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~ Research Article ~

## ***A Feminist Perspective on Women's Museums in Turkey: İzmir Case\****

**Selin Önen\*\*****Abstract**

Museums appeared as modern institutions in the nineteenth century. Historical transitions such as the Enlightenment, emergence of scientific conceptions based on principal of universality and preservation of dominant ideology (such as imperialism, nation building) affected the context of modern museums. Hence, museums clearly indicate the inclusion and exclusion mechanisms of modernity. The changing nature of history through pluralization opened new spaces for women, children, workers, ethnic and religious communities as well as other silenced people. Thus, women's museums reflect the flux of identity, alternative history and representation of mundaneness. Turkey's first women's museum, Women's Museum İstanbul, was established as a virtual museum in 2012. The first women's museum to have an actual location, however, came in 2014 in İzmir. Women's museums ensure visibility of women contributing to the feminist movement. Feminist critiques indicate that men and women in the classical museum are not represented based on equality principle; on the contrary, exhibitions of gender relations are hierarchical, and the roles of women are secondary to those of men. Apart from gender roles, women's museums are also important for representation of women, since the issue of women who are represented and women who are excluded, is also subject of feminist debate. Women's museums, considered in relation to collective memory and can be differentiated from historical experience. This paper thereby tries to evaluate opportunities and limitations of women's representation in the case study of Turkey's first women's museum in İzmir.

**Keywords:** Women's museum, feminism, museum studies, collective memory, İzmir

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~ Araştırma Makalesi ~

## ***Türkiye’de Kadın Müzeleri Üzerine Feminist Bir Perspektif: İzmir Örneği\****

**Selin Önen\*\***

### **Öz**

Müzeler modern kurumlar olarak on dokuzuncu yüzyılda ortaya çıkmışlardır. Aydınlanma, evrensellik temelinde bilimsel kavramların ortaya çıkışı, baskın ideolojinin (emperyalizm, ulusların kuruluşu) muhafaza edilişi gibi tarihsel dönüşümler modern müzeciliğin bağlamını etkilemiştir. Dolayısıyla müzeler açıkça modernitenin içerme ve dışlama mekanizmalarına işaret etmektedirler. Tarihin çoğulculaşmayla değişen doğası kadınlar, çocuklar, işçiler, etnik ve dini gruplar, topluluklar ile sessiz kalmış diğer halklara yer açmıştır. Bu bakımdan kadın müzeleri kimliklerin akışkanlığı, alternatif tarih ve sıradanlığın temsilini yansıtmaktadırlar. Türkiye’de ilk kadın müzesi, sanal müze olarak İstanbul Kadın Müzesi adıyla 2012’de; belirli bir mekâna sahip olan ilk kadın müzesi ise 2014’te İzmir’de açılmıştır. Kadın müzeleri, kadınların mekânsal olarak müzede görünürlüğünü sağlama konusunda feminist harekete katkıda bulunmaktadır. Feminist eleştiriler klasik müzede erkek ve kadın temsillerin eşitlik temelinde gerçekleştirilmediğini, toplumsal cinsiyet sergilerinde kadınların rollerinin erkeğin rollerinin gerisinde kaldığına dikkat çekmektedirler. Toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri dışında da müzede hangi kadınların temsil edilip hangi kadınların dışarıda bırakıldığı da feminist tartışmalarda etkilidir. Kadın müzeleri aynı zamanda kolektif bellek bağlamında ele alınmasıyla tarihten de farklılaşmaktadır. Bu makale, İzmir’de kurulan Türkiye’nin ilk kadın müzesi bağlamında kadınların temsilinin fırsatlarını ve sınırlılıklarını tartışmaya çalışmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Kadın müzesi, feminizm, müzecilik, kolektif hafıza, İzmir

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## ***A Feminist Perspective on Women's Museums in Turkey: İzmir Case<sup>1</sup>***

Museums have begun to have place in sociology in a variety of fields such as inequality, tourism, culture and visual depiction. Museums have inclusive and exclusive mechanisms in modernity. This paper argues that, history is represented in classical museums on the premise of objectivity and universality. However, they also exclude women as subjects of history. Hence, women's museums differ from classical museums' framework which does not have an immanent feminist perspective. Relatively, this paper argues that a women's museum having a feminist perspective should challenge patriarchy and include non-hegemonic identities.

