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Gender Inequality in Urban Areas: A Critical Investigation of Street Naming Practices in Turkey

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Abstract

Urban place naming extends beyond navigation and constitutes a political practice through which ideological discourses are inscribed into space and collective memory. Naming practices play a central role in shaping gendered representations of space and determining whose identities are rendered visible in the public realm. Within this framework, and focusing on the case of Turkey, this study examines how patriarchal narratives are embedded in urban memory through toponymic practices, by approaching urban place names as a city text. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative and qualitative analyses to investigate gender representation in street, avenue, and boulevard names in Turkey. The findings reveal a pronounced gender imbalance: 23,020 urban place names (12.80%) commemorate men, whereas only 719 (0.40%) commemorate women, meaning that male names are approximately thirty-two times more prevalent than female names. Even in major metropolitan centers, female representation remains below 1%. Women are predominantly commemorated through familial roles, while representations based on professional, intellectual, or artistic identities remain extremely limited. Overall, the findings demonstrate that urban memory in Turkey is largely structured through male-centered narratives, marginalizing women in public space. The study highlights the importance of reconsidering urban naming policies to promote more inclusive and equitable urban environments.

Keywords: Turkey, toponymy, anthroponymy, street names, gender, public space, feminist geography

Introduction

“The primary function of street names is to provide spatial orientation” (Azaryahu 2009a, 460). In this regard, in everyday urban life, they often appear mundane and unremarkable. However, urban place names are not merely neutral descriptors that serve navigational purposes. Decisions concerning urban naming are deeply political, reflecting attempts by governing authorities to inscribe particular ideological narratives into social space and, more enduringly, into collective memory (Rose-Redwood & Kim 2020; Zuvalinyenga 2020; Alderman & Inwood 2013; Azaryahu 2011, 2009b, 1996). As Alderman and Inwood (2013, 212) emphasize, “place names are more than innocent spatial references or passive artifacts; they are embedded in social power relations and struggles over the identities of places and people”. Critical toponymic scholarship has demonstrated the political and ideological nature of urban naming practices (Ak & Kadioğlu 2025; Giraut & Houssay-Holzschuch 2022; Duncan 2019; Rose-Redwood et al. 2018; Berg & Vuolteenaho 2009).

Place names play a crucial role in shaping collective memory and identity by reflecting communities’ cultural values and historical narratives. Rather than being neutral labels, they function as mnemonic devices that embed selected interpretations of the past into everyday spatial experience. In this regard, Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) highlights how elements of the built environment can serve as focal points for the preservation and transmission of collective memory (2006). Extending this perspective, the notion of the geography of memory emphasizes that spatial practices—including naming—actively participate in the production and maintenance of memory within the landscape (Foote & Azaryahu 2007).

When considered within this framework, place names are far more than mnemonic markers: they are ideologically embedded products of practices that contribute to the formation and reinforcement of political and cultural identities. Urban place names, which carry the imprints of power relations and function as political instruments, therefore play a significant role in the social construction of space (Mamvura et al. 2018; Vuolteenaho & Berg 2009; Yeoh 1992). As expressed by Tümertekin and Özgüç (2022, 184), this process can be observed “through the tendency of newly independent countries to first replace place names inherited from the colonial period”. Similarly, Light argues that “a change in political order is frequently accompanied by the redefining of the national past: through the renaming of streets, new narratives of national history and identity are inscribed onto the urban landscape” (2004, 155). Mamvura, Muwati, and Mutasa (2018, 429) further stress that “the role of place names as components of the cityscape merits scholarly interrogation because they are neither politically neutral nor innocent”. In this context, urban place names make it possible to discern which historical figures, events, or ideals are made visible in the public sphere and, conversely, which social groups, identities, or experiences are excluded.

“Because toponyms often reflect the values and worldviews of dominant, elite social classes, they tend to ignore the past experiences and struggles of marginalized or subaltern groups” (Alderman 2022, 31). From a gender and social justice perspective, urban place-naming practices reveal a highly hegemonic and exclusionary character (Giraut 2024). As a result, urban toponyms often embody profound social divisions. As Gutiérrez-Mora and Oto-Peralías (2022, 1794) note, “the fact that commemorative street names express

the ruling socio-political order and that marginalized groups are underrepresented is hardly surprising, but the exclusion of women from the cityscape is particularly shocking because they are not a minority but half of the population". In this context, place names can be understood as a cultural text produced under patriarchal power (Nash 1999).

