

# Transforming Rural Communities: Women's Influence in Sugar Factories in Early Republican Türkiye

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## Introduction

In the formative years of the Turkish Republic, industrial development was conceived as a strategic vehicle for advancing national consolidation through economic growth, political stance, and social transformation. Industrialization was closely associated with the notion of civilization. The industrial sectors prioritized during this period included the so-called “three whites”: flour, cotton, and sugar. Among them, sugar factories emerged as significant institutions, established to meet the country's growing sugar demand and contribute to developing the national economy and agriculture-based industries. Previously imported due to political, financial, and technical constraints, sugar became a domestically produced staple food by cultivating sugar beets, marking it as a primary focus of the Republic's industrial policies. The sugar industry was widely welcomed as a source of national satisfaction and economic benefit.

To realize this objective, national resources were allocated, and relevant legal frameworks were introduced.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the Uşak and Alpullu sugar factories were established consecutively, with production beginning in 1926. The 1930s, characterized by the adoption of statist economic policies, marked a period of intensified industrialization. Within this context, new regulations were enacted to boost sugar production and expand the factory network, establishing additional factories in Eskişehir (1933) and Turhal (1934).<sup>2</sup> In the following years, sugar factories increased significantly, fulfilling national sugar demands and the broader vision of economic self-sufficiency.<sup>3</sup>

Both historical accounts and archival documents on establishing sugar factories reflect a sense of remarkable national achievement, embodiment of scientific progress, and symbolic encouragement for future advancement. These themes align with Kemalist ideology,<sup>4</sup> which sought to construct a *muasır medeniyet* (contemporary civilization) through the active involvement of the state, encompassing economic development, social and cultural modernization, and political regulation. Within this framework, the state assumed responsibility for fostering industrial

1 At the 1923 İzmir Economic Congress, it was emphasized that sugar beet cultivation should be promoted, sugar factories should be established, and, in connection with these developments, livestock breeding and the food industry should be advanced. In line with these objectives, the Law No. 601 of Privileges and Exemptions Granted to Sugar Factories, enacted on April 5, 1925, introduced various incentives and privileges to support domestic sugar production.

2 With the enactment of the Law for the Promotion of Industry (1927) and the implementation of the First Five-Year Development Plan (1934), the number of industrial facilities increased rapidly between 1933 and 1938.

3 Upon the implementation of the Turkish Sugar Industry Expansion Program (1951) and the enactment of the Sugar Law (1956), the number of sugar factories gradually increased. Between 1926 and 2001, a total of 30 sugar factories were established in Türkiye.

4 Kemalism refers to a set of six principles, *Cumhuriyetçilik* (Republicanism), *Milliyetçilik* (Nationalism), *Halkçılık* (Populism), *Devletçilik* (Statism), *Laiklik* (Secularism), and *İnkılapçılık* (Reformism), that were either directly derived from or inspired by the words and vision of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. These principles were formally adopted by the Republican People's Party (RPP), the ruling single-party of the time, during its congress in 1931.

growth and shaping citizens following Western norms, employing modern science and technology as key instruments of national progress.<sup>5</sup> Industrial development, seen as a fundamental tool for nation-building in all dimensions, was equated with modernism. Sugar factories were therefore not merely industrial initiatives but strategic instruments of modern industrial sites where scientific advancement, national pride, and the ideals of a modern society were simultaneously cultivated and realized.

It can be regarded that the architectural design and spatial planning of these four sugar factories were rational, innovative, and advanced for their time. Their construction, including machinery and equipment, was undertaken by European companies, primarily German and Czech firms. Numerous foreign engineers specializing in construction, machinery, and agriculture were employed during the establishment and aftermath of the process. Fundamentally, sugar factories were production-oriented and stood out with their self-sufficient design. Settlements were equipped with organizational and operational structures, as well as residential units, a guesthouse, a cinema-restaurant, a school, a hospital, an infirmary, a pavilion (*köşk*), various sports fields, parks, etc. These were designed to meet the laborers' and residents' social, cultural, and physical needs. A journalist assigned to observe all sugar factories established up to that time reveals:

“In a sugar factory, machinery and technology are only half of the story. Do you know what social issues, work dynamics, living conditions, psychological phenomena, and outcomes exist there? Can you imagine the cinema, sports, everyday life, hygiene, nightlife, culture, and lifestyle? A factory is a strange country situated on a piece of land the size of a large village or a small town offering all the complexities and diversity of civilized life...”<sup>6</sup>

In this sense, everyday life within the settlement was practiced almost like a school, where the ideals of modern society were introduced and disseminated to remote corners of Anatolia. The state undertook significant efforts to improve living conditions to introduce the ideals of modernity into the rural areas, which remained marked by hardship and inadequate infrastructure, including transportation, water supply and sanitation, and public service buildings. The primary issues adopted were prioritizing science and modern education in Anatolia.<sup>7</sup> In this context, the first four sugar factories constructed in rural areas catalyzed this broader process of social transformation. The facilities and opportunities offered by the factory settlements functioned as a vehicle for introducing and disseminating the Kemalist ideology of science and education, helping bring the ideal of *muasır medeniyet* to rural communities that had remained mainly beyond the reach of this ideology.

In this context, women in the early Turkish Republic were entrusted with an important responsibility. Beyond its domestic consumption, sugar came to be associated with women and social advancement. With the proclamation of the Republic, sugar was regarded as a vital component of national nutrition policy and a crucial factor in promoting a healthier population in Türkiye. Women were ideologically associated with the responsibility of raising future generations through the incorporation of sugar into household nutrition. Furthermore, their engagement extended far beyond the domestic sphere and nutrition of the families. Women, as visible symbols of the Republican revolution, were granted fundamental rights and equality to ensure their active participation in all spheres of life alongside men. The image of the educated, working, and productive woman aligned with the idealized female figure envisioned by the Republican revolutions.

In this context, these settlements became transformative spaces where women, working and residing, transcended their traditional roles, gained economic independence, and assumed

5 Levent Köker, *Modernleşme, Kemalizm ve Demokrasi* [Modernization, Kemalism, and Democracy] (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 133, 208, 223.

6 İlhan Tarus, *Uzun Atlama: Bir Endüstrileşmenin Romanı* [Long Jump: A Novel of Industrialization] (Ankara: Mars Matbaası, 1957), xix.

7 For this purpose, *Halkevleri* (People's Houses) and *Köy Enstitüleri* (Village Institutes) were established. Feroz Ahmad, *Modern Türkiye'nin Oluşumu* [The Making of Modern Türkiye] (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1999), 69.

influential positions within societal structures as modern citizens of the Republic. The physical layout of the settlements, with its architectural design and spatial planning with cultural and social facilities, enabled women to work and live under conditions comparable to those of their male counterparts. While working women contributed to industrial labor, other women residing in sugar factory settlements, such as the wives and daughters of male staff/laborers, embodied this process by practicing modern everyday life and disseminating it to women and girls in the surrounding communities. This paper argues that sugar factory settlements were sites where the symbolic alignment between the idealized 'new woman' and modern architecture was both socially and physically realized, placing women at the heart of Türkiye's rural modernization project. Women's newly assumed roles were further reinforced through conceptualizing the sugar factory as a "family," a structure that softened class distinctions and fostered a collective identity rooted in nationalist consciousness. The "Sugar family" concept was consistently emphasized across various texts, including official rhetoric and personal memoirs. In the sugar industry, relations were marked by mutual respect, care, and recognition, with employees collectively referring to their institutions as the "sugar family."<sup>8</sup> Framed by the metaphor of the factory as a "family," women in sugar factories — both as factory workers and as members of workers' families — played an important role in fostering social cohesion and transmitting modern cultural practices within and beyond the factory settlements. While their numbers in the workforce remained limited, their everyday presence and engagement with family and community life positioned them as key facilitators of collective identity, industrial nationhood, and rural modernization. In this sense, the metaphor of the factory as a "family" was closely tied to women's symbolic and practical role within the household as well as the "sugar family," which further underlined their significance in shaping the social fabric of factory life.

