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Empowerment and Resistance Strategies of Working Women in Turkey

The Case of 1960–70 Graduates of the Girls' Institutes

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ABSTRACT This article deals with the empowerment and resistance strategies used by working women in Turkey. In order to explore the ways in which gender ideologies are produced and resisted, a very specific group of women were studied using life history and focus group interviews. The interviews were conducted with women who had graduated between 1960 and 1970 from Girls' Institutes. The Girls' Institutes were all-female high schools and the curriculum of these institutes was particularly geared towards modern domestic, or homemaking skills. However, despite the notion of producing modern women for the domestic sphere, most of the graduates have chosen to work outside their homes. Of these working women some have remained single, some have not had children. These outcomes present a paradox. The article focuses on the resolution of these paradoxes, the power and resistance manoeuvres that women employ and their relationship to the processes of modernization and westernization in Turkey.

KEY WORDS education ◆ gender awareness ◆ power ◆ resistance ◆ Turkey ◆ women ◆ work

INTRODUCTION

In feminist thought, the concept of patriarchy refers to the systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination (Stacey, 1993). In recent theoretical discussions, the necessity for the conceptualization of

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patriarchy as a mode of construction and reproduction of gendered subjects has been indicated (Mahoney and Yngvesson, 1992). In a similar line of thought, women are considered not to be passive victims of patriarchy (Hart, 1991), but like subordinates of other oppressive systems, they are social actors who perceive and interpret social institutions as a party to the dynamics of the gender order. They are actively involved in every sphere of social relations (Shaw, 1994) and initiate by reproducing, resisting or negotiating with patriarchy. Such a configuration has the potential to highlight the functioning and the continuation of patriarchy despite the wide range of intensive and extensive forms of women's oppression. There appears to be a necessity for a paradigmatic shift from the common tendency of the objectification of women towards positioning women as subjects and actors. Such a shift involves in itself the analytical tools for a better understanding of how and why women contribute to, and negotiate with the oppressive system of patriarchy. In other words, how women manipulate their own manipulation.

The Foucauldian notion of power expands the theoretical discussion on power and has had a widespread influence on the agenda of the political sciences. The conceptualization of power as having a complex and diverse structure with repressive and productive characteristics forming knowledge, discourse and subjectivities provides us with an analytical framework on resistance as well. Power is a mode of action upon the action of others in an arena of free subjects and resistance arises because subjects are free to counteract (Sawicki, 1991; Wearing, 1990). There is an interplay of resistance, concession, manipulation, transformation, negotiation and renegotiation (Wearing, 1990). Conceiving the nature of power and how it works through resistance would also provide an important means to understand the struggle against oppression, specifically of women, and the ways they resist (McGuiness, 1993; Wearing, 1990).

The literature on women's resistance thereby focuses inherently on the subject of power, covering many aspects of women's lives and their very different experiences (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Bordo, 1990; Eves, 1991; Giles, 1992; Kaplan, 1990; Martin, 1990; Wearing, 1990). Research shows that women deploy strategies like refusing to do housework (Eves, 1991 Wearing, 1990;) or to make love (Eves, 1991), or to enter into family-arranged marriages (Abu-Lughod, 1990). Furthermore, certain psychological problems among women like anorexia, hysteria and agoraphobia are signs of protest (Bordo, 1990: 13). On a more aggressive level, resistance may take the form of murder, infanticide and even suicide (Eves, 1991).

The studies on Turkish women show that women deploy few direct resistance and negotiation strategies. Threatening to stop working, refusing to make love or to pay visits to their husband's relatives and friends and provoking quarrels (Bolak, 1993), leaving their homes for

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their father's in cases of crisis in the marriage (Yalçın-Heckman, 1993) and utilizing the surrounding relational web (Sirman, 1993) are some of the resistance strategies used by Turkish women. Although these actions seem to be deployed at the micro-level of social relations, a wider perspective on macro-definitions and their interpretation within the public and private spheres need to be addressed for a better understanding of Turkish women's individual striving for power and resistance in modern Turkey.

