Korkut*

Analogous to Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (411 BCE), and Plato's *The Republic* (380 BCE), *The Book of Dede Korkut* sketches women in the sphere of men, having a say in major administrative decisions and equal opportunities to protect the family and country. *The Book of Dede Korkut*, an anonymous pre-Islamic epic telling of the traditional lifestyle, customs, and traditions of the Oghuz Turks in the east of Anatolia between the 12th to 14th centuries (Özel 55), belongs to oral tradition and was probably written down in the middle of the 15th century (Meeker 231). The Oghuz was one of the major divisions of the Turkic peoples and the ancestors of the Turks of Turkey as both the Seljuks and the Ottomans were the offspring of the Oghuz (Eleonora 135). F. Ferhan Parlak signifies the stature of *The Book of Dede Korkut* for the Turkish world as such: *The Book of Dede Korkut* describes the traditions, morals, beliefs and customs, wars and entertainments

of the Turks, in short, the ancient Turkish life with all its vitality. It is one of the most important sources on the history of Turks (i). In the text, the female sphere is not only identified with home but, as Senay Eray Sarıtaş accentuates, it is coded with heroism, mainly peculiar to the male sphere, within the framework of the Alp woman (1957). Alp, a word denoting hero, valiant, and fearless that was primarily employed by the ancient Turks, was applied to women in addition to men. The principal pillar of family life was also considered to be the Alp woman of the Turkish world, who was characterized as a woman riding horses, firing arrows, and fighting for her community (Koman Parlak 95). Turkish women demonstrated bravery during battle by fighting with their men and exercising like men do, such as riding horses, shooting arrows, and wrestling. Women had to be as strong, courageous, and warlike as males because of the steppe's rugged terrain, unpredictable climate, and intense animal husbandry. It was their responsibility to protect their homes, tribes, and eventually their countries and states (Sever 130). To exemplify, in Scythians, women received military training together with men and fought alongside men in wars. Yunus Tayga encapsulates how girls were trained along with boys in Turkish society which beat a path for the emergence of the Alp woman:

> Archery and hunting activities were very important for ancient Turks. Since it was necessary to get used to the difficulties of the geography and the natural conditions they lived in and to raise the children accordingly, they would train their boys and girls to shoot, hunt, and ride horses. Children learned to hunt birds and rats with small bows and arrows, and as they got older, their bows and arrows were developed accordingly. After they grew up, they would have taken their place in society when they could use heavier fighting vehicles, join the war, and prove themselves. (20–21)

Conforming to the Alp woman type, women appear as heroes and are identified with courage and valour in *the Book of Dede Korkut*. Dede Korkut women, ancient Turkish women, are at the forefront by their out-of-home activities such as shooting arrows, wrestling, holding a sword, and riding a horse. They do not lag behind their husband and son in courage and bravery, and even save their lives when necessary. Aysel Ceyhun tells of these women: In the Oghuz Turkish society, people lived in tents and were surrounded by infidels; thus, women must be heroic, agile, and fearless (60). *The Book of Dede Korkut* includes stories delineating these heroic women who penetrate the male sphere. In the 1st story of *The Book of Dede Korkut*,

Dirse Khan, who fathered a son with the council of his wife, shoots his son while hunting by the provocation of his enemies. Upon learning that her son did not return from the hunt, the mother, just like a heroic man, gets on her horse to find him and sets off. She, accompanied by "forty thin girls" (17), goes in search of his son. To find him, she climbs the dangerous hills of Kazılık Mountain, whose snow never melts in summer or winter.