Beyond academic debates, these inequalities have also been challenged through activist interventions. "While the issue of gender imbalance in urban toponymies remains neglected from an academic perspective, there are projects underway to rename cities in commemoration of women that have been launched by members of the public and activists in Europe, the United States and India" (Pecorelli 2023, 96). Alderman points out that "in 2015 activists from the French feminist organization Osez le féminisme staged a protest in Paris by unofficially renaming 60 streets through posters bearing women's names placed over existing street signs, aiming to highlight the near absence of women's names in the city's toponymy, given that only 7% of streets were named after women compared to 51% after men" (2022, 29). The same street-renaming action was replicated in Ankara in 2015. Such initiatives, both globally and in Turkey, have contributed to the recognition of gender-unequal urban naming practices as a significant social issue.

The study of the gender politics of street naming has long been considered a relatively underexplored field. As noted by Rose-Redwood et al. (2018, 13), "the study of the gender politics of street naming is still a woefully neglected theme in urban studies and critical toponymic scholarship". However, in recent years, a growing body of research has begun to address this gap. Studies examining place names from a gender perspective have been conducted in Italy (Baggetta et al. 2024; Pecorelli 2023); Romania (Rusu 2024); Poland (Górny & Górna 2024); Spain (Gutiérrez-Mora & Oto-Peralías 2022; Novas Ferradás 2018); Belgium (Ouali et al. 2021); the United States (Beck 2021); Ukraine (Gnatiuk & Glybovets 2020); France (Beaudoin & Martin 2019); Iran (Riazi 2019); Zimbabwe (Mamvura et al. 2018); South Africa (Forrest 2018); and New Zealand (Berg & Kearns 2009). Collectively, this body of work has consistently demonstrated that women remain significantly underrepresented in public space. With regard to the global landscape of place naming, Bigon and Zuvalinyenga (2021) suggest that urban toponymy across diverse geographical contexts reproduces similar patriarchal regimes of memory. These gendered toponymic patterns are not confined to specific cultural or regional settings but constitute a widespread mechanism through which male-dominated historical narratives are inscribed into urban space.

This study is situated at the intersection of critical toponymy and feminist geography. Feminist geographers have long argued that space is not a neutral container but is socially produced through power relations that are inherently gendered (Mitchell 2003; Calkin & Freeman 2020; McDowell 1999; Massey 1994). From this perspective, urban place naming constitutes a spatial practice through which gender roles are produced, normalized, and reproduced in everyday life. Feminist geography seeks to "make women visible in the history and theory of the city" (Alkan 2000, 93), drawing attention to the subtle yet persistent mechanisms through which women are reminded that public space is not fully theirs (Gqola et al. 2024; Jarvis et al. 2009; Staeheli & Martin 2000). Street names, as highly visible elements of the urban landscape, represent one such mechanism. Approaching place names as a "city text" enables an examination of how patriarchal ideologies are embedded within symbolic landscapes and how women's exclusion from public space is rendered ordinary and legitimate. From the combined perspectives of critical toponymy and feminist geography, place names can therefore be understood not merely as descriptive labels but as spatial practices through which gender inequalities are constructed and sustained. Examining urban toponymy through a gendered lens thus contributes both to critical onomastic scholarship and to feminist geographical inquiries into the production of space.

Furthermore, this study aims to investigate how street, avenue, and boulevard names in Turkey reflect gender representation and public memory. Specifically, the research addresses the following three questions: (1) What is the gender distribution of urban place names in Turkey?; (2) Through which discursive frameworks—that is, the dominant narrative structures and symbolic meanings embedded in naming practices—are women commemorated in urban space?; and (3) How are these representations distributed geographically, and what regional patterns emerge? By addressing these questions, the study aims to uncover whose lives and contributions are most frequently commemorated in Turkey's urban landscapes, and, conversely, which groups remain systematically absent. This study situates these questions within the context of gender, memory, and urban space, providing a comprehensive examination of how urban toponymy both reflects and reproduces social hierarchies in Turkey.

