



## On resilience and response beyond value change: Transformation of women's movement in post-1980 Turkey

Saime Ozcurumez\*, Feyda Sayan Cengiz

Bilkent University, Department of Political Science, 06800, Bilkent, Ankara, Turkey

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### SYNOPSIS

This study examines the nature of, and reasons for, the transformation of the women's movement in Turkey in the post-1980 period by focusing on the origins, rationale, organization of two women's organizations and their interaction with political institutions. It seeks to answer two questions: in what ways do the post-1980 women's organizations differ from those of pre-1980 in Turkey? What factors have played a role in this transformation? In addressing these, this study critically examines two propositions put forward in the general literature on transformation in movements: emergence of postmaterialist values and changing political opportunity structures. Relying on evidence from Turkey, this study proposes three alternative factors adding nuance to these propositions in the general literature: the restrictions imposed by the 1980 *coup* on social movements bearing new frames of reference by activist women, the changing values and ideas of second wave feminism, and the limits of state-centered modernization for the women's movement in Turkey.

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### Introduction

"New social movements" have been a matter of profound academic interest, especially since the 1960s, the period as initiating the "new" aspects of social movements. Research on social movements attempted to answer the questions: Why do people engage in social movements? How and on what basis are social movements organized? In industrial societies, traditional social movements such as the labor movement are generally associated with claims and demands of certain class interests and claims related to economic security and the distribution of welfare; in post-industrial societies, on the other hand, the emerging social movements such as the environmental movement, the women's movement and the peace movement tend to focus on specific issues related to quality of life, attracting participants across diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. This transformation eventually gave rise to new questions within social movement research, questions relevant

to the study of the women's movement in Turkey in the pre and post-1980 *coup d'état* period.

The women's movement in Turkey underwent a swift transformation in the era following the 1980 *coup* (Arat, 1994, 1997, 2004; Tekeli, 1990a,b; Cindoğlu & Esim, 1999) which led the movement towards a more feminist "new social movement" (İlkkaracan, 1997; Şimşek, 2004). This study asks: (1) What is the nature of this transformation? (2) What are the dynamics that brought about this transformation? Could such a transformation be explained by a profound and long-term "culture shift" as indicated by Inglehart (1990)? Or, alternatively, were there other dynamics in the rise of the post-1980 feminist movement in Turkey, such as the contradiction between a "highly resonant cultural value" and conventional social practices (McAdam, 1994, p. 40)? In addressing these questions, case studies of two women's organizations embedded in the movement will be analyzed: the Progressive Women's Association (PWA), which was established in 1975 within the framework of the Turkish Communist Party (TCP) and was closed down in 1980, and the Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation (PRWSF), which was established in 1990. The rationale for the case selection is as

\* Corresponding author.

follows. First, these two organizations constitute a relatively representative sample of organizations impacted by the military *coup*. The PWA represents the 1970s leftist women's organizations and tracing the transformation in this particular movement is critical for understanding the response of the leftist women's organizations which have mostly been destroyed by the *coup*. The PRWSF represents one of the first institutionalization attempts at post-1980 feminism whose founders mostly are from the leftist women's organizations. Second, both organizations have a relatively broad base of support and membership. While the specific experience of these organizations and their transformation cannot be generalized to the entire women's movement in Turkey, they constitute critical examples for this study as both have been shaped by the changing values defining feminism in Turkey and the limits imposed on the movement by the *coup*. Furthermore, one movement (PWA) disappeared entirely after the *coup*, whereas the seeds of the other movement (PRWSF) were sown in the immediate post-1980 era as there existed consciousness raising activities on women's issues among women in semi-organized informal groups. Hence, we discuss the conditions under and the extent to which the explanations put forward by the approaches in the literature emphasizing value change and opportunity structures, verify the reshaping of social movements.

The PRWSF is a descendant organization of former informal meetings and consciousness/awareness raising activities of the post-*coup* years; more precisely, the first half of the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> There has been a notable variety of the type of organizations which emerged in this era such as secularist-Kemalist women's organizations,<sup>2</sup> as well as Islamist women's organizations.<sup>3</sup> However, in this study we focus on the transformation within organizations that faced challenges due to their ideological position on the left side of the political spectrum and, henceforth, develop a critical reading of Inglehart's claims on new social movements.

In the first section, we review the scholarly literature on the emergence of social movements. We address the existing literature focus on four factors that explain the emergence and transformation in social movements: the impact of value change from "material to postmaterial" values, the role of "political opportunity structures", the function of actors in social movements exercising choice, and the significance of "cultural opportunities". Although each theoretical framework explains conditions under which some movements emerge and the ways in which they act, we maintain that such explanations remain limited in explaining the transformation of the women's movement in Turkey. Hence, we review the propositions offered by these approaches by discussing the evidence from two women's organizations (PWA and PRWSF) along four lines: origins, rationale for activities, organization, and interaction with political institutions. Finally, we conclude by providing alternative explanations for the cases in Turkey which could also shed light on explaining the change in other "new" social movements in general and feminist movements in particular: First, we suggest that the *coup* transformed the institutional setting constraining how these groups were permitted to act, and defined how the actors perceived and formulated their survival as a movement in the system. Second, we propose that the transformation of the women's movements may be

partially attributed to how both the actors and the movement reacted to the structural shock brought about by the *coup*, challenging the very existence of the movement. Therefore, the movement emphasized supporting women's issues by referring to feminism exclusively and underplaying references to the class-based ideology which was perceived to contribute to the elimination of the movement in the first place by the 1980 *coup*. We argue that the actors in the movement aimed to overcome the challenges they encountered within the movement itself prior to the *coup*. First, the pre-*coup* organization of the women's movement was characterized by hierarchy, which the post-1980 *coup* organization would aim to overcome by introducing equality in the organization. Second, the pre-*coup* movement's demand on politics as class-based rather than feminist, was already increasingly being replaced by everyday experiences of women *as political*. Therefore, the discussion on how the "personal is political" was even further emphasized in the aftermath of the *coup*.<sup>4</sup>