The most striking story where women step into the male domain is the 3rd one. In the story, Banu Chichek, the daughter of a khan, shoots arrows, rides horses, and wrestles. When Bamsi Beyrek, the son of another khan, Bay Büre, unknowingly enters the pavilion of Banu Chichek to hunt a deer, Banu Chichek loses her temper and says: "Whom is this presumptuous man trying to prove his masculinity?" (48). Bamsi Beyrek asks to see Banu Chichek. Pursuant to Turkish traditions, Bamsi Beyrek and Banu Chichek are betrothed in the cradle, but they haven't seen each other before. When Banu Chichek learns that Bamsi Beyrek wants to see her, she assumes a new persona to put him to the test since a man must prove he is a man in order to be allowed to marry a woman as heroic as she is: "I am Banu Chichek's nanny. Let's go hunting. If your horse beats my horse, you will surpass her horse. And let's shoot arrows, if you pass me, you will pass her. Then, let's wrestle; if you beat me, you will beat her, too" (49). As can be traced from the words of Banu Chichek, men share their gender roles with women who are equal to men in terms of valour. In order to deserve Banu Chichek, Bamsi Beyrek must overcome her gallantry. When Bamsi Beyrek surpasses Banu Chichek in every field, Banu Chichek reveals her identity and they get engaged. In another example, Bamsi Beyrek tells his father that he wants to get married with words foregrounding the joint sphere of men and women: "Father, find me a girl, who gets up before I get up, who mounts before I mount my black horse, and who kills my enemy right before I find him" (50). The words of Bamsi Beyrek prove women are expected to be equal to men in terms of valour and even to get the upper hand. Mehmed Kaplan clarifies this situation as such: The greatest value in the ancient Turkish community is heroism […] consequently; men seek heroic qualities that are the highest values for him in women, too (100). Likewise, Adnan Binyazar tells of the ideal Turkish woman of the time: She should be able to take the place of a man in every sense (62). Put differently, the ancient Turkish woman should have manifested herself in every sphere currently deemed exclusively male.

Similarly, in the 4th story, Burla Khatun learns that her son is captured by the infidels while on a hunt and says to her husband: "Let me know if you gave my son to the blasphemous infidels. […] If this is the case, let me jump on my horse

and gather soldiers. […] I won't come back unless I save my son even though I'm covered in blood" (84–85). When her husband is also imprisoned by the infidels, Burla Khatun takes her sword and "forty thin-waisted girls" (90), gets on her black horse, and arrives at the land of the infidel. In the 6th story, Kan Turali, son of Kanli Koja, wants to marry a heroic woman, yet he has to kill three monsters in the shape of a bull, a lion, and a camel respectively to marry her. While fighting them, Selcan Khatun, another example of the Alp woman, rushes to his aid: "A part of this enemy is for me, the other for you" (119). Kan Turali later realises that it was Selcan Khatun who raided and dispersed the enemy. Kan Turali and Selcan Khatun attack and defeat the enemy together.

In *The Book of Dede Korkut*, women are portrayed as the epitome of bravery, riding horses, shooting archers, engaging in combat, and defending their homeland against the infidels. This portrays the shared realm of masculinity and femininity in ancient Turkish civilization. In addition to associating the Turkish woman with motherhood and the house, the text also shows her fighting with the male. That is to say, as a noteworthy point, the ancient Turkish woman enters the men's sphere without sacrificing her role as a mother or a building block at home. To exemplify, in the 1st story of *the Book of Dede Korkut*, the mother laments when she finds her son lying on the ground, severely wounded. But his mother's milk becomes a balm for her son and he gets better. That is how motherhood is brought to a sacred level and the mother is described as a life-giver. Furthermore, the stories frequently highlight how mothers' authority is equivalent to God's, elevating motherhood to a hallowed position. The text also makes the important point that women are supposed to guide men and be more heroic than men as wise figures which is still unusual in today's world. Ancient Turkish society seems to be the equivalent of the utopian dream that Judith Butler points out for the modern world and that the concepts of masculine and feminine were reshaped and denaturalised (42).[1]

Gender Roles as Divided Poles in Modern Turkish Society

Coming to the second part of the study, it is observed that Turkish masculinity, alongside femininity, has changed its hue. Women were almost completely removed from the male sphere and roles mainly, besides other possible reasons, due to the nation-building process after the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923