Method

This study employs a mixed-methods research design grounded in critical toponymy and feminist geographical scholarship. In line with the conceptual framework developed in the Introduction, the methodological approach integrates a large-scale quantitative analysis of commemorative urban place names. It is complemented by a qualitative interpretation of the discursive frameworks of commemoration through which gender is articulated in urban space. This design allows for the systematic identification of structural gender inequalities in urban toponymy while also enabling an interpretive examination of how women are positioned or omitted within public memory.

The empirical material consists of the names of streets, avenues, and boulevards located in all metropolitan municipalities and provincial centers in Turkey. All data were obtained from Geofabrik (2025), an open-access, collaboratively maintained geospatial database that is widely used in urban and spatial research. Geofabrik was selected because it provides comprehensive street-level coverage across Turkey and facilitates transparent and reproducible data collection at a national scale. Street names were compiled using the name tags associated with road features in the Geofabrik database. Only urban place names corresponding to streets, avenues, and boulevards were included in the analysis; paths, service roads, intersection names and other road types that are not comparable in terms of function or symbolic visibility were excluded. Following compilation, the dataset underwent a systematic process of cleaning and standardization. Duplicate records were removed, spelling variations were harmonized, and entries lacking name information were excluded. These procedures were applied to ensure internal consistency across the dataset and to render it suitable for analysis.

From the cleaned dataset, place names were identified and selected for analysis. In this study, commemorative names are defined as urban place names that commemorate identifiable individuals, historical figures, or socially recognized persons. Place names referring exclusively to physical geographical features, abstract concepts, dates, institutions, or generic descriptors were excluded, as they do not function as forms of personal commemoration. The resulting dataset therefore consists solely of person-based urban place names.

Each commemorative place name was subsequently classified according to the gender of the individual commemorated. Gender attribution was established through the consultation of historical records, biographical sources, and authoritative reference materials. In cases where gender could not be determined with sufficient certainty, the entry was excluded from gender-based quantitative analysis but retained for overall descriptive counts. This decision was made to preserve analytical rigor while avoiding speculative classification.

Female commemorative place names were further coded into thematic categories in order to capture the dominant representational patterns through which women are commemorated in urban space (Bengtsson 2016; Güler et al. 2015). These categories include women recognized as political figures or activists; artists, writers, and intellectuals; scientists and other professional figures; members of ruling families or elite lineages; and figures defined primarily through familial or relational identities, such as mothers, wives, or daughters of prominent men. This categorization enables an assessment not only of numerical underrepresentation but also of the qualitative dimensions of gendered commemoration.

Quantitative analysis was conducted to calculate the proportional distribution of male and female commemorative place names at national, regional, and city scales. The analysis also distinguishes between commemorative (person-based) and non-commemorative (gender-neutral) place names in order to assess the relative prevalence of commemorative naming practices within the broader urban toponymic landscape. Descriptive statistics were used to identify overarching patterns of gender imbalance, while comparative regional analysis was employed to examine spatial variation. In addition to descriptive statistics, inferential statistical analysis was conducted to assess whether the observed gender distribution differs significantly across cities. A chi-square test of independence was employed to examine the relationship between city (81 categories) and gender (male, female, and gender-neutral) categories. Given the categorical structure of the data, this test is appropriate for determining whether observed differences reflect random variation or systematic patterns. To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative content analysis was applied to both female and male commemorative names, with particular emphasis on the representational patterns associated with women. Following established approaches in critical toponymy, this analysis focuses on how particular forms of female identity are privileged while others are marginalized within the urban commemorative landscape (Caballero-Cordero et al. 2025; Gutiérrez-Mora & Oto-Peralías 2022; Rusu 2022, 2019; Mam Mamvura et al. 2018; Sekulić 2014).

