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Women’s Liberation in Turkey Before the 1980s: The Case of Nezihe Kurtiz

By Fatma Fulya Tepe

Abstract
A favorite argument for explaining the situation of women in Turkey is the one about emancipated but unliberated women published by Binnaz Toprak in 1982. Here, Toprak defended the idea that the legal reforms which were launched with the Westernization movement in 1923 emancipated women but could not liberate even the urban and educated ones. In 2000, this line of thought was extended to include the argument that women became both liberated and emancipated in the 1980s due to their feminist public and collective activism. While the former argument focuses more on the structures restricting women, the latter argument gives priority to women’s exercise of collective agency, while at the same time also giving some room for women’s individual agency. Here I will suggest that the idea of women’s liberation does not necessitate the exercise of collective agency, but can be understood and explained with reference to the agency of individual women alone. In other words, I will argue that any individual woman’s struggle for freedom and her achievements in her personal life should count as liberation, even though it does not translate itself to collective agency. To support this individual agency approach, I will use data from ten oral history interviews that I made with Nezihe Kurtiz, a woman of 90 years of age at the time of the interviews, and I will show that in exercising her own agency, Nezihe Kurtiz became both emancipated and liberated, and that this could take place in Turkey even before the 1980s.

Keywords: Turkish women, female academics, academics, women's liberation in Turkey.

Introduction
After being defeated in the First World War, Turkey, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, fought a national war of independence between 1919 and 1922 against the European powers. After this war had resulted in the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, Mustafa Kemal adopted Westernization as a political path for the new republic, and laws changing the legal status of women were introduced (Arat, 2001: p. 27). In this context, the shari’a law, a remnant of the Ottoman Empire, was replaced by the 1926 Swiss Civil Code, which equalized women and men in relation to divorce and inheritance, abolished polygamy and required civil marriage (Arat, 1996: p. 29). Women were given equal rights with men to receive education, including higher education, in 1924 and received rights to vote and to be elected in local elections in 1930 and in national elections in 1934.

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Kemalist women’s rights defenders equated the new legal reforms with the liberating of women in Turkey. This view was later criticized in the Emancipated but Unliberated Women Argument (EUWA), which suggested that while legal reforms could emancipate women, even educated women were still far from being liberated in Turkey (Toprak, 1982). The EUWA is still a point of consensus in Turkey. In 2000, the EUWA was extended to include the idea that the liberation of women could take place only in the 1980s, when different groups of women challenged the Kemalist state’s top down relationship with them, making demands relating to sexuality, religion, and protection against domestic violence, thereby also furthering a liberation of the public as well as the private sphere. As this argument focuses on the collective agency of women, we may call it the Collective Agency Extension (CAE) of the EUWA.

One way to understand the new legal reforms coming with Westernization, as well as the EUWA and the CAE, is to look at them in the light of Bryan Turner’s distinction between citizenship from above and citizenship from below. Yeşim Arat, a prominent women studies scholar in Turkey, referring to Turner’s distinction, evaluates the above mentioned Kemalist reforms as practices of citizenship from above. According to this, “[c]itizens were expected to be passive agents and accept those civil, political and social rights granted to them” (Arat, 1996: p. 29). The idea of citizens as passive recipients of rights is implicit in the EUWA, too. On the other hand, the feminist activism of women in the 1980s, as described in the CAE, could be understood as an embodiment of Turner’s citizenship from below.

Another way to analyze the EUWA and the CAE is to approach them strategically along the lines of two dichotomies, namely the structure vs. agency dichotomy and the collective agency vs. individual agency dichotomy. While the EUWA (1982) was built more on the structures restricting women, the CAE (2000) emphasizes women’s collective agency, although implicitly accepting that this collective agency is built on the individual agency of each and every woman. In other words, the CAE suggested that liberation could be defined as the free exercise of a combination of collective and individual agency.

In this paper, I will suggest that liberation could be embodied in the agency of individual women even when this is not coupled with the exercise of collective agency. In other words, I will propose that when each individual woman fights for personal freedom against her family or other agents of her daily private sphere life, this should count as liberation, too, even if it is only an exercise of her individual agency. Moreover, taking my point of departure in my oral history research on the agency of Nezihe Kurtiz, a woman born in 1919, I will show that liberation of this kind, contrary to what is suggested by the CAE, could take place even before the 1980s. This example is intended to suggest that more research is needed to elaborate the EUWA in order to fully recognize the the private sphere struggles of individual women for freedom. However, my reason for developing this individual agency approach is not that I support the Kemalist perspective opposed by the EUWA and the CAE, but rather that I want to uncover and give room to the much neglected micro level story of women’s individual agency.