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1 In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler defines gender as "the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized" (42).

and the religious subtext that guided gender roles by assigning separate roles and domains for males and females. To begin with the nation-building process, as Gerami claims, during the nation-building process, local ideals of masculinity are outweighed by national ideals of masculinity owing to strong national leaders like Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Turkey who promoted the Western hegemonic masculinity and banned men's skullcap and ethnic and religious clothing replaced by Western codes of dress (450). To Serpil Sancar, this change of attire was more related to the modernisation process of Turkey rather than gender roles. This was a period of great social transformation including the modernisation process based on establishing a nation-state in which it was up to women to support men and raise children who were devoted to the country. In this nationalist portrait, the country was a family headed by a man. The role of women was limited to raising children dedicated to the country (19, 32, 54). Sancar further remarks, in this modernisation process, women endeavouring to be active by participating in the political institutions of the new Turkish Republic were not included in political decisions and, either by force or voluntarily; they were directed to the so-called social aid activities (193). Defining the period after the early modernisation as the era of conservative modernity (1945–1965), Sancar puts, in a nutshell, the change in the role of women and how they were excluded from the male sphere as such:

> The Turkish woman is an image of a woman who has to embody, without contradiction, the characteristics of a nurturer and educator of the children of the homeland, and who fights when necessary, actively makes sacrifices for her homeland and her family along with the qualities of an obedient and quiet woman […] Yet, [this woman] who is desired to modernise is limited by the modernisation discourse itself by constantly reminding her of her duties and responsibilities. (194)

This family-oriented social space, where women can make themselves visible and be active with different empowerment strategies, is also the space for gender regimes to flourish and equip themselves (Sancar 195). As Sancar further argues, as a product of the family-oriented construction of modernity, the fields of femininity and masculinity were reshaped. While the family-oriented private sphere was attributed to women along with feminine values such as sharing feelings, making self-sacrifice, and transferring and teaching culture to new generations, the public sphere, where a social partnership was experienced and prioritized political practices based on the representation of economic conflicts of interest, competition,

winning and the ability to make everyone accept their own power, was ascribed to men (57–61). Thus, social life was gendered and women were deprived of the male space and the active roles they possessed in ancient times. That is how women take on a passive, weak, and submissive role that requires protection by men whereas men become active, strong, assertive, and protective, keeping women away from the masculine domain.[1] Although the mission given to Turkish women carries a nationalist spirit, it isolates them from the active male sphere and locates them in a domestic, private, and passive sphere.

In addition to the national construction of gender roles heartening Turkish women as the mothers of the nation in charge of raising devoted generations away from the masculine domain, Islam cherishes motherhood as the most essential virtue of womanhood putting women at the core of the family and home for the moral and religious well-being of the society. The subordinate role of woman can be simply traced in the well-known statement in the Qur'an that Eve was created from the ribs of Adam. Interpreting the words 'He who created you from a single soul and created its mate from it', commentators state that the first woman, Eve, is from Adam and created from his rib (Birinci 152).[2] Accordingly, in Islamic tradition, man is regarded as the head of the family and woman should be obedient under the protection of man, bringing about the superiority of men over women. This

1 These polar opposite adjectives assigned to men and women of the modernization process took the Turkish woman from her previous position and placed her in the sphere of the distinction between feminine and masculine analogous to the statements of Simone de Beauvoir in her ground-breaking work, *The Second Sex*. Simone de Beauvoir points out how men and women are defined by separate adjectives, and rather than woman, it is always man used in language to refer to human beings: "[…] man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity" which brings about "an absolute human type": the masculine (13). Therefore, "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being" (15).