In this article, the results of a qualitative study of a particular group of Turkish women, namely graduates of the Girls' Institutes (*Kız Enstitüsü*) between 1960 and 1970 who have pursued careers as schoolteachers or academics, are discussed, with a focus on power and resistance strategies. The study looks at the limits and success of such strategies at various stages of these women's lives. And it asks how women take part in the manifestation of patriarchy and what rules they obey, resist or transform.

WOMEN AND KEMALIST REFORMS IN TURKEY: THE EXPERIENCE OF GIRLS' INSTITUTES

After the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the Kemalist reforms began to direct the young Turkey towards weseternization; a cultural revolution took place, turning a traditional society into a modern one. With this aim, the state replaced the Arabic alphabet with the Latin; closed down all the free religious schools and installed secular, scientific and coeducational schools under the Ministry of Education; banned the activities of religious brotherhoods; restricted the wearing of the traditional fez in favour of western dress codes for both women and men; and imposed the Swiss Civil Code, i.e. the rules of western lifestyles, in place of the Ottoman code. The banning of polygamy and the granting of property rights to women were some of the radical changes that the new code introduced. Women, in this modernization project, were not only to be emancipated from the traditional restrictions to education and work, but also to take active roles in modelling the society as a whole. The crystallization of this positivist discourse makes itself evident in the case of the Girls' Institutes.

Education in Turkey to the level of university is state funded. Elementary education is mandatory for both girls and boys but there is no legal obligation for further education, i.e. high school education. At high school level, the students have the option of choosing between technical schools and normal high schools. Recruitment to university, however, is based on nationwide examination. Between the 1930s and 1960s, the Girls' Institutes had the role of training students to be good wives and mothers. However, in 1974, they were changed into Girls' Vocational High Schools

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with a new curriculum, including technical drawing and use of industrial machinery, due to new employment opportunities in the country's developing industrial sector. The total number of vocational schools (both junior high schools and high schools) increased from 503 in 1960 to 913 in 1970. During the 10-year period, the total number of female students educated in these schools was 112,519, representing a mean of 32.1 percent of total students educated at technical schools. In comparison, the mean percentage of female students in normal junior high schools and high schools was 53.49 percent, or 397,312 female students (State Institute of Statistics, 1995, 1996).

The Girls' Institutes were single-sex educational institutes at high school level, where daily contact with the opposite sex was curtailed. They were established in urban areas in the 1930s and spread to more rural areas over time. Students in these schools were trained to be good housewives and mothers and were instructed in traditional feminine skills like sewing, embroidery, handicrafts and home economics. In this respect, the Girls' Institutes did not threaten the values of the traditional families, where the belief was prevalent that female children should not be educated at all. The establishment of the Girls' Institutes emerged as a policy of compromise between the state and society: that is, female children were to be educated, but along the lines of their gender roles and not in a coeducational environment. With the Girls' Institutes, the state would ensure women's education and women would spread the modern, westernized lifestyle to society.

Accordingly, with the aim of becoming a good housewife and mother, the students in the institutes were taught the requirements of becoming middle class, urban, westernized housewives. They were taught how to use dinner sets and how to serve food at a table in a culture where most families at the time used wooden spoons and ate on the floor. These students were taught how to make artificial flowers and how to welcome guests according to the etiquette of the West. They were taught how to sew and iron western attire. When one considers the underdeveloped state of the ready-to-wear industry in the early years of the republic, the Girls' Institutes in a way have fulfilled the role of producing Turkish society's modern appearance. Girl students were to become dressmakers, producing clothing for their parents, husbands and children and for themselves. By the same token, they were also to introduce the image of modern-looking women to society especially to other women – a part of what one analyst has called the republic's *modernes des robes* (Kadıoğlu, 1994). Accordingly, as good mothers, they were to learn how to bring up the future generation, armed with scientific and medical knowledge. The students were taught that babies were to be breastfed systematically every three hours. If mother's milk was not available, the babies had to be fed via sterile bottles. Even the