The Emancipated but Unliberated Women Argument

While the Kemalist revolutions came into effect in the new republic in 1923, women’s activism, having the Ottoman women’s movement as its background, was silently repressed and

2 In this article, the phrases “Kemalist reforms” and “Westernization reforms” are used interchangeably since the Westernization reforms which were launched by the first president of the Turkish republic, Mustafa Kemal, are often associated with his name.
forgotten in the country (Çakır, 1996). Following this, there appeared a literature celebrating the new situation, presenting the rights given to women as a grant from the republic and the women themselves as grateful receivers. Prominent producers of such literature were women such as Afet İnan and Tezer Taşkıran (Toprak, 1982; Toprak, 1999; Durakbaşı & İlyasoğlu, 2001). It is the criticism of this literature that constitutes the background for the Emancipated but Unliberated Women Argument (EUWA).

In 1982, Binnaz Toprak made a critical evaluation of the Kemalist literature and its view of women as grateful receivers of rights in an article entitled Türk Kadını ve Din [translation: Turkish Woman and Religion]. The Kemalist literature equated legal rights given to women with the near completion of urban women’s liberation, at least for those who were educated. Toprak argued that despite the existence of rights for women, even educated urban Turkish women were still far from liberation. In her analysis, Toprak distinguished women’s liberation from their emancipation. While emancipation meant gaining legal and political rights, liberation meant making choices of their own. Emancipation was a pre-requisite of liberation, but it did not guarantee liberation itself (Toprak, 1982: pp. 361-362).

According to Toprak, the position of women in Turkey was more ambiguous than suggested by the Kemalist literature. On the one hand, there was a new, legal gender equality. On the other hand, there was the old Islamic model of a society with its gender roles that was not affected by any reforms (Toprak, 1982: p. 367). In this confusing setting with conflicting premises, urban women found themselves losing the protection provided by the traditional society while still not being really free. Toprak summarizes the predicament of the educated and urban women as follows:

_Educated urban women have undoubtedly achieved emancipation as a result of the Kemalist reforms, although they have not fared any better in terms of liberation. These women are caught in a role conflict: on the one hand is a self-perception based on nominal equal status with men, and on the other is a self-image conforming to the limits set by Islamic society. They have neither the security that traditional Islamic society provides for women, nor the opportunity to become truly liberated. They do not wear the veil but are still captive in a society that teaches them to be docile, economically dependent on men, and geared to housework and childrearing._ (Toprak, 1990, p. 43)

The rural women’s situation was far less changed by the legal reforms. In Toprak’s words:

_Although such reforms constitute major steps towards emancipation of women, their impact on women’s status in Turkish society should be assessed with caution. For one thing, it is clear that legal measures have failed to effect changes for women living in more closed provincial communities. The civil code’s provisions concerning marriage, divorce and monogamy are sometimes ignored in favor of the more traditional arrangements Islam has sanctioned for centuries (Timur, 1972: 92-93). Similarly education of females has remained limited, as the wide gap between literate men and women in census findings demonstrates. Women in most small towns and villages are still socially secluded._

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1 Toprak rewrote this article in 1999, but this time in English with some minor updates and changes.
sexual promiscuity is a taboo and a question of family honor in rural and urban communities alike, although similar behavior in men is not only tolerated but countenanced as a sign of virility. Male authority is unchallengeable in most families of rural background and manhandling of women is quite common. In short, the success of legal reforms in changing the condition of women has been limited largely because Islamic beliefs and traditions concerning sex roles continue to be socially valid (Toprak, 1990, pp. 42-43).

The EUWA, as summarized above, was later supported and applied by other scholars such as Deniz Kandiyoti in Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case (1987), Nermin Abadan-Unat in The Impact of Legal and Educational Reforms on Turkish Women (1991) Zehra Arat in Educating the Daughters of the Republic (1998). Similar arguments were made in different terms by other scholars, such as Ayşe Durakbaşa (1998a; 1998b), Ayşe Durakbaşa and Aynur İlyasoglu (2001).

Yeşim Arat’s From Emancipation to Liberation: the Changing Role of Women in Turkey’s Public Realm (2000) complements Toprak’s work in two ways: First, while Toprak’s work focuses on structural aspects, Yeşim Arat’s work is based on data concerning the collective agency of post-1980 women. Second, Arat’s article develops the Toprak argument, stating that Turkish women became both emancipated and liberated in the post-1980 period. This is what we may call the Collective Agency Extension (CAE) of the EUWA. Here Arat compared the obedience of the pre-1980 Kemalist women with the political initiatives and activism of the post-1980 women, reaching the conclusion that because of the activism of post-1980 women in Turkey the relations between state and women changed. Women overtly expressed that their demands were not satisfied by the offers of Kemalism and asked for further rights as regards sexuality, domestic security, religion and ethnicity:

Until the 1980s, Turkey prided itself on the women’s emancipation that the Kemalists had delivered. But in the past two decades, women have become critical of the Kemalist project of modernity and its effects on women. (...) The increasingly intensifying links with the Western world allowed a second wave of feminism to trickle into the country. Meanwhile, domestically, an opportunity opened for those who began to call themselves feminists (....) These women encroached upon the public sphere that had been monopolized by the state as they organized to expand their opportunities and solve their gender-based problems. They demanded substantive equality beyond formal equality, expressed their needs to be in control of their own sexuality and protested domestic violence. In the process, they expanded and strengthened Turkey’s nascent civil society (Arat, 2000: pp. 112-113)