### **New social movements and value change: possible explanations for transformation**

The term "new social movements" itself is contested. The debate revolves around questions regarding why and to what extent these movements are new. As Johnston, Larana, and Gusfield (1994) put it, "the concept refers to an approach rather than a theory" (p. 6). Whereas the authors point to the difficulty of reaching a unified set of propositions, they formulate a number of common characteristics that can be attributed legitimately to new social movements: class is not the social base of these movements; reference to ideologies diminishes<sup>5</sup>; issues of identity gain importance as opposed to economic grievances; the scope of the movements extends into the individual domain and everyday life; the movements become alternative to conventional channels of political participation; organization of the movements becomes less hierarchical and less centralized (Johnston et al., 1994, p. 6–8). Moreover, the new social movements literature is permeated with questions about the source and reason for the changing characteristics of social movements (Cohen, 1985; Offe, 1985; Melucci, 1994; Dalton, Kuechler, & Bürklin, 1990; Inglehart, 1990; Touraine, 1971, 1992).

In the scholarly debate on social movements, this study may be classified among those which work on the origins and the emergence of a new social movement in order to explain the transformation in the women's movement in pre- and post-1980 Turkey. The explanatory variable is the change in the value system from one period to another as also put forward by Inglehart (1990). Inglehart (1990) argues that participation in new social movements takes place because of the existence of a particular value system (i.e. postmaterial), its attendant objective problems, and "cognitive mobilization" around those values to solve those problems through the development of political skills. In other words, he focuses on the "value systems" that are arguably related to the emergence of new social movements and claims that "postmaterialist values underlie many of the new social movements" (Inglehart, 1990, p. 373). Such an approach challenges rational choice accounts of the emergence and transformation of new social movements, which fall short of

explaining long-term systemic change. Additionally, the New Social Movement (NSM) approach explains what the Marxist approach could not; that the protest movements of the 1960s were not led by the working class but by the middle class. Moreover, these movements were concerned with matters on quality of life and not about security and redistribution. Therefore, Inglehart (1971) relates the shift in values to the rise in levels of economic and physical security in Western societies in the post-war era. He suggests that such values have started to be adopted in the post-war period by age cohorts who have been socialized during the times of “West European economic miracles” and during an “unprecedentedly long period of unprecedentedly high affluence” (Inglehart, 1971, p. 991). As a result of this process, those cohorts have started to take economic and physical security for granted. Therefore, both a secure economic environment and enough time to let one generation live their pre-adult years in welfare have been essential for the appropriation of post-materialist values. Hence, as political parties fall behind in terms of pursuing postmaterialist goals, increasing numbers of people who pursue such goals, turn to new social movements (Inglehart, 1990, p. 373).

At this point, a critical reading of Inglehart's explanation is necessary. Do social movements gain new characteristics (such as prioritizing identity issues and organizing in a less hierarchical fashion) only in those countries that are in the process of a transformation towards advanced capitalism? Inglehart's (1990) account assumes that the adoption of postmaterialist values in a society requires a relatively long process of intergenerational change. We contend that Inglehart's account does not take into consideration whether the existence of nurturing conditions for postmaterialist values—hence new social movements—outside of Western Europe is possible.

Pichardo (1997) emphasizes that new social movements challenge the new modes of production, the new requirements of capital and its relations with the state. However, this does not necessarily mean that the value change is really an outcome of wealth, prosperity and economic security. Contending views perceive the value change underlying new social movements is related to the disenchantment with the belief in progress and frustration arising from failures of modernization (Giddens, 1990) or a means of defense against the risks of modernity (Beck, 1992). Such focus on prosperity and security limits the scope of analysis to social movements in advanced industrialized societies. However, it is hard to argue that there are no new social movements in countries other than advanced industrialized countries. For example, scholars analyzing new social movements in Latin American countries point to the significance of structural change during the transformation to capitalism or political processes to explain their emergence (Slater cited in Pichardo, 1997). Slater's (1985) and Safa's (1990) arguments about movements in Latin America, conclude that political processes brought about by a *coup*, economic grievances or domestic strife, may in some cases be conducive to the emergence of new demands in line with those labeled postmaterialist by Inglehart. Such social and political contexts result in political mobilization and a search for new ways of raising demands by forcing people to mobilize or by pushing them into a search for new ways of mobilizing.<sup>6</sup>

The significance of the particular historical, social and political context has been emphasized in a study of the feminist movement in Poland as well through the question of why such a movement has been slow to develop in this country (Bystydziński, 2001). Bystydziński does not directly address how her study challenges Inglehart's arguments; however, her elaboration on the unfavorable conditions for the flourishing of a feminist movement due to both the Communist legacy and the domination of the Solidarity movement by the Catholic Church complicates Inglehart's scheme. The emphasis on the influence of transnational feminist advocacy networks and transnational women's rights movements on women's movements at the national level (Friedman, 2003; Reilly, 2007) necessitates even further a rethinking of Inglehart's arguments.

Tarrow's account of social movements challenges Inglehart's argument by pointing to the changes in the political context which facilitate participation in social movements. Tarrow (1998) emphasizes the emerging “political opportunities” in order to explain the origins of social movements and argues that “contention is more closely related to opportunities for, or limited by constraints upon, collective action than by the persistent social and economic factors that people experience” (p. 71). For Tarrow, cultural symbols and common frames of meaning remain necessary for the success of social movements but are not sufficient for their emergence. Tarrow (1998) identifies five dimensions of political opportunity: increasing access to participation, shifting alignments, divided elites, influential allies (who take the role of guarantors against repression or acceptable negotiators), repression and facilitation by the state.