The history of museums dates back to the fifteenth century tracing its origins to curiosity cabinets of the Renaissance princes and scholars. During that era, collections included:

fanciful artifacts, such as unicorns' horns and the remains of dragons, their attempt was to represent and comprehend "nature" through the collection and interpretation of material culture, and to this extent it is useful to consider them in relation to the emergence of conceptions of science (Macdonald, 2010: 5).

In the cabinet system of museology, there was no rational taxonomy system. Objects in the cabinets were antithetical, weird and anomalous and thereby not representative. The aim was not to divide objects but to construct narration within cabinets. Special people like emperors had the privilege to read this correspondence. Hence, there was no universality principle for the configuration of these collections. Cabinets and emperor museums represented the emperors' sovereignty within their territories (Artun, 2017:16-22).

During the seventeenth century, museums played a vital role in the new project of observation and comparison because natural philosophers emphasized the idea of comparison as opposed to the principles of similitude and resemblance. Verification

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this study was presented at 12th Annual Conference on Sociology in Athens, Greece, May 6, 2018.

was regarded as a scientific method where authenticity of a finding was controlled by specific procedures. The repudiation of personal testimony as the basis of truth was replaced by the scientific truth. Hence, there was a transformation in museum collections affected by science between the period of Renaissance and the eighteenth century (Macdonald, 2010: 5-10). Museums became modern institutions and collections, acquired modern functions as public goods that were enshrined in the museums in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The emergence of “culture of space” in museums is related to modern notion of a continuous and systematic time-space displaced by a hierarchy of aggregated spaces (Fyfe, 2006: 33-34).

Museums became available to the public in the early nineteenth century. They represented scientific knowledge and cultural heritage as well as the measure and mechanisms of change in the nineteenth century. Citizens received education not only at schools but also from museums’ visual reality (Artun, 2017: 26; Crane, 2006: 99). Regardless of class, gender and ethnic differences, modern populations came to think of their commonality; “they show how ‘imagined communities’ were conjured out of complexity, impersonality, and opacity of modern social life” (Fyfe, 2006: 36). Hence, “the museum is instrumental in shaping knowledge as well as disciplining social and cultural practices of collecting” (Bartlett and Henderson, 2016: 131). In this regard, as Tony Bennett suggests,

if museums were regarded as providing object lessons in things, their central message was to materialize the power of the ruling classes (through the collections of imperialist plunder which found their way to the Victoria and Albert Museum, for example) in the interest of promoting a general acceptance of ruling-class cultural authority (2005: 64).

Hence, museums as spaces may concede feelings of inclusion and exclusion. To Pierre Bourdieu, museum visiting was predominantly the preserve of higher classes (as cited in Fyfe, 2006: 38-39). Another critique says that museums might have acted as an agency functioning like a dominant ideology “whose function is to conserve the social order; its narrative of civilization is interwoven with the divisions of nation-building, imperialism, corporate power, elitism and plunder” (Fyfe, 2006: 38). In addition, according to avant-garde artists, the museum was considered as a place

“where artifacts were cut off from the springs of creation, and the notion that museums, particularly art museums and ethnographic collections, are like prisons continues to animate the museum literature” (Fyfe, 2006: 38).

John Urry and Jonas Larsen argued that the way people gaze at museums has significantly changed, which is relatively parallel to the changed conception of history. They also explained the changing view of history as:

declining in the strength of a given, uncontested national history, which national museums exemplify. Instead many alternative or vernacular histories have been developed –social, economic, populist, feminist, ethnic, and industrial and so on. There is a pluralization and indeed a contemporary-isation of history (Urry and Larsen, 2011:150).