Yeşim Arat argued that the changing relationship between women and the Turkish state indicates that the post-1980 activist women were not only emancipated but also liberated. The emancipated but unliberated women argument implies that the pre-1980s women in Turkey were the product of an external framework that also restricted them. However, looking at the situation of women from the perspective of restricting structures ignores the actions of individuals and their agency. Now, while the work of Yeşim Arat focused on women's overt
collective agency and women’s implicit individual agency, other writers have studied women’s experiences rather than their agency (such as the above mentioned works by Zehra Arat, Durakbaşa and Durakbaşa & İlyasoğlu as well as İlyasoğlu’s 1998 article). However, to complement these studies, we also need micro studies focusing on the individual agency of women.

This article is a micro level study which takes its point of departure from the idea that women are not passive recipients of structural frameworks but rather utilize the systems in which they live for their own purposes. What I would like to do in this article is to contribute to the discussion of the EUWA by focusing on Turkish women’s subjectivity from an individual agency perspective. To be able to do this, I will introduce the life story of a woman named Nezihe Kurtiz, born in 1919, who, although she was a woman of the pre-1980 period, differed from the stereotypes of the EUWA and the CAE. She did not belong to any collective feminist movement but in her individual struggle with her father, she both emancipated and liberated herself to the extent that she opposed her father when he did not let her go abroad to conduct research. In the end, she chose a way of her own, building a career for herself, thus also building a new free self in the process.

Methodology

In this research, I have used oral history methodology. In the standard explanations of the term, oral history is contrasted with history (Hoopes, 1979; Neyzi, 1999; Neyzi, 2010). While traditional history is based on the study of written documents and defined as the history of states, middle and upper classes, oral history developed in the 1960s as the history of relatively powerless people and focused on their oral life stories as its material with the intention of uncovering viewpoints of groups such as working class, women, minorities and foreigners or immigrants (Neyzi, 1999: pp. 5-6). Oral history is not regarded as a substitute but as a complement to traditional history (Hoopes, 1979: p. 12; Neyzi, 2010). An example of a typical definition of an oral history interview is the following:

An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives (Ritchie; 2003: p.19).

Approaching women as research subjects is one interest which is shared by both oral historians and feminist researchers. Another common denominator of oral historians and feminist researchers, especially standpoint feminist researchers, is the emphasis on studying and understanding women in detail from their own perspective. This is in line with the Turkish anthropologist and oral historian Leyla Neyzi’s concept of oral history as a microethnography (Neyzi, 1999; Neyzi, 2010). Oral history, especially when it is conducted as a series of interviews with one person as in the present study, could also be conceived of as a form of an improved case study method. In line with this, the following purposes of case studies are certainly valid for oral history studies, too:

[T]o illustrate an idea, to explain the process of development over time, to show the limits of generalizations, to explore uncharted issues by starting with a limited
case, and to pose provocative questions. For example, a carefully chosen case can illustrate that a generalization is invalid. For this reason studies of exceptional case have great heuristic value. Although they cannot establish a generalization, they can invalidate one and suggest new research directions (Reinharz, 1992: p. 167).

For instance, this particular oral history study, based on the memories of a ninety year old female professor, will suggest an alternative to the so called emancipated but unliberated argument regarding women in modern Turkey.

Oral history methodology was introduced in Turkey during the 1990s by, among others, Arzu Öztürkmen and Leyla Neyzi. In the 2000s, oral history studies developed into memory studies. Since the start of oral history in Turkey, various oral history workshops have been organized hosting figures such as oral historian Paul Thompson and memory studies scholar Andreas Huyssen. Today, there is a limited number of oral history and memory studies courses in Turkey; however, the number of oral history studies and translation of key books is increasing and interest in oral history is growing. In 2009, a two day oral history workshop was organized by Garanti Bank’s Ottoman Bank Museum and Research Center. Over 200 persons applied to participate in this workshop (Neyzi, 2010). I was one of the participants and I started my oral history interviews for this research within the context of the biweekly meetings which followed the workshop and were organized to support oral history research.

At the time of the interviews in 2009, my research subject, Nezihe Kurtiz, was about 90 years old. I used a snowballing technique to find her. I conducted ten oral history interviews with her which lasted a total of 18 hours and 40 minutes. I conducted the interviews in a rest home for the elderly in Istanbul. Towards the end of the interviewing process, Nezihe Kurtiz told me that she and I had become like friends. This was actually what I had hoped for from the beginning because I thought that meeting on equal terms would be a more liberating and protective relationship, given the hierarchical culture of Turkey.