Scholarly literature on industrialization and modernization in early Republican Türkiye primarily focuses on the ideological underpinnings of Kemalist reforms.<sup>9</sup> Numerous sources examine sugar production and factory development from economic, agricultural, and political perspectives. Key works such as Turan Veldet's *30. Yılında Türkiye Şeker Sanayii* [The Turkish Sugar Industry in its 30th Year] (1958), Nazım Taygun's *Türkşeker'in Öyküsü* [The Story of Türkşeker] (1993), İlhan Taru's *Uzun Atlama: Bir Endüstrileşmenin Romanı* [Long Jump: A Novel of Industrialization] (1957), and Kenan İpek's *Ah Benim Şeker Fabrikalarım* [Ah, My Sugar Factories / Children of Sugar] (2020) provide valuable insights into the institutional and personal dimensions of Türkiye's sugar industry, factories and everyday life in the settlements. Architectural perspectives are addressed by Durukan Kopuz, in an article that analyzes the spatial design of early sugar factories, though it does not engage deeply with everyday life within the settlements.<sup>10</sup> Some studies claim that spatial planning contributed to realizing the Republican ideals of a modern Turkish society in the 1930s by referring to Alpullu and Eskişehir sugar factories.<sup>11</sup> Complementary studies provide comparative architectural analyses of industrial housing and the spatial aspects of laborers' everyday life within factory settlements during the early Republican period.<sup>12</sup>

8 Taru, *Uzun Atlama*, 4-5; Nazım Taygun, *Türkşeker'in Öyküsü* [The Story of Türkşeker] (Ankara: Mars Tic. ve San. A.Ş., 1993), 6, 33, 143, 157.

9 Ahmad, *Modern Türkiye'nin Oluşumu*; Köker, *Modernleşme, Kemalizm ve Demokrasi* [Modernization, Kemalism, and Democracy]; Şevket Pamuk, *Türkiye'nin 200 Yıllık İktisat Tarihi* [Two Hundred Years of Türkiye's Economic History] (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2017); Yahya Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)* [The Economic History of the Republican Era (1923–1950)] (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2015).

10 Ayşe Durukan Kopuz, "Spatial Evaluation of Primary Sugar Factories in Early Republican Period in Turkey," *ITU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture* 14, no. 3 (2017): 127-41.

11 Ayşe Durukan Kopuz and Tuğçe Tetik, "Traces of Modern Life in Thrace: Alpullu Sugar Factory and Workers' Housing," *A+Arch Design International Journal of Architecture and Design* 2-3 (2016): 1-15; Ekim Deniz Ayhan, "Workers' Health and Architecture: A Reading on Eskişehir Sugar Factory within Turkish Modernization" (Master's Thesis, METU, 2006). In addition to those, numerous studies addressed sugar factories built after the early Republican period, especially from the 1950s onward. However, these are not discussed in this study, as they fall outside the scope of its focus.

12 Ali Cengizkan, (ed.). *Fabrika'da Barınmak: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi'nde Türkiye'de İşçi Konutları*:

Key theoretical grounding on architectural modernism is offered by Bozdoğan in “Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic” (2001), where she interprets early Republican architecture as a concrete expression of modernism, demonstrating how spatial design shaped education, daily life, and industry. She highlights how modernism was ideologically embraced and adapted in state-driven projects influenced by Western principles. Her later collaboration with Akcan, “Turkey: Modern Architectures in History” (2012), further examines modern architecture as a tool of Republican ideology and nation-building, linking state projects such as People’s Houses (*Halkevleri*) (1932) and Village Institutes (*Köy Enstitüleri*) (1940) as agents of transforming peasants into republican citizens. Within this framework, factory towns are identified as socially transformative spaces, with the Kayseri Sümerbank textile factory (1933) exemplifying a modernist, state-planned industrial complex, an important case in Türkiye’s early industrial heritage, equipped with housing, daycare, cinema, library, and even a swimming pool designed for mixed-gender use.

Studies on gender in the early Republic emphasize how women, with their bodies, identities, and social roles, were instrumental in constructing national identity and modernity.<sup>13</sup> Bozdoğan (2001) also discusses the symbolic alignment between modern women and modern buildings, emphasizing how both were celebrated as embodiments of health, simplicity, rationality, and a scientific worldview, thereby positioning gender and architecture as parallel markers of the Republican vision of modernity. Although studies that focus directly on industrial female labor remain limited, Balsøy’s article discussing the *Vakit* newspaper’s 1929 survey titled “Women in Working Life,” along with Akgöz’s article “Spaces of National-Industrial Modernity: Factories and Factory Women in Early Republican Turkey,” which examines the subject through the lens of social history, reveal women’s constrained positions shaped by social norms, low wages, and inadequate housing conditions, while also revealing symbolically significant roles within factory spaces.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the substantial literature on industrialization, modernization, and gender politics in early Republican Türkiye, no direct study examines the intersection of sugar and women within the ideological and spatial framework of the era, particularly through the sugar factory settlements. The architectural planning and social organization of sugar factory settlements have not been previously analyzed from a gendered perspective. While women’s symbolic presence in nation-building narratives has been acknowledged, their material roles and lived experiences within factory communities remain largely unexplored.

#### *Aim, scope, and methodology*

This study evaluates how these factory settlements contributed to economic development and the dissemination of Kemalist ideology in rural Anatolia. It particularly emphasizes the transformative impact of sugar factories in assigning women new roles and meanings in rural Anatolia. While women in Türkiye had long been associated with domestic roles as nurturers of the family, this study explores how their participation in factory life, both as workers and residents, redefined their societal roles. Within the ideological metaphor of the factory as a “family,” women emerged as agents of modern identity, social unity, and industrial nationhood in regions that had previously remained on the periphery of Republican reforms. This significant gap is addressed by an interdisciplinary approach that links architecture, modernization, and industrialization ideals of early Republican Türkiye from a gender perspective, thereby contributing a new dimension to the scholarly discourse.

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*Yaşam, Mekân ve Kent* [Dwelling in the Factory: Workers’ Housing in Türkiye during the Early Republican Period: Life, Space, and the City]. (Ankara: Arkadaş Yayınları, 2009).

13 Nükhet Sirman. “Kadınların Milliyeti” [The Nationality of Women], in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce: Milliyetçilik*, ed. Tanıl Bora (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 226-44; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Cinsiyet ve Millet* [Gender and Nation] (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003).

14 Gülhan Balsøy. “Women in Working Life’ in the Early Years of Republican Turkey,” *Labor History* 65, no. 6 (2024): 801-12; Görkem Akgöz. “Spaces of National-Industrial Modernity: Factories and Factory Women in Early Republican Turkey,” TRAFÖ—Blog for Transregional Research (2021).