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nappies needed to be sterile. When children got sick, they were not to be cured by old wives' remedies, but by medical doctors and nurses. The Girls' Institutes, in a sense, were schools directed at the modernization of traditional femininity. Women, who had performed the same work of mothering and housekeeping and transferred their know-how from generation to generation for so many centuries, were now being taught in public institutions by schoolteachers. The state aimed at the exclusion of the traditional in the name of the modern, not questioning the traditional gender roles but giving them a modern outlook. The objective of the Girls' Institutes was to transport the feminine role confined in the private sphere to the public sphere and back to the private sphere, because, in the end, graduates would be good housewives and mothers with a diploma. However, such a vision proved questionable by the emergence of two paradoxes surrounding the graduates of these schools. First, some of the graduates did not become housewives exclusively, but instead worked in the public sphere. Second, and more interestingly, among the graduates who chose to work outside their homes, some did not marry or become mothers as anticipated.

THE STUDY

In order to investigate these two paradoxes and the women's ways of empowerment and negotiation, a qualitative study consisting of three focus groups and 14 life history interviews were conducted with women who had graduated from the Girls' Institutes between the years 1960 and 1970. In total, 32 women living in Ankara were interviewed. Of the three focus groups, the first consisted of academics and the other two of schoolteachers. In the focus groups, 18 women were interviewed in total.

Of the total 32 respondents, 19 were schoolteachers and 13 were academics working at a university faculty of vocational education. Five of them were single without children, two of them were married without children and 25 of them were both married and had children. The respondents had been 17 or 18 years of age when they had graduated from the Girls' Institutes and at the time of the study, they were middle aged, that is between 42 and 59.

The family background of the respondents denotes a rather heterogeneous, middle socioeconomic status. The fathers were mostly state officials and military officers, although some were artisans and farmers. The fathers' education level varied between primary school and university. The respondents' mothers were housewives. The educational level of the women's mothers varied between primary school and high school. The structure of the families was mostly nuclear though some of the women

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had extended families with grandparents or other older relatives living under the same roof.

PARADOX AND RESOLUTION: THE NEW FEMALE GENERATION IN TURKEY

All the respondents we interviewed emphasized that their families had been supportive with regard to their attaining an education for economic independence and self-sufficiency along the lines of 'standing on one's own two feet'. The mothers' support in women's education was more significant than that of the fathers', as the following case dramatically shows:

> My uncle was a *hodja* [religious teacher, or *imam*]. Pressuring my father, who did not want me to have an education. Several times I told them [her father and uncle] that I wanted to go to school. I got the school administration [Girls' Institute] on my side as I told you before. My father agreed at last. I was successful. But besides this, there were many obstacles. I was beaten . . . On my head . . . they threw a bucket at me [my uncle said] 'What will you do with an education?' Of course this was mainly [the problem] with my uncles. But I did not listen to any of them. The one who helped me, the one who helped most, was my mother. 'Nobody can stop me. I have only one daughter. My daughter should have an education as much as she wants to.' she said. May she rest in peace; I owe my mother so much. My mother was very enlightened. My father was also enlightened but my mother helped me more. (From a focus group interview)

The reason for the mothers' support for their daughters' education had roots in their own lives. Mothers did not want their daughters to live a dependent life similar to theirs and saw education as a safe way to achieve independence.

> My mother certainly wanted me to be raised as a woman who earns her own living. She wanted me to be able to stand on my own two feet and never need a man. . . . My father was an authoritarian. . . . My mother was concerned with economic matters, you know, not being able to stand on her own two feet, like 'If I had the opportunity, I would get divorced.' (From a life history interview)

In this sense, education and work, which emerged as the mothers' unachieved goals, were perceived to be the key for their daughters' empowerment and release from oppression. For this wish to be realized, these women's mothers thought that their daughters' formal education was more important than traditional education at home. The mothers refrained from teaching their daughters home economics at home and avoided the insertion of values that prioritize domesticity. They did not

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direct their daughters primarily in the direction of marriage but towards education and work.