Tarrow's account focusing on “political opportunities” is both developed and challenged by McAdam (1994), who highlights the relationship between objective shifts in political opportunities and subjective shifts in framing and generating new meanings with the concept of “cultural opportunities”. He suggests that “it is extremely hard to separate these objective shifts in political opportunities from the subjective processes of social construction and collective attribution that render them meaningful” (McAdam, 1994, p. 39). Accordingly, he argues that although structural factors encourage social movement mobilization, in order to analyze a social movement, one also has to account for how and through which processes collective framing efforts, which McAdam refers to as “cultural opportunities”, are stimulated and expanded. Furthermore, he contends that the expansion of cultural opportunities is triggered by certain processes. Accordingly, “ideological or cultural contradictions” constitute one such pattern that triggers the expansion of cultural opportunities: The contradiction between a “highly resonant cultural value” (McAdam, 1994, p. 40) and conventional social practices potentially sets social movement mobilization in motion. He further cites the example of the feminist movement in US in the 1960s and 1970s: “...it was the egalitarian rhetoric and forms of sexual discrimination evident within the civil rights movement and the white student Left that fueled the development of a radical feminist frame” (McAdam, 1994, p. 40).

McAdam's account related to the emergence of social movements is significant in terms of challenging Inglehart's value change approach in that, this account has an explanatory

potential for the emergence of contemporary social movements in societies where long-term intergenerational value change has not taken place. Shifts in cultural opportunities do not necessarily have to occur as a result of transformation towards advanced capitalism either. Moreover, the “cultural opportunities” approach challenges and enriches the “political opportunities” approach by underscoring the significance of the construction of new frames of meaning for the emergence of a social movement.

Moreover, McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996) highlight the role of agency, in this case a group of actors who are able to capitalize on new openings in the system through the political opportunities which have formed. This argument is furthered with an emphasis on the significance of the symbolic meanings that are attributed to the actors: McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) employ the example of Rosa Parks and draw attention to the fact that she was not just any woman “taking advantage of an objective structure of opportunities”; she had a background in civil rights activism, and therefore, the subjective meaning attributed to her and her action played a crucial role in the Civil Rights Movement (p. 46).

In this study, we examine the validity of the explanation offered by Inglehart on the proposition that postmaterialist value change leads to the emergence of new social movements by analyzing the evidence from the pre and post-1980 organizations in women's movements in Turkey with a focus on two women's organizations, PWA and PRWSF. However, both of these groups constitute critical cases which represent the priorities and characteristics of women's movements in Turkey in the corresponding periods of their emergence, the PWA emerging pre-1980 and the PRWSF in the post-1980 period. As well-known organizations, they provide the availability of access to rich accounts of origins, rationale, organization and interaction with political institutions for the periods under study. Furthermore, the PWA disappeared in the post-1980 period and the PRWSF only emerged in the aftermath of the 1980 *coup* in the format of a women's movement under the roof of an organization. Therefore, the context surrounding the transformation, which took place with the processes attending to the 1980 period, impacted both organizations' characteristics in profound and distinct ways allowing for control over the factors that shaped and constrained the transformation in the movement.

### **New women's movement, second wave feminism and Turkey**

Women's movements, which have flourished around the world since the 1960s, are generally referred to as movements that perfectly exemplify “new social movements”, along with the environmental movement and the peace movement (Dahlerup, 1986; Inglehart, 1990). The critical question has been what makes them “new”? The answer to this question is embedded in the transformation of the modern feminist thought that forms the intellectual basis of women's movements. An extensive analysis of the history of feminist thought exceeds the scope of this study; however, there are parallels between the transformation of feminist thought and the transformation of social movements in general.

Second wave feminism, which shapes the theoretical foundation of new women's movements, has developed as a response to the limitations of egalitarian feminism that had been the dominant paradigm since the second half of the 19th century. At the core of egalitarian feminism lies the expectation that attaining equality with men in terms of legal and political rights, education and employment opportunities will liberate women (Bryson, 1992, p. 159). Therefore, the loci of egalitarian feminist movements' demands are involvement in state institutions and conventional channels of political participation. In contrast to egalitarian feminism, second wave feminism emerged as a response to the disillusionment stemming from the idea that achieving certain levels of legal, political, educational and even economic equality for women has not yielded the expected outcomes. An analysis of patriarchy in everyday life is central to second wave feminism in order to account for why “equality on paper” is incapable of preventing the oppression of women. Dissatisfied with a focus on the legal and institutional realms, second wave feminists rather emphasize the “personal” and look for the roots of the male oppression in family life, sexual relations, everyday life experiences, etc. Through this analysis, they also challenge the boundaries of the “political” and extend politics in order to include an analysis of “the personal” (Bryson, 1992, p. 181–183).

Second wave feminism is affiliated with the spirit of 1968, forming the theoretical base of the new women's movement. Dahlerup puts the difference of the second wave feminist movements succinctly: “Political reform, that is reform effected through the political establishment, has never been the main strategy of the women's liberation movement. The goal is to change ‘people's way of acting and thinking’” (Dahlerup, 1986, p. 7). It is also important to note that the increasing popularity of the second wave movement has not signified the end of the existence of women's movements organizations that struggle for legal, political and economic rights.

Turkey is one of the countries where women's movements have shifted their aims in parallel with the new women's movement, even though this shift occurred almost two decades later. The following sections explore the fundamentals in the transformation of women's movement from the pre-1980 era dominated by secularist and Marxist women's associations, to the post-1980 era in which a *new* feminist women's movement emerged in Turkey.

The women's movement in Turkey dates back to the Ottoman Empire during which various women's organizations were struggling with demands such as a woman's right to divorce (Çakır, 1994). After the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, milestone reforms regarding women were initiated by the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. One of these reforms was the introduction of the Turkish Civil Code, an adaptation of Swiss Civil Code in 1926, which granted women equal rights in matters of divorce as well as banning polygamy. The right to vote and be elected followed in 1934.<sup>7</sup>

In the following decades, the scene of the women's movement in Turkey was dominated by organizations established in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, such as the Turkish Association of University Women (1949), The Society for the Protection of the Rights of Women (1967), and The

Society of Mothers (1953). Whereas these associations emphasized the legal, political and educational equality of women in parallel to the egalitarian feminism of the Western world, their ideological references were to Republicanism, secularism and Kemalism, rather than feminism (Kılıç, 1998).