I conducted the oral history interviews in Turkish and later translated the parts which I wanted to use for this article into English. As regards translating oral history interviews, I believe Donald Ritchie’s comments about editing are well founded:

*Editing and rearranging interviews for clarification and cutting away tangential material are appropriate so long as the original meaning is retained. The goal is to sharpen the focus without putting words in the interviewee’s mouth or altering the essence of what was said* (Ritchie, 2003: pp. 128-129).

In this article, when presenting interview segments in English, I have most of the time opted for a literal translation, word for word. However, sometimes, when this method would result in sentences in English that would make little sense to the reader, I have instead tried to capture the meaning of what was said rather than making a word for word translation, in accordance with the advice given by Ritchie. Approximately ten per cent of the quotations are translated in this way. When I have omitted some sentences or paragraphs in the narrative, I have used ellipsis dots within parentheses: (…).
The Significance of her Father for the Agency of Nezihe Kurtiz

Nezihe Kurtiz was born in Taşköprü, a small town near the Black Sea coast, in 1919, four years before the establishment of the Turkish Republic. She had four siblings, two of them being boys. Her father was a clerk and later a manager of the local post-office and her mother was a housewife. Her father was a man who was immensely affected by not being sent to high school in Istanbul when he was a teenager. According to Nezihe Kurtiz, because he was not sent to school, he wanted all his children to study. He was convinced that education was the most important thing in life:

Now my father’s story is very interesting. When he was a child, according to what he told me, all schools in Taşköprü were at the level of secondary school. After this, my father wanted to study more and his mother and father didn’t accept this because this meant separation from them. So what did this child do? He ran away from home. At the time, there weren’t many vehicles, either. He had gone to Sinop on foot. He planned to find some transport there. He would go to Istanbul where he would study. Of course, his father sent a man after him and my father was caught in Sinop. He told me both his feet had developed blisters. Of course, he was tired and got caught. He returned agreeably enough without any opposition. Now according to what I understand, this was a source of great frustration to my father. I mean that he couldn’t continue his studies. Of course, as much as he could, he read every book that he found. Also, he made very good friends with people like the district governor and people in his workplace who had studied more and got opinions. He had read books, too, and in almost every community my father’s opinions and conversation would make him stand out even though he was self-taught. This great frustration left in him a determination that his children would do what he couldn’t. Therefore, in our home, neither marriage nor engagement would be talked about, but only educated or non-educated.

I started my interviews with Nezihe Kurtiz by first asking about her earliest memories. After a moment of hesitation, she said “It is as if everything started with school”. After having learnt about her father’s childhood experience of not being allowed to continue his studies, it made more sense to me that she began her talk by saying that everything started with school for her.\(^4\) However, when speaking retrospectively in our interviews, Nezihe Kurtiz considered this more like an obsession of her father and thought that because of this conviction of his, she and her sister could not get married when they were young.

Nezihe Kurtiz had a very close relationship with her father until her years at university as an academic. Close relations between fathers and daughters in this period, especially in the middle and upper classes, have also been underlined by previous research (Durakbaş, 1998b; İlyasoğlu, 1998; Durakbaş & İlyasoğlu, 2001). However, it cannot be said that we know enough about the details of these relations, especially in less privileged families. In the cases mentioned in the Durakbaş & İlyasoğlu research, the involvement of fathers in their children’s socialization took place because they were more educated than the mothers, and they were the

\(^4\) In Leyla Neyzi, “Gülümser’s story: life history narratives, memory and belonging in Turkey”, New perspectives on Turkey, Vol.20, Spring 1999, pp. 1-26, Neyzi emphasizes that the way Gülümser starts telling her story showed how things are for her. When Nezihe Kurtiz started her talk with me by saying “It is like as if everything started with school”, I remembered and benefited from this comment by Neyzi.
representatives of modernity in the upper and middle class homes of the subjects (Durakbaşa & İlyasoğlu, 2001: p. 197). Moreover, Durakbaşa mentions the tacit agreement between fathers and daughters. According to this, fathers supported their daughters’ educational and professional lives and in return daughters were expected to be careful in their relations with males and to suppress their sexuality until they found an appropriate candidate for marriage (Durakbaşa, 1998a: pp. 151-152; Durakbaşa, 1998b: p. 47).

Nezihe Kurtiz started primary school in 1927 in Taşköprü, three years after the launch of mixed education for girls and boys in primary schools, and one year before the adoption of the Latin alphabet. Her earliest memory is related to the adoption of the Latin alphabet. The following memory is where she starts to position herself in relation to the new Western Turkish Republic.

At the first grade of the primary school, there were Arabic letters which we called old letters and I got really bored in the class. I never liked it. I never forget this foxiness of mine. For the teacher not to ask me questions, I would throw my pencil on the floor and go under the desk so that he did not see me. I vividly remember this. Then in the second grade or the end of first grade, I can’t remember very well, I got scarlet fever (...) I was seemingly the child that my father loved most but I caught this that lasted for 40 days or so. In the first grade, I failed because of this or I failed because I couldn’t succeed in Arabic letters. I can’t remember how I passed to the second grade, either. In the second grade, I mean in 1928, new letters had been launched. OK, now I remember. My disease had been continuing, I guess. I mean I was at home, my brother had learned the new letters, and he would have written the new letters on the wall and would have taught them to me without me going to school. Later, in the second grade, my teacher was very good, too. I guess, she had come recently, she was a good teacher who had graduated recently. She loved me, too. In this way, I became a student who loved her school and who was loved in the second grade. But I didn’t like the period before this. I don’t want to remember, either.