The focus is on the first four sugar factories (Alpullu, Uşak, Eskişehir, and Turhal) established between 1926 and 1934 during the Early Republican period, considering also that the factories built after this period demonstrate significant differences in the spatial planning and organization of the settlements.<sup>15</sup>

The results stem from a qualitative analysis method, conducted through a wide range of diverse and numerous sources: primarily historical documents such as books, newspaper/magazine articles, personal memoirs, brochures of the Girls' Institutes, dessert recipe books, and archival materials including official correspondence, documents, commemorative books, publications of *Türkiye Şeker Fabrikaları A.Ş. Neşriyatı* (Turkish Sugar Factories Corporation), as well as visual materials like photographs and architectural drawings,<sup>16</sup> and contemporary books/articles/theses on development of sugar industry and factories, and political, economic, industrial, social, cultural, and gender policies of Türkiye during that period. Using these sources, this study employs a thematic content analysis approach to examine how factory settlements visually and textually embodied state narratives of modernization, industrialization, socio-cultural life, and women's roles. The selected sources are interpreted not merely as descriptive records, but as instruments of ideological dissemination, particularly regarding how women were spatially and socially positioned within the ideal of the modern industrial family. For example, analyzing factory layouts and visual portrayals of women in everyday life, such as attending cinema, working in laboratories, or residing in modern housing, reveals how spatial design (visually) and literature (textually) supported women's visibility and social transformation in rural Anatolia.

### **Nutrition, Industry, and Nation Building: The Multifaceted Role of Sugar and Sugar Factories in Republican Türkiye's Modernization Agenda**

With the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, the primary objective of the Republic of Türkiye was to establish a strong national state with a robust economy within the borders defined by the *Misak-ı Milli* (National Pact). If the Republic of Türkiye were to reach its goal of becoming a modern civilization, launching industrialization was inevitable. According to Kautsky, industrialization generally leads to processes of modernization. While Western Europe underwent modernization from within, external influences in non-Western societies often initiated it. Once contact between traditional and modern societies began, a class of intellectuals emerged in the industrializing society. These intellectuals acted as internal agents who sustained and advanced the modernization process.<sup>17</sup> The Kemalists established a series of primary national industries in succession in Türkiye through a rational, modern, and scientific approach aimed at achieving rapid and balanced development. In line with this goal, during the 1930s, statism should be understood as a policy in which the state undertakes key industrial investments while encouraging and protecting private initiative.<sup>18</sup> One of the key objectives was to achieve self-sufficiency in producing essential goods known as the "three whites": textiles, sugar, and flour.<sup>19</sup>

Sugar was regarded as a matter of national concern. After the unsuccessful attempts during the Ottoman period,<sup>20</sup> establishing sugar factories in the early Republican period marked a significant

15 This divergence stems from Türkiye's profound political and economic transformations, especially after the 1950s, marking the beginning of a new phase in industrial development and the rural-urban nexus. Therefore, the second-phase of sugar factories, which started to be constructed by 1953, are excluded from the scope of this research.

16 All archival materials of Turkish Sugar Factories used in this study are drawn from the digital archive created by TOBB University of Economics and Technology. This archive was made available in accordance with protocol No. 89616 760-800-E.450, signed on January 4, 2017, between TOBB ETÜ and *Türkiye Şeker Fabrikaları A.Ş.* (Turkish Sugar Factories Inc.) for the purpose of conducting a research project.

17 John H. Kautsky, *The Political Consequences of Modernization* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1972).

18 Köker, *Modernleşme, Kemalizm ve Demokrasi*, 189.

19 Pamuk, *Türkiye'nin 200 Yıllık İktisadi Tarihi*, 181.

20 The earliest factory initiatives were planned since the 1840s. Turan Veldet, *30. Yılında Türkiye Şeker*



Fig. 1: Aerial view of the Alpullu Sugar Factory

shift in industrial policy, which was described as “remarkable swiftness.”<sup>21</sup> Mustafa Kemal Atatürk expressed this deliberate policy in 1930: “The establishment of sugar factories across all suitable regions of our country, and thereby meeting the national demand for sugar, must be recognized as one of our essential goals.”<sup>22</sup> The first sugar factories in Türkiye were established in Alpullu (1926), Uşak (1926),<sup>23</sup> Eskişehir (1933), and Turhal (1934). The Trade Commission emphasized that the selected factory locations were strategically chosen based on practical criteria such as proximity to raw materials, access to transportation, and water availability, indicating a thoughtful and well-planned approach.<sup>24</sup> Despite all the economic, agricultural, and logistical challenges in its initial phase, a significant achievement was made through determination and perseverance. For example:

“Considering Turhal’s remote location, the underdeveloped and isolated nature of the region, the need to transport thousands of tons of materials from İstanbul and then, during the summer months, from the portless city of Samsun to Turhal solely by railway, as well as the shortage of laborers and skilled staff, completing and launching such a large-scale investment within seven months was by no means an easy task, especially under the conditions of that time. Even the Germans who supplied the equipment did not believe the deadline could be met.”<sup>25</sup>

Taygun also emphasizes that all employees had a strong sense of unity and commitment from top-level management to the general workforce. Turkish and foreign staff collaborated seamlessly toward a shared objective. The spirit of liberation and progress sparked by Atatürk deeply motivated everyone involved, leading them to dedicate their full energy to building a symbol of modernization and prosperity in a region long overlooked and economically disadvantaged.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the economic and technical limitations, the agreement with Prague-based Škoda (Czechoslovakia) marked the beginning of the Turkish sugar industry and a broader economic transformation in the early Republic. The 1925 contract with Škoda ensured that the factory would be fully equipped and operational by 1926. Škoda engineers oversaw the entire setup process, enabling the factory to begin production within a year. This milestone was made possible through establishing the Uşak Terakki Ziraat Turkish Joint-Stock Company, formed with the support of 5,000 to 10,000 villagers, merchants, farmers, and craftsmen as a private initiative backed by the Industry and Mines Bank.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, proposals were sought from

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*Sanayii* [The Turkish Sugar Industry in its 30th Year] (Ankara: Doğuş Ltd. Şirketi Matbaası, 1958), 33.

21 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, xiii.

22 The Commemorative Book of Alpullu Sugar Factory. Turkish Sugar Factory Inc. Archives.

23 The foundation of the first sugar factory in Uşak was laid on November 6, 1925, and the factory was put into operation on December 17, 1926. Although the foundation of the Alpullu Sugar Factory was laid later, on December 22, 1925, its construction was completed before that of Uşak. Therefore, it became the first sugar factory to open in Türkiye, on November 26, 1926.

24 Veldet, *30. Yılında Türkiye Şeker Sanayii*, 72.

25 Taygun, *Türkşeker’in Öyküsü*, 111.

26 *Ibid.*, 112.