2 The significance of language and texts are undeniable in promoting the construction of gender. Likewise, in Butler's words, gender is a construction, "offered within language" in parallel to society, and "[i]f gender is the social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this "sex" except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that "sex" becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access" (1993, 5). Thus, to Butler, gender, constructed by language and society, is an unreal inaccessible phenomenon. This phenomenon is largely inspirited by language and discourse used in texts, whether literary, religious, or scientific. To exemplify, *Malleus Maleficarum* by Dominican H. Kramer was one of the influential texts encouraging the secondary role and inferiority of women by the pretext of witchcraft in the Middle Ages.

superiority is accentuated by Binnaz Toprak as such: "So little is Islamic faith in women's ability for rational reasoning that the Koran accepts the testimony of two women as equivalent to the testimony of one man" (285). In the division of labour pursuant to divine law, the male is responsible for carrying out work outside the home while the woman is in charge of tasks inside the home. Men are the defenders and maintainers of women, according to the Quran (4:34). Maulana Wahiduddin Khan underscores the separate gender roles in Islam:

> The status of women in Islam is the same as that of men […]. Yet, Islam perceives man as a man and woman as a woman, and considering the natural differences, it advocates the principle of the division of labour between the two sexes rather than the equality of labour. (95)

Yet, for Khan, this does not mean that a man is a woman's superior, and in Islam, there is "the wisdom of the division of labour rather than the superiority of man over woman" (27). To Khan, it should be acknowledged that a woman's more passive nature, her aptitude for household chores, her mildness and affection, all of which make her ideally suited for domesticity—to which she is undoubtedly better adapted than her male counterpart—are the motives behind why she finds herself in a position of responsibility in managing the home (28). Furthermore, the biological separation of humans into males and females is the upshot of the Creator's design and without respect for this distinction, there can be no human progress. Any challenge to transgress the boundary established by the Almighty is equivalent to dismantling the entire natural order, a process that can only end in annihilation (Khan 136–137). Then, to Khan, based on biological differences, Islam justifies different gender circles. Turkish women are *ipso facto* somewhat imprisoned in the feminine domain of home and child-rearing compared to their active roles in the male domain in ancient times. Regarding the change in Turkish women's social position and role, Muharrem Kaya notes that while women were on an equal footing with men in terms of administration and the law in ancient Turkish societies, the nomadic horse culture was effective in bringing about the change in Turkish women's social standing and role. However, after the adoption of Islam, women were pushed to a more passive position in society with the influence of Arab, Persian, and Byzantine cultures (49).

Sevil Sezgin associates the transition of women's role from an active sort to a more passive one with the role of women in Arab society, where Islam was born and spread (54). Mehmet Akif Aydın tells of this role: At that time, women had a

secondary place in male-centred society. Leading a nomadic life also played a role in this. In the life of the nomadic tribes, who had to move frequently in harsh desert conditions and had to struggle with other tribes to gain booty, women, who were not from the warring class and were seen more as consumers, had a secondary role. As of this position, women's lives became trivial. The fact that girls were sometimes killed by their own families in order to prevent the family and tribe from exhausting their means is proof of this reality (86). Similar to Sezgin, Koman Parlak argues that it was inexorable that the Turks, who belonged to the Arab-Persian cultural sphere, would encounter a cultural shift that would have an impact on their existing order and material and spiritual civilization with the introduction of Islam. Certain alterations and transformations arose from the coming together of Turkish society, where women dynamically participated in social and political life before Islam, and the Arab society, which did not appreciate women at all before meeting with Islam, disregarded them and even buried them alive. These knotty views held by Arabs toward women, linked to their own cultural beliefs and the role they assign women in society, do not correspond with the worth specified to women by Islam (95).