> I mean, I never heard her [my mother] saying, 'My beautiful daughter has grown up. She will marry. I will have a grandchild. She will have a beautiful house. I will buy her bedroom furniture. I will prepare her bedroom clothes.' No, never. (From a life history interview)

Some of the women defined their vocational education as their 'golden bracelet'. In the same way people sell their golden bracelets in times of economic necessity, vocational education is thought to secure women the means of living independently with no need of any other person from within or outside a marriage. The following statements exemplify how a vocational education was considered a means of reserve power:

> They regarded [my being a schoolteacher] as if my life had been saved. My being dependent on my husband, maybe, would disturb them. I was sensing that. 'You wore your golden bracelet', they said. 'Either you work or not, as you wish.' . . . Economic dependence, I mean, when you were in need of something, you would have to ask permission. You would ask for money. They wanted this not to happen [to me]. I think the same way for my daughter. She has to have economic comfort. She should not beg from her husband. She should buy things when she wants to. This is what every mother wants. (From a life history interview)

In general, working had an absolutely positive impact on women's lives. The advantages of working include: economic independence (the most important), social security, social productivity, opportunity for self-realization, social environment outside the house, prestigious social status, opportunity to renew oneself, motivation to take care of oneself, quality mothering time for children, respect in marriage and more say in family affairs. When regarding these advantages, it is clear that women perceive themselves empowered in the private sphere by their accessibility to the public sphere.

The respondents who were married thought that their working status increased their power in the decision-making process in their nuclear families. Either they were able to influence their husbands (sometimes with the help of the children) towards the decision that they wanted to be made or they and their husbands decided together. Although women argued strongly that working provided them economic freedom within the marriage, this is not the actual reality because most of them reported that they gave all of their salary to their husbands. A few of them said that they managed to keep back some money for themselves from their salary without the husband's knowledge. With respect to ownership of property (house, car) acquired after marriage, women generally pursued the argument that it was an unimportant subject or they already had security

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through their jobs. However, it seems that women did care about this issue because they had detailed knowledge on current ownership legislation. Generally, ownership fell entirely to their husbands or was shared by the spouses. In this sense, the belief in economic freedom of women may not be analysed in absolute economic terms but it is significant in that it at least enables women to have some power. This power can be a reserve power, correlatingto the idea of the 'golden bracelet'.

The problematic of standing on one's own two feet highlights another paradox observed among the respondents, that is the significance of remaining single among working graduates. To look at this issue in depth, it is necessary to discuss the women's expectations of a husband, and their evaluations of marriage.

> I would want to marry a man who was enlightened and democratic in thought. . . . Above all, a respectful person. In my opinion, he should be respectful and cultured. . . . In the house, it should be like that. When he comes home, I should not be doing all the work, all the cooking and the like, as a wife. I have never thought of marrying that kind of man. (From a life history interview)

Marriage, according to some of the single respondents, fell into the arena of sacrifice. But although sacrifice in marriage is questioned, motherhood constitutes a more 'sacred and devoted' arena. Motherhood is a valued and cherished activity and longed for by single women. In the later years of life, they verbalize their longings and regret, as follows:

> Marriage is a very serious institution but it has to be accompanied by many sacrifices. . . . I wanted and I did [postpone sacrifices and live my life]. It [the choice of remaining single] can be defined like this. Sincerely, it can. (From a life history interview)

> I wish I had had children because I love children. I satisfy this need with my students. I love my students. Maybe because I feel this way, marriage became useless for me. If it is just to have a child, there are other children around. This is selfishness, of course. This is a selfish thought. I have always maintained this. I used to say, 'To have a child, why is it necessary to suffer the other consequences of marriage?' This is selfishness on my part. This is wrong. This is absolutely wrong. (From a life history interview)

> I would hardly have found a reason to bear a man in the case [of marrying but not having children]. I give precedence to being a mother. . . . First of all; I wish that I had had a lot of children. And I wish I had married a man with sufficiently well off to have raised those children. I wish I had had servants to do the housework. And I wish that my children had had a good education. I love big families. But to have this, I would have had to get married the year I finished school. . . . I would have been a wonderful mother but I would not have had a career, because I would have wanted to raise my children myself. I could have not come to school after leaving them to

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> carers. If my children had gone to school on their own, I could not have been teaching here because I would have had worries about home. I value human beings very highly. (From a life history interview)

In response to questions about the significance of remaining single among institute graduates, married respondents pointed out the personality characteristics of graduates who chose not to marry as an additional factor to the main issue of the attainment of economic independence, that they wanted to attain social independence as well.