27 Veldet, *30. Yılında Türkiye Şeker Sanayii*, 76-77, 80-81, 149.

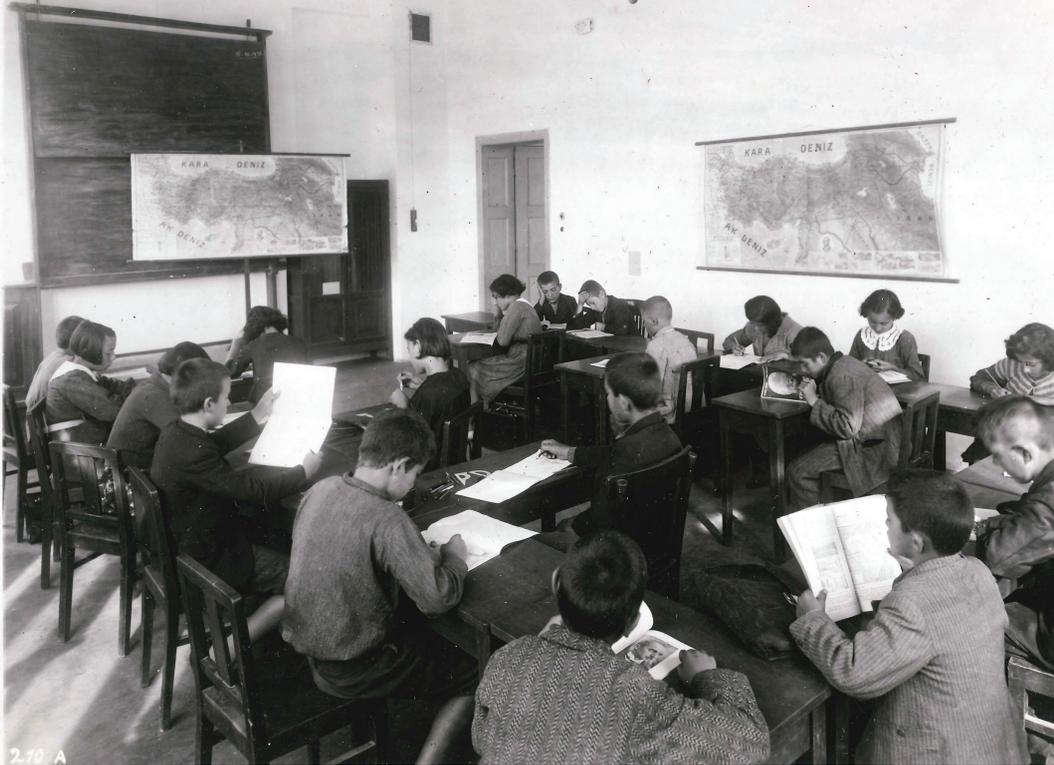


Fig. 2: The primary school in Alpullu Sugar Factory

various European firms to establish the Alpullu Sugar Factory and related facilities like alcohol production and animal feed processing. The contract was awarded to Maschinenfabrik Buckau R. Wolf of Magdeburg (Germany).<sup>28</sup> As Veldet noted, the authorities at that time sincerely appreciated this company by saying, “this trust led to further collaboration in the construction of the Eskişehir and Turhal factories, with the partnership continuing in the development of later factories as well.”<sup>29</sup>

Foreign experts played a vital role in establishing the sugar factories, with some continuing working in Türkiye for years. The advanced nature of sugar beet cultivation required specialist support from European technicians, at least in the beginning. At the Uşak Factory, Škoda supplied key personnel, including a director, chief technician, and technical staff.<sup>30</sup> To sustain progress, contracts required foreign technicians to remain until Turkish laborers were trained, while also recommending the education of Turkish youths abroad in sugar beet farming.<sup>31</sup> This also brings a direct social encounter between Turkish and European culture.

When discussing the planning of the sugar factories, it is obvious that spatial planning and architectural design were functional. Located near essential water sources and transport routes, these factories were built far from cities, requiring the creation of self-sufficient settlements by providing all kinds of modern facilities and entertainment options. Alongside production facilities, the first four factories included housing units (laborers’ pavilions, staff and administrative housing), a guesthouse, a bath, a cinema, restaurants, schools (primary, middle, and high), a pavilion, an infirmary or hospital, a pharmacy, playgrounds, retail stores, parks, etc. They also featured recreational amenities, unusual in traditional Turkish culture, such as a mini-golf area, swimming pool, stadium, volleyball and basketball areas, and tennis court (Figs. 1 and 2).

28 *Ibid.*, 241.

29 *Ibid.*, 270.

30 *Ibid.*, 106, 113.

31 *Ibid.*, 93-94, 147.



Fig. 3: April 23 National Sovereignty and Children's Day celebrations (1931), Alpullu Sugar Factory

The introduction of spatial planning and social organization marked a major change for the local population, which was traditionally dependent on agriculture and unfamiliar with industrial life. More importantly, the architectural facilities of the factory introduced Anatolian communities to new forms of modernity and built environments. Social and cultural activities within the campus, such as national holiday celebrations, theatrical performances, lectures, concerts, and film screenings, redefined everyday life and fostered new social dynamics, contributing to the cultural development of nearby communities (Fig. 3). The everyday life of the sugar factories is expressed as follows:

“A perfect harmony of jazz frequently played, upright pianos in homes, young girls holding musical instruments; a tailor's shop, dressmakers, a small flower garden in front of and around every house, a fire brigade, garages, vegetable gardens, such a fire brigade that even the town of Uşak relies more on it than on its municipal team. The townspeople know, as surely as their names, that a fire could be extinguished immediately before the first flame even flares up. At every doorstep, like in the movies, bottles of milk, bowls of yogurt, and packages of snow-white bread are left in the early morning light. The firewood and coal cart arrive precisely when requested. The street sweepers patrol the factory town with a sense of order unseen in our cities, equipped with modern cleaning tools and handcarts.”<sup>32</sup>

This statement highlights themes of hygiene, health, maintenance, and aesthetics, and reflects how every aspect was carefully planned for a joyful life. Tarus's book, among the most important sources on this topic, offers valuable observations on sugar factories and related issues through his background as both a journalist and a lawyer. This book describes the factories as sites of an 'unfamiliar modern life': “A factory, especially in our country, will become the source of long-overdue wealth, forgotten technical civilization, unexperienced comfort and prosperity, unfamiliar modern life, and untasted blessings of the world.” The author emphasizes their deep connection with modernization, suggesting civilization spread through smoke from their chimneys.<sup>33</sup> These concepts were articulated by the Prime Minister İsmet İnönü (1934) as follows:

32 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, 111.

33 *Ibid.*, xxii.

“Today we inaugurated and visited the Turhal Factory. Its state-of-the-art design makes it an imposing and captivating facility. With its technical and repair workshops, the factory also serves as a major educational and economic center... Each sugar factory brings significant economic benefit to at least four provinces. The housing units for civil servants and laborers, and the educational and healthcare facilities, add further value to the complex. The children of our nation, accustomed to living and resting in clean, well-ventilated, and spacious rooms with simplicity and dignity, will grow stronger in their pursuit of civilization, productivity, and prosperity.”<sup>34</sup>

The architectural infrastructure of sugar factories provided hygiene standards that improved notably through facilities such as laundry services and Turkish baths (*hamams*), which were available to both staff and laborers. Physical well-being is another issue promoted through sports programs. Recreation areas like stadiums, volleyball courts, tennis courts, etc. were widely accessible and used enthusiastically by all, from managers and laborers to women and children. These recreational spaces cultivated a strong sense of community and collective identity within the factory settlements.<sup>35</sup>

It can be understood that the sugar factories were ideologically charged and carefully designed to reflect the values of modernity, hygiene, health, and order, which can be summarized as social transformation envisioned by the early Republican regime. It is striking that the concepts attributed to sugar factories closely align with values strongly associated with women, such as hygiene, health, simplicity, and practicality. As Bozdoğan claims, referring to 1930s Kemalist reforms: “the idealized qualities of new women, simplicity, health, youth, unadorned beauty, practicality, and most importantly, a ‘scientific’ worldview, were precisely the same attributes for which modern architecture was celebrated.” The physical appearance of buildings and individuals was linked to scientific ideas about hygiene and rationality, aligning with Western norms. Republican critiques of women’s veiling reflected cultural and ideological concerns and emphasized health, cleanliness, and aesthetic considerations, echoing architectural discourses influenced by the Corbusian emphasis on light, air, and greenery.<sup>36</sup>

It can be argued that sugar factories, as industrial institutions, can likewise be considered integral to this broader network of socio-political and spatial relations. The factory settlements were planned with simplicity, cleanliness, order, and elegance, providing health and hygiene for the residents, reflecting the Republican-period notion that sugar, alongside women’s nurturing role, was a source of “health and joy.”

### **The Cultivators of Modernism and Nation-building: Women as the Nutritional Agents in the Sugar Factories**

The significance of sugar factories stemmed from the fact that sugar was seen as an essential nutrient for raising healthy new generations during the early Republican period. It became an ideological matter, closely associated with child development and domestic life. In the 1940s, publications such as *Ev Kadın* and contemporary recipe books emphasized sugar as a physical and emotional necessity, essential for energy, vitality, well-being, and beauty, symbolically positioned as the “fuel” of healthy, cheerful, and joyful generations.<sup>37</sup> Sugar was widely promoted as a vital energy source in contemporary magazines.<sup>38</sup> A booklet prepared for sugar beet farmers says:

34 Taygun, *Türkşeker’in Öyküsü*, 39.

35 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, 23.

