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Reconceptualising Women's Activism in Iran and Turkey at the Turn of the 20th Century

Abstract

Both Atatürk's and Reza Shah's reforms and policies regarding women and their rights and roles in the newly established nation states have been criticised for not altering patriarchal gender roles and practices and for eradicating the independent women's movements which had been hitherto active for decades. However, I argue that there is still a need for a more accurate analysis and reconceptualization of the relationship between the state and the women's movement in Iran and Turkey at the turn of the 20th century. I propose the concept of 'reciprocal gain' as an alternative reading of the relationship between the two in this critical period since it better describes the dynamics of this complex relationship with an emphasis on 'reciprocity' and does justice to the agency of the activist women by acknowledging their 'gain.' Based on a comparative analysis of the primary and secondary sources on the subject in both countries, this paper reinterprets women's activism and their dynamic relations with the state and concludes that their activism in this period was pragmatically designed, took strategic forms in the fast-changing political contexts, and managed to insert a great influence on the policies of the nation states.

Keywords: Women's movement, agency, Iran, Turkey, Middle East, reciprocal gain

1. Introduction

With the increasing popularity of women's history and the feminist methodology, women's activities and writings in the late 19th and early 20th century Middle East have drawn considerable attention and a great number of quality works have been published revealing women's long-forgotten activities in social and political spheres. This long-due visibility and acknowledgement of women's activities and influential roles did not directly give way to a complete understanding of their actions, motivations, and perspectives in those dynamic historical contexts also due to the lack of analytical tools and perspectives. Despite the popularity of the idea of conducting comparative studies among the scholars of the Middle East due to similarities and diffusion of ideas and movements between the countries of the region, very few could so far dare to undertake this risky task despite its promising analytical potential. Iran and Turkey have been among the most popular candidates for such studies due to the social, political, and cultural parallels they shared as the only two countries which were not colonised in the Middle East by the turn of the 20th century. The similarity of their nation-state building projects, authoritarian modernisation policies, as well as

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the pursued gender politics as a part of their modernisation, make them ideal cases for a comparative study.

This article is based on my examination and comparative analysis of both the primary sources written by the intellectuals and activist women from Turkey and Iran in Turkish and Persian and the secondary sources by historians and social scientists on women's activism in the period. When I embarked on this project, I aimed to find the reasons behind the similarities and differences between women's activities and their relations with the political authorities in Iran and Turkey in this period. My comparative review of the sources on the subject from a social movement studies perspective let me notice the need for a new conceptualization of women's activism and agency, especially in its relations with the state and other political actors in this critical period. Therefore, I propose the term *reciprocal gain* to explain the motivations and actions of the two political actors in their relationship: the women's movement and the nation state in Iran and Turkey at the turn of the 20th century.

In the following sections, first, I discuss the problems of women's history in the Middle East in general and in Iran and Turkey in particular. Then, I describe my comparative perspective and methodology. Third, I present the evolution of the women's movement and the ways in which activist women came to terms with the authorities in Turkey and Iran. I showcase the similarities in the emergence of women's movements in the two countries, in their activities and discourses, and finally in their relationships with the political authorities of the period. Finally, after a summary of gender politics of the Reza Shah's and Atatürk's modernisation projects, I present my interpretation of the complex relationship between the newly emerging nation states and the women's movement with a special focus on their motivations and strategic choices.

2. Complications of Women's History in the Middle East

Fleischmann's (1999) proposed trajectory for the evolution of the women's movement in the 'Third World' received wide acceptance among the scholars of Middle Eastern studies since the 1990s.[1] Accordingly, first, the notable women and men began to question the status of women and the social practices causing their inferior position in their countries. The reformers and intellectuals engaged in debates on the 'woman question' in their writings in newspapers, journals, and books. Meanwhile, some women also took the opportunity to participate more vigorously in a wide range of activities in the public sphere including education, publishing, charity, protests, demonstrations, and wartime efforts. With the rise of nationalist movements in the region, women's movements adopted, among others, a nationalist discourse for their emancipation. Finally, in the process of nation-state building, the authoritarian governments took over women's initiatives, suppressed independent women's movements, and implemented a policy often referred to as 'state feminism.' Women's movements in Turkey and Iran seem to have followed this trajectory at first sight. Even if this

1 Fleischmann 1999, 96.

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historical representation of the 'fate' of women's rights movements in the Middle East is more or less accurate; the implicit pessimism in its presentation and the underlying implication that it was the end of women's activism is problematic. For example, one can ask if this trajectory was detrimental to their cause, or more importantly, if the role of women and their decisions and actions were actually more decisive and impactful on the gender policies of the nation states than what has been suggested so far.

The representation of 'Middle Eastern' or 'Muslim women' as passive or submissive subjects is unfortunately still dominant in the mainstream popular representations, even though it no longer prevails in the historiography of the region. Despite the attempts to emphasise and discover women's participation in and activisms during the 'modernisation' processes of their countries,[2] the remnants of old orientalist perceptions of Middle Eastern women are still present in mainstream Western popular literature.

The problems of the women's history in the region are not limited to its distorted perception in the Western imagery. The national historiographies of the countries are also the culprit. The official historiography in Turkey, for example, has depicted women as passive recipients of the political and civic rights granted to them by the new republic as if they had not been demanded by women. This official depiction of women as passive subjects and the disregard for women's previous efforts and activities during the late Ottoman and early Republican periods have created one of the most important problems in women's history in Turkey for a long time, namely until 1980 when feminist historians began to uncover women's activism during the late Ottoman and early Republican periods.

In the case of Iran, however, the 1979 Revolution and the gender politics of the Islamic regime established afterwards cast their shadow over the historiography of women's activism. The negative legacy of the Pahlavi dynasty led to a misrepresentation of the activist women in this period. For example, the depiction of the violent enforcement of unveiling by the Reza Shah's regime resulted in a complete loss of legitimacy for the 'Women's Awakening Project' (*nahzat-e banovan)* in the eyes of the public as well as among scholars and intellectuals of the later periods. As Najmabadi states '[t]he current dissident historiography of women's organisations not only credits (blame) Reza Shah with the unveiling campaign, but it often considers women such as Masturah Afshar, Hajir Tarbiat and Sadiqah Dawlatabadi as traitors to the cause of the independent women's movement and as stooges of Reza Shah.'[3]

Like the Iranian women's movement, the Ottoman/Turkish women's movement did not receive attention before the 1990s when scholars began to reveal the lively and active women's movement before and after the foundation of the new Turkish Republic in 1923. As the arguments of the 'old school' approach to the women's history, represented by scholars such as Afet İnan (1968), Tezer Taşkıran (1973), and

2 See for example: Demirdirek 1998; Çakır 2007; Durakbaşa 2000; Kabasakal Arat 1998; Kandiyoti 1991, 1997; Mahdi 2004; Najmabadi 2002, 2007; Paidar 1995; Rostam-Kolayi 2003; Zihnioğlu 2003.