The PWA represented a milestone for women's organizations in the 1970s in Turkey, where the social movement organizations were dominated by various socialist, Marxist organizations, including women's organizations.<sup>8</sup> The PWA was established in 1975 within the framework of the TCP and gathered up to 20,000 members, mostly recruited from within the powerful 1970s labor movement. It has been indicated that the PWA was the women's organization that organized the largest number of women in Turkey (Akal, 2001, p. 460). However, the feminist activists of the 1980s criticized the PWA among other leftist women's organizations for subordinating women's issues to the cause of socialism and the labor movement (Tekeli, 1990b). The association could no longer exist after the 1980 *coup*, falling victim to the general suppression of the leftist movement.

The 1980 *coup* left significant marks on Turkish political life. Political and civil societal organizations were substantially affected. With the military *coup*, a considerable number of trade unions and associations were closed down. The 1982 constitution set strict and discouraging laws for associations, putting associational activity under tight surveillance (Akşin, 2007). The impact of the *coup* on leftist and socialist women's organizations has been effective in structurally changing the scene of the women's movement in Turkey. The post-*coup* period witnessed the emergence of organizations that defined themselves as "feminist" for the first time (Kılıç, 1998). Therefore, many authors studying the women's movement in Turkey refer to 1980 as the milestone in the movement's history (Sirman, 1989; Tekeli, 1990a,b,1998; İkkaracan, 1997; Kılıç, 1998; Arat, 1999; Cindoğlu & Esim, 1999). İkkaracan (1997) argues that the feminist movement was the first "new social movement" that displayed the courage to articulate demands and organized rallies in the aftermath of the 1980 *coup*.

The feminist tendencies in the post-1980 women's movement have their seeds in the first half of the 1980s because of the gatherings of very limited numbers of women. These gatherings formed the base of the "Women's Circle," which was founded in 1984 as a "company" instead of an association. This was in order to avoid the surveillance of the state, which had been very strict on associations at that time (Arat, 1998b, p. 297). The Women's Circle undertook a wide variety of activities ranging from supporting women's labor, providing consulting services to women's legal problems and health problems, organizing consciousness raising activities and translating classical feminist books into Turkish. These activities started to turn towards institution building in the 1990s, and the PRWSF was established in 1990, with the aim of protecting women against domestic violence.

#### *Transformation of the women's movement: PWA and PRWSF*

Through an exploration of the PWA and the PRWSF we can further understand the nature and causes of the shift in the women's movement in Turkey. Leftist activist women of the pre-1980 period, especially those who had gained experience

in the PWA, have also been influential in the emergence of a feminist consciousness and activism. The PRWSF emerged out of this process as an institutionalized form of this feminist consciousness, fighting against patriarchal violence in the privacy of everyday life. Akal (2001) states that, "Today the most renowned names of the feminist circle have been members or sympathizers of leftist parties and organizations" (p. 479). She also argues that although the PWA did not define itself as feminist, it was a "traditional Marxist feminist" organization (p. 478). From this point of view, she emphasizes that the PWA should be evaluated in the framework of a continuous feminist movement in Turkey. Tekeli does not agree that the PWA had a feminist outlook; nevertheless, she argues that most feminists "came from various lines of the socialist left", and that the first feminist meetings in the post-1980 period even "created the platform for repairing the ranks of socialist left," which had been divided into camps (Tekeli, 1990b, p. 278).

#### *Origins*

The PWA was established by a small group of women in 1975 based on a directive from the TCP. In 1974, a small group of female members were given the duty to form a women's organization. According to one of the founding members of the PWA, all the founding members "knew that they had started this work because of a party directive" (Akal, 1996, p. 93). The founding members and the leadership mostly included female, leftist-oriented laborers from both lower-middle and middle classes. The social base of the association consisted of female workers as well as the wives of male workers. There are contending views as to whether the movement was dominated exclusively by the TCP or if the association was able to make autonomous decisions. Nevertheless, the narratives of PWA's founding members reveal that the establishment of PWA was not directly linked to 'the woman question', but was rather established for the sake of strengthening the TCP:

"... (PWA) was not an initiative that started with a group of women coming together with the intention of setting up a women's organization.... The TCP, like all other communist parties, wanted a supporter women's organization" (as cited in Akal, 1996, p. 92).

PRWSF, on the other hand, had its origins in grassroots activism against domestic violence. It is possible to trace its origins back to the feminist consciousness raising groups of the early 1980s. The initial consciousness raising activities started with small groups of women who gathered in houses as early as 1981. These low-profile activities were followed by the campaign for the ratification of "The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW) in 1986, which was successfully ratified. In the same year, the growing feminist women's groups organized a campaign that resonated widely in society: the Campaign Against the Battering of Women. The seeds of the PRWSF were sown during this campaign. Feminist women who gathered around the campaign organized meetings and festivals, established a women's museum, and published a book against domestic violence. This continuous feminist

activism resulted in the establishment of the PRWSF in 1990 out of the perceived need for a solidarity network and shelters to help victims of domestic violence. Arat (1998b) points out that the 1990s were the years when the feminist activism of the 1980s turned into institution building attempts (p. 297). The early 1990s witnessed the foundation of the Women's Library and Information Center, Directorate General on the Status and Problems of Women (that today functions under the command of the Prime Ministry), women's studies programs and research centers in some universities (Arat, 1998b).