36 Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 80, 82, 84.

37 *Ev Kadın* Magazine (1946), 6; *Türk Kadınının Tatlı Kitabı* [The Dessert Book of the Turkish Woman] (Ankara: Mars Matbaası, 1966), 5.

38 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, xv.

“The best and purest fuel for the human machine is sugar. Do not laugh! Sugar is quickly digested in the stomach and absorbed into the bloodstream, thus nourishing the body and providing the calories and energy necessary for movement and strength. For this reason, sugar is highly beneficial for people of all ages and social classes, especially children, the elderly, the sick, wrestlers, farmers, and soldiers, offering strength, vitality, and endurance.”<sup>39</sup>

This expression is visualized in a cartoon, which shows the figures of the Republic’s athletic citizen and hardworking farmer, illustrating sugar’s contribution to bodily strength and national productivity. It should be emphasized that comparing the human body to a machine and sugar to its fuel strongly references the factory. Moreover, by stating that sugar is necessary for all social classes, the text acknowledges class differences while simultaneously suggesting that sugar is meant for everyone, implying its unifying and inclusive nature.

Besides its notable role in public nutrition and cultural life, symbolizing joy and health, it is also associated with the emotional warmth of a Turkish woman. A dessert cookbook from the period offers insights into the cultural meanings attached to sugar, portraying it not only as nourishment but also as a medium of affection and domestic vitality; “sweet words,” “sweet smiles,” and the expression “şekerim” (sweetie) are cited as uniquely Turkish associations between sugar, aesthetics, and femininity, revealing gendered expressions. The book, which refers to Turkish housewives as a gift, reinforces the symbolic link between women, sugar, and family life. The booklet for farmers also employs a metaphor within the text, even equating sugar beet cultivation with motherhood, illustrating the deep emotional and symbolic connection between women and sugar in the public imagination.<sup>40</sup>

Sugar, as a modern industrial food, was ideologically entrusted to women within the family, reflecting their broader role in raising healthy future citizens. Like sugar, women were symbolically linked to modernity, as seen in the state’s emphasis on their political, educational, and social rights. Türkiye stood out in the Middle East by addressing women’s rights early and comprehensively, granting civil rights in 1926 and voting rights in local elections in 1930 and general elections in 1934. Like many modern nation-states, the Republic intervened in the domains of women and family to shape a homogeneous, modern citizenry.<sup>41</sup> As expressed in various campaigns for and against women’s veiling, voting rights, education, and employment, the discourse and struggles surrounding “women’s emancipation” or “women’s adherence to tradition” lie at the heart of many modernist and anti-modernist nationalist movements.<sup>42</sup>

Republican Türkiye enabled women to transition from small-scale, often underpaid industries in Ottoman society to factory work, and by the 1930s, growing industrialization increased labor demand, leading agricultural women into industrial employment where they gained economic independence and a sense of empowerment. Their education is regarded as the key to increasing women’s participation in the workforce. From the outset, co-education and vocational training were emphasized in Republican Türkiye, particularly within the education and industrialization agenda.<sup>43</sup> Among those newly opened institutions, Girls’ Institutes aimed to prepare young women for modern professional roles, such as teachers, tailors, factory laborers, and competent homemakers. Their curricula reflected modern values, featuring European recipes and teaching students to serve meals with metal cutlery at tables instead of using wooden spoons on floor mats.<sup>44</sup> It is significant that cheerful and robust children could be raised thanks to the women

39 *Pancar Çiftçilerine Faydalı Bilgiler* [Useful Information for Beet Farmers] (Ankara: Arı Basımevi, 1958), 61.

40 *Türk Kadının Tatlı Kitabı*, 5; *Pancar Çiftçilerine Faydalı Bilgiler*, 23.

41 Deniz Kandiyoti, *Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar, Kimlikler ve Toplumsal Dönüşümler* [Concubines, Sisters, Citizens, Identities, and Social Transformations] (İstanbul: Metis Kadın Araştırmaları, 1997), 67, 106-7.

42 Davis, *Cinsiyet ve Millet*, 57.

43 Aynur Soydan, “Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşması Çerçevesinde Mesleki Teknik Eğitim (Cumhuriyet İdeolojisinin Kuruluş Sürecinde Kız Enstitüleri –1923–1940)” [Vocational and Technical Education within the Framework of the Formation of Women’s Identity (Girls’ Institutes in the Process of the Establishment of Republican Ideology – 1923–1940)], *Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları* 1 (2002): 269-87.

44 Şule Toktaş Çelik, “Uzlaşma ve Çatışma: Kız Enstitülerinden Mezun Öğretmen ve Akademisyenlerin

educated in the Girls' Institutes,<sup>45</sup> which directly corresponds to the previously mentioned statements emphasizing the importance of sugar for the Turkish family. It becomes clear that sugar and women were considered fundamentals in raising healthy future generations. It can be said that the modern way of life was brought into homes and families through women and, in this way, was effectively disseminated throughout society.

According to *Altan* magazine, one of the Republic's main goals was to extend prosperity and progress to even the most remote parts of the country. The state brought economic opportunities to eastern Türkiye by providing infrastructure like railways. At the same time, state policies recognized the vital role of women in education, which begins in the family. A key strategy was assigning graduates of Girls' Institutes to rural areas, where they would act as agents of modernity. Trained in hygiene, nutrition, and home economics based on using rational and efficient techniques, Taylorist principles,<sup>46</sup> these women were expected to apply their knowledge there by enhancing family well-being and embodying Republican ideals. The article notes: "Today, we see the long-term outcomes of these efforts, as women succeed alongside men in every field, demonstrating their capacity to significantly contribute to advancing the Turkish nation, economically, intellectually, and morally."<sup>47</sup>

### *Women in the sugar factories*

As visual materials (photos, cartoons, etc.) reveal, sugar was attributed to men and sugar factories were largely male-dominated spaces, where men comprised the majority of the workforce across all levels, from factory laborers to administrators and farmers. The previously mentioned publication aimed to encourage farmers includes visual materials portraying the Turkish farmer in a gendered manner, predominantly as male. In the same booklet, innovative beet planting and harvesting recommendations were taught by a humanized figure with a beet-shaped head, speaking to a stereotypical Anatolian male farmer characterized by his traditional cap. Another image metaphorically likened the delivery of sugar beets to the factory for weighing to a military operation, emphasizing its "orderly and disciplined" nature.<sup>48</sup> Apart from these, an oil painting by Ratip Tahir (1934), "Returning from the Fields," depicts a male farmer with a rake, accompanied by a woman carrying a water jug, symbolically reinforcing traditional gender roles by portraying the woman as supportive and nurturing. Naturally, over time, sugar beet cultivation and its industry created a new field of employment among women peasants (Fig. 4).

The sugar factories also facilitated employment opportunities for women who actively participated in factory work as laborers and staff who were mostly graduates of vocational institutes (Fig. 5). For instance, at the factory's opening ceremony, a Uşak Girls' School student presented a bouquet to the Minister of Commerce with a note expressing their gratitude to the Republican government. They wrote how limited job opportunities they had before, causing economic hardship for women in the region. By saying so, they shared their hope that the factory would bring prosperity and well-being to working families.<sup>49</sup>

While it is acknowledged that it provided employment opportunities for women, the group photograph of administrative staff from Uşak (1936) attests that women staff were in a clear minority (Fig. 6).