3 Najmabadi 2007, 173.

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Bernard Caporal (1982), were no longer satisfactory because of their exclusive focus on the Kemalist reforms on the achievement of women's rights, a 'new school' of women's studies in Turkey, represented by Şirin Tekeli, Serpil Çakır, Deniz Kandiyoti, and Nükhet Sirman, emerged around the 1990s and brought about a change in the ways in which women's history is studied in Turkey.[4] Others have followed suit and questioned the traditional perceptions, beliefs, and myths concerning women's activities, roles, and achievements not only in the last period of the Ottoman Empire but also during and after the foundation of the Turkish Republic.[5] With the rise of interest in women's history and gender as an analytical category, several studies have begun to emphasise the long-omitted parts and realities of women's lives and activism in Iranian history, too.[6] These studies drew attention to the developments paving the way for women's activism in different areas during and after the Constitutional Revolution[7] in Iran. However, both in Iran and Turkey, this late-found enthusiasm among historians to discover and uncover women's presence and activism has fallen short of offering a new interpretation for the trajectory of women's activism beyond what was suggested by Fleischmann and her counterparts[8]: the authoritarian nationalist states suppressed the women's activism completely and implemented a gender politics of their own.

In the same vein, unfortunately, the post-1980 feminist scholarship in Turkey, following the lead of scholars like Tekeli, was too quick to dismiss the women's activism between 1935 and the 1980s and define the period as the 'barren years.'[9] The influence of mainstream political perspectives in the period after 1980 on the feminist historiography is one of the reasons for the dismissal of some of the women's activities as 'not feminist enough' or for a one-sided interpretation of their relationship with the state. This led to the romanticisation or idealisation of women's independent organisation and disregard for their cooperation or strategic negotiations with the state. Only recently in the 2010s, studies have begun to reinterpret and cover women's activities and achievements in this period as a part of various political and social movements.[10]

4 Çakır 1994; Kandiyoti 1987; Sirman 1989; Tekeli 1982, 1986.

5 For example, see: Altınay 2004; Durakbaşa 2000; Kabasakal Arat 1998; Zihnioğlu 2003.

6 See: Amin 2002; McElrone 2005; Najmabadi 2007; Paidar 1995; Rostam-Kolayi 2003.

7 The Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911, took place against the Qajar dynasty as a reaction to its concessions to the Western countries. The leading actors of the revolution were the intellectuals, the Islamic clergy (*ulama*), and the bazaar merchants (*bāzāri*) who had been hurt by the Qajar's oppressive policies. Thus, they cooperated to limit the powers of the monarchy through the formation of a constitution. Sanasarian 1982, 16.

8 Fleischmann's reading of the women's activism in this period resonated well with those of the feminist historians in Turkey and Iran such as Tekeli (1986), Çakır (1994), Paidar (1995) and Amin (2002).

9 Çağatay 2017, 16–8. Çağatay argues that the omission is due to the feminist scholars' viewing of feminism and Kemalism as antithetical (ibid 41).

10 Akal 2011; Azak and de Smaele 2016; Çağatay 2017; Çakır Kılınçoğlu 2019; Şahin and Sarıtaş 2016, 2017.

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3. A Relational and Processual Comparative Approach to Women's Movements

One can always make a list of differences between Iran and Turkey[11] to explain the nuances and differences between women's movements in the two countries. For example, the two countries differed in the structure of the political authority – Qajar Iran was decentralised while the Ottoman Empire was more centralised in the influence the clergy enjoyed in politics and society, and in their relationship to the West and Western ideas. These differences of course had consequences on the women's movement, too. For example, activist Ottoman women appear to be bolder in their writings or demands. However, it is not the objective of this article to make an all-encompassing list of differences and then discuss their influence on the women's movement. Instead, in order to make an analytical comparative interpretation of the two cases, this study aims to focus on and compare the salient features of the two cases, namely the relational mechanisms influencing the trajectory of women's activism in the context of nation-state-building processes. Thus, the emphasis is on the contextual and relational dynamics between the actors in question.

A contextual and relational approach to women's activism allows us to see the similarities between the tactics, strategies, and compromises that both Iranian and Turkish activist women resorted to in a hostile, i.e., a conservative patriarchal setting. The specificity of the patriarchal setting they inhabited was determined by several factors to differing degrees, such as (a) dominant Islamic discourse, (b) conservative male intellectuals, (c) traditional values, and (d) emerging nationalist convictions of the period. Therefore, as the examples below demonstrate, we observe certain similarities in both women's activisms in Iran and Turkey at the turn of the 20th century, such as (a) recourse to Islamic and nationalist discourses to gain legitimacy, (b) disappointment in the previous political projects, such as the constitutional periods before the emergence of nation-states, and finally (c) deliberate compromise in the face of emerging strong nation-states. These similarities entail a more comparative and analytical approach to women's movements than what have been offered in the national and regional historiographies so far.

Feminist historiography and scholarship have been a great source of inspiration in the reinterpretation and reconceptualization offered in this paper. For example, Kandiyoti (1988)'s formulation of the 'patriarchal bargain' in illustrating the resilience of women's agency even in the most unlikely patriarchal settings, Rostam-Kolayi (2003)'s revelation of the appropriation of the Shah's regime of the women's discourse and demands after closing down all the independent women's organisations, Najmabadi (2007)'s emphasis on women's agency during Reza Shah period, and also

11 Justification for a comparative study between the authoritarian modernisation projects of Iranian and Turkish nation states is already warranted in the literature by the works of prominent scholars such as Atabaki and Zürcher 2004 and Atabaki 2004. Besides, comparison and contrasting of their gender politics, e.g., concerning their handling of women's veiling have been a regular subject in the relevant literature, see, for example Adak 2022; Chehabi 2003; Rostam-Kolayi and Matin-Asgari 2014.

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Tekeli (1986)'s discussion of Kemalist reforms as 'instrumental' for its modernisation project all inspired me to coin the term *reciprocal gain* in explaining this dynamic, interactive, and unequal relationship between the state and the activist women. Where they fall short of recognizing the agency, i.e., tactical capacity, of the women's activism as strategic actors, I complete it with a comparative perspective and by relying on the conceptual framework of social movement studies.