Therefore, the PRWSF was both an outcome and a part of the process of institutionalizing grassroots feminist activism, which mostly consisted of younger middle class professional women.<sup>9</sup>

The contrast between the establishment processes of the PWA and PRWSF is striking. Whereas the former was established upon a top-down initiative from the TCP leadership, the latter was founded upon an autonomous initiative by women. Hence, in contrast to Inglehart's arguments about the shift in values or intergenerational change, the origins of both organizations seem to confirm the political and cultural opportunities available in the system as claimed by McAdam and others. More precisely, we argue that the swift transformation of the movement is related to the transformation in the dominant frames of political and cultural references. In the post-1980 era, we observe that "political opportunity structures" have shifted such that the TCP lost the possibility of pursuing its political activities, leaving the women's movement "scene" open to new alignments, as Tarrow would suggest. Moreover, the TCP also lost the potential to provide the women's movement with a frame of meaning that keeps the latter attached to the values and objectives of class struggle. Therefore McAdam's conceptualization of "cultural opportunities" explains the case of the post-1980 transformation of the women's movement in Turkey, for at least two reasons: First, McAdam underlines that the political opportunity structures interact with frames of meaning and cultural opportunities that nourish social movements. Second, McAdam argues that the expansion of cultural opportunities is made possible, among other factors, by the contradictions between a generally accepted cultural value and conventional practices in a given movement. We maintain that McAdam's argument resonates with the post-1980 women's movement's dissatisfaction related to the hierarchical structure of TCP and the secondary status that the TCP assigned to PWA, as will be elaborated in the following sections.

#### *Rationale behind the movements' activities*

In terms of references to belonging, it can be legitimately argued that whereas the PWA associates its *raison d'être* with the ideological conviction of class identity and struggle, the PRWSF's reference is to gender identity and feminism. The PWA makes its class origins clear in its legal foundation. In the statute of the PWA, the "aims" section starts with the clause that "All women, *but first of all working class women*, should be able to use fully their legal rights in the family and in society" (quoted in Arıkan et al., 1996, p. 24, translation by authors). Akal (1996) points out that although the PWA claimed to

appeal to a very large base of membership, they openly expressed that they did not want to include bourgeois women, thereby "othering" a certain class of women. The PRWSF, to the contrary, declares that its primary objective is "to provide shelter and opportunity for protection for all women exposed to domestic violence" (quoted in Arat, 1998b, p. 303). The underlying motive is that, patriarchal violence is not a problem of class; women of every class can be exposed to such violence. Therefore, the problem that the PRWSF addresses is not a problem of class but a problem stemming from gender ideology.

The PWA especially attended to legal and economic rights and the demands of working class women through activities such as organizing and supporting strikes. The PWA's statute makes the organization's priorities clear: "rearranging the laws that harm women's rights and freedoms" and "defending women's labor in accordance with equal pay principle in the factories, fields, bureaus" (quoted in Arıkan et al., 1996, p. 24, translation by authors). Their references to women's problems in everyday life are limited to demands such as establishing kindergartens in factories. Even these activities have been derided as "trivial" by the leftist activists of the time. Even more significant is that such demands have led to accusations of "feminism" against PWA members (Akal, 1996).

In contrast to the PWA, the PRWSF emphasizes "feminism" and prioritizes it over—in fact independent of—leftist ideology. All of the aims of PRWSF take issue with violence against women, which is the crystallized form of patriarchal power relations in everyday life: (1) to provide shelter and opportunity for protection for all women exposed to domestic violence; (2) to help shape new, alternative lives for women in a context of solidarity and mutual help; (3) to rid women of the guilt that is a result of the widespread perception of beating as legitimate; and (4) to rid women of their fear and sense of inferiority. Moreover, they apparently see the prospects for liberation of women not on legal or educational grounds, but in a profound challenge to patriarchal perceptions widespread in society. Additionally, their emphasis is not on economic security of women (which would be prioritized by PWA and leftist ideology) but on "new, alternative lives for women in a context of solidarity and mutual help" (quoted in Arat, 1998b, p. 303). They emphasize their perception of women's shelters as places of mutual solidarity, as opposed to places of charity. As well they stress their "allergy" to structures of authority and hierarchy (Arat, 1998b). Hence the PRWSF begins to view women's problems with a renewed lens, and reformulates the attendant solutions with revised reasoning along the same lines as second wave feminism. This again attests to parallelism between second wave feminism and the post-1980 feminist movement in Turkey.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Organization*

The contrast between the PWA and PRWSF in relation to organizational structure is a sharp one. The PWA adhered to a highly hierarchical and centralized organization. Its organizational structure consisted of a General Assembly, a Central Executive Committee, an Auditing Committee, a Disciplinary Committee, Branches, Local Branches and several other committees. The women working in local branches were

appointed by the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee was elected every three years and its decisions were binding on lower organs. The hierarchical style is also apparent in the way members went through standard training. The training sessions would consist of lectures based on notes prepared by the Education Committee (Arıkan et al., 1996). The hierarchical nature of the lectures is criticized by a prominent former member of the PWA, who was herself involved in the preparation of lecture notes. Sixteen years after the association was closed down she explains: “Who am I to give training?... It was nice and fun to write them (lecture notes) but we had no right to impose them on anyone” (Arıkan et al., 1996, p. 78, translation by authors).

The PRWSF, on the other hand, declares that their fundamental principle requires “not to construct a hierarchy” (“Nasıl Çalışıyoruz?” n.d.). Other principles include the rotation of responsibility, collective decision-making and solidarity. On the Foundation's website, it is indicated that decisions are discussed until full consensus is reached; this means that the decision process starts all over again even if one person disagrees (“Nasıl Çalışıyoruz?”, n.d.). This sensitivity against hierarchy can be traced back to the first consciousness raising groups of the early 1980s. A striking account of this sensitivity is expressed by Şirin Tekeli:

“In the first consciousness raising group that we established, we had discussed in detail how repressive, authoritarian, hierarchical the organization models of old organizations were.... This was typically a product of the “male” political understanding. While starting a new political struggle with a new search, these old structures could not be preserved..... (In the consciousness raising groups) We arranged the chairs, armchairs, cushions in circles. Because a circle does not have a hierarchy.... Everyone was asked to contribute in rotation.” (Tekeli, 2004).