Güçlenme ve Direnme Stratejileri" [Reconciliation and Conflict: Empowerment and Resistance Strategies of Teachers and Academics Graduated from Girls' Institutes], in *20. Yüzyıl Sonunda Kadınlar ve Gelecek*, ed. Oya Çitçi (Ankara: Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1998), 400.

45 Ö. Kemal Açar, "Kız Enstitüsü Açıldı," in *Altan*, vol. 34 (Adana: Türksöz Basımevi, 1937), 12-13.

46 For further information on this topic, see Yael Navaro Yaşın, "Evde Taylorizm: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin İlk Yıllarında Evişinin Rasyonelleşmesi (1928-1940)" [Taylorism at Home: The Rationalization of Housework in the Early Years of the Turkish Republic (1928-1940)], *Toplum ve Bilim* 84 (2000): 51-74.

47 Nuriye Hekimoğlu, "Kız Enstitüsü Niçin Açıldı?" [Why Was the Girls' Institute Established?], *Altan*, vol. 33-34-35 (İstanbul: Ülkü Basımevi, 1938), 32-33, 37.

48 *Pancar Çiftçilerine Faydalı Bilgiler*, 44.

49 Veldet, *30. Yılında Türkiye Şeker Sanayii*, 85-86.

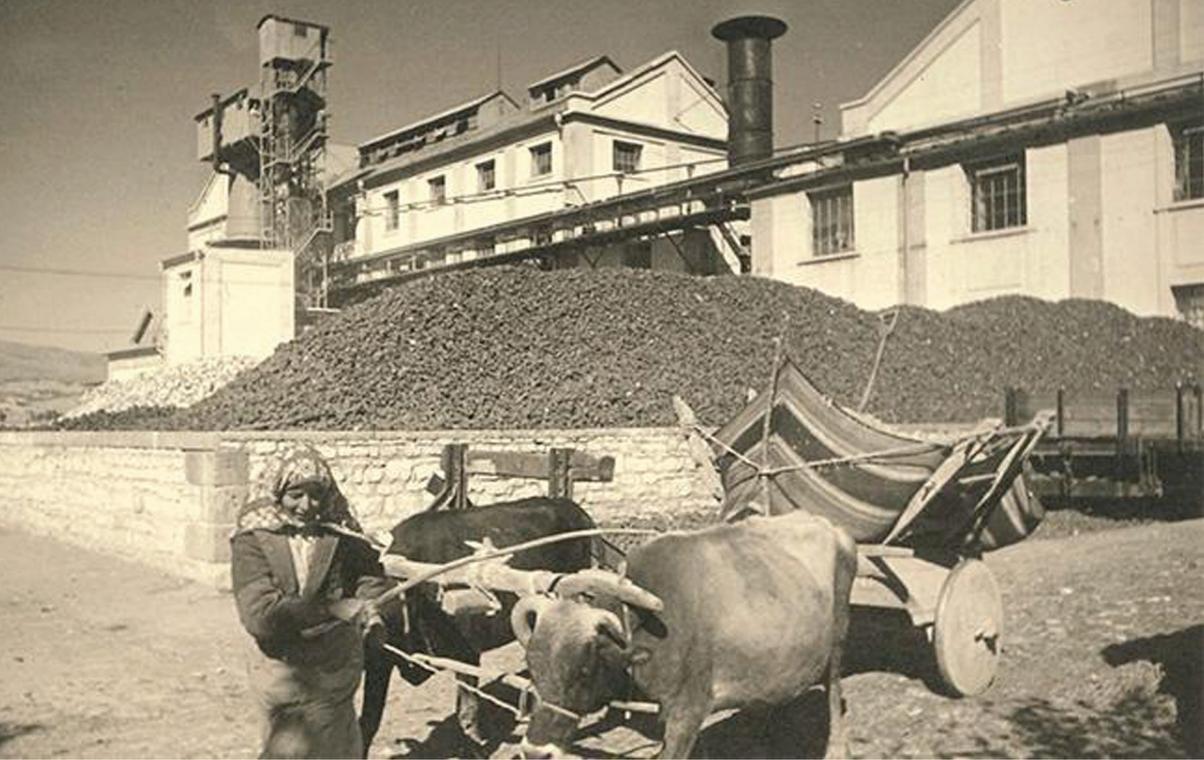


Fig. 4: Woman peasant transporting sugar beets with an ox cart, Uşak Sugar Factory (above)

Fig. 5: Women laborers of Alpulu Sugar Factory (below)

Fig. 6: The administrative staff of Uşak Sugar Factory (1936) (facing page)





However, despite being predominantly male spaces, sugar factories assigned women roles that were symbolically and functionally central to the broader socio-political objectives of the period. While visual evidence is not adequately enlightening in this regard, literary accounts offer a coherent and substantive narrative regarding the role and conditions of women in sugar factories. According to the publications from that period, women were regarded as equal individuals enjoying the same conditions as men and became role models for all the rural women and girls near the settlements. The amenities provided particularly to female staff, as well as the balance between their working and personal lives, are vividly described in the book *Uzun Atlama* (Long Jump):

“Just ten steps away, the red-haired female chemist, dripping yellow sweat from her neck, was trying to take a sample from a vat. That evening, you would see her at dinner in a fashionable blouse and wonder at which metropolitan hairdresser she had managed to get her hair done in just half an hour.”<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, it is noted that modern accommodation facilities within the factory campuses were provided to staff, both men and women, without gender discrimination.

“In many places, I observed that rooms were allocated to married staff couples, unmarried employees who could not find space in the bachelor dormitories, and female chemists and engineers. Those who resided there free of charge enjoyed a life of comfort resembling that of a wealthy household. These young women and men, stayed in mostly vacant guesthouses by the factory director for practical reasons, were truly a sight to behold. In the mornings, as they reached for their breakfast dishes, four or five varieties laid out on white linen, covered tables, their eyes, without exception, sparkled with the light of happiness.”<sup>51</sup>

Women became key agents in transforming rural communities, particularly by being role models and acting as informal educators in early sugar factories. Modern lifestyles could extend to even the most remote corners of Anatolia through their presence. The influence of sugar factories, social and cultural facilities on rural women is described as follows:

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50 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, 13-14.

51 *Ibid.*, 28.

“From her modest barrack, the engineer’s wife breathes the spirit of civilization into the hearts of rural women. Among these women are many who have received higher education, graduated from institutes, or completed secondary and high school in urban centers. In this way, a wide range of cultural interactions and inspirations, from the value, role, and aesthetic identity of womanhood to the colorful images of fashion magazines, flows steadily toward the villages.”<sup>52</sup>

The sugar factories themselves gradually took on the character of modern republican towns and, in doing so, also became popular weekend destinations for visitors from surrounding villages and districts.<sup>53</sup>

As central figures in these modern industrial spaces, women significantly shaped social, cultural, and hygienic practices, making sugar factories critical sites.