Accepting both the states and the activist women in question as dynamic, interacting, and strategic political actors, rather than one-dimensional, ideological, or static 'bodies,' is a prerequisite to employing the concepts and approaches of the social movement studies. In this context, following the contentious politics strand of the social movements' literature, I propose the concept of *reciprocal gain* to explicate the relationship between the nation-states and women's movements to emphasise the reciprocity of the gains both sides have acquired by appropriating or compromising and offer a new interpretation beyond the women's activism as the victim of the almighty authoritarian nation-state. Reciprocal gain, as a defining feature of the relationship between the main actors, explains why the states adopted the activist women's discourse and demands, and why the activist women made big compromises at certain periods. What has been proposed so far as the possible consequences of any social and political activism especially in its relationship with the state, are failure, co-optation by the state, and institutionalisation.[12] Falling somewhere between institutionalisation and co-optation, I argue, the perspective of reciprocal gain explains even seemingly counterintuitive or irrational decisions and actions of the movement actors when we view them as reactions based on the actors' deliberate reflections and perceptions. As scholars of activism and contentious politics have recently demonstrated, the actions and decisions of the activists depend not only on contextual factors, such as opportunities and threats but also on the ways in which they are perceived by the activists.[13] The perceptions of the activists, on the other hand, are observed to be determined by various factors including their relations with other relevant actors including their constituency, state, political parties, intellectuals, adversaries, etc., their ideology, their level of collective identity formation, and other cognitive mechanisms.[14] It is immensely useful to pay them the due attention in making sense of the collective and individual actions and decisions of the activists. Therefore, I analyse the women's activism in question from a processual and relational approach. In other words, the

12 Here I refer to a general tendency or understanding in the social movement studies literature. However, an interested reader can refer to the early works of Charles Tilly for detailed discussions of the relationship between the state and social movements. For the discussion of various other mechanisms proposed to explain the dynamics of the relationships between the social movement activists and other relevant actors and how they operate, see, for example, Tilly 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2015.

13 See, for example, Della Porta 1995; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Polletta 2006; Tilly 2002; Tilly and Tarrow 2015.

14 See, for example, Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou 2015; Della Porta 2013; Tilly 2001.

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analysis is situated in its dynamic historical context which was constantly reshaped by other actors and their relationships to each other.

4. The Emergence of Women's Activism in Iran and Ottoman Turkey

The Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911) has been considered a turning point in the history of the women's movement in Iran since intellectuals and reformers of the period, including some women, began to continuously voice demands for women's rights. Furthermore, some middle and lower-class women engaged in unprecedented activism by participating in demonstrations, protests, and boycotts during the Revolution.[15] Women's participation in the Revolution was significant for several reasons. First, they adopted the dominant nationalist and religious discourse in their protests in the face of economic and political pressure imposed by the imperialist powers, Britain and Russia. Women were affected by the economic crisis, and thereby able to seize the opportunity to legitimise their organised presence in the public sphere.

Second, the women's activities during the riots both before and during the Revolution were encouraged by the religious leaders (*ulama*). However, the *ulama* whose fiery speeches and instructions stirred a reactionary movement among the Iranian women during the Constitutional Revolution were not the traditional conservative clerics but liberal-minded (*azadikhah*)[16] *ulama* and preachers who were in favour of constitutionalism.[17]

Women's participation in the Constitutional Revolution mainly materialised through the secret societies called *anjuman*. They opened girls' schools and published women's journals by collecting donations via *anjuman*s. These were historic developments increasing the knowledge and consciousness of women through activism.

Although women's activism during the Constitutional Revolution sowed the seeds of their further organisation and involvement in politics, all was in vain in terms of gaining civil, political, and educational rights from the new parliament.[18] Their objection to this injustice was echoed in the pages of the period's publications as one woman expressed her frustration: 'Why is it that the Constitution has prevented women from gaining their rights? [Women] did not take part in the revolution to have their rights trampled upon.'[19] This was clearly a teaching moment for the activist Iranian women and influenced the character of their future activism and strategies.

15 Shuster 1968; Bāmdād 1968.
16 Bāmdād, 1968, 7.
17 Activist women spoke against *ulama* as well when they opposed women's activities or rights. This was due to the pragmatic characteristic of the women's movement and did not change during Reza Shah's rule as well. They pursued alliances and cooperation with other forces and actors as long as they served women's interests.
18 See Afary 1996; Bayat-Phillipp 1978; Paidar 1995 for the details of the discussion that took place in *Majles* concerning women's rights.
19 Paidar 1995, 55.

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In terms of educational and legal rights, women in the Ottoman Empire had already been in a better position than Iranian women. For example, the 1858 Land Code had given equal inheritance rights to male and female subjects of the state.[20] Moreover, it was as early as 1842 in the form of midwifery training schools that the state first initiated the education of women.[21] The opening of secondary schools and teachers' schools for girls followed soon after.[22] Still, also in Ottoman Turkey, women's rights and related reforms were not even included in the agenda of the first Parliament despite that these issues were discussed and necessary reforms were suggested by influential male and female intellectuals of the period.

Therefore, the emergence of a separate women's press, for women, and by women, marked a major development for the women's movement in the Ottoman Empire. Before the foundation of the Turkish Republic, forty women's journals had been published,[23] the first one as early as 1868. Newspaper for Ladies (*Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete)*, which was published from 1895 until 1908, was exceptional in many respects. Although its first writers were the daughters of civic officials or princesses, within a year professional journalists and schoolteachers took over and their writings covered the pages of the journal.[24]

4.1. Islam, Nationalism, and Women

In the early years of their activism, most women tried to abstain from criticizing Islam directly. Instead, they condemned men, conservative clergy, or traditions for their inferior condition. Besides, some also attempted to reinterpret the Quranic verses and the conducts of the Prophet and his family in its historical and social context to support their claims. For example, as early as 1894, Bibi Khanom Astrabadi, in her book titled *The Vices of Men* (*Ma'āyib al-rijāl*), opposed polygamy by referring to the verse ordering men to marry additional wives only if they believed that they can treat them justly.[25]

As one of the most prominent Ottoman women of the period, Fatma Aliye (1862–1936) was renowned for her emphasis on the role of Islam in the development of women's rights. In her serial articles, which were titled Famous Women of Islam (*Namdaran-ı Zenan-ı İslamıyan*),[26] she pointed out the successes of Muslim women in history, and hence, claimed that Islam is not an impediment to women's progress.[27] Her

20 Aytekin views this change in the law as a step towards gender equality, but it is a little far-fetched of a statement. As he also states in the same article, the change in the Code should be seen as a part of the Empire's capitalist modernisation reforms. Aytekin 2009, 142, 148.
21 Taşkıran 1973, 32.
22 Tekeli 1986, 182.
23 Çakır 1994, 8.
24 Frierson 1996, 17.
25 Amin 2008, 35.
26 Published in *Malumat* in 1899.
27 Demirdirek 1993, 87–8.