Therefore, the emphasis on equality in the PRWSF and hierarchy in the PWA concerning their organizational style attests to how these organizations respectively were influenced by the political and cultural opportunities in the political system, the former organization remained fairly far from egalitarian ideals of organizational concerns in the women's movement. The latter organization adapted the egalitarian tendencies in style and outlook for their organization from their incipient stages in line with the second wave feminism.

#### *Interaction with political institutions*

The TCP's direct and decisive role in the establishment of the PWA has been mentioned above. This role continued in the following years until the closure of the association in 1980. Even though the founding members of the PWA tried to keep an autonomous face in order to broaden the Association's activist base and involve women from other leftist organizations (Akal, 1996, p. 97), it is difficult to argue that the TCP displayed much sensitivity in terms of granting the PWA any significant autonomy. For example, the documents of a TCP Conference in 1977 reveal that the party leadership viewed the women's movement as a “rich source for the TCP

of young woman communists who have been tested in action” (as quoted in Akal, 1996, p. 106). More importantly, even the PWA members who were aware of the importance of the autonomy of the Association, perceived it as natural that membership in the TCP was the final objective for PWA members. As one member of the PWA puts it succinctly, “The membership period was considered as a process consisting of several stages leading to party membership” (as cited in Akal, 1996, p. 107). The relation between the PWA and the TCP has important repercussions for the purposes of this study. First, membership to the PWA was not only regarded as a preparation stage for the TCP, it was also understood as having a subordinate status in relation to TCP membership. Hence, ‘the woman question’ was simply an introductory question intended to recruit women to join the communist cause and become activists. Second, the PWA's existence is related to a political organization with massive objectives; the particular objective of arriving at solutions to women's problems is, at best, subsidiary.

On the other hand, in sharp contrast to the PWA, the PRWSF gave special effort not to be absorbed within the framework of any political institution. This is in parallel with the post-1980 feminist movement's sensitivity to stand independent from political parties. As Tekeli (1990a) puts it, the feminist groups have kept such distance from political positions in order to appeal to women of all backgrounds and political tendencies. Secondly, there was also a concern not to subordinate the problem of battered women to other political issues. Arat (1998b) gives the example that while the founders of the PRWSF were looking for a building to turn into a shelter in Istanbul, they had major difficulties as they did not want their cause to be absorbed by authorities such as municipalities due to their skepticism towards hierarchy and authority. Moreover, the case of PRWSF also has its peculiarities related to its domain of activity: As an institution that maintains shelters for battered women, the founders have been very sensitive not to turn the shelters into places where women will be scrutinized by any kind of authority (Arat, 1998b).

The contrast between how each of the organizations related to the established political structure narrates the ways in which they have interacted within the political system. The former organization perceived its existence and continuity through the political party whose lifetime coincided directly with its own lifetime, almost independent of the women's cause. The latter organization, PRWSF, emphasized, from the beginning, independence from any institution in the political system to the extent possible to accentuate the ‘woman question’ and prevent any challenge that might compromise the ideal of protecting and promoting women's rights. Both the transformation of political opportunity structures and the ideational change in the system toward women's movements supported such preferences and attending action such as focusing on domestic violence that cuts across all kinds of political tendencies.

#### **Analyzing women's movement in Turkey: a new turn for social movements?**

The comparison between the PWA and PRWSF and the four categories of analysis provides a general picture of the

transformation of how two significant women's organizations perceived and dealt with 'the woman question' in the pre- and post-1980 era. There has been a shift in terms of membership style from mass political party affiliation to small groups of activists; from a perception of 'the woman question' as a "subset" of "broader" questions such as socialism, to the prioritizing of women's problems for the sake of women; from hierarchical organizations to decentralized ones; from a class-based rationale of activity to an identity-based rationale; from legal and economic demands to demands that diffuse into the personal domain and everyday life.

To give an example that encapsulates the essence of this transformation, it would suffice to look into how the PWA members approached feminism. The former PWA members' narratives are laden with instances of how they tried to escape the accusation of being "feminist" and weakening the socialist front. Moreover, they explain that they were not really aware of the debates on second wave feminism taking place in Western European countries in the 1970s (Akal, 1996). This was not only because of their low sympathy to feminism but also because they did not tend to read much on feminism or on the woman question per se: "Publications originating from Moscow were sufficient for us, we found the solutions to everything in those publications. Publications other than those were just diversions." (Arıkan et al., 1996, p. 77, translation by the authors). Akal (2001) agrees that the PWA members "missed" the differences between the first and second waves of feminism and did not understand the challenge that the second wave posed to social institutions. It was only within a decade that the women's movement in Turkey turned its face towards feminism and produced a fresh discourse parallel to second wave feminism and the new women's movement of Western European countries and the US. The question is, how do we account for the transformation of the movement in a feminist direction and the adoption of new characteristics that are generally attributed to "new social movements" in a relatively short time after the *coup*.

Considering the post-1980 women's movement in Turkey, it is possible to argue that the 1980 *coup*, which put severe restrictions on civil societal associations, constrained the institutional setting for such associations and influenced the direction and scope of the women's movement in Turkey. Such an argument would support the approach that emphasizes the role of political processes and changing structures of political opportunities as an explanation for the origins of social movements. However, focusing only on the institutional changes would lead us to overlook the transformation in the demands of the women's movement and its shift in focus from a class-based rationale of activities to one based on gender identity. Which dynamics facilitated the acquisition of a new feminist outlook to the "woman question"? It is hard to answer this question simply by referring to the political opportunities available in the period under question.

Thus, the paradoxical impact of the modernization process on women in Turkey should be taken into account as a historical factor that would help us understand the motives of actors who participated in the post-1980 movement. In this framework, we suggest three points that seem to explain the transformation of the women's movement in Turkey.