It is Islam that gave women a wide range of freedom in Arab society (Çubukçu 37). Islam made significant changes in the social, economic, and legal position of women in Arab society (Aktaş 37–43). What is more, with the advent of Islam, as Koman Parlak claims, the position of women in Arab society has completely changed, and women have been saved from being a victim of ignorance buried alive and attained a lofty position where Heaven is laid under their feet. However, the negative perspectives of the communities that accepted Islam, due to their old customs and traditions, were unfortunately tried to be associated with Islam (97). Islamic thought gave the greatest value to women and enabled them to live in a dignified and honourable manner. From the Islamic standpoint, a woman is a noble and decent creature who should be treated with compassion, respect, and kindness. The Prophet is supposed to have advised against offending or hurting women, citing their sensitive, compassionate, and gentle nature (Sezgin 54). This delicate role; however, analogous to nationalistic concerns in the Turkish context, condemns women from their previous active role in society. Likewise, Aynur İlyasoğlu claims that women's piety is seen as compatible with the passive and submissive role assigned to them for conservative policies, and religious women live under the oppressive codes of patriarchy. Within the framework of this role imposed on them, religious women are expected to be women who speak little, know their place, are not very demanding, respectful to their husbands as good and supportive housewives, and are loving mothers (9–10). Feride Kaya encapsulates how this

blessed yet passive role confines Turkish women and even prevents them from being an individual:[1]

> The fact that women have a lower position than men at home and social life in the patriarchal structure has confined women to be good wives or mothers as a result of traditional roles. Our society, where girls are not even counted as part of the population in rural areas and are traditionally seen as workers in the fields or at home, has always blessed *motherhood*. Although this perception has moved to a point where the *maternity right* is extolled by religion, women still have not been cherished as an individual. (77)

The voice of Turkish women, imprisoned in a private domain and opposed being removed from their active roles coded with heroism in the male domain, became striking by Turkish feminist writers such as Fatma Aliye Topuz (1862–1936), Selma Rıza Feraceli (1872–1931) and Halide Edip Adıvar (1884–1964). Surprisingly, this voice is heard meritoriously through Ayşe, the little girl in *The Rainbow* by a male writer, Ömer Seyfettin (1884–1920), who is known for his nationalist stance. Apart from *The Rooster* (*Horoz*) (1919) and *The Order of the World* (*Dünyanın Nizamı*) (1919), his stories have not been studied much in terms of gender roles. His story, *The Rainbow* (*Eleğimsağma*) (1917), breaks new ground regarding gender roles by mirroring the pressure of gender roles on women through the eyes of a little girl.

Turkish Gender Roles in Separate Spheres in *The Rainbow*

The Rainbow, published in 1917, just before the establishment of the Republic, takes place in a village, Bozkaya. The protagonist of the story is 10-year-old Ayşe.

1 The role of Islam in shaping gender roles has been a topic of debate by copious scholars such as Gerami: *Women and Fundamentalism: Islam and Christianity* (1996) and "Men and Immigration" in *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia* (2003), "Mullahs, Martyrs and Men: Conceptualizing Masculinity in the Islamic Republic of Iran" (2003), and "Islamist masculinity and Muslim masculinities" in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (2005). Another noteworthy book, among others, is *The Idea of Women in Fundamentalist Islam* (2003) by L. R. Shehadeh. In Turkey, studies on the relationship between Islam and gender roles are quite a few. İlkkaracan contributes to this neglected field via her book, *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies* (2000), and highlights how Muslim women are restricted by religion and nationalism. Another peerless study contributing to this ignored field is Gul Ozyegin's *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures* (2016). This edited volume encompasses articles focused on Muslim identities regarding masculinities and femininities in Egypt, Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran.