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less-known work titled Addition to the Polygamy of Men (*Taaddüt-i Zevcât'a Zeyl*)[28] is worth mentioning for its similarity to Bibi Khanom's book *Ma'āyib al-rijāl*. Similar to Bibi Khanom, Fatma Aliye wrote this book in response to a work of a cleric supporting polygamy of men in Islam and opposed his arguments by referring to Islamic rules and history. Just like Bibi Khanom, Fatma Aliye also resorted to the same verse ordering men to marry additional wives only if they believed that they can treat them justly and points out the impossibility of this condition.[29]

Additionally, to obtain support for the foundation of an adult school for women in Iran, the members of the Society of Patriotic Women (*Jam'iyat-e Nesvān-e Vatankhāh*) did not hesitate to return to the *ulama*. They used the argument that women would only be more devoted to Islam if they could read.[30] Activist women also tried to appeal to spreading nationalistic feelings. For instance, the founders of two schools for girls sent a letter to the journal *Iran-e Naw*, which argued that, when girls received an education, 'every household [will be] headed by a learned lady who knows well household management, child rearing, […] and from whose breast milk love of homeland will be fed to the infants so that they shall be deserving of service and sacrifice.'[31]

The first examples of economic nationalism of women go back to the foundation process of the National Bank in 1907 in Iran.[32] The activist women included the objective of promoting the use of domestic products in the goals of the other *anjumans* as well. For example, while the Society of Women of the Motherland (1909) was against taking foreign loans and importing foreign goods, the Society of Patriotic Women (1922) emphasised the importance of wearing homemade clothes.[33]

The activist women[34] in the Ottoman Empire, like their counterparts in Iran, were also invested in the economic and nationalist issues in their country. For instance, as an indication of their active involvement in the creation of a nationalist economic policy, they founded the Women's Society for the Consumption of Local Products (*Mamulat-ı Dahiliye İstihlaki Kadınlar Cemiyeti*) in 1913.[35] The Women's Section of the Union and Progress, the Society for the Protection of Women, the Society for the Elevation of Women, and the Ottoman Islamic Association for the Employment of Women were among the most well-known women's organisations of the time dealing with political and economic issues.[36]

28 Aliye 2007.
29 Öztürk 2002, 378.
30 Khusraw'panāh 1381 [2002 or 2003], 190.
31 Najmabadi 2002, 121.
32 It was reported that women of Iran donated jewellery and other personal belongings to contribute to the foundation of the National Bank. See Afary 1996 Bamdad 1977; Shaykh al-Islāmī 1972.
33 Nāhīd 1989, 107–15.
34 This study focuses on Turkish activist and intellectual women. Unfortunately, studies on the issue have mostly excluded non-Muslim, Armenian and Kurdish women who were also active in the same period.
35 Van Os 1999, 301.
36 Toprak 1991, 447.

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4.2. Publishing and Education as the Forefront of Women's Activism

As mentioned, activist women in both countries were engaged primarily in publishing and education activities. In 1917, Sadiqeh Dowlatabadi, one of the most prominent activists in Iran, founded the first girls' school in Esfahan and established the Esfahan Women's Association. In 1920 she published Women's Language (*Zaban-e Zanan*), the first periodical published under the editorship of a woman. Since *Zaban-e Zanan* explicitly stated that it aimed at awakening women, it drew more hostility; and after her house was stoned and looted, Dowlatabadi had to move to Tehran[37] first and left the country to study in France in 1922. As in the example of Dowlatabadi's experience, girls' schools or women's associations were subjected to constant physical attacks and various forms of social pressure. Moreover, even during the late 1920s, when women had already gained the support of the government on girls' education and some girls' schools were opened by the government, they had to endure vandalism and humiliation.[38]

In the early period of their activism, women in Ottoman Turkey demanded education not only to become good mothers and wives but also for their self-development. They believed that only through education could they 'establish a presence and encounter men for equality.'[39] Furthermore, Ottoman activist women also demanded the right to work and vote, as well as 'the right to live.'[40] In 1914, Feriha Kamuran wrote in the pages of the Women's Universe (*Kadınlar Alemi)*:

> Women have played important roles in civilized and advanced countries, especially in the history of their constitutions. The struggles that women have gone through, particularly in the social revolutions that follow the political revolutions, are as significant as those of men…A civilization and a constitutional regime without women are impossible.[41]

Among the Ottoman women's publications, Women's World (*Kadınlar Dünyası)*, published between 1913 and 1921, had a distinct place. It was the first women's journal whose owner and writers were solely women. It did not allow men to write in its columns and announced that '[u]ntil our rights are recognised in public law, until men and women are equal in every profession, *Kadınlar Dünyası* will not welcome men in its pages.'[42] Although its writers were usually elite and intellectual women of the time, it provided women from all walks of life with a venue to make their voices heard. Even its owner, Ulviye Mevlan, was coming from a modest background as a daughter of a Circassian family deported from the Caucasus by Russian forces in 1864.[43] *Kadınlar*

37 Bāmdād 1977, 79.
38 See Bāmdād 1977, 84; Khusraw'panāh 1381 [2002 or 2003], 188.
39 Demirdirek 1993, 68.
40 Demirdirek 1993, 82, 111, 117.
41 Atamaz Hazar 2009, 430.
42 Çakır 2007, 69.
43 Çakır 1994, 139.

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Dünyası received an enthusiastic welcome from women who sent supporting letters and pieces comprising their opinions and suggestions for the journal.[44]

Naturally, activist women were not in agreement on every issue. For example, their opinions diverged on the issue of unveiling in Iran. Even in the pages of the same journal, *Shukufeh* (1912–1916), while Shahnaz Azad and Shams Kasma'i wrote in favour of unveiling, others like Muzayyan al-Saltanah argued against it.[45] Similarly, as opposed to Fatma Aliye's moderate position, Fatma Nesibe Hanım did not hesitate to call men enemies of women and held them responsible not only for the mistakes of the past that caused the current problems in Ottoman society but also for the women's misery.[46]

Despite the relatively freer atmosphere of the Second Constitutional period (1908–1918) in the Ottoman Empire, women were disappointed with this new era of 'freedom' because the reforms that they had been expecting were not introduced. They argued that 'reformists had forgotten their pledge to emancipate women once they obtained state power.'[47] Women even called the fifth anniversary of the 1908 constitution the 'National Day of Men.'[48] Here, the similarity between the experiences of the Ottoman and Iranian women is striking. Iranian activist women also complained about the indifference of reformist men to women's issues soon after the Constitutional Revolution. Women in both counties soon realised that they had been utilised by men for the sake of their political projects, such as fortifying patriarchal nationalism.