First, it is essential to deal with a question that points out a paradox: The *coup* brought severe restrictions to associations and all kinds of civil societal activity. However, it was this atmosphere in which feminist activism emerged based on the principles of second wave feminism. Tekeli (1990b) elucidates this "paradox" with the argument that after the 1980 *coup*'s harsh impact on left-wing organizations, it became possible to define the concept of "struggle" outside the parameters determined by the left.

Yeşim Arat's (1999) emphasis on the post-1980 women's movement's resistance to the state's "transcendental understanding" of the "common good" also supports Tekeli's explanation of this phenomenon. According to this view, the post-1980 feminist movement opened up space to voice particularistic demands as opposed to the transcendental concept of the "common good". Hence, Arat's approach underlines the liberating potential of the women's movement not only for the woman's issue but for democracy at large. Tekeli agrees: "The 1980 military regime razed much, but in doing so cleared the way for the redefinition of basic concepts necessary to the formation of social consensus. These concepts became of key importance in the discussion of democratization in Turkey in general and of the women's movement in particular" (Tekeli, 1990b, p. 264).

Whereas the post-1980 environment brought new frames of reference and new connotations to basic concepts, it also necessitated a change in institutional structures. Hence we turn to our second point about the post-1980 feminist organizations' distance from centralized and hierarchical structure and the transformation in terms of demands.

Tekeli argues that the distance from the hierarchical structure is related to two factors: first, the negative experiences with hierarchy in the 1970s mass organizations, and second, the reluctance to attract attention in the repressive political environment of the post-*coup* period (Tekeli, 1998, p. 344). According to Tekeli, the fact that the initial consciousness raising groups were held in homes, reflected the concern to "protect against the possible accusation that they were secret underground meetings, the assemblies took the guise of tea parties—a common practice among Turkish women" (Tekeli, 1990b, p. 276). Sirman (1989) adds that the women had better chances of carving out a political space for themselves through non-official organization, because in this way they could eschew both the scrutinization of the state and the "ideological pressure coming from the more-orthodox left which branded their efforts as bourgeois deviations" (p. 7). The significant point is that this kind of organizing in loose groups without definite centers is also compatible with the organizational style of new social movements. One of the defining "new" aspects of new social movements is their decentralized forms of organizing, as suggested by Johnston et al. (1994), p. 6–8). This style of organization has a normative connotation: second wave feminist movements are not about "teaching" women objective, uncontested truths but about sharing subjective personal experiences and providing solidarity. This clearly indicates that, in the case of women's movement in Turkey, the strategies of survival in a post-*coup* political environment overlapped with the new values compatible with second wave feminism.

A similar argument can be employed regarding the transformation in the demands voiced by the women's organizations. As outlined in the third section, the post-1980



feminist women's organizations had been mostly concerned with the issue of domestic violence. The main campaigns organized in the 1980s in which loose groupings of feminist women gathered, mostly aimed to fight this problem. Efforts to abolish the widespread practices of domestic violence culminated in the establishment of the PRWSF. Interestingly, although domestic violence against women is a very important problem in Turkey, formerly it had not been taken as a priority issue by women's organizations. In order to explain this discrepancy, it is again necessary to consider the issue in two ways: On the one hand, although taking issue with domestic violence poses a significant challenge to the patriarchal power relations, it was not perceived as a challenge against the state. It is possible to argue that this attribute of lack of challenging the state itself contributed to the survival of the movement. On the other hand, displaying the social and political aspects of seemingly "private" problems is a significant feature of the "new" women's movements of the second feminist wave. Therefore, the transformation in the demands of the women's movement in Turkey might also owe to the combination of survival strategies and the adoption of new values.

Before making the last point, let us emphasize once again that the transformation within the women's movement in Turkey did not "wait" for a generational time lag, as Inglehart's developmental account would suggest. It has been indicated throughout this study that former leftist activist women have played significant roles in the transformation. Hence, it is possible to maintain that there is a continuity of actors to some extent, but discontinuity in what they prioritize and how they organize. This discontinuity reflects the effect of political opportunities to some extent as suggested by Tarrow (1998), such as repression and facilitation by the state or shifting alignments in the political scene. However, an explanation that is based exclusively on political opportunities and strategies of survival within the framework of those opportunities would lead us to argue that the actors of the post-1980 women's movement adopted a new outlook on the "woman question" solely because the new structure of opportunities dictated so. According to McAdam, attributing a movement's emergence exclusively to political opportunities "betrays a 'structural' or 'objectivist' bias". He responds to such "bias" with the argument that "it is extremely hard to separate these objective shifts in political opportunities from the subjective processes of social construction and collective attribution that render them meaningful" (McAdam, 1994, p. 39). He develops his concept of "cultural opportunities" as an analytical tool to account for the subjective processes of social construction. He suggests that "ideological or cultural contradictions," which correspond to "events that dramatize a glaring contradiction between a highly resonant cultural value and conventional social practices," constitute one such cultural opportunity (McAdam, 1994, p. 40).

So then, why was there a relatively swift shift into the values and priorities of second wave feminism in the post-1980 women's movement in Turkey? We suggest that this shift should be evaluated with reference to the paradoxes of the effects that modernization had on women in Turkey, which brought about "cultural contradictions", borrowing McAdam's concept. On the one hand, the history of the Turkish Republic has also been the history of emancipating women and opening up a space for women in the public