In this regard, plurality and flux of identity are reflected in various forms of museums. Cultural aspects of museums changed since the 1970s with the rise of social movement politics and multiculturalism, the history from below, critical theory, neoliberalism and globalization. Contemporary museums indicate to prime sites for generating social memory (Bartlett and Henderson, 2016:131). Pierre Nora (2006) points out the difference between history and memory, stating that the first organizes the past and the second is embodied in living societies. Classical museums engaged with the history, framing the past as a cultural institution. Besides, women’s museums are opportunities to sustain women’s collective memory, which was not narrated in the period of classical museum.

The establishment and development of museums have changed so much especially since the post-war period that new museums<sup>2</sup> were opened such as: folk-museums, open-air museums and living history farms. The aim was to collect, preserve and display of artifacts related to the daily lives, customs, rituals, and traditions of non-elite social strata (Bennett, 2005: 63). The changing nature of museums was titled as “postmodern museum” because of the fact that

no longer visitors are only interested in seeing great works of art or artefacts from very distant historical periods... There is a fascination with

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<sup>2</sup> “New museology” is the title of Peter Vergo’s “landmark of essays in 1989, looks for more reflective and politicised understandings of social construction of knowledge as rehearsed and reproduced through museums” (Bartlett and Henderson, 2016: 131).

the “mundane” and popular and a tendency to treat all kinds of object, whether the Mona Lisa or old cake tin of a Lancashire cotton worker, as almost equally interesting (Urry and Larsen, 2011:150).

Museums also bring that locality and mundaneness to the fore-front especially in the post-war period in Europe. Bennett explains the changing nature of museums with Antonio Gramsci’s notion of *picturesque* element:

namely to represent the cultures of subordinate social classes not in their real complexity but as a “picturesque element”. As a consequence, the terms in which the ways of life of such classes are represented are often so mortgaged to the dominant culture that “the people” are encountered usually only in those idealized and deeply regressive forms which stalk the middle-class imagination (Bennett, 2005: 64).

According to Bennett (2005:75), the changing aspect of museums concerned primarily with the preservation and display of materials relating to the daily lives and customs of ordinary people is termed conservative romanticism. For him, increasing popularity of “museuming” as a leisure activity needs to be broken. In short, on one hand, the changing view of museology can be observed through opening up space for distinction. On the other hand, this plurality of flux of identities may be limited in the postmodern museum framework, which also produces popular or mundane, which is the same dilemma of modernity.

## **Women’s Museums**

The pioneers of women’s museums, Women’s Memorial House Museum in Australia and the Pioneer Woman Museum in the USA, were established in the 1950s as a reaction to display of only men’s biographies at honor list of their cities’ or countries’ spaces such as the Pioneer Memorial House or Hall of Fames. Women are usually not subjects in the classical museums. The first women’s museum called *Fraunmuseum* was established in Germany in 1981. Marianne Pitzen, an artist, together with a group of academic women established women’s museum in order to react to the fact that the representation of women’s art had been so limited in the classical museums. One of the extraordinary examples of women’s museums was

established in Washington, USA. Jeanne Schramm, who was a history teacher and a librarian, transformed an old bus into a mobile museum. She introduced pioneer women's biographies at this mobile museum. The first women's museum in Africa was established in Senegal in 1994. Varieties of Senegalese women's lives, from rice plant workers to academic and political figures, were displayed. National Women's History Museum was established in Washington, USA in 1994 (Akkent, 2018). Vietnam Women's Museum was established in 1995. Thi Bich, director of the museum, defines it as a gender-tasks museum to improve the rights of Vietnamese women through education with experts, online website and exhibitions. Thi Bich evaluates exhibitions organized by this museum as follows:

These exhibitions focus on women's issues in contemporary life and depict the challenges, difficulties, sacrifices, and losses suffered by women. These women include vulnerable groups, women living in the disadvantaged areas, female victims of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, and women entrepreneurs who are facing challenges in a period of international integration (Thi Bich, 2012: 303).