> [Single women] they bolstered their own personalities, valued themselves, I mean, as a lady having many things, I do not know, in order to achieve self-confidence, I mean, I don't know. With self-confidence the worldviews of women may change. . . . [Single] women considered themselves superior. The achievement of economic freedom . . . (From a life history interview)

> There were many who were single. It is true. But that's the way it is. . . . In this respect, our schools had great role. Why do I say this? First of all, the children of a very different stratum of society attended these schools. The wealthy families wanted wealthy environments. Girls wanted husbands who could give them what their parents gave. There was that expectation. . . . One more thing, in our schools, the best, and the perfect had been taught to us. The details had been taught thoroughly. When details are taught, people want a partner to match these details. Consequently, the eyes looked high. Remaining single was due to not meeting a good candidate. . . . And also, our environment, our school environment taught us to look higher. We would be happy like that. . . . Some of them did not like the marriage proposals that they got. Therefore, many of us remained single. (From a life history interview)

The single respondents listed the following reasons for not getting married: not meeting anyone with the right qualities, the evaluation of marriage as an institution of constraints, sacrifices, impositions, ambiguities and workload, and the liberal attitudes of the family and society (though limited), in addition to the basic issue, i.e. the attainment of economic and social independence. The important aspect at this point seems to be that work provided single women a more powerful position vis-a-vis the institution of marriage. In other words, work gave women bargaining power vis-a-vis unfit marriage proposals.

EMPOWERMENT AND RESISTANCE STRATEGIES

In the study, resistance and power manoeuvres mainly emerged in relation to the spheres of education, work, marriage and family. With specific reference to education in the Girls' Institutes as the means to self-sufficiency, education emerges as an important means of empowerment.

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Education enables women to achieve upward mobility by means of marriage and a respectable status in that marriage. Furthermore, through the skills taught in the Girls' Institutes with which women can earn their living, women are empowered to choose to terminate bad marriages by means of divorce. Similarly, in the case of their husband dying, women are able to carry on without needing to rely on someone else for support. It has to be emphasized again that it is not marriage which is the end-goal for these women and their families, but self-sufficiency. In this respect, self-sufficiency acts as power reserve to be used as necessary and serves as an invisible barrier against the oppression women may face. In this context, marriage is only one of the cases where self-sufficiency can be deployed.

It is possible to differentiate between strategies of resistance according to the life stages that women are in. In the early years of their lives, these women showed a more cooperative outlook with their families but utilized indirect strategies to realize their goals. The resistance manoeuvres in the sphere of education come out as indirect and surreptitious. Where their father's attitude towards education was negative, the women allied with their mother or institute teachers, who used strategies like reasoned argument in order to convince the father. If that did not work, women deceived their father and carried on with their education aided and abetted by their mother.

Another arena of power and resistance is work. Like education, work also empowers women and enables them to stand on their own two feet. However, in addition to the empowerment through education which some of the respondents defined with the idea of the golden bracelet, work provides women with more of an action-oriented power operating continuously in social relations both in the private sphere and in the public sphere. In another sense, the reserve power that education provides is activated in work as real power, like taking the initiative on decisions. Therefore the strategies of resistance in the sphere of work are different from those of education because, now, one witnesses active resistance. Women start to speak directly to those who try to exert an oppressive influence on them.

For married respondents, the status of 'working wife' is the main source of power in marriages. Work provides women with social security and economic independence from the husbands, as well as more power in the decision-making within the family. Regarding the other advantages of work described previously, some women resist the demands of their husbands and children for them to retire early so that they can spend more time and energy on the family. Below is an example:

> I tried to explain to them [her children] that I also wanted to be with them, but my work would be more beneficial to them. . . . I tried to persuade them

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> with explanations like, 'After living in this house for a certain time, you will leave home. I can only fulfil your absence by having a career.' But they were never convinced, yet I continued working. (From a life history interview)

The women also tended not to want to marry men who would not allow them to work. But some of them were obliged to marry due to family pressure, like one of the respondents whose husband did not want her to work. However, she resisted him and started working many years later. She described her resistance as follows:

> I was oppressed when it came to working, too. My husband said '[My wife's] working is not written in *my* book.' But I did not listen to him because in a month's time I would have lost my chance to work due to age limitations [the Turkish state's requirement for employment in public offices and schools], when I started to work, 33 years of age was the deadline for women. So I did not listen and replied, 'The courthouse is there! I finished studying Child Development. I want to be a schoolteacher and you are hindering me. In the past, my grandfather placed many obstacles before me.' And I started like that. I mean, we did not go to court. The men are more oppressive in Turkey . . . I wish I had not listened to him from the beginning. There is something that family imposes. I mean my father, mother. . . . We are oppressed. And in the end, thank God, I started the struggle and nothing [awful] happened. I am very glad today. (From a focus group interview)

> [Resistance] occurs in married life. First of all, I have always observed this. Our husbands are like our fathers but we are not like our mothers. Therefore, our husbands imitate our fathers, but we are not the people under the same rule our mothers were. . . . You become more aware. Of course we are not like our mothers. Therefore conflicts occur. (From a focus group interview)

Marriage is another institution where power and resistance manoeuvres take place. As was mentioned before, single women resisted marriage as a whole, approaching it as an institution of sacrifice. Some of the women, both married and single, resisted family-arranged marriages and wanted to make their own decision about who they would marry. In this sense, marriages of love were regarded as more advantageous, where women could secure a more respectable position and a more powerful status. Resistance strategies towards arranged marriages consisted of different manoeuvres such as not welcoming the family of the proposed husband, not going to meet the suitor, quarrelling with the parents or other figures like grandparents who were pushing the marriage, and, if all other strategies failed, threatening suicide.

> I mean that traditional structure was more important in those times. There was also the oppression by my father. I mean, although my family was saying that they were against marriages after friendship, they did not object for they knew that I would not marry by family arrangement because I was

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> always rejecting the marriage offers of the families who came to our house. I even told [my parents] directly that I would not marry like that. We [daughters] were saying, 'We are not for sale.' (From a life history interview)

According to the respondents, both single and married, the family is an institution which needs not total denial and regression but which needs continuous effort for change. The regulation of relations with in-laws, the management of housework and the process of decision-making arise as issues which need to be coherently handled.

With regard to in-laws' demands, in general married women's working acts as a respected barrier against the pressures from the husband's family. The traditional expectations of the parents-in-law to live in their son's house and to be taken care of by their daughter-in-law diminish due to women having a career. Relationships with the husbands' family are important in the sense that they can have a huge impact on the marriage. If they are not on good terms, they can cause trouble in the relationship with the husband. If problems occur with the husband's family, either the husband can interact as a buffer between the woman and his family, or the woman sets the relationship at a distant but respectful level, or even totally freezes the in-laws out. It must be added that a bad relationship with the parents-in-law can adversely affect the husband's relationship with the women's own family. If the former is good, the latter is good, too. So the strategy of freezing one's in-laws out is considered to be not very advantageous, and is utilized only as a final resort. On the other hand, if the relationship with the in-laws is acceptable, women try to maintain the network as a locus of support against the husband.

> My mother-in-law loved me a lot. She never denounced my faults in front of everybody. She always praised me. She loved me a lot. She would come to my house and do the cooking for me. She was very helpful. We would even chat and gossip about her son. We relaxed like that. She would give advice to her son; she listened to my complaints. . . . I had her support on everything. She always said, 'You are right my child. It was that way in our times. I raised my son like this. There is no such thing as a good husband, for if there were they would not call him a husband.' (From a focus group interview)

The issue of housework is one of the most important subjects in which married respondents want change to take place. Women push for the housework and childcare to be shared among all members of the household, including the children and husband. Although they are not totally successful in this, at least they prevent more demands being made on them from their husbands or children. In order to make their husbands or sons do housework, women use the strategy not of enforcement but positive reinforcements like praising the male ego, as in the following quotations:

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> If the mother claps in appreciation like 'How well you did, son!' it is easier. (From a focus group interview)