To enhance reliability, gender attribution and thematic coding were conducted iteratively and verified at multiple stages of the analysis. Ambiguous cases were resolved through consultation of multiple sources, and coding criteria were applied consistently across the dataset. Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The analysis is confined to named streets, avenues, and boulevards recorded in Geofabrik and does not capture informal or vernacular place names that are not represented in the database. In addition, gender classification relies on historically documented identities and does not account for non-binary or

contested gender categories. These limitations reflect both the constraints of the data and the gendered nature of institutional commemorative practices themselves. Despite these limitations, the dataset provides a comprehensive and methodologically robust basis for examining gender representation in Turkey's urban toponymy.

Results

The analysis covers all 81 provincial cities in Turkey. Across these cities, a total of 180,062 urban place names were identified. Of these, 23,020 names (12.80%) commemorate men, whereas only 719 names (0.40%) commemorate women. The remaining 156,323 place names (86.80%) are gender-neutral, referring to geographical features, historical events, or other gender-neutral (non-person-based) designations.

To assess whether the observed gender distribution in commemorative street naming differs significantly across cities, a chi-square test of independence was conducted using city and gender categories (male, female, and gender-neutral). The results reveal a statistically significant association between these variables ($\chi^2 = 5185.956$, $df = 160$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the observed distribution is not random but reflects systematic differences in gender commemoration across urban space. However, 22.6% of the cells had expected counts below 5, which may affect the reliability of the chi-square approximation. Despite this limitation, the large sample size supports the robustness of the findings.

In absolute numbers, female commemorative names are most numerous in large metropolitan and western cities. The highest counts are observed in the following cities: İstanbul (213), Tekirdağ (45), Balıkesir (41), İzmir (38), Ankara (34), Bursa (29), Muğla (27), Çanakkale (17), Kocaeli (15), and Edirne (15). Despite these higher counts, the proportion of female commemorative names remains extremely low even in these cities. At the other end of the spectrum, seven cities contain no streets named after women at all: Ağrı, Aksaray, Bingöl, Bitlis, Karaman, Muş, and Niğde. In addition, female commemorative names are extremely rare in several other cities. Only one female commemorative street name was identified in Adıyaman, Artvin, Bayburt, Çankırı, Elazığ, Erzurum, Isparta, Malatya, Mardin, Rize, Siirt, and Van.

When the ratio of female to male commemorative names is considered, the highest proportions of female representation are observed in cities where the overall number of commemorative names is relatively low, resulting in small but proportionally more balanced distributions. Conversely, in large metropolitan areas such as İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir, despite higher absolute numbers of female commemorative names, the ratio remains heavily skewed toward male commemoration. This indicates that numerical presence does not necessarily translate into proportional equality.

At the national scale, person-based urban naming practices are therefore overwhelmingly male-dominated. These findings reveal a striking spatial unevenness in gender representation, which aligns with the statistically significant association identified in the chi-square analysis, with female commemorative names concentrated primarily in western metropolitan regions, while many cities in Central and Eastern Anatolia exhibit extremely limited—or entirely absent—female representation in urban toponymy. Streets named after men outnumber those named after women by approximately thirty-two to one (figure 1). This further reinforces the statistically significant pattern of gender imbalance identified in the analysis, highlighting a pronounced quantitative disparity in gender representation within the urban toponymic landscape.