There are eighty-three women's museums worldwide, fourteen of which are virtual museums. International Association of Women's Museums was also established with the aim of: promoting "culture, arts, education and training from a gender perspective"; fostering "exchange, networking, mutual support and global cooperation among women's museums"; conducting "research and development of projects, exhibitions, new initiatives, community activities, seminars and conferences"; promoting and strengthening "the acceptance of Women's and Gender Museums worldwide; achieving international recognition in the world of museums" and advocating for "women's rights and a gender democratic society" (iawm.international, 2017) <sup>3</sup>. It is possible to evaluate these listed aims in terms of praxis dimension of women's museums worldwide. Hence, not only stable displays, but also seminars, projects, training activities related to gender perspective foster women's museums.

Gaby Porter (2012) argued that feminist critics overlooked museum studies and concentrated on other media such as history, television, cinema and magazines.

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<sup>3</sup> There is a list of women's museums on the website of International Association of Women's Museums. İzmir Women's Museum can be seen on this list but it is not a member of International Association of Women's Museums.

When Porter worked on different museums, she noticed that their displays and collections do not represent the histories and experiences of women as fully and truthfully as those of men. In her work, she examines “gender relations as hierarchical oppositions, central to the ways in which museums organize their identity, collections, space and exhibitions to make stories and meanings, both shaping and shaped by notions of masculinity and femininity” (Porter 2012: 64). Porter concluded that the roles of women in the museums are relatively passive, undeveloped and closed, whereas men’s roles are relatively active, developed and open. In addition to the roles of women and men, representation of gender in the classical museums is displayed in the neutrality; especially on the premise of objectivity and universality. Nevertheless, “the neutralized other is us. Feminists challenge us to scrutinize this experience of estrangement and to acknowledge ourselves as gendered, not neutral subjects” (Hein, 2007: 35). Hence, “museums are not neutral spaces that speak with one institutional, authoritative voice. Museums are about individuals making subjective choices” (Marstine, 2006: 2). In addition, feminist critique also challenges the classification of the objects in the classical museum that have succeeded in preserving what is best. Feminists have opposed to selection of masterworks because what is considered to be important is debatable (Hein, 2007: 36). Porter (2005) indicates that the private space becomes prominent to the public space with regard to women’s representation in history. As Porter argues,

Entering museums to look at the history of men and women, the visitor will find that women are represented mainly –if not exclusively- in the home...[T]he museum visitor might be forgiven for thinking that women in the past did not work outside the home at all, and spent most of their time sitting at home sewing (Porter, 2005: 105).

The changing nature of classical museums opened up a significant site for the production of narratives of identity and its interrogation coincides with social movements like feminism. Women’s museums in the world give opportunity to cultural diversity, alternative history from the silenced and invisible people. Museums are accepted as modern institutions that turned into cultural varieties (Karadeniz, 2015). Hence, there is a direct relationship between feminist history and women’s museums. Traditional history focuses on the events of men’s life practices and men’s



historical experiences. The subject of history was men. This history precludes women not included in the wars, conquests, parliaments, etc. History refers mostly to the results rather than the events, which is usually materialized in public space. There is no space for women who are also subjects of history. Women's history appeared in the late 1970s with the second wave of feminism (Çakır, 2013: 30).

Both feminist history and feminist theory are important analytical tools that can contribute to women's museums through two inter-related concerns: representations of women and collective identity and women's movement. Firstly, women's museums help in eliminating passive and suppressed roles and make women more visible. Thereby, representation of women at the women's museums is a vital issue to criticize power relations and androcentric discourses. As Arndís Bergsdóttir (2016:129) argues, the main focus of the feminist museology is on "representations of women" to deconstruct the hierarchical relationships and binary oppositions inherent in women's exhibitions since 1980s. Secondly, feminist history opens space to women's museums in recreation of critical knowledge. Herein, women's museums become a place of memory for collective memory of women's rights. In this regard,

the role of objects as triggers for memories creates an affective and cognitive link between the past and the present, thereby potentially enabling a continuation of feminist politics... In the processes of making and consuming feminist objects, they make "the personal is political" happen and, as a consequence, allow the production of a collective identity" (Bartlett and Henderson, 2013: 86).