> I appreciate [my husband] like this. For example, when he throws his dirty socks down somewhere in the house, I never look for them. He should put them where they belong. I do the ironing, do the washing. For example, he goes on a trip. He travels frequently as a forestry inspector. I have never prepared his suitcase. All his things have been neatly put away in the right place [but he will ask for something] 'Can you give me that?' but I say, 'No, get it yourself.' When he asks for something, I don't give it to him, because everything has its own place. He should get it himself from where he left it. But I watch him. I keep an eye on the suitcase to see whether there is something he has forgotten to take, but without making him aware of what I am doing. I watch him, but when he orders me to do something, I never do it. They should do their own work; why don't they? I try to make him do it by saying 'You do it better than me, so could you take care of that yourself?' No matter how much you work, how hard you work, unfortunately they like using you. I really believe this. They like using you. Therefore, we have to use them, too, like a politician, without them realizing it. (From a focus group interview)

Not only in matters of housework but also in decision-making, open admiration of the male ego is a preferred strategy. Getting the children to collaborate by getting them on their side against the husbands is also a frequently used strategy.

> When my children had grown up, I said, 'Daughter, I have never been able to persuade your father [to do such and such]. Maybe you can persuade him because you are closer.' I preferred that strategy for this reason: I said, 'Get close to your father, try to resolve certain things by talking to him.' Believe me it worked. . . . My daughter said at last, 'Father, do not oppose mother anymore. My mother suffered so much and she has never said "I need money" to you. Please do not interfere with what she buys.' I mean children observe this. They also appreciate us. (From a focus group interview)

> My children are on my side. For example, our furniture had to be changed. We have been married for so many years and we have been sitting on the same couch . . . I was bored with the furniture. Thank God! We have given the control of the budget to one son. He said, 'My dear mother, you want this furniture to be changed, don't you? I can persuade my father by talking to him as if I were the one who wanted it to be changed.' (From a focus group interview)

> When he does not like something and prefers to buy the cheapest, my children say, 'Father, you always want to economize. Let my mother buy what she wants this time. What she says makes more sense.' If he thinks it's appropriate, he buys the thing that I want. (From a focus group interview)

In sum, as these quotations from the interviews show, the respondents' resistance and empowerment strategies mainly occur in spheres of

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education, work, marriage and family, which can be interpreted as the dichotomy of the private and the public spheres.

DISCUSSION

The feminist discourse on women's ways of doing politics points to the difference of styles between women and men and refers to the significance of women adopting a different notion of politics, based upon primary relations and family and community interests (Martin, 1990; Kaplan, 1990). This study showed that politics take place in the small, everyday routine events. Even in the most intimate instances, women in this study perform politics that pursue their own interests. In these politics, there occurs the utilization of tools like education and work that modernity proposes as empowerment strategies.

It has been claimed that women consider work as a strategy to gain more economic and social independence from men (Moore, 1993: 111). Education opens the doors to work for Turkish women, as symbolized by the metaphor of the 'golden bracelet' (Acar, 1994). Work enables women to have a say on decisions, like the allocation of the household budget (Giles, 1992). Accordingly, this study has observed that women's education and careers lead to empowerment in social relations. In this sense, this can be interpreted as empowerment from outside. Work is considered a means of independence. For the respondents who are single, work enables them to have a powerful bargaining position vis-a-vis the institution of marriage. Work in general allows women 'to stand on their own two feet', and so being a schoolteacher or being an academic will affect the degree of how firmly they stand. Academics seem to be more powerful than schoolteachers. It has also been reported that academic women utilize the unpaid labour of relatives or paid woman labour to relieve housework and childcare responsibilities (Acar, 1983; Cindoğlu and Muradoğlu, 1996). In this study, the same support mechanism is also observed, hence more available to academics than schoolteachers.

Another source of power is age, which, as Kağıtçıbaşı described it, is a sign of status (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1981). Drawing on Özbay's argument about Turkish women becoming powerful as they get older (Özbay, 1993), this study confirms that age as a determinant of power is salient for the respondents. In this study, age is also one of the main determinants of the nature of resistance. Although not clear-cut at a specific life stage, there is a tendency for resistance to take the form of rather more passive strategies at comparatively younger ages, and more active strategies at older ages. The more passive forms of resistance mainly involve the negation of an imposed situation or a restriction. Women who refuse to take part in

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family-arranged marriages express their reluctance only by denouncing the proposed husband or by not welcoming his family when they come to her house to discuss arrangements for the marriage. At later stages the resistance takes forms which are verbally more direct, more focused, more active than passive.