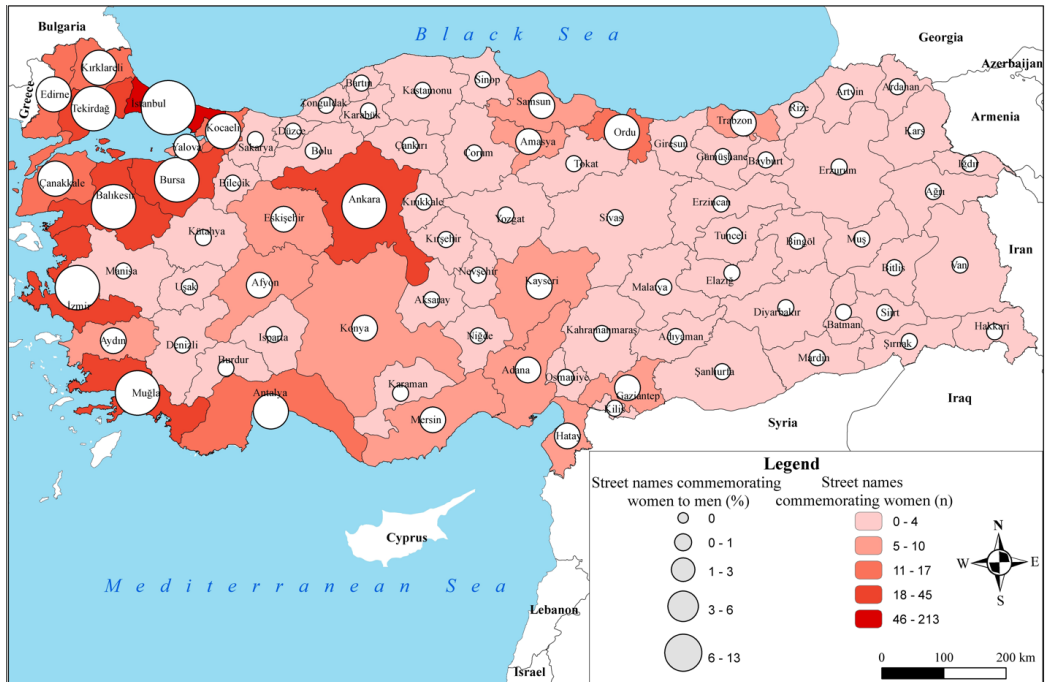


Figure 1: Number and Proportion of Urban Place Names by Gender

The distribution of commemorative place names across different types of urban roads further reveals gendered patterns of spatial visibility. In Turkey, women’s names are more frequently assigned to local streets, while their representation decreases as the spatial hierarchy of roads increases from streets to avenues and major boulevards. By contrast, male commemorative names are disproportionately concentrated on higher-order and more prominent urban roads (figure 2). This pattern mirrors findings reported in other urban contexts, where women are more commonly commemorated in less visible or peripheral locations (Sekulić 2014; Pecorelli 2023).

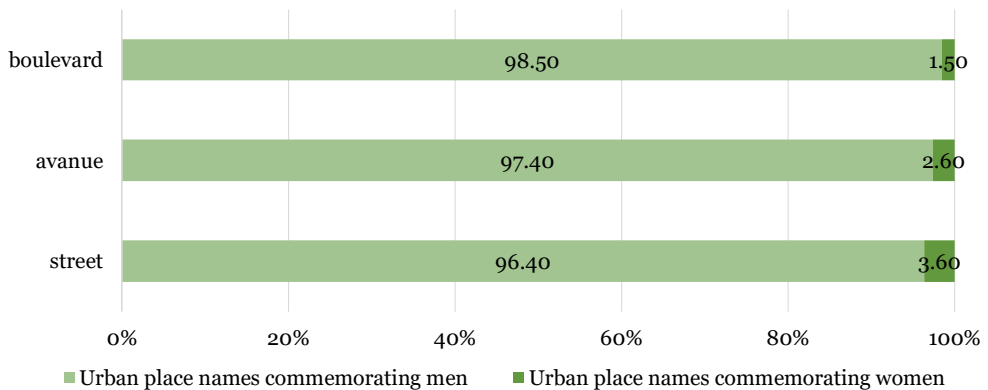


Figure 2: Proportions of Female and Male Place Names at Boulevard, Avenue, and Street Level

Content analysis of the limited number of place names commemorating women reveals recurring patterns in the types of social identities through which women are represented. Female commemorative names fall into three main categories: familial or relational roles (40.68%), professional or artistic roles (34.68%), and roles associated with national heroism or self-sacrifice (20.75%). Place names that do not clearly fit these categories account for the remaining 3.89%. The largest category consists of place names that identify women through familial or relational associations, such as mothers, wives, or daughters. Examples include *Zübeyde Hanım Street*, *Valide Sultan Avenue*, *Semra Özal Street*, *Mother Ayşe Street*. The second category comprises place names commemorating women through professional or artistic identities, including *Teacher Yasemin Tekin Avenue*, *Hostess Rana Altınay Street*, *Mukhtar Oya Çolpan Akyüz Street*, *Chef Hanım Street*, and *Nurse Handan Kurtuluş Avenue*. The third category includes place names representing women in relation to national heroism or sacrifice, such as *Nene Hatun Street*, *Kara Fatma Street*, *Soldier Saime Street*, and *Şehit Filiz Toydemir Street*.