To be able to provide a wider context here, it is important to note the ratio of resources allocated for education at the primary, secondary and high school levels in the national budget at the time Nezihe Kurtiz was studying. The amount of resources allocated for education in 1923 was 3.2% of the whole national budget. This ratio was 3.6% in 1930, 4.6% in 1935, and 6.6% in 1940 (Gök, 2004). It is also important to know something about the literacy rates at the time when Nezihe Kurtiz began primary school, in order to situate her in the bigger picture of Turkish education. As can be seen from the table below, the overall Turkish literacy rate in 1927 was 10.6% but only 4.6% of the women were literate. In 1940, when Nezihe Kurtiz was a university student, the overall literacy rate was 22.4%, while the percentage of women who were literate at that time was 11.2%. Even in the 1960’s, less than 25% of Turkish women were literate (Kazgan, 1982: p. 167). These figures show that the situation of Nezihe Kurtiz, especially as a female student from an Anatolian town (implying less opportunities for success, more traditional life, and being more remote from the possibilities offered by big cities), is far from being the norm.

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Literacy Percentages among Men and Women at the Age of 6 Years and above 1927-1975

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Nüfus Sayımları DIE (Kazgan, 1982: p. 167)

After her first school years in Taşköprü, Nezihe Kurtiz continued her third year of primary school in 1932 in the nearby city of Bolu. Her father was closely following her studies and was with her in her daily academic life. One incident showing this is the following:

"Then I remember this very well. I guess I was a slightly spoiled child. Such a bighead and so on. In the same class, there was a friend having the same name as mine, Nezihe. Her mother was a teacher at the primary school. I was in the third or fourth year of primary school. I can’t remember which. My grade for maths or some other course was not as good as I desired. I got angry suddenly, saying bad things such as that Nezihe was favoured because her mother was a teacher. I spoke in an ugly way. Of course, this isn’t nice for a student. Her mother, I mean the one who was the teacher, thought that if she complained about me to my father, my father would scold me saying why did you act like this? My father never did. (Laughing)(…) He didn’t say “you behaved shamefully”. I don’t know why he did like this. It appears that…I mean, it was not a nice thing. I don’t forget this. At the third grade or the fourth.

In the above interview piece, Nezihe Kurtiz describes an incident from her school life in which a teacher, in her private capacity as a mother, made a complaint about her to her father. Despite the complaint, her father did not get angry with her and did not scold her. Instead, he gave implicit support for the efforts of Nezihe Kurtiz to defend herself and to position herself at the school. It is obvious from the last part of the above interview piece that Nezihe Kurtiz was
very pleased with the implicit support that her father gave her and she never forgot this supportive behavior of her father.

Another incident showing the ongoing closeness of the father-daughter relationship is the following:

_I guess it was during the second year of secondary school. Again, a (student) representative was being elected. In that election of a representative, they did not choose me. Oh, I got so shocked. I lost control of myself. How did it happen that I was not elected? To my surprise, they had been resenting my swaggering, I guess. They had carefully prepared the plan. Imagine how bewildered I was, being only in the second grade of the secondary school. Immediately I telephoned my father, “Father, come here”. That is to say, I always relied on my father when I was troubled. The school had a big garden and I met him at the gate. He asked: “What is the matter?”. He did come, although it was a long way for him to go. Of course, Bolu is a small place but the PTT (the post office where her father worked) was at one end of the town and the school was at the other end. And he told me something. I mean, he neither criticized me nor did he agree, instead he diverted me._

Her father closely monitored the child Nezihe Kurtiz’s school life and she, for her part, relied on her father’s support and guidance. All this shows a close relationship between father and daughter in daily life. Considering that her father was the most powerful person at home, one can imagine that Nezihe Kurtiz enjoyed this close relationship with him a lot and also got a lot of self-confidence from it. But this does not mean that relations at home were democratic. Nezihe Kurtiz describes her father as an authoritarian person with strong powers of persuasion:
Of course, when it comes to authority issues, my father was a person who had strong powers of persuasion, and he was an authoritarian type, but he did not exercise his authority by raising his voice, or making a grim face. He spoke gently, but he got things done. He had such a way of doing things. It was not possible for my mother and her four children not to do what he said; I mean, the opposite does not come to my mind. Because he made us believe that what he says was right. Of course, he probably acted in the right way all the time.