Alison Bartlett and Margaret Henderson give examples to these kinds of objects from Australia's feminist museum, which are largely text based as books, periodicals and newsletter, with other forms of minor presences namely photographs, music, badges and t-shirts. Fatmagül Berktaş (2015: 15-29) states that feminist history criticizes social history and offers a methodology, a perspective and a position. Although statement of "women's history" is not inclusive and universal, it interrogates history's claim of universality. The "women's history" approach develops with postmodern theory and examines the relationship between knowledge and power. In Foucauldian sense, social sciences describe and explain the world, and are part of a power network (Berktaş, 2015). History writing has always been dominated by men and

women's contributions to history tended to be unimportant and marginalized. As a matter of fact, even the working class history precludes working women's experiences and struggles. Social history framework has changed since the 1970s and 1980s. The new subjects of family structure, sexuality, culture, childhood etc. are important elements necessary to understand societal and economic transition. Hence, women's history is intertwined with social history. Feminist history also criticizes social history since it does not focus on gender. Feminist history has also focused on "ordinary" women's experiences, thus importance of oral history method has increased.

To evaluate İzmir Women's Museum, it is essential to briefly consider the history of feminism in Turkey. Şirin Tekeli (2011: 28) suggested that women's struggle and feminism in Turkey can be examined in three periods. The first period started with the Second Constitutional Era during the Ottoman Empire. The structural changes of the Ottoman Empire, which was established on traditional basis, occurred during the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1918). The status of Ottoman women changed with in regard to this modernization period. The women who were confined to private sphere started to demand a change in their legal status as well as the right to work and the right to education. It was possible to observe women's struggles in women's magazines and women's associations. Women's magazines helped women to express their individuality and women's associations transformed these demands in an organized manner (Çakır, 2013: 59-87; Tekeli, 2011: 28-33). In the second period, the Turkish Civil Code was adopted in 1926 and women were given the right to participate in municipal and general elections. Women started to work in public, mostly as teachers, nurses, etc. Tekeli termed the second period of feminism in Turkey as "state feminism". In this period, secularism was considered to be as the best avenue to usher in the equality of men and women. Nevertheless, patriarchy in private sphere was not questioned. The third period appeared in the late 1980s, when feminists got organized around women's associations and women's movement was seen from the bottom up (Tekeli, 2011: 29- 33).

History of feminism in Turkey can also be examined with regard to the waves of feminism. The first wave of feminism occurred in the Anglo-Saxon World around the struggle for civil and political rights, women's right to education, work, and to be

elected. In Turkey, the period in which women organizations demanded civil and political rights overlaps with the first wave of feminism in the early 20th century. The second wave of feminism in Turkey occurred in the 1980s after the military coup. The second wave of feminism's famous slogan, "personal is political" affected Turkish women's framing of violence not as an individual matter in the domestic realm, but as a political topic that needed to be dealt with in the public realm. The third wave of feminism in Turkey emerged in the 1990s around identity politics (Diner and Toktaş, 2010: 41-45). İzmir Women's Museum represents especially traces of the first wave of feminism since the museum focuses on women's visibility in the public space using photographs and exhibitions.

### **İzmir Women's Museum**

The history of museums in Turkey started in the nineteenth century with the İstanbul Museum which preserve ancient artifacts and archeology. The Ottoman museum movement was considered together with archeology and fine arts. The İstanbul Museum (Müze-i Hümayun) echoed with the Alexandria Museum which was regarded as the archetype of the museums for its incorporation of academy and museum. Identity of Ottoman Empire's museum collection represented hybridity in response to nation-state centered universal discourse of civilization represented by Western museums. During the Republican period, artists and elites continued to discuss the representation of museums in the process of nation-building. The National Art Museum could not only be opened until 1937. In Turkey's museum movement, archeology and ethnography museums gained importance, while art museums were overlooked and could only come around with privatization and neoliberal cultural politics since 2000s (Artun, 2017: 38-63).