An examination of the most frequently recurring commemorative place names highlights distinct gendered patterns in urban naming practices (table 1). Among male commemorative toponyms, the most common names are associated with figures linked to Turkey's political and national history. These include founding leaders of the Republic, such as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, İsmet İnönü, Kazım Karabekir, and Fevzi Çakmak, as well as prominent literary and cultural figures, including Mehmet Akif Ersoy. Names associated with Ottoman sultans (e.g., *Fatih Sultan Mehmet*, *Yavuz Sultan Selim*) and Sufi figures (e.g., *Mevlâna*, *Yunus Emre*) also appear frequently among male toponyms. Overall, frequently recurring male place names are concentrated around political, military, cultural, and religious figures (table 1). Despite their frequency, these names constitute only a small fraction of the overall dataset, highlighting the limited scale of female commemoration compared to male figures.

Table 1: Most Frequently Repeated Male and Female Place Names in Cities in Turkey

	Most Frequently Commemorated Male Figures	Category	Count	Most Frequently Commemorated Female Figures	Category	Count
1	Mustafa Kemal Atatürk	Political Leader	1,293	Zübeyde Hanım	Family Figure	104
2	Kazım Karabekir	Military Figure	362	Nene Hatun	Historical/Heroic Figure	38
3	Fevzi Çakmak	Military Figure	294	Halide Edip Adıvar	Writer/Intellectual	37
4	İsmet İnönü	Political Leader	452	Bahriye Üçok	Academic/Politician	16
5	Mehmet Akif Ersoy	Poet/Intellectual	188	Taya Hatun	Family Figure	11
6	Adnan Menderes	Political Leader	170	Sabiha Gökçen	National Figure/Aviation Pioneer	9
7	Mevlana	Religious Figure	167	Adile Naşit	Artist	7
8	Fatih Sultan Mehmet	Historical Ruler	482	Valide Sultan	Family Figure	6
9	Yavuz Sultan Selim	Historical Ruler	277	Müzeyyen Senar	Artist	5
10	Yunus Emre	Poet/Mystic	245	Türkan Saylan	Scientist/Activist	5

Frequently recurring female commemorative place names display a pattern that differs markedly from that observed for male toponyms. Common female names include figures such as *Zübeyde Hanım*, *Nene Hatun*, and *Valide Sultan*, which are associated with roles related to motherhood, sacrifice, and protection. Other frequently recurring female toponyms refer to women recognized for their intellectual, political, or educational contributions, including *Sabiha Gökçen*, *Halide Edip Adıvar*, *Bahriye Üçok*, and *Türkan Saylan*. In addition, women associated with artistic and cultural production, such as *Adile Naşit* and *Müzeyyen Senar*, also appear among the most commonly commemorated female figures. Overall, the most frequently used female place names cluster around familial, cultural, and symbolic forms of recognition, in contrast to the political, military, and religious figures that dominate the set of recurring male toponyms.

Discussion

Urban place naming in Turkey should be understood not merely as a cultural or administrative practice, but as a gendered regime of public patriarchy (Walby, 1990) through which power, memory, and spatial legitimacy are produced and sustained. Within the framework of the “geography of memory”, these names function as “landscapes of memory” that do not simply store the past but actively reframe historical meaning to suit contemporary socio-political needs (Foote & Azaryahu, 2007). From a feminist geographical perspective, public space is structured by unequal power relations, and historically organized around masculine dominance (Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1993). When these strands of scholarship are brought into dialogue, urban toponymy emerges as a key mechanism through which gendered power relations are spatially institutionalized. The findings of this study demonstrate that urban place names in Turkey overwhelmingly privilege male figures associated with state authority, political leadership, and national history, while women remain largely absent from the symbolic landscape. This pronounced asymmetry suggests that toponymic practices function as a form of “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 1991), where the erasure of female presence from the public space actively participates in the reproduction of gender hierarchies by normalizing masculine authority as an unquestioned social “doxa”.