It is significant that Nezihe Kurtiz emphasized her father’s strong persuasive ability and how he made the family members accept his authority. This indicates that Nezihe Kurtiz did not see herself as just a child obeying her father, but rather as a child who came to agree with her father’s ideas. I believe that this participatory agency of Nezihe Kurtiz, which is embodied in the act of agreeing, prepared the way for her liberation in the 1960s.

After secondary school, in 1935, Nezihe Kurtiz was sent to Istanbul, to the Kandilli Girl’s High School, while her family remained in Anatolia. This was a boarding school where her father had to pay for the dormitory and living expenses. Because she was the only child in the family who managed to attend high school, she enjoyed a special status.
It was again her father who gave her ideas for a choice of profession in the last year of high school. Nezihe Kurtiz had a far-reaching trust in her father. She would ask him everything and get his opinion:

Now as I was finishing high school, it was my father who gave me ideas about what to do. What profession I would choose, now that was a topic much focused upon. I was not surprised by this, but I liked it. For instance, no profession was thought of or mentioned in relation to its salary. The profession that was most suitable for me and was most liked by me and you – these were the things that we focused upon. Architecture, for instance. There were one or few other things, too. My father was not very well educated, but he was cultured. For instance, if I wanted to be a lawyer, he would immediately go and see if there was a woman lawyer in that city. That is to say, if he found a woman who had made herself a reputation in that profession, he would get her opinion. And I would trust my father very much, which was, of course, not very good. I would ask him everything and get his opinion. He had the ability of convincing me. I mean, when he talked, I had the idea that my father presented the most correct idea. In the end, we decided on me becoming a teacher. In high school, my physics was very good. My math was a bit less so (...) I will be brief about this. I decided to be a physics teacher. I mean, being a teacher is the first profession. Physics, the second. We didn’t focus on anything else.

As is shown in the previous interview excerpt, she thought her father was very convincing and she trusted his judgement. In the end, Nezihe Kurtiz and her father decided that she should become a teacher, which was one of the professions seen as suitable for women at the time. In addition, she chose physics because it was a subject she liked.

In 1938, she entered Istanbul University, Faculty of Science, Physics Department. Since this was the year Mustafa Kemal Atatürk died, her first year in the university witnessed various public speeches made by students and other people about the virtues and successes of Mustafa Kemal. She listened to these speeches with admiration. Until the second year of her undergraduate education, she lived in the student dormitory. At that time, her father having retired, her family moved to Istanbul and she started to live with them after having spent four long years on her own in the big city. This was a very unusual experience for a girl of her age at that time in Turkey. In the 1940-41 academic year, when there were still very few universities in Turkey, Nezihe Kurtiz was a second year student in the Physics Department of the Faculty of Science at Istanbul University. In this particular year, there were 371 male students and 90 female students in the Faculty of Science (Taşkıran, 1974: p. 21). Nezihe Kurtiz was one of these 90 female students.

Looking at the percentages of women among diploma holders will help to situate the position of Nezihe Kurtiz in the wider picture of university graduates. Within this context, in the table below, we see that in the 1940-41 academic year, when Nezihe Kurtiz was a 3rd year student in the Physics Department, only 20.7% of university graduates were women. This ratio remained the same ten years later, and actually declined during the following ten year period.
Women’s Level of Education: Percentage of Women among the Total Population who got a Diploma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>Secondary School</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Vocational and Technical Schools</th>
<th>University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930-1</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-1</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-6</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Nufüs Sayımları, DIE (Kazgan, 1982: p. 167)

Physics was the favorite subject of Nezihe Kurtiz in high school, and that is why she chose it for university studies. However, the way physics was taught in the Istanbul University disappointed her. She once again put her individual agency into action and started to think about what to do to overcome her dissatisfaction with the university studies. She thought of going to Germany for university education and she brought the issue to her father’s attention, too:

*Then at the university, in the first year we had this class called PCB. Physics, Chemistry, Biology. We studied Physics there and it was too easy for us. For a student, a graduate of Physics from my high school, it was very easy. We passed easily. But when we moved to the second year, I did not like it, asking myself “Is this physics?”*. It was like this: Fouché, I showed his photo to you, was a Frenchman, teaching in French. An associate professor was translating it into Turkish. And we were making notes based on this translation. The teacher spoke slowly in order to allow us to take notes. And there was nothing to give excitement or pleasure. This broke my spirit a bit. Now, at that time, in 1938-1939 or 1939 - 1940, I think war was going on, but somehow a woman who had been to Germany told me that Germany is such a cheap country and one can go there and study, and so on. So suddenly, it occurred to me that I should go to Germany and study there. Now, there is something contradictory about this, there being a war going on and me going to Germany. The one who waged war was Hitler. Now it doesn’t sound quite right, but I don’t doubt it. I decided to go to Germany and to study there. Now, I was in Istanbul and my family was in Bolu. I went to Bolu on holiday. “Father, I will go and study in Germany”. My father was a clerk. We had some land in Taşköprü. I mean not land but fields. They used to grow hemp there. My grandmother’s fields. I don’t know much about these things. Whatever I wanted would be done, I imagined. My father would sell the property and send me to Germany. Now I can see that these were childhood dreams, and I feel like laughing. Whether my father’s money would be sufficient or not, how he would be able to sell those fields, well, I didn’t care about it. I imagined he would sell the fields and do whatever was necessary. He would send me to Germany. My father, being very mature about the whole thing, found a way of convincing me, without hurting my feelings, that I should not go. He convinced me not to go. I don’t
remember what he said. He would never have told me that he couldn’t sell the fields. He would never have told me that he didn’t have the money. He would have come up with something else. Of course, I stayed in Istanbul University nice and well. And with this tempo (of the lectures). Never getting any pleasure from physics. And the years passed. In the third year, as I told you last time, I became an assistant teacher. And I liked that very much, of course. Both making money and being a teacher, of course I felt very good about it.