Not so unexpectedly, the socio-economic background of the activists played a critical role in the type of activities and activisms women were undertaking. While elite and middle-class women in Iran, including the daughters and the wives of the king, princes, *ulama,* and the members of the parliament (*Majles)*, were engaged in educational and intellectual activities, lower-class women mainly organised street demonstrations, riots, and clashes with anti-constitutionalists. Later, an ideological division formed among the intellectual activist women as well. While some women waged a war against every sort of obstacle inhibiting women from political activities, others constrained themselves to educational activities.[49]

Among the activities carried out by the grassroots women's movement during the Constitutional Revolution in Iran were fighting on the front lines, rioting against hoarding and shortages of food, collecting money to be sent to the families of constitutionalists, demonstrating in the streets of Tehran, giving refuge to deputies, and hiding volunteer soldiers in their homes.[50] Some even fought against the Royalist forces in male clothes, and many were killed in the siege of Tabriz.[51] The elite activist

44 Çakır 1994, 146.
45 Najmabadi 2007, 161.
46 For the full text of her speech see: Çakır 1994, 117–25.
47 Sirman 1989, 6.
48 Çakır 2007, 71.
49 Khusraw'panāh 1381 [2002 or 2003], 20.
50 Paidar 1995, 57–8.
51 Afary 1996, 194.

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women, on the other hand, established first Muslim girls' schools often in their residences.[52] By 1910, there were more than 50 private girls' schools, literacy, and night classes in Tehran.[53] However, for a long time, the 'woman teachers and girls attending these new schools faced gross insults, obscene gestures, and spitting,' and were even subjected to stoning by men.[54] The price they had to pay for their activities could sometimes be life threatening.

Activist women in the Ottoman Empire were mostly educated and coming from middle and upper-class families as was the case in other parts of the world in the same period.[55] However, grassroots women also participated in women's activism through sending letters to the newspapers. From 1912 until 1922, both elite women and women from lower classes contributed to the war efforts through raising funds, organising supplies, and tending the wounded, while some others actively fought or were recruited as workers in textile and ammunition factories.[56] Likewise, the War of Independence and the state-building process from 1918 to 1923 paved the way for an even more active role for women in society and politics: '[T]hey organised public meetings, addressed the masses, founded Defence of Rights associations, and fought actively in the war.'[57]

In short, two striking similarities are worth mentioning regarding women's activism in both countries in this period. First, the diversity of activities between the women from upper and lower classes reflected the differences between them in terms of their socio-economic backgrounds, privileges, access to sources and networks, and interests and it was present from the beginning of the emergence of women's mobilisation in both countries. What they had in common, namely their subordinate position vis-à-vis men and their objective to improve their status, i.e., women's cause, allowed them to benefit from the activities and accomplishments of one another even though they were not always able to actively support and cooperate with each other. For example, even when the anti-imperialist and nationalistic activities of women were not directly driven by a feminist or gender-conscious agenda, they still contributed to a gendered awareness by letting women encounter the patriarchal nature of politics and public space in their societies. While the writings of elite and intellectual women in the newspapers raised the gender awareness among the middle- and lower-class women, the public presence and active participation of middle- and lower-class women strengthened the position and legitimised the demands of their sisters in upper echelons. However, it should be borne in mind that it was mostly the elite and upper-middle-class activist women who shaped the discourse of their activism. Besides, they could afford a continuous presence in the fields of their activism, and thereby, inflict their influence in the following periods. However, they were also more invested and connected

52 Najmabadi 2002, 118.
53 Afary 1996, 182.
54 Bayat-Philipp 1978, 300.
55 Fleischmann 1999, 104.
56 Sirman 1989, 8.
57 Tekeli 1986, 183.

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in the networks of the elites of the emerging nation-states which had an impact on the strategies they adopted in the following periods.

Second, disappointment experienced by both Iranian and Turkish activist women in the aftermath of the constitutional revolutions at the beginning of the 20th century was the most important relational mechanism setting its influence on their collective memory as the reformist male politicians chose to 'forget' their promises concerning women's rights after seizing power. As a result of this experience, activist women learned that they could be instrumentalised by men for the sake of their political projects. However, in the following periods, instead of refusing cooperation with male reformists and nationalists completely, they acted more strategically and tried to turn the dominant discourse and current situation to their own advantage. At the same time, activist women concluded that they cannot rely only on men in power to achieve their goals.[58] Thus, women's own initiatives in the areas of education, publishing, and organising increased to a great extent in the constitutional periods; thereby helping them become political actors to be reckoned with in the following periods.

5. The Nation States and Women's Movements

5.1. Iranian Women's Flourishing Activism

Reza Shah did not take any action against women's movement when he seized power in 1921. Even after taking over the crown in 1925, he pursued a reconciliatory policy with most of the political and social actors that flourished since the Constitutional Revolution, including *bāzāri* and *ulama*, the leftist groups, the women's movement, and the Conservatives and the Democrats in the *Majles*. However, together with his gradual consolidation of power, his attitude towards these groups became more suppressive until his crackdown on any kind of independent formation reached its peak in the 1930s.[59] Therefore, women's organisations were still independent until the early 1930s and most of them supported Reza Shah's reforms.

Meanwhile, the demands of activist women for change in the 1920s increased and became more pervasive. Both the flourishing intellectual groups and political parties with their reformist agendas for women's rights in the country and the news about the emancipation of women in the Muslim Soviet Republics encouraged activist Iranian women to raise their demands.[60]

58 For example, Emine Semiye pointed out this issue clearly in her article, titled 'From Whom Shall We Expect the Progress of Womanhood?' (*Terakkiyat-i Nisvaniyye'yi Kimden Bekleyelim?*), where she argued that women had only one reliable force to ameliorate their own situation: women. See: Demirdirek 1993, 75–7. The strong support she received from other women is proof of the popularity of this idea among women. See: Sirman 1989, footnote: 9.