“It signifies that the local villagers are beginning to understand the meaning of the twentieth century. From this point onward, the miracle of machinery will give rise to creations that intellectually elevate, spiritually enrich, and materially empower humanity. Everything, from the engineer’s attire, way of thinking and living, to the utensils used at meals and modes of entertainment, will be presented to the awareness of people from nearby cities, towns, and villages. *Görgü* (etiquette) is half of the application. Within a year, the women in these nearby communities will aspire to dress like the wives of the hundred or so engineers, clerks, accountants, and technicians living on-site. The most challenging step in escaping agricultural labor is the first move toward factory work, which the peasantry will begin to take. They will experience the joy of daily showers and hot meals served at set times on porcelain plates. They will encounter cinema, the captivating and formidable miracle of civilization. They will learn the skills of raising clean-faced, well-dressed children. Even elderly women will discover the delight of that magical powder and rouge that can create beauty from nothing.”<sup>54</sup>

The premise of a healthy life, a Republican ideal, seems reachable in rural areas through industrial facilities. A woman who had given birth to four children in the factory settlement is presented as a symbol of health. The author recalls seeing this woman during “a magnificent evening celebration” at the factory, describing her as “one of the youngest and most beautiful ladies of the night. I would also say the healthiest, but perhaps I exaggerate under the influence of my imagination...”<sup>55</sup>

### **Caring for the Collective: Women’s Role in Facilitating Social Unity and Industrial Nationhood**

A particularly compelling feature of the sugar factories worth emphasizing is the profound sense of belonging they cultivated, an atmosphere that transcended social class and gender boundaries. Tarus and İpek, for instance, vividly recalled how managers, security guards, laborers, women, and children all shared the same recreational spaces, from sports fields to community events, noting that even senior officials joined in youth matches. Such accounts illustrate how leisure and recreation were intentionally designed to reinforce solidarity and communal identity. Assembly halls within the factory campuses served multiple purposes, hosting formal gatherings, union meetings, or transforming into venues for celebrations, and contributed to workers’ emotional well-being. Later memoirs confirm that these spaces were often livelier and more dynamic than similar facilities in nearby urban centers, underscoring the sugar factories’ role as cultural as well as industrial institutions. Access was, of course, limited by their status as institutional sites, but facilities such as cinemas extended cultural opportunities more broadly. Screenings of

52 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, 39.

53 Kenan İpek, *Ah Benim Şeker Fabrikalarım (Şekerin Çocukları)* [Ah, My Sugar Factories (Children of Sugar)] (İstanbul: Su Yayınları, 2020), 18.

54 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, xxi-xxii.

55 *Ibid.*, 46.



Fig. 7: Factory employees at a family dinner, Turhal Sugar Factory

popular films from Istanbul, alongside educational programs for children, enriched the lives of factory residents and even selected audiences from surrounding towns, fostering a controlled yet meaningful form of social integration.<sup>56</sup>

These examples are remarkable since industrialization and mechanization are strictly associated with the emergence of the working class. Lefebvre argued that these divisions shape everyday life, suggesting that a truly modern daily experience is often absent among the working class.<sup>57</sup> As sources regarding the sugar factories demonstrate, Lefebvre's argument does not apply; instead, the principle of Populism, one of the principles of Kemalism, does apply — in early Republican Türkiye, as part of the state-driven modernization and development agenda, populism functioned as a mechanism to mitigate social and class tensions.<sup>58</sup>

In the sugar factories, this social organization was often framed through the concept of the “factory family,” where solidarity, mutual support, and shared identity prevailed. Women were at the core of this communal life, and they played a vital role in nurturing the families in domestic life and weaving the emotional and cultural fabric of factory life. Women helped transform these industrial spaces into tightly-knit communities rooted in care, social unity, and industrial nationhood (Fig. 7).

In that respect, the concept of “family” was deemed a keyword for the early Republican period, when it was regarded as the origin of civilization, as well as the basis of innovation and power for Atatürk's ideological framework. As the nation's core, he believed that trouble in the family was the simultaneous cause of social, economic, and political calamities.<sup>59</sup> It is remarkable to see the family bond in the sugar factories, which relies on strong collective identity and emotional solidarity among laborers, staff, managers, and local communities (Fig. 8).

56 Ibid., 22, 23; İpek, *Ah Benim Şeker Fabrikalarım*, 20, 44; Taygun, *Türkşeker'in Öyküsü*, 118.

57 Henri Lefebvre, *Modern Dünyada Gündelik Hayat* [Everyday Life in the Modern World] (Istanbul: Metis Yayıncılık, 1998).

58 Quoted in Feyza Turgay, *Devlet, Emek ve Şehir - Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde (1936-1960) İzmit SEKA Fabrikası* [State, Labor, and the City: The İzmit SEKA Factory in the Early Republican Period (1936-1960)] (Istanbul: Sosyal Tarih Yayınları, 2022), 36.

59 Müjgan Cınbur, “Atatürk Dönemi'nde Kadın Eğitimi” [Women's Education in the Atatürk Era], *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 7, no. 23 (March 1992): 263.



Fig. 8: The wives of sugar factory employees at a picnic, early years of the Turhal Sugar Factory

Taygun and Tarus emphasize the concept of “family” in their portrayal of sugar factories referring also to official rhetoric, describing the strong sense of unity and belonging as a deliberately cultivated and strategically planned outcome. Tarus described the “nucleus of the family” as central to the institutional culture of sugar factories. In his account, sincerity derived from a consciously cultivated “family consciousness,” while discipline and seriousness were instilled through systematic training. Together, these practices created a strong moral framework that underpinned factory life and distinguished it from other sectors of Turkish industry. Rather than being coincidental, this cohesion was the result of deliberate planning aimed at merging loyalty, work ethic, and shared purpose within a familial model. Tarus ultimately suggested that the distinctive unity between intellectual and manual labor unique to sugar industry stemmed from this carefully constructed institutional culture — an intentional merging of work ethic, loyalty, and shared purpose rooted in the familial model.<sup>60</sup>

The administration was like an “industrial family,” bonded with friendships and kinship-like relations. The factories were established according to the principle of a “family home,” reflecting organizational unity and deep nationalistic sentiment. This spirit of togetherness united villagers, laborers, staff, and civil servants under a shared sense of motivation. Beyond offering housing within factory compounds, often rent-free or at symbolic prices, the sugar factories also supported laborers in becoming homeowners, further deepening their sense of belonging and commitment. This approach elevated the role of sugar production from a matter of industrial development to a national cause. Solidarity among laborers was sometimes reinforced through shared leisure events, collective memories, distant kinship ties, or marriages; workplace companionship was the strongest and most enduring bond. The collective effort was rooted in sincerity and discipline, all centered around the shared goal of producing as much sugar as possible, of the highest quality.<sup>61</sup>

The sugar factories’ meticulously planned, well-organized, functional, and aesthetically organized spaces played a crucial role in encouraging people to remain within the factory settlements. Not only were their basic needs met, but the environment also provided nearly everything they aspired to have: happiness, health, and fulfillment with a sense of contentment and belonging. Factory housing was not only comfortable but also culturally enriching. Homes were

60 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, 5, 9, 14.

61 *Ibid.*, 4, 13, 54; Taygun, *Türkşeker’in Öyküsü*, 157; İpek, *Ah Benim Şeker Fabrikalarım (Şekerin Çocukları)*, 17.

equipped with libraries, and up-to-date periodicals and literary works were regularly delivered, even in remote towns. In addition, laborers' basic needs and cultural aspirations were thoughtfully addressed through facilities such as schools, mosques, baths, entertainment venues, and sports fields. Clean, well-cooked meals were served in elegant cafeterias with porcelain plates and linen tablecloths, while hygiene habits such as daily showers became the norm among rural laborers. In more developed factories like Alpullu and Uşak, dairy products were distributed free of charge to laborers' families and produce from factory-owned farms was sold to employees at highly affordable prices.<sup>62</sup> Tarus noted that in the sugar factories, the social needs of workers were addressed with an attentiveness that often exceeded contemporary standards and regulations. He observed that labor representatives and union leaders, free from coercion or fear, voiced few demands since their essential needs were already met. Even without such statements, his detailed inspections of the facilities revealed the extent to which the factories ensured workers' well-being.<sup>63</sup> These examples illustrate the factories' commitment to industrial production and building a healthy, cultured, and stable working-class community.