This incident shows that Nezihe Kurtiz continues to attempt exercising her agency in the university years, too, on important issues such as her educational future. This is further proof that she had the space to exercise her agency. However, here her agency seems to have been conditioned by the financial situation of her family. Her father managed to divert her to stay in Istanbul University. In her third year at the university, her department asked the students if anyone was interested in becoming a student assistant. She immediately volunteered for the position and was hired. However, in her view, one reason that she was immediately hired was that there was no queue for the position. In 1942 she finished her undergraduate studies, and because her professors liked her she was made a research assistant:

Now I tell you when it is time. Now we are in the third year. In the first year we had PCB, Physics, Chemistry, Biology. This course had a big laboratory. A German by the name of Dember established this laboratory. Sometimes they didn’t have enough assistants to work there. (...) They wanted deputy assistants. Someone came to our class; we were in the third year. The professor was there, too. “We need one deputy assistant”, he said. I was already since my childhood curious about being a researcher. I said “I can do it”. Nobody else volunteered. So they took me to the laboratory and made me an assistant while I was still a student. There were other students, more hardworking than me, but they didn’t want to be a deputy assistant. So this happened because I wanted it and other students didn’t want it. Probably, they considered it as a burden. (...) As a deputy assistant I was given some money, too. Probably 60 lira in a year.
A Gradual Separation from Her Father

Beginning from the year she started to work as a research assistant, I see in her narrative that Nezihe Kurtiz gradually distanced herself from her father as a result of a series of small incidents. In all these incidents, the reason for distancing herself from her father was the restrictions that her father imposed on her due to her gender. One of the incidents which made her see the gender-conditional character of her father’s support more clearly was when he did not allow her to stay at the university after work for early evening chats with her colleagues in the department. Her more senior male academic friends from the department talked to her father about giving her permission to stay, but the answer was a “no”. Here, Nezihe Kurtiz felt herself still to be on her father’s side, but with a longing for the chat sessions with her colleagues. This incident suggests that her father's idea of her university education was instrumental, while she herself came to see her education in terms of more personal values. Her father wanted her to have a diploma; she wanted to have a life of her own.

The final but most significant incident took place when Nezihe Kurtiz wanted to go abroad to conduct research. She admired colleagues who had studied abroad and, in her own words, she wanted to be a little bit different, like them. She found an opportunity for a research stay in London for six months with a scholarship. She expected that her father would oppose this and therefore she tried to create a context in which her father could be convinced that she should go. During the six month period before the research stay in London, she invited to their home some family friends, whose daughters studied abroad, in order to make the idea of studying abroad seem natural and to show its advantages. Despite these efforts, her father’s reply was yet another “no”. But this time, she could not accept it:
After I became an associate professor, I gained a scholarship to go to London. But this was an international scholarship. I would do research in London for six months. But he prevented that. He said: Don’t go. So, imagine, he sent me to high school, I stayed in a dormitory until the second year of the university. This did not seem like a problem to him. I mean, he himself was in Anatolia, in Bolu, at the time. I was in the dormitory (in Istanbul). And the dorm means that you can do whatever you want, coming and going there late or early. So... He accepted that. After I got my associate professorship, he did not accept that I should go to London...This happened maybe because of... He got retired and stuff. His world view changed. Whatever... There were some reasons. He did not want me to go. Well, almost all of my friends in the university studied abroad. They took exams. I mean, they were so different from me. So I should go somewhere, too. And I had got a scholarship, too. I wanted to be a little bit different as well. (...) I saw myself lagging behind my friends at the university. And he told me not to go. “Father”, I said, “despite all your opposition I will go”. “Do you know why? I asked. Later on, I don’t want to say to myself: “Were you a child when your father opposed you? Did you just sit down?”