The empirical findings reveal a pronounced geographical disparity within this toponymic regime, manifested as a distinct East–West gradient throughout Turkey. While female commemorative place names are relatively more visible in western metropolises and other western coastal provinces—such as Istanbul, Izmir, Bursa, and Muğla—they remain almost entirely absent in much of Eastern and Central Anatolia. This spatial variation is rooted in the diverging socio-political structures of these regions; in the East, a more conservative social fabric and deeply entrenched traditional norms prioritize the preservation of a patriarchal collective memory, which effectively marginalizes women’s names in the official commemorative landscape of the city. Conversely, in the West, the historical legacy of secular modernism and a more progressive political culture have allowed for a higher symbolic inclusion of women as civic subjects, although this presence remains numerically limited and does not achieve gender parity. Notably, certain inland cities such as Ankara and Eskişehir diverge from the broader conservative trends of Central Anatolia, exhibiting relatively higher female representation in their toponymic landscapes. This pattern reflects their historical roles as key centers of the Republican modernization project and a progressive political culture. These factors have fostered a symbolic inclusion of women in public commemorative spaces, aligning more closely with patterns observed in western coastal provinces than with those of neighboring regions.

From a feminist geographical perspective, urban naming practices in Turkey actively reproduce the public/private divide by regulating the conditions under which women may appear in public space. Women’s presence in urban toponymy is not only quantitatively limited but also symbolically constrained: when women are commemorated, they are most often represented through familial and relational roles such as “mother”, “wife”, or “daughter”, or through narratives of self-sacrifice and moral virtue. Such representations, acting as a discursive mechanism of memory, implicitly relocate women’s identities from the public sphere of political authority and civic agency to the private realm of care, kinship, and devotion. In contrast, male figures are predominantly commemorated as autonomous historical actors—statesmen, military leaders, intellectuals, and founders—whose identities are firmly embedded in the public domain. Through this gendered differentiation, naming practices function as a spatial discourse that naturalizes men’s dominance in public space while rendering women’s public presence conditional, exceptional, and derivative. Urban toponymy thus operates as a subtle yet powerful mechanism through which the public/private divide is reinscribed into the spatial organization of the city and its collective memory.

Critical toponymic scholarship emphasizes that urban space is not symbolically homogeneous; rather, it is organized through hierarchical spatial orders in which certain locations carry greater visibility, prestige, and commemorative value than others (Azaryahu 1996; Alderman 2003). From this perspective, the symbolic power of a place name is inseparable from the spatial prominence of the location it designates, thereby creating a “geography of prestige” that reflects the ruling social order. Central boulevards and major avenues function not only as everyday transit corridors but also as key stages for public ceremonies, political events, and collective rituals, thereby acquiring heightened mnemonic and representational significance. The findings of this study align closely with this theoretical framework, demonstrating that gender inequality in Turkey is materialized through a highly stratified “toponymic attachment” to urban axes. In Turkey, male figures are disproportionately commemorated in the most visible and prestigious segments of the urban landscape—particularly boulevards and primary avenues—while women’s names, when present at all, are largely confined to smaller, less prominent streets. This pattern reveals that gender inequality in urban toponymy operates not only through numerical underrepresentation but also through a spatial hierarchy of visibility that reinforces the “masculinist” coding of the city’s core (Rose 1993). By assigning male names to the most symbolically charged urban axes, naming practices reinforce masculine authority as the normative reference point of public space. Conversely, the marginal placement of women’s names within the urban periphery limits their symbolic reach and restricts their incorporation into collective urban memory. Urban

toponymy thus functions as a spatial ordering mechanism through which gendered power relations are materialized, rendered visible, and sustained within the city (de Miguel González & Sebastián-López 2022).