sphere. On the other hand, traditional gender roles, bias related to sexuality, and the domestic division of labor, in short, the private realm remained intact (Erturk, 1991; Arat, 1989; Öncü, 1981). This paradox, or rather the unfulfilled promise of the secular modernization project, has been formulated by Kandiyoti (1987) succinctly as "emancipated but unliberated." Participation in the left-wing organizations of the 1970s provided the leftist activist women with a new expectation of liberation; however, it is argued that rather than challenging the traditional gender roles, these organizations reproduced these roles in their own structures (Berktay, 1990, Tekeli, 1990b). Berktay (1990) maintains that these organizations were not only reluctant to change traditional gender roles, but more importantly, they were cherishing those roles as "the values of the people" (p. 292). The patriarchal pressure on women remained "unacknowledged and untreated both by Kemalism and by the Leftist ideology" (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 308). Therefore, liberation did not materialize in these organizations either. Hence, it is possible to point out a process of "double disillusionment" (Cindoğlu, 1986): neither Kemalism nor the leftist politics responded to women's problems and concerns stemming from their gender identity. This may have led women to a reconsideration of their own roles, in both the public and the private spheres, providing a "cultural opportunity" that fueled the development of a feminist movement in Turkey.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to respond to the first question set out in the *Introduction*: in what ways did the post-1980 women's movement organizations differ from those of the pre-1980 era, and what was "new" about both the organizations in particular and the movement in general? This question has been addressed through a comparative analysis of the two organizations, the left-wing PWA and the PRWSF. These two organizations have been compared with reference to their origins, rationale for the movement's activities, organization and interaction with political institutions. We argued that the PRWSF represents the aspects of a new social movement, such as being a grassroots organization, distancing itself from political institutions, maintaining a decentralized style of organization and perpetuating rationale for action based on gender identity rather than class.

Second, we attempted to develop an explanation as to why the women's movement in Turkey went through such a transformation with a critical reading of Inglehart's thesis on the emergence of new social movements. As a response to this second question, we have suggested three dynamics of change that pertain to the women's movement in Turkey: room for new struggles, strategies of survival and the adoption of new values. This being a new turn in the paradox of modernization inherited from the past in women's emancipation in the case of Turkey.

We suggest two limitations of this study. First, we have confined our analysis to the transformation of the women's movement in Turkey mainly through pointing out the contrast between a left-wing women's organization and a feminist organization. This has served the purpose of engaging in a critical reading of Inglehart's account regarding new social movements expecting value change as the main

trigger for the emergence and transformation of new social movements. Secondly, we have examined a brief time period when considering the narrative of the women's movement in Turkey. However, since the 1980 *coup* constitutes a substantial critical juncture institutionally, legally and socially, which shaped the history and the trajectory of the movement, we believe that the explanations provided in this paper have considerable weight in explaining the attending transformation. Further studies including other women's organizations and focusing on other critical junctures such as Turkey's process of accession to the European Union, may facilitate a broader picture that elaborates on various explanations regarding the transformations in the women's movement in Turkey.

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### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> For details on women's groups organized as informal groups in Turkey dating back to the establishment of the Turkish Republic see Kümbetoğlu (2001), "Kadın Gruplarında Yapi ve Katılım Sorunları" (Problems of organization and participation in women's groups) in Aynur İlyasoglu and Necla Akgokce (eds) *Yerli Bir Feminizme Doğru* (Toward an indigenous feminism), İstanbul: Sel Yayıncılık, p. 302–306.

<sup>2</sup> The discussion regarding Kemalist women's organizations mostly refer to the modernization process of Turkey, women's position in this process, and the headscarf issue. For a discussion of Kemalist women's organizations and their relations to feminism, see Arat (1998a) *Cumhuriyet'in 75. Yılında Türkiye'de Kadın Tartışmaları*. (Discussions on women in Turkey in the 75th year of the republic) In N. Arat (Ed.), *Aydınlanmanın Kadınları* (Women of the enlightenment) (pp. 21–35). İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitap Kulübü; Arat (1997) *The project of modernity and women in Turkey*. In S. Bozdoğan and R. Kasaba (Eds.), *Rethinking modernity and national identity in Turkey* (pp. 95–111). Seattle: University of Washington Press.

<sup>3</sup> The discussion within Islamic women's organizations is mostly concerned with secularism in Turkey and the headscarf ban in public institutions. There are also activist women who identify themselves as Islamist feminists. Başkent Kadın Platformu (Capital City Women's Coalition) is an Islamist women's organization that embraces Islamist feminists. For a discussion of Islamist feminists, see Marshall (2008), 'A question of compatibility: feminism and Islam in Turkey', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 17(3): 223–238.

<sup>4</sup> For details see endnote 1, p. 305.

<sup>5</sup> At this point, we would like to note that we do not emphasize the diminishing of ideology so as to denote a distance from politics but to reevaluate how problems are viewed and solutions are sought and implemented. In that sense, we view feminism as the defining ideology for the post-1980 women's movement in Turkey, particularly along the lines of the second wave feminism. Therefore, when we mention feminism and/or gender ideology throughout the text, we refer to feminism as ideology which is political. When we refer to political ideology, we aim to highlight left–right ideology which has been eliminated by the 1980 *coup*. Hence we also take issue with how the relationship between feminism and leftist ideology is defined and redefined in the pre and post-1980 era for women's movement in Turkey.

<sup>6</sup> Slater (1985) relates the emergence of new social movements in Latin American countries to the excessively centralized, ineffective states, Safa (1990) argues that the demands of the new women's movement in Latin American countries reflect "survival" concerns such as those related to collective consumption and opposition to market intervention. However, participation in these movements is based on gender identity, rather than on class. This argument necessitates a reconsideration of Inglehart's dichotomous regard of "survival values" and "postmaterialist values".

<sup>7</sup> These moves were significant in terms of granting women legal and political rights, however there are contradicting perspectives on whether the granting of rights has opened up the way to a women's movement in Turkey (Arat, 1998a) or whether the prospects of an autonomous grassroots movement has been curbed by the allegedly paternalist and patriarchal attitude of the state (Tekeli, 1991; Arat, 1994). The closing down of Union of Turkish Women by the state in 1935 is a case that is emphasized by the defenders of the second approach.

<sup>8</sup> Besides PWA, there were other socialist women's organizations such as Revolutionary Women's Association, Laborer Women's Association, and Black Sea Women's Association.

<sup>9</sup> For details on the leadership and membership in women's groups see endnote 1, p. 307.

<sup>10</sup> We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point to substantiate our argument about the similarities between second wave feminism and post-1980 feminist movement in Turkey.

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