Here we clearly see how Nezihe Kurtiz opposed her father at the moment when she thought that he impeded her academic and personal development. This also suggests that the academic position of Nezihe Kurtiz led to a personal transformation. However, even before this confrontation, as stated before in the part where Nezihe Kurtiz talks about her father’s persuasive abilities, the material suggests that Nezihe Kurtiz was not a girl who just passively obeyed her father’s orders. Her willingness to act in accordance with his wishes was to a large extent based on her decision to trust him and on her being convinced by his arguments. In this sense, she was already an agent before openly opposing her father. In the seventh interview, Nezihe Kurtiz told me that she agreed with this interpretation of mine.
The result was a clash of power between Nezihe Kurtiz and her father. In the end, she realized her desire to go abroad for research despite her father’s opposition. After staying in London for six months, the British university where she was employed extended her research stay for another six months, granting her a new scholarship. After this first year, her London university offered her a contract for one more year. However, she could not benefit from this contract, because at that time she was informed by her family that her father had died:

I had this six month scholarship given by the Association of Turkish University Women. Our university had given me another six months. In total, it had been one year. Of course, I was in mail contact with my family all the time. Everything was easy. I woke up... I took the bus and got off at the laboratory. I had my own key. I said hello to people I met. I made my experiments. It was a rather monotonous life (...) This is how my life went on approximately for one year without much change. (...) One year later, they told me, “continue here, we will find a scholarship for you”. Probably they had detected some quality in my way of conducting experiments. I accepted this. One week or 15 days later, I am not sure, although I was not told directly that my father had died, I understood there was a crisis at home. I went to the college reading my letter and crying. Barlow and others were baffled when they saw me crying. I couldn’t stop myself. Later while passing by the post office, I sent a telegram home. I wrote that I was coming immediately. And I left that scholarship and I went home. This is what my London adventure was like...

Nezihe Kurtiz could not benefit from the scholarship arranged for her second year in London; however her relations with the academics in London continued, and one year later, she was again invited to work with them:

Now in London we had become very good friends in the dormitory. I exchanged letters with professors Lamb and Barlow now and then, too. We used to send greetings to each other. One year later, I went to Glasgow to work with them. Lamb was given a professorial chair at Glasgow University, and he could bring with him any person he wanted. So he was promoted. It means that I was with them once again one year later.

That is to say Nezihe Kurtiz fought a war of liberation with her father and, given her context, she won this war and liberated herself as proved by her research stays in London. Therefore we are able to conclude that she was not only emancipated but also liberated. The case of Nezihe Kurtiz thus contradicts the generally accepted EUWA. Consequently, we should recognize that there were women in Turkey, even as early as in the 1960s, who were personally liberated. They did not fight a liberation war in the public sphere, organized in any collective movement, but preferred to focus on their immediate environment to liberate themselves. Hence, the Nezihe Kurtiz case also provides us with a reason to modify the CAE, as it points to the need to emphasize the significance of individual agency and micro level studies of the liberation of Turkish women. The case of Nezihe Kurtiz shows us that being personally liberated was possible in the 1960s, even for a woman who did not originate from the upper classes and who had an Anatolian background. Nezihe Kurtiz owed her liberation to her profession:
Now my power was like this. I had a profession. My profession sent me, and I knew where to go. There was no uncertainty in my mind about where to stay in London. I was going to a certain place and I knew I would be welcome there. There was no problem whatsoever. If it is like this, why should I not go? After high school, when I was eighteen, my father let me stay in a dormitory. (...) This was not a problem for my father, but when I, at the age of forty, wanted to go to London, that was a problem for him. Was I supposed to think that this was OK? There I lost my faith in him. I lost my trust in him. Now I was also strong enough to rebel against him. But I was always sad because he didn’t write me. But if he had written, it would have been even worse, because then I would have returned two months later thinking that my mother and sister couldn’t manage on their own.

Hence, getting a professional education and developing her identity as an independent agent in the process empowered Nezihe Kurtiz:

When I became a person who had a profession, I ended up in total conflict with my father. He wanted his authority to continue. But I had gained a personality of my own. It did not work.

Conclusion
The first generation of women after the establishment of the Turkish Republic are generally seen as emancipated but unliberated, and only starting with the 1980s, Turkish women are thought of as liberated as well. This argument, the EUWA, is the consensus point of women’s studies in Turkey when it comes to explaining the predicament of Turkish women. However, experiences like those of Nezihe Kurtiz should be considered when we assess the overall validity of the EUWA. The interview data show that Nezihe Kurtiz was not only emancipated but also liberated to the extent that she successfully fought for her personal freedom as early as 1960. Her case also points to the need to reconsider the CAE, that is, the Collective Agency Extension of the EUWA. The history of Turkish women’s liberalization should not be confined to collectively organized struggles in the public sphere but should also include the freedoms gained by individual women’s efforts to expand their agency in the private sphere. In line with this argument, and substantiated by the case of Nezihe Kurtiz and the story of her confrontation with her father, I suggest that, contrary to the established view, women’s liberation in Turkey can be traced back to a time well before the 1980s. Hence, the EUWA needs to be elaborated to include experiences of women like Nezihe Kurtiz. More research should be done to show the complexity of Turkish women’s struggle for liberation. The example of Nezihe Kurtiz also shows the need for further micro level studies of individual women’s agency in Turkey.

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References