Knowing that the way to get rid of the pressures on her and to lead a free life is to become a man, little Ayşe dreams of becoming a man by going under the rainbow, based on the belief in society. In fear of wearing the chador, which can be argued to symbolise socially accepted female roles, and of being deprived of riding and wrestling, which are considered peculiar to men, Ayşe falls asleep in the woods and dreams that she is a stalwart boy. She wakes up to the truth from her three-hour sleep in which she gains the freedom and dignity she desires by becoming a man. The story begins when Ayşe gets up from the loom she has been sitting on since the early hours of the morning. Although she is only 10 years old, she looks older than her age. She looks at herself in the mirror, her charcoal eyes, her rosy cheeks, and her black hair, and smiles: "How beautiful I am" (7). This beauty and her being close to adolescence mark the turning point of her life. She would lose the freedom she had as a child and want to become a man because of gender pressure. She is so strong that they call her "the wrestler Ayşe" (8) as she knocks even boys down with her strength. Like a boy, her favourite activities are riding horses, shooting guns, wrestling, and playing leapfrog. When she grows up, she would have to leave all these behind. This fact is always slammed in her face by the village vicar, Kurt Hodja: "Ayşe, tell your mother to get you veiled. It is no longer appropriate for you to wander around without a headscarf" (8). Knowing that she will have to wear a headscarf like every other girl growing up, Ayşe thinks that she will spend life in prison until she dies at the counter, and dives into deep thoughts: "Oh if I were a man..." (9). Ayşe has no doubts that she will become a hero when she becomes a man because to her only men can be heroes:

> Oh, if she were a man […] What would she not do!.. First of all, she would be the greatest wrestler not only in Bozkaya but also in the whole district. Then... a celebrated hero... and she would definitely marry the little daughter of the Zaims. She would fight battles, her chest would be full of medals, and she would cross mountains and spend weeks hunting bears as brave village boys do. (9)

Ayşe, similar to ancient Turkish women, wants to go into the masculine sphere that was denied to the Turkish women of the Republic period according to the roles they were assigned. In other words, she wants to go back to the times when women were more equal to men and had a say in society. But now heroism has become identified only with men and has been attributed to the male domain. Now it is only men who can go to the army to protect the homeland and wear medals on their chests.

Noticing the rainbow, Ayşe remembers the ancient belief that if one passes under a rainbow s/he changes his/her sex. She passes under the rainbow and becomes a man: "She is surprised when she gets up. She has grown in height and her shortened skirts remained at her waist. She brings her hand to her wet face. Her moustache touches her fingers. She looks at herself. A big lad! But not in men's clothing" (12). Here begins Ayşe's dream and also her assuming male roles. She runs home to put on men's clothes. She is so strong that she crosses the way she came in half an hour in three steps. What Ayşe wants is to act freely like men as well as the respect, power, and prestige she can gain in society by taking part in the masculine sphere. In a similar vein, Michael S. Kimmel expounds that masculinity is equivalent to having power over women and other men (238). Such a man as Ayşe would marry the most beautiful girl in the village. She takes the rifle hanging on the wall, goes outside, and hears the sound of drums and horns. She learns from the children playing on the path that the Zaims have a wedding and men are wrestling. She heads straight in that direction as it is time to show her masculinity. She, as the most potent man of the village, must marry Gülsüm, the youngest daughter of the Zaims. She enters the courtyard and shouts like a hero: "Step back and see who the hero is!" (13). Ayşe not only becomes a man, but she also becomes the most valiant and robust of them. Therefore, rather than wearing a headscarf and staying at home, she can get everything she wants and live a life as she pleases.

In the rest of the story, to everyone's surprise, Ayşe wrestles with two men at the same time. She defeats the mukhtar's son Hasan and asks Kurt Hodja to divorce Hasan and Gülsüm. Kurt Hodja, who exposes her to gender pressure every time he meets her by telling her to wear the chador, is Ayşe's worst enemy. Ayşe asks Kurt Hodja to marry her to Gülsüm, but Kurt Hodja rejects. As Ayşe did to Hasan, she raises Kurt Hodja in the air and threatens to kill him. The villagers begin to gather around and shout at Ayşe in the direction of the Hodja. Moreover, they have black chadors in their hands. Shrugging, Ayşe shouts and hugs her rifle. One by one, she knocks down anyone who stands in her way. Ayşe is about to kill the Hodja. Yet, she falls to the ground and hits her head on the ground. When she opens her eyes, she finds his father in front of her, punching her head. Thus, Ayşe's dream, interrupted by the Hodja signifying gender oppression, is terminated by another man standing for the same pressure. At the end of the text, the reader realises that the whole story is just a dream. Ayşe is in shock and cries in embarrassment. She wakes up from the dream that she is a man to get her freedom, ride a horse, shoot a rifle, wrestle, and so on. She is once again told that she has to give up all these as she is at the age of chador. At the end of the day, unlike her ancient female counterparts, Ayşe cannot

enter the realm of men in a society dominated by the patriarchal order.