59 Abrahamian 1982, 118–69; Keddie 2006, 73–88.

60 Moghissi 1994, 35.

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Activist women still disagreed with each other on whether observance of veiling is compatible with women's progress or not;[61] however, the number of proponents of unveiling was visibly increasing. In the pages of the Messenger of Women's Prosperity (*Payk-e Saadet-e Nesvan*) women's unveiling in Uzbekistan was celebrated, and *chador* was depicted as an obstacle to the employment of women.[62] The Society of Patriotic Women sent petitions to Reza Shah as a part of its anti-veil campaign.[63]

Publication activities of the activist women also continued unabated. Women's World (*Ālam-e Nesvān*) was published by the graduates of the American Protestant School in 1920 and survived for 14 years; it was a record among the women's publications in Iran. Its agenda consisted of similar demands to the previous and contemporary women's organisations; however, it emphasised mainly three demands: 'family-law reform, women's employment, and unveiling.'[64]

In the face of growing women's activism and demands, the Marriage Act of Civil Code was ratified in 1931. It can be considered Reza Shah's first attempt to gain the support of women's rights activists.[65] This act was also in line with the new regime's overall policy of modernising Iranian women. Although it retained the codes of Islamic law (*Shari'a*) and did not change the legal rights of women in marriage and divorce substantially, many activist women supported it. Thanks to the new law, at least the marriage age was increased, women gained extra leverage during marriage negotiations, and registration of marriages (including temporary marriages) was made compulsory. [66]

Although the writers in *Ālam-e Nesvān* took a cautious stance on the issue of unveiling in the early 1920s, they were standing firmly against face veil (*chador* and *picheh)* by 1931 like many leftist journals and organisations of the time. Veiling was depicted as backward, unnatural, and as an impediment to the development of both women and society.[67] This position was to be adopted by the state in the second half of the 1930s. As early as 1922, the journal also called for the training of women as doctors, lawyers, physicians, dentists, tailors, and midwives; and it continued to fight for women's rights to work in these professions.[68] While these demands were tolerated by the government, some Iranian women's recommendations for electoral rights were rejected by the *Majles* in 1933.[69]

61 Najmabadi 2007, 170.
62 Najmabadi 2007, 169–70.
63 Moghissi 1994, 39.
64 Rostam-Kolayi 2003, 159.
65 Amin 2008, 14.
66 Rostam-Kolayi 2003, 168.
67 Rostam-Kolayi 2003, 168–70.
68 Rostam-Kolayi 2003, 170–3.
69 Mahdi 2004, 430.

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5.2. Adoption of the Women's Movement's Discourse by Reza Shah Government

Finally in 1931, by a law banning 'collectivist ideologies' Reza Shah Government prohibited all the leftist journals and organisations including *Payk-e Saadet-e Nesvan*. By 1935, all the other women's organisations and publications either were banned or disappeared. In their stead, the infamous Ladies' Centre (*Kanun-e Banuvan*) was established by bringing many prominent women activists under its umbrella. This was the final move by the Reza Shah Government to co-opt the women's movement and its activities.

However, not only did the Reza Shah Government take over the women's movement but also adopted its discourse and demands. The regime did not invent a new discourse or roles for women but assumed the whole discourse which had been developed mostly by women since the constitutional movement. The adoption of the arguments of women's rights supporters by the Pahlavi regime was evident in the decrees and articles published by the governmental offices and even in the speeches of Reza Shah.

When Reza Shah announced the compulsory unveiling policy of the state on January 7, 1936, he started his famous speech by quoting Hajir Tarbiat, the president of the newly established women's organisation *Kanun-e Banuvan*: 'As Khanum Tarbiat has noted, women in this country could not develop their innate capacities because they were kept outside society.'[70] According to Najmabadi, this indicates that her opinion was regarded as important and even seen as an affirmation of what was being said by 'the most powerful man in the country.'

Furthermore, Reza Shah, in the very same speech, repeated 'verbatim the arguments already articulated in Ālam-e Nesvān.'[71] Ironically, since the activist women had developed their discourse cautiously based on the contemporary religious and traditional norms of Iranian society, the Reza Shah Government did not have a hard time adopting women's rights discourse. It was also the case with the implementation of other policies and reform programs by the government such as the education of girls, women's employment, and even unveiling. As opposed to the long-held assumptions, it has become clear that the 'notorious' compulsory unveiling campaign 'was neither legislated nor 'decreed' by Reza Shah.'[72] As mentioned above, it was in line with the demands of at least some of the activist women and instead of being the main objective of *Kanun-e Banuvan*,[73] it was put into practice as a part of 'a broader authoritarian nationalist project of modernizing women's education, physical health, and moral cultivation.'[74]

70 Najmabadi 2007, 174.
71 Rostam-Kolayi 2003, 172.
72 Rostam-Kolayi and Matin-Asgari 2014, 121.
73 Though this argument is expressed in the studies conducted under the Islamic Republic, the unveiling is not among the main goals of *Kanun-e Banuvan*. Rostam-Kolayi and Matin-Asgari 2014, 126.
74 Rostam-Kolayi and Matin-Asgari 2014, 126.

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Nevertheless, Reza Shah and the whole project were accused of having never aimed at the equality of men and women,[75] but rather at suppressing the 'democratic' and independent women's movement and causing nothing but misery and humiliation to Iranian women. However, as Amin also asserts, despite all its shortcomings and wrongdoings, the Women's Awakening campaign had changed the fate of Iranian women so drastically that from then on, some achievements were taken for granted and have never been abandoned by secular and Islamist women's rights movements in the following periods. For example, 'the Marriage Laws of 1931 and 1937, the opening of higher education to women, or trends toward literacy and professional employment among urban women' can be regarded as among those achievements.[76] Similarly, Paidar stresses that the *Kanun-e Banuvan*, which was funded by the government, provided much-needed security to the women's rights activists even though its establishment meant the end of women's independent activities. The state offered women financial support, protection from harassment by fanatics, and respect from the authorities. Therefore, many women chose to continue their struggle under the framework of this Centre.[77]

Furthermore, with regard to Dowlatabadi's support for Reza Shah's policies, Najmabadi suggests that she could 'be seen as using the government as much as the government can be seen as using her.'[78] As another example, Masturah Afshar, the president of the Society of Patriotic Women, also supported the 1931 and 1937 laws and considered their ratification as a success for women rather than the 'submission of compromising women to a strong state.'[79] After having experienced disappointment at the end of constitutional movements and violence for their activities from the public, activist women's acceptance of the nation-state's co-optation in exchange for protection is more of a strategic move than a sign of failure or submission.

5.3. Women under the Turkish Republican Regime

The new Turkish Republic, founded in 1923, had a unique place among the Muslim-majority societies in the Middle East of that period since it made the first and most comprehensive reforms in terms of the secularization of the state as well as the status of women in legal, political, and social spheres. First, the 1924 Constitution extended the right to education to women by rendering it free and compulsory for both sexes.[80] Then, in 1926, with the adoption of the new civil law, polygamy was banned, the legal minimum age for marriage was increased, women were entitled to initiate divorce, and equality between the sexes was accepted as a general princi-

75 Paidar 1995, 109.
76 Amin 2002, 7.
77 Paidar 1995, 105.
78 Najmabadi 2007, 173.
79 Najmabadi 2007, 170.
80 Gök and Ilgaz 2007, 124.