Placing the Turkish case within a broader international context further clarifies the structural nature of gender inequality in urban toponymy. Critical toponymic studies conducted across different geographical settings consistently demonstrate that public naming practices tend to privilege male figures while marginalizing women's presence in urban space (Berg and Kearns 2009; Ouali et al. 2021; Gutiérrez-Mora & Oto-Peralías 2022; Rusu 2024). When compared with these international cases, Turkey does not represent an isolated anomaly but rather an extreme manifestation of a globally prevalent pattern. While women remain underrepresented in urban toponymy across Europe and beyond, the proportion of female names in Turkey is markedly lower than those reported in many comparable contexts. This disparity underscores the intensity with which patriarchal norms shape symbolic space in Turkey, particularly through the institutionalized mechanisms of public memory and commemoration which function as a form of symbolic boundary-making that restricts female visibility. At the same time, the Turkish case reinforces a key insight of feminist and critical toponymic scholarship: gendered inequalities in place naming are not culturally specific deviations but are embedded within broader regimes of spatial power. By revealing the depth and scale of women's marginalization in urban naming practices, this study contributes to comparative debates by demonstrating how global patterns of gendered toponymy can assume particularly rigid and exclusionary forms within specific national contexts. Turkey thus emerges not as an exception to the rule, but as a critical case that exposes the structural persistence and enduring strength of patriarchal spatial regimes.

By integrating feminist geography with critical toponymy, this study advances the understanding of urban place naming as an active mechanism in the production of gendered spatial power, rather than a passive reflection of social relations. The findings demonstrate that urban toponymy in Turkey does not merely mirror existing gender inequalities but actively organizes public memory through a patriarchal logic that privileges masculine authority, visibility, and legitimacy. In this respect, the study contributes to feminist geographical debates on the public/private divide by showing how this dichotomy is not only socially enacted but also spatially institutionalized through naming practices that perpetuate a form of symbolic violence by rendering women's contributions invisible. At the same time, it extends critical toponymic scholarship by foregrounding gender as a central analytical category in the examination of naming regimes at the national scale. The concept of toponymy as a gendered regime of public patriarchy offers a theoretical framework through which urban naming can be analyzed as a form of symbolic governance that regulates who is entitled to appear in public space and under what conditions. Beyond the Turkish context, this framework holds relevance for comparative research, as it enables scholars to examine how similar regimes of gendered memory operate across different political and cultural settings. Consequently, this study underscores the need to approach place naming not simply as a question of representation, but as a critical site where spatial justice, gender equality, and spatial power intersect.

Conclusion

Urban place naming in Turkey operates as a structurally anchored site of gendered power, through which symbolic and spatial boundaries are institutionalized within the public sphere. By addressing the research questions posed, the findings demonstrate that the commemorative landscape is characterized by a profound masculine monopoly, empirically validated by a thirty-two-to-one ratio between male and female names. This disparity extends beyond numerical differences and functions as a multidimensional form of exclusion, manifested through both uneven spatial distribution and restrictive symbolic framing.

These patterns are not isolated occurrences; rather, when viewed through the combined lenses of critical toponymy and feminist geography, they reveal a systematic mechanism of symbolic governance and social boundary-making. This mechanism effectively produces a form of symbolic violence that excludes women from prominent urban axes and predominantly represents them through relational or socially constrained identities. In contrast, male figures are consistently commemorated as autonomous actors associated with political, military, and cultural authority. Such a hierarchical structuring of public memory naturalizes masculine dominance as a spatial norm, thereby rendering women's legitimacy within the urban landscape conditional.

From a policy-oriented perspective, addressing gender inequality in urban place naming should not be viewed merely as a symbolic or cosmetic intervention, but as part of a broader commitment to gender equality and inclusive urban governance. Reconsidering naming practices offers an opportunity to align urban symbolic landscapes with internationally recognized principles of social justice and gender equality, particularly those articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals—most notably Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). While place names alone cannot transform structural gender inequalities, they play a meaningful role in shaping public memory, everyday

spatial experience, and normative understandings of belonging. Incorporating a gender-sensitive perspective into urban naming policies may therefore contribute to more inclusive representations of social history and to the long-term normalization of gender equality in public space. In this sense, urban toponymy should be recognized not only as a cultural or historical domain, but also as a modest yet significant arena for advancing more equitable and sustainable urban futures.

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