In *The Rainbow*, a male-dominated society, comprising a gender culture that keeps women away from active roles in the male world, is depicted through the lens of a little girl. The restrictions imposed by gender roles mostly put pressure on girls, as in the case of Ayşe. For 10-year-old little Ayşe, deprived of doing what she wants and expected to wear a chador, the way to freedom and to gain power and status is to become a man. Although the roles of femininity are at the forefront of the story, the stereotypical expectations about male roles are also underlined. These roles put pressure on men as well as women. It is certain that men, who are always expected to be strong and brave, may also experience a stalemate due to these roles. The adjectives passive, submissive, weak, and emotional are assigned to women; whereas the adjectives active, strong, prone to violence, and realistic, including heroism that Ayşe pursues, are considered appropriate for men. Then, unlike in ancient Turkish society, women were strictly kept away from the male domain which transformed into a private area that contained only male-specific features.

Conclusion

The concepts of masculinity and femininity determine our way of thinking; therefore, they play a crucial part in the formation of identity. To Butler, gender is "applied to embodied persons as "a mark" of biological, linguistic, and/or cultural difference" (*Gender Trouble* 13). Within these parameters, it is observed that culture shapes others and even precedes biological differences. Masculinity and femininity roles shaped by culture bring along the characteristics that individuals are expected to comply with. The function of religion in shaping these roles is inevitable, too. There have been radical changes in the perception of masculinity and femininity before and after Islam in Turkish society. Due to the teachings of Islam, women have been more identified with home and the Turkish woman, who shared the roles of men before Islam, has been replaced by the woman identified solely with domesticity and motherhood. That is how masculine roles have been removed from women and the masculinity sphere has become a taboo for them. Another reason why the doors of the male realm are closed to Turkish women is the role assigned to them in the construction phase of a modern country after the proclamation of the Republic. According to this role, women are supposed to undertake the mission of raising children for the homeland as the caretaker of the home rather than protecting the home and homeland. In line with this mission, the gifts of heroism are not ascribed to women but are considered peculiar to men. Thus, a radical change has emerged in Turkish femininity turning women into passive individuals away from

the borders of heroism.

Culturally and historically constructed (Hearn 9; Gardiner 35), it is usual for the characteristics of masculinity and femininity to change relatively over time. In the Turkish context; however, a radical change is detected. The study discloses the deep-seated transformation of Turkish gender roles from a shared sphere to a private one by analysing a classic Turkish epic *The Book of Dede Korkut* which gives a picture of the ancient Turkish society before Islam, and *The Rainbow* by Ömer Seyfettin which portrays modern Turkish society in its bloom right before the proclamation of the Republic. In ancient times, as depicted in *The Book of Dede Korkut*, Turkish masculinity welcomes women into its domain. Women are connected with heroism, protecting the family and country coupled with shooting arrows, using swords, wrestling, riding horses, and having a say in administrative affairs. On the other hand, *The Rainbow* tells the story of a little girl who longs to possess a place in the masculine sphere that does not accept females in it due to religious values and the assigned roles to women in line with the nation-building process. On account of the transformation of gender roles, associating masculinity with heroism, and femininity with domestic and maternal responsibilities, in the recent Republican Turkish society, little Ayşe cannot find room in the masculine world even in her dreams. When all's said and done, gender equality, typical in ancient Turkish society, has remained utopian in a recently republican Turkey and even in today's Turkish society.

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