> We came to a certain age, like 35. Everyone could be saying to her husband, 'That is enough!' There were also others who said, 'I will do this, no matter what you say, I will do this.' It is not possible to argue when you are young. It is, however, say after 35 or 40 when you are able to say, 'I will do this.' (From a focus group interview)

Another characteristic of women's resistance is that its forms are focused on the women's close family members, i.e. parents, husband, husband's family, and children. However, it has to be noted that single women had a particularly more decisive resistance strategy. Since they thought of marriage as a sacrifice and as being potentially oppressive, they openly refused to marry men who did not fit their criteria. The belief in the incompatibility of marriage and work was also prevalent in Acar's study on academic women (Acar, 1991, 1993). Women's choosing to remain single can be interpreted as the most radical strategy.

Resistance towards parents on issues of pursuing an education and rejecting family-arranged marriages takes the form of strategies like misinformation, keeping secrets, allying with other family members and the institute teachers, convincing, bluffing and quarrelling. They are verbal or relatively passive ways of resistance. Generally, the women are uncooperative with their families and their expectations. They act from the position of negation.

In their relationships with the husbands, women resist more fiercely and more determinedly. Unlike resistance to parents at a time when the women were younger, women employ either more cooperative and affirmative strategies or when met with counter-resistance, more destructive strategies. There is also the significance of the multiplicity of manoeuvres utilized. The responsibility for housework rests solely on the women: the compartmentalization of women's lives into two separate spheres is a main coping strategy for role conflicts (Acar, 1983). Women try to make their husbands do housework using strategies such as pretending not to hear husbands' demands or orders; praising their male ego; and quarrelling with them. As for the decisions in the family, married women again use the strategy of praising the male ego and rally the support of their children against the husband. Praising the male ego seems to be a political utilization of masculinity and agrees with the arguments Bolak made in her study on Turkish women, who defines the strategy as the instrumental use of the cultural scenario (Bolak, 1993: 240). Women also resist pressure from their husbands for them to retire by

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convincing them of the importance of their job. But whether the husband is convinced or not, the women continue working.

The respondents who are married accept their in-laws as a centre of power that could threaten their relationship with the husband. They resist the traditional demands of the husband's family, like living in the same house, having to look after them, or attempting to have influence over their sons. They mainly use the strategy of getting their husbands on their side through persuasion; relationships can end up severed and the husband's family frozen out.

With regard to their children, the mothers resist their demands to retire by trying to convince them how important their job is to them. But, again, whether the children are convinced or not, the mothers continue working. Interestingly, women seem to be more resistant to their sons helping out with household duties than their daughters.

In the light of these findings, it can be argued that women are conscious of the positioning of their gender, and they resist this oppression. However, they seem to remain within the confinements of their gender roles and react from that positioning.

CONCLUSION

Although the Turkish state both defined what was traditional and what was modern in term of gender roles and modernized the requisites for gender roles, women as active participants in their construction seemed to redefine it. The categories of traditional and modern for the gender roles were not taken for granted by these women. According to them, no matter how different the details of the homemaking, the traditional stood for the confinement of women to the domestic sphere. In this sense, these women of the republic were seeking a better future through the critique of the gendered division of labour in the family.

Taking a different stance to that of the state, the traditional represented the oppression of women in that sphere. To illustrate, women doing all the housework was traditional, and the sharing of housework between husband and the wife was modern. Women doing what the husband ordered them to do was traditional, but sharing the decision-making on family matters was modern. Dependence of women on their husbands was traditional, but independence of women was modern. How the respondents' own conceptualizations of the traditional and modern reflect on their lives does not have a direct cause and effect relationship, because they seem to suffer from both making the bread, and earning the bread, as well as finally handing the bread over to their husbands. Yet, that process seems to have had a critical impact on women's lives. Women at least attempt to pursue their own redefinition, whether it ends in success or failure.

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