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ple.[81] Compared to the Reza Shah Government, the Turkish Republic seems to have acted quicker and been generous regarding the women's rights reforms. However, the above-mentioned boldness of the demands of the activist Ottoman women in contrast to those of Iranian activist women in the same period played a significant role in this difference. Nevertheless, both regimes initially followed a conciliatory and adaptive policy towards women's activism and demands, within the limits of their political projects. Moreover, just like Reza Shah's regime, the Kemalist Republic both appropriated the discourse of the Ottoman women's movement pragmatically and suppressed its organisations and representatives in the process of the consolidation of its power.[82]

The formation of 'the modern Turkish woman' through reforms and rights was an essential component of the Turkish Republican elites' nation-building project. In their efforts to create a new national identity, the leaders of the new republic embraced the pre-Islamic Turkish past, customs, and values as a source of inspiration. During the project of 'creating' a Turkish identity that was egalitarian and democratic, the image of powerful Turkish women who had actually been equal to men among the pre-Islamic Turks emerged mainly from Ziya Gökalp's writings, who even claimed that the old Turks were feminists.[83] Adopting Gökalp's arguments regarding the role and place of women in Turkish society was very convenient for Mustafa Kemal who could thereby justify his gender politics without crediting women's movement or empowering their discourse. Women were designated as 'patriotic citizens' and then as 'daughters of the Republic.' Besides, they were expected to be dedicated mothers and proper wives while their duty to educate future generations of the nation gained even more emphasis. A selective adoption of the arguments of the Ottoman women's rights movement and redressing of them as inherent Turkish values can clearly be observed in these instances.

Nevertheless, some activist women, the most prominent of whom was Nezihe Muhittin, kept fighting particularly to achieve women's political rights before they were 'granted' to them. They were suffragettes and aimed to establish a women's party.[84] The events which revolved around the foundation of a women's party and the reactions of the Kemalist elites to women's activism and demands would well define the atmosphere in which women fought for their rights under the Republic.

On June 15, 1923, the women's association declared the establishment of the Women's People Party (*Kadınlar Halk Fırkası,* KHF) with an ambitious party program, and Nezihe Muhiddin was elected as the chair of the party.[85] In the statute of the party it was clearly stated that, in addition to social and economic rights, the party sought to achieve political rights for women. The party secretary, Şükufe Nihal, declared that they set a goal to send their representatives to the parliament. [86] However, the KHF's

81 Çiçekli 2018, 110.
82 Çağatay 2017, 96–100.
83 Durakbaşa 2009, 121.
84 Zihnioğlu 2003, 121–2.
85 Çakır 1994, 126.
86 Çakır 1994, 127.

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application for authorization was rejected by the government without an explanation. Nevertheless, these women did not yield, established the Turkish Women's Union (*Türk Kadınlar Birliği*, TKB, est. 1924) instead and fought for the political rights of women within the framework of this union from 1924 to 1927.

TKB published a journal called the Woman's Path (*Kadın Yolu*) between 1925 and 1927. In the pieces published in the journal, writers stated their commitment until and after achieving the right to vote, replied to the criticisms against their cause, and defended women's political rights. They also gave examples of women's movements from all around the world and explained the differences of feminisms in theoretical discussions.[87] More importantly, in the pages of the Woman's Path, women demanded equality in divorce and inheritance, as well as custody rights before they were regulated by the civil code in 1926.

However, the Union faced many problems and its activities received considerable criticism in the press until the dismissal of its leader, Nezihe Muhiddin, in 1927. Especially, the daily *Cumhuriyet* and its columnist Nadir Nadi took a very hostile stance against Muhiddin, feminism, and TKB.[88] As a result of systematic pressures from the government and the press, from 1927 until it was abolished, TKB could only do charity work and support the government's policies concerning women.[89] Finally, the succeeding leader, Latife Bekir, announced the abolishment of the Union, in 1935, 'under the pretext that the regime had already achieved all of TKB's goals without leaving any need for its existence.'[90] However, the Kemalist regime did not only target the women's organisation but also closed down many other independent organisations, such as the Workers' Advancement Society (*Amele Teali Cemiyeti*) and Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*) by the mid-1930s,[91] like Reza Shah clamped down on all the leftist and women's organisations and publications around the same time. Kemalists were not against women's political rights per se but their promotion by an independent women's organisation such as TKB. Accordingly, women's public activities and organisations were assigned to the wives and daughters of the Kemalist elite, sometimes even hand-picked by Mustafa Kemal.[92] Nevertheless, women in Turkey obtained the right to vote and to stand for election first at a local level in 1930 and then at the national level in 1934. This could be viewed as the ultimate success of the Kemalist regime in co-opting the women's movement and in appropriating its legitimacy by taking all the credit for the achievement of women's rights in the country. However, this is neither the whole story nor the end of women's activism.

For example, even during its most 'idle' years, TKB and its members were active in the education of girls and helping orphans. Moreover, TKB continued to have the authority and legitimacy as representing women whose opinion still mattered and was

87 Ateş 2009.
88 Zihnioğlu 2003, 160–4.
89 Zihnioğlu 2003, 249–50.
90 Sirman 1989, 13.
91 Durakbaşa 2009, 127
92 Çağatay 2017, 94–6, 101.

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asked, even though just to pay lip service to the Kemalist reforms. Nonetheless, when asked whether she would engage in politics like Nezihe Muhittin did before her, Latife Bekir did not refute the idea completely but stated that 'the time for it would come […] but before that we have work to do […] we will try to find work for women and children who are in need.'[93] While the political activities of the previous period were redefined as charity, and thereby unthreatening, the activist women seemed to adapt their priorities to the political contexts of the period.

Despite its compliant and supportive statements and activities, TKB was still perceived as a threat. There were several reasons for this. First, these women gathered under the umbrella of TKB and shaped public opinion via articles and declarations in the press, conferences, and speeches. They even received the support of Mustafa Kemal's then-wife Latife Hanım.[94] They had created pressure on the legislature in every possible way to gain more rights for women and protect them. Since all the attention and policy of the new regime were heavily focused on the achievement of 'national solidarity' in the first years of the Republic, the activities of TKB were regarded as ill-timed and even as a 'threat' to national solidarity. [95] Second, according to Tekeli (1979) and Abadan-Unat (1981), at a time when fascist dictatorships were gaining ground in Germany and Italy, single-party rule in Turkey wanted to assert its democratic orientation through egalitarian reforms such as the enfranchisement of women. Therefore, they wanted to create an image of a 'democratic Turkish Republic granting all their rights to women' rather than accept 'the deeply rooted tradition of the women's movement fighting for and obtaining their rights.'[96] Eventually, as a result of the abolition of TKB and the closure of the Woman's Path, the Turkish nation-state took over the independently growing women's movement and created its own 'feminism.'[97]

'State feminism' on the one hand referred to theoretical equality between men and women in the discourse of the state, including Mustafa Kemal's own speeches. However, as mentioned above, the division of labour between them was patriarchal and it emphasised motherhood as the main responsibility of women. One of Atatürk's statements is a perfect testimony to state feminism's patriarchal perception: '[women] must be virtuous, dignified, and capable of gaining respect […] the high-

93 Zihnioğlu 2003, 250.

94 Latife Hanım was well known for her support for women's rights and the improvements of their conditions in society. She even challenged Mustafa Kemal and his entourage regarding women's rights. See: Çalışlar 2007.