The changing view of museology and history as well as women's rights affected the foundations of women's museum in Turkey. As mentioned before, the first women's museum was established in İstanbul in 2012 as a virtual museum and it was named as *Women's Museum İstanbul*. It focuses on the biographies of women who contributed to the art and cultural life of İstanbul from the period of the Byzantine

and the Ottoman Empires to the Republic of Turkey (Karadeniz, 2015: 143). The aim of the museum is described as follows:

Inclusion is an ideal as well as an organizational principle for the Women's Museum İstanbul. The museum's work is a contribution to creating an inclusive women's history of the city of İstanbul. ... Dedicated to the more than 2600 years of women's history in the city of İstanbul the aim of the museum is to provide a showcase for the history of women in Turkey, a history which was lost, obscured or disowned all too quickly by mainstream opinion, and to share this history as a counterpart to male-dominated historical writing, to create and encourage understanding and dialogue among the generations, genders and among the different cultural and ethnic groups of the city (istanbulkadinmuzesi.org).

Hence, this virtual museum opens a new historical space against the male dominated history and establishes women's history according to the collective memory of the city. This virtual museum is not limited to the Internet. In October 2016, the museum organized a congress called "Women's Museums: Centre of Social Memory and Place of Inclusion" which was held in İstanbul (iawm.international, 2016).

Apart from the virtual museum in İstanbul, İzmir Women's Museum is the first women's museum in Turkey established by the Municipality of İzmir in 2014. It was followed by another women's museum established in Antalya in 2015. İzmir Women's Museum is located in a three-storey house in İzmir in the Tilkilik neighborhood.<sup>4</sup> The rooms of the museum are categorized as: "Women in Ancient Times in Anatolia", "Women from Past to Present", "Protest and Women's Room", "Collection Monuments Room" and "Installation Room". The exhibitions at the rooms include photographs, journals, clothes and customs and newspaper reports related to women, etc. The display of the museum generally overlaps the classical modern museum's perspective where "traditionally museums frame objects and audiences to control the viewing process, to suggest a tightly woven narrative of progress, an 'authentic' mirror of history, without conflict or contradiction" (Marstine, 2006: 5). Indeed, women's museums are not traditional museums but the fixed and closed category of display is a method of modernity. Janet Marstine (2006) mentions the

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<sup>4</sup> Jews and Turks lived together in Tilkilik neighborhood until 20th century in İzmir. The museum house represents neoclassical style including both European and Turkish styles together (konak.bel.tr., 2017).

Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam that presents a chronological display as an example for this framing. Women's museums are important contributions to the classical museum tradition with respect to identity politics. To display the identity variations, curators contribute to the museums' decision for representation of women. In this context, curators are professionals who decide and direct the exhibitions. That being said, İzmir Women's Museum does not have a curator.

History is presented on the displays focusing on women but those are images of prominent women in the public space that appear at the museum instead of ordinary women. Porter (2005) argues that there are some profound results of such selection: "For example, less advantaged, affluent, and articulate groups -such as unskilled and casual workers, unemployed people, migrants and travelers- are underrepresented or omitted from social and industrial museum" (2012: 105). There are photographs of standing women in the arena of art, politics, literature, science, etc. in İzmir Women's Museum. Moreover, visitors also see the photographs of the pioneer women in different arenas of the public space in Turkey; for example, the first woman translator, the first woman magazine founder, the first woman war photographer, the first woman university rector and the first Miss Turkey. Although it is very important to consider the pioneer women in their field in history, it is limited to famous women in Turkish history. Nevertheless, representation of ordinary women is limited with dressing and costumes of the nineteenth century. This kind of representation measures women's museum up to ethnography museums. Thereby, exhibits in İzmir Women's Museum would have been richer if collective memory of women's rights and struggle with patriarchy were richly represented.