The success of the sugar factories lies in the adequate provision of social and living infrastructure necessary to convince individuals uprooted from urban life to settle permanently in rural industrial settlements. Engineers, clerks, laborers, and other employees in the sugar factories often remained in their posts for long stretches, as transfers were uncommon and tied to long-term planning. It was not unusual for staff to spend more than a decade in the same factory, with their spouses, children, and even elderly parents sharing the same living environment. For professionals relocated from major urban centers such as Istanbul, Ankara, or Izmir, whether technicians, scientists, accountants, sustaining a satisfactory social life within the settlements was crucial to prevent nostalgia for city life. Integrating such individuals, particularly women and the elderly, who were accustomed to metropolitan settings, into rural factory compounds was a challenge that required deliberate planning and the creation of robust social infrastructure to foster stability and belonging.<sup>64</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

The early Republican sugar factories played a significant role in developing Türkiye's national economy, particularly as industrial initiatives that processed sugar beets into sugar and related products. Their relevance, however, extended well beyond economic production, generating wide-ranging social, cultural, and spatial effects. Conceived as institutions of modernity and progress, they effectively functioned as informal "schools" through which the principles of Kemalist modernization were introduced and disseminated across Anatolia. As Tarus emphasized, the success of the sugar factories lay in the simultaneous implementation of economic and social programs, which were closely aligned with the broader contours of the Republican development agenda centered on self-sufficiency. These factories were conceived not only as industrial ventures but as socially grounded national development projects.<sup>65</sup> The factory settlements instilled discipline, reinforced respect in social relations, and fostered cultural refinement, while workers' children, inspired by contact with professionals, aspired to similar careers. Thus, sugar factories became spaces where economic aims and social transformation were deliberately intertwined.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to providing employment, the factories became sites where rural communities were introduced to new concepts such as modern industrial work, advanced agricultural practices, and contemporary lifestyles, elements fostered through spatial design and architectural planning. Tarus notes: "Visits to the sugar factories revealed that the industry had produced

62 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, 38; İpek, *Ah Benim Şeker Fabrikalarım (Şekerin Çocukları)*, 18, 36.

63 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, 37.

64 *Ibid.*, 19-20.

65 *Ibid.*, 29-30.

66 Taygun, *Türkşeker'in Öyküsü*, 118.

model examples not only in production but also in areas such as sports, cinema, community life, dance, entertainment, festivals, nightlife, and music.<sup>67</sup> Taygun also claims that cultural elements like cinema, sports, music, and radio radiated outward from these factories, often situated in remote mountainous areas, to neighboring towns and villages.<sup>68</sup>

A critical point to underscore is that, even before the formal establishment of the People's Houses in 1932<sup>69</sup> and the Village Institutes in 1940,<sup>70</sup> sugar factories had already begun to play a transformative role in modernizing rural Anatolia. Built in peripheral regions largely untouched by Republican ideological influence, these factories, with their infrastructures including schools, healthcare centers, cinemas, and recreational facilities, enabled the spread of modern lifestyles and Republican values. In this sense, sugar factories can be seen as institutional precursors to the Village Institutes and People's Houses, laying the foundational groundwork for rural modernization in Türkiye from the late 1920s onward.

Regarding their significance for women, it is important to recognize that the Republican ideal of the "new and modern woman" was embodied by those living and working in these factory settlements. This modern female image extended into rural life through everyday social practices, etiquette, clothing, and appearance, making factory spaces not only centers of production but also platforms for the transmission of Republican cultural norms. Rural women who had never before encountered a newspaper or book began attending night classes, while local families experienced many aspects of modern life for the first time. Rural women were taken to restaurants by their husbands once they became factory employees, tasted meals prepared by others rather than by themselves, and grew accustomed to the novelty of being served. In terms of appearance, the wives of workers increasingly adopted the fashions of Istanbul's Moda district, reflecting the diffusion of urban cultural norms into rural factory settlements.<sup>71</sup>

As the cornerstone of family life, women held households together and nurtured new generations. This image was also reinforced in visual representations, such as oil paintings, where male and female farmers are portrayed side by side, symbolizing companionship, familial unity, and solidarity. A contemporary source observed: "If the woman is virtuous, the family becomes virtuous as well; and the virtue of families raises the level of society and the nation. A nation of high standards can produce great individuals and heroes."<sup>72</sup> Women's newly assumed roles were further reinforced through conceptualizing the sugar factory as a "family," a structure that softened class distinctions and fostered a sense of solidarity and collective purpose. As İpek claims "the mothers of the factory did not envy one another; they rejoiced together in each other's gains and shared pride in each other's accomplishments."<sup>73</sup> Social hierarchies were reimagined within a familial setting, illustrating how the Republic's principle of populism could be embodied through industrial and communal life.

The metaphor of the factory as a "family" underscores how gender roles, social cohesion, and industrial nationhood were deliberately constructed and spatially embedded in everyday life. Women and men lived and worked together with shared values and common goals, exemplified by the various civic associations established within the Turhal Sugar Factory. Among these were

67 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, 19.

68 Taygun, *Türkşeker'in Öyküsü*, 125.

69 In 1932, the Republican People's Party established the People's Houses (*Halkevleri*) as adult education centers with the aim of promoting cultural, sports, and educational activities in different cities of Türkiye. In addition, *Halkodaları* (People's Rooms) (1939) were established as their rural counterparts, aiming to extend the same vision to villages.

70 To extend the reach of modern civilization to all parts of the country, including rural areas, *Köy Enstitüleri* (village institutes) were established. These institutes aimed to train young men and women who could adopt modern methods, apply them, and spread them within their villages, thus fostering planned rural transformation.

71 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, 39; İpek, *Ah Benim Şeker Fabrikalarım (Şekerin Çocukları)*, 16, 18-19.

72 Hekimoğlu, "Kız Enstitüsü Niçin Açıldı?," 37.

73 İpek, *Ah Benim Şeker Fabrikalarım (Şekerin Çocukları)*, 188.

organizations such as *the Child Protection Society, the Philanthropists Association, and the Red Crescent*, all of which were administered by the men and women of the factory. Their financial resources often exceeded those of many provincial centers, and their activities were consistently visible and influential within the community.<sup>74</sup> In this way, civic associations within the factory not only strengthened communal bonds but also transformed the factory settlement into a microcosm of the Republic's ideals of solidarity, welfare, and collective advancement, where women played a central role in shaping and sustaining this social fabric.

Although this transformation unfolded within the male-dominated nature of industrial labor, women emerged as essential architects of communal life. Embodying the proverb, "it is the female bird that builds the nest," women transcended traditional domestic roles and became the nurturers and cultivators of the social and cultural fabric within and beyond the sugar factory settlements. Their symbolic significance, far exceeding their numerical presence in the workforce, underscored the centrality of women in sustaining collective identity and solidarity.

Taken together, this study demonstrates how the program of sugar factory settlements, the overarching state ideology of modernization, and the social engineering enacted through the "family" metaphor converged in the early Republican period. It was at this intersection that women were positioned simultaneously as nurturers of the family, productive laborers in industrial settings, and visible embodiments of the new Republic's ideals. By bringing these three dimensions into alignment, sugar factories operated not merely as sites of economic activity but as laboratories of social transformation, where modern architecture, state ideology, and gender roles materialized in everyday life. In this respect, the sugar factories stand as critical spaces for understanding the making of industrial nationhood and rural modernization in early twentieth-century Türkiye.

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74 Tarus, *Uzun Atlama*, 170.

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- Fig. 3: Author's archive.
- Fig. 6: Veldet Turan, *30. Yılında Türkiye Şeker Sanayii (The Turkish Sugar Industry in its 30th Year)*, 170.
- Fig. 7: Kenan İpek, *Ah Benim Şeker Fabrikalarım (Şekerin Çocukları) (Ah, My Sugar Factories (Children of Sugar))*. (İstanbul: Su Yayınları, 2020), 20.
- Fig. 8: İbid., 71.