95 Zihnioğlu 2003, 224–5.

96 See Zihnioğlu 2003, 225–33, for the description of the qualities of the 'daughters of the republic' and the 'father' figure of the regime.

97 The term 'state feminism' was first used by Şirin Tekeli and many other scholars followed suit. However, Zehra Arat (1994) argues that the policies of the Turkish State concerning women cannot be called feminism whatsoever, since they 'were not aimed at liberating women, […] promoting the development of female consciousness and feminine identity' instead they only aimed to contribute to the 'republican patriarchy.'

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est duty of women is motherhood.'[98] In practice, on the other hand, this 'feminist' project meant investment in and promotion of education of girls, legal and electoral rights for women, and advancement of women's participation in the public sphere. In the 1930s, although never codified or centrally organised, the Kemalist regime too embarked on campaigns on a local level to discourage the use of face veil (*peçe*) and wearing the whole-body cover (çarşaf) as a part of their modernisation project.[99] For the Kemalists, women's public appearance and presence carried also a symbolic value representing both the rupture with the Ottoman past and the modernising feature of the new Republic.

Indeed, women gained important rights thanks to 'state feminism.' In the first elections after the women's enfranchisement in 1935, 18 women deputies, 4.5 percent of the total, could enter the parliament. At that time, this was the highest ratio among Western democracies after Finland.[100] Yet, they did not achieve full equality to men. Men remained the legal heads of the household, women had to have the permission of their husbands to work, and they had to take their husbands' names and follow them to a new residence after marriage.[101] Needless to say, the women who could take the most advantage of these reforms were coming from elite upper and middle-class families in the country.[102]

Still, many women seemed to adopt the state's discourse concerning women's nationalist and gendered roles and responsibilities. Some also actively cooperated with the state in the implementation of its gender politics and achievement of its reforms, like in the cases of Afet İnan and Nakiye Elgün. For example, the chair of TKB, Nakiye Elgün, defended TKB's decision not to nominate candidates in 1927 by arguing that '[t]he time is not yet ripe for us to participate. Our government has so far given every right that our womanhood merits; even more than that.'[103] Even Nezihe Muhiddin, whose activities to achieve political rights for women had been constantly impeded and criticised, dedicated her book Turkish Woman (*Türk Kadını*) to Mustafa Kemal and praised him and his reforms in her book.[104] However, these women's support for Kemalist reforms and policies were not unconditional or submissive but instead pragmatic and strategic.

Ironically, for example, the efforts of Afet İnan to promote electoral rights for women could be a testimony to women's agency and strategic positioning. In a book she co-authored with Atatürk, Civic Information for Citizens (*Vatandaş için Medeni Bilgiler)*, she argued that electoral rights for women are good not only for the society

98 Erkan 2011, 1024.
99 Adak 2022, 12–4.
100 Tekeli 1986, 184.
101 Fleischmann 1999, 116.
102 Tekeli 1986, 185.
103 Yeğenoğlu 2006, 101.
104 Zihnioğlu 2003, 249.

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and the nation but also for women themselves.[105] The book was published in 1931 when TKB was adopting a more 'obedient' discourse on the issue.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, based on the comparative analyses of the relevant actors and contexts, I argued that the concept of *reciprocal gain* explains better the relationship between the newly emerged nation-states and the women's movements in Iran and Turkey at the turn of the 20th century. After the disappointments, as well as the threats and violence experienced during the constitutional periods, activist and intellectual women in Iran and Turkey regarded the gender policies and reforms of the Reza Shah government and Kemalist Republic as political opportunities. Besides, the conservatism of the society, the plausibility of a religious backlash, and still-present misogynist political elites and institutions were the threats that women had to take into account. Finally, given that at least some of the activist women were among the elite and upper middle class which might have also played a role in their decision-making processes, they could be optimistic about their prospective role in public and social change as they benefited from the reforms directly.

The aforementioned examples illustrate clearly that both the discourse of 'women's rights granted by the state' and 'women's movement co-opted by state feminism' underestimate women's agency. Instead, I suggest seeing this episode of the women's movement's trajectory as one of a reciprocal gain even if the power relations between the actors were unequal to do justice to the accomplishments and resilience of the women's activism.

Contrary to various historiographical depictions in both countries and beyond, the influence of the women's activities and demands on the reforms implemented by the authoritarian regimes of Iran and Turkey is obvious when we look at the similarity of these reforms to what women had been demanding. Rostam-Kolayi (2003) draws attention to the journal of *Ālam-e Nesvān* and its role and influence on the later policies of the Reza Shah Regime concerning women. A similar relationship can be seen between the demands and goals of women writing in *Kadınlar Dünyası* (and later on in *Kadın Yolu*) and the policies of the Kemalist regime concerning women. Almost all of the reforms put in practice and the rights 'granted' by these nation-states had already been demanded by the activist women previously and none of them were gained without being fought for. That is because when these regimes took over the independent women's movements, they also adopted women's long-established discourse and arguments to legitimise their actions.

The nation-states were neither totally capable of suppressing and controlling women's movement, nor were they only instrumentalising women's cause to gain legitimacy. It was mostly the power of the women's movement and the legitimacy and popularity of their demands, both nationally and internationally, that 'forced' these

105 Üstel 2008, 236–9.

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states to articulate a policy such as 'state feminism' or Women's Awakening. For example, even the elite women who seemed to have nothing to do with independent women's activism were following and convinced by the discourse of women's rights activism both in their countries and in the West. Therefore, the modernisation policies of Mustafa Kemal and Reza Shah appropriated strategically the discourse and demands of the women's movement to consolidate their legitimacy and gain their support, while the women secured the guarantee and protection of the state to achieve the rights for which they had been striving. This unsung *reciprocal gain* between the two strong political actors determined the character of their relationship until at least the mid-1930s in both countries and must be recognised regardless of the developments in the following periods.

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