Meanwhile, İzmir was an important port city since it had an efficient hinterland to trade with the West throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Outsiders call İzmir as "infidel İzmir" throughout history. Its Armenian, Greek, Jewish and *Levanten* population who were mainly engaged in trade activity, gave İzmir a cosmopolitan character. Nevertheless, İzmir Women's Museum is short of exposing details from history concerning women with various social backgrounds. Ordinary women find themselves a place with their wedding dresses, hats and bags at the museum's Collection Monuments Room. However, it is not possible to claim these objects to be feminist objects, because they are not trigger for memories. When

representation of women is limited only to dominant identities (ethnicity, class, sexuality), the museum automatically excludes other identities of women such as; lower classes, minorities, ethnic groups, lesbians, etc. Hence, historical representation of women is limited in terms of pluralism, inclusivity and diversity. One explanation for limitations of displays can be the absence of a curator museum. The display in this museum starts on the first floor in the Women in Ancient Times in Anatolia Room, which challenges history writing and the mythology on how women were excluded from history or indicated negatively. For example, Pandora's Box is explained alternately: "Women who have been displayed as the source of all sins in stories such as Pandora and Eve clearly indicate the perspective of the male-dominant society on women." The other example among the displays is the Amazons who are believed to be Anatolia's legendary female warriors in the ancient times. There are different stories about the Amazons, one of which claims that "founders of many cities in Western Anatolia were Amazon queens. One of these cities is Smyrna (İzmir)". In addition, "the Anatolian women of the ancient era are governors, queens, nuns, weavers, doctors, athletes, philosophers..." Sappho was a Greek female poet and was depicted on Greek vases playing the lyra. However, there is no information on Sappho's lesbian identity. Hence, we can assume that there is a criticism of history by women's museums but this criticism may not be related to feminism. As Marstine suggests, "although feminist voices have been raised for change in the museum since the nineteenth century, most museum narratives continue to convey gender stereotypes. Gay and lesbian identity is rarely acknowledged" (Marstine, 2006: 18).

Women's museums are seemingly presented as alternative spaces to the classical museum context in terms of knowledge, history and representation of gender. On the other hand:

these museums are arguably an effect of 1970s and 1980s efforts to recover women's history, this does not necessarily mean that such museums align themselves with feminism per se. While the retrieval and celebration of women is a dominant feature of women's museums, references to feminism may be absent (Bartlett and Henderson, 2016: 133).

Museums are not value-free institutions just like history discipline, but if women's museums are differentiated from classical museums, they should be more inclusive. In this regard, İzmir Women's Museum is not inherently a feminist museum. Because the first makes women's identity appear within a given space, the latter simply challenges with patriarchy. For example, it is not enough to say that women were also present throughout the history; there has also been a reinvestigation of the history and representation of it through the exhibitions.

Protest and Women's Room is the most interesting part of the museum. There are different news items related to women's struggles on the wall. For example, one piece reports women in İzmir who protested the increase of bread prices in 1828 and managed a reversion of increment. Another piece is about women protesting sexual harassment during the 1<sup>st</sup> Feminist Congress held in 1989 marking the beginning of "our body belongs to us, no to sexual harassment" protests throughout the country. Badges written with slogans were handed out to people in several places in Ankara between October 14<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 1989. Purple needles symbolizing the resistance against harassment were also handed out. As Bartlett and Henderson suggested, "museums are now understood to be prime sites of social memory, generating and reproducing regimes of knowledge and identities" (2016: 131). Hence, social memory and women's rights in Turkey are remembered in this museum.

Social movement is not only limited to the urban space. The Bergama movement which was a social movement by peasants aiming to "prevent operation of a goldmine in Bergama", appears as a relevant women's news at the museum. The news report says: "On December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1996, the people of Bergama, mostly women, protested gold search with cyanide which would devastate their future." As Hayriye Özen (2007) argues, different social groups mobilized against the operation of a multi-national gold-mining company in three villages of Bergama, İzmir in 1990s and early 2000s. While men expected work opportunities at the mine, women did not consider the mine as a viable alternative to agriculture. Women played an important role in mobilization of the peasants against the mining project. They not only played a crucial role in the protests but also convinced men to participate in the protests.

Examples of news presented at Protest and Women's Room are linked to the grassroots women's movement in Turkey. Additionally, news pieces exhibited

demonstrate particular events, eras, moments and tendencies of women's activism as part of collective memory of women's movement. As Nora reminds us, memory never ends but becomes open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting. In addition, Nora presented museums as an example of memory places projecting constructive idea of memory (Nora, 2006: 11-18). Women's museums may also expand collective memory of women's rights with exhibitions that particularly aim at universal and local development of women's rights. With regard to universal women's rights, there was a live museum drama performance titled "Chasing Butterfly" performed at İzmir Women's Museum on November 25<sup>th</sup> International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 2018. Some of 13 female characters performed by actresses included Zübeyde Hanım (Atatürk's mother), Clara Zetkin, Emma Goldman, Türkan Saylan, Mirabel Sisters and Nezihe Muhiddin. On the other hand, local feminist movement is reflected at İzmir Women's Museum especially through the first wave of feminism history in Turkey.

These examples show that women's movement has earned itself a place at the museum in terms of collective memory of women's rights. R. Ray and A. C. Korteweg discussed women's movement as:

the range of activities in which women engage to better the circumstances of their lives. ...Literature on women's activism has shown that women are mobilized not only as women but also as mothers, workers, peasants, and citizens. Initially, scholars focused on interests, specifically whether such a thing 'women's interests' could be identified. More recently the focus has been on identities, specifically how identities mobilize women (Ray and Korteweg, 1999: 48-49).

In this regard, Karen Beckwith distinguishes between women's movement and feminist movements.

Women's movements can be defined as social movements where women are the major social actors and leaders, who make gendered identity claims as the basis for the movement. ... Feminist movements are a type of women's movements that challenges patriarchy and contests political, social and other power arrangements of domination and subordination on the basis of gender (Beckwith, 2017: 314).



Beckwith also evaluates feminist movements as subset of women's movements. The museum, in general, lacks feminist perspective even though the Protest Room of the Museum gives opportunity to visitors to remember both women's movement and feminist movement in Turkey historically.,

## Conclusion

Women's museums appeared in the 1980s as an alternative space to the classical museums worldwide. The appearance of women's museums is related to an observable change in museums especially in the cultural aspects since the 1970s with the rise of social movement politics and multiculturalism and the history from below. Women history and feminist history have been challenging issues for museum spaces since 1970s. Museums are not neutral spaces, therefore, displays and collections do not represent experiences of men and women equally. In classical museums, the roles of women are generally passive and limited to the private sphere, whereas, men's roles are active and at the forefront of the history.

In Turkey, the first actual women's museum was established in İzmir in 2014. Women's museums appear as an alternative space to male dominated history, knowledge and representation. The representation of women at İzmir Women's Museum overlaps mostly with the first wave of feminism, where prominent women with their photographs and biographies are emphasized in the public space.

In addition, this paper argues that women's museums should be different from ethnography museums. The representation of ordinary women in history should not be limited to clothes or domestic home materials. In İzmir Women's Museum, historical knowledge on the displays focuses on prominent women in the public space. Hence, the curators' contribution might be important in designing the displays but İzmir Women's Museum has no curator. Moreover, the Protest Room among the other rooms in the museum is the best challenging room with history, and it focuses on women's resistances throughout Turkey's history as depicted by newspapers.

Women's museums around the world give opportunity to cultural diversity and alternative history from silenced and invisible people's visibility. Nevertheless, İzmir Women's Museum falls short of offering a satisfactory variety of women's representation in terms of identity and class. Women's museums are not limited to

representation but may convey collective memory. In short, İzmir Women's Museum is Turkey's the first museum to take women into consideration historically, but it does not automatically align itself with feminism. It is possible to overcome this limitation by fostering the praxis dimension of the museum with different activities, seminars, workshops, displays etc. related to gender and becoming a part of national and international women's museum platforms.

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