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The radicalization of the left in Turkey and Iran in the 1970s and a comparative analysis of activist women's experiences

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INTRODUCTION

1.1. Subject of the Study and Objectives

The long 1970s, which can be traced from the events leading to the 1968 uprisings until the mid-1980s, was marked by a unique sort of activism experienced almost globally. This global contention occurring concomitantly in different parts of the world has been labeled variously, usually in accordance with theoretical and ideological perspectives of those defining it, namely: political violence, terrorism, radical or extreme left, armed insurgency, guerrilla warfare, illegal or underground revolutionary activism, so on and so forth.¹ The inconsistency in usage of the terms describing the insurgent groups and their activities engaged in political violence to achieve social and political change in their societies throughout the period could also be attributed to the differences in their discourses, methods or the contexts in which they have occurred. However, what is more important than the characteristics distinguishing them from each other, at least for the purpose of this study, is what they had in common: contemporaneity, universality, and similarity of objectives, discourses, origins, and trajectories, more importantly the repertoires of contention they adopted, in other words, assumption of political violence as a form of protest.

Inspired by the contemporaneous anti-imperialist and liberation movements around the world such as the guerrilla movements in Latin America, many young people in Turkey and Iran too were mobilized and organized around revolutionary ideals in order to put an end to what they perceived as authoritarian or ‘puppet regimes’ in their countries. From the very beginning, women from the middle and lower classes supported and actively participated in the leftist movements in the forms of student or workers’ movements. Despite the fact that women from upper, middle and lower classes were drawn to revolutionary and radical left-wing movements and participated in various degrees during the 1960s and 1970s, both the

¹ Patricia Steinhoff and Gilda Zwerman, “Introduction to the Special Issue on Political Violence,” *Qualitative Sociology* 31, no. 3 (July 17, 2008): 213.

national and leftist historiographies have largely ignored their presence and experiences. Iran and Turkey have not been exceptions in this sense.

Women's involvement in the radical leftist movements is significant for a number of reasons. First, the means they resorted to, namely, urban guerrilla war or armed struggle, is peculiar, especially when the theories like 'weapons of the weak' are taken into consideration. Second, women's participation in the radical leftist movements in these countries and their experiences, for example in the safe houses, obviously defied traditional gender roles in their societies. Third, women's activism in the ranks of revolutionary or guerrilla groups also challenges traditional approaches and perspectives on the role and place of women especially in the Muslim societies, as well as the public-private dichotomy with regard to gender roles. The conventional perspectives on and approaches to women in these societies have assigned almost no agency to them and restricted our understanding of them to the obsolete concepts that are overused and abused like 'oppressed,' 'confined,' and 'submissive'. Therefore, women's active involvement in the radical leftist movements in these societies presents us with both challenges and opportunities that can be benefitted only through right approaches and methods.

My objectives are threefold. First, I intend to understand how and why so many Turkish and Iranian women participated and remained committed in the radical leftist movements during the 1960s and 1970s; as well as what kind of experiences they had in this specific sort of high-risk activism. To this purpose, I study the experiences of these women through oral history interviews focusing specifically on their everyday lives. Thereby, I examine how their relationship with these leftist movements was established in the first place, what sort of organizational tasks they undertook, and how their everyday lives were organized during this high-risk activism. Second, through the comparison of experiences of Iranian and Turkish revolutionary women, I identify similarities and differences in their experiences in these underground revolutionary organizations against the backdrop of dominant patriarchal social and cultural values. Finally, in order to explain the reasons for the similarities and

differences in the women's experiences, especially given the similarities in the political, social and cultural structures in the two countries, I specifically look into the dynamics of the radicalization process that the left-wing contention went through during the end of the 1960s and 1970s.

Since its conception, this dissertation is meant to be an interdisciplinary study, which relies on a number of methods and approaches from oral history, social movements, history of everyday life, and gender studies in order to investigate, in a comparative way, the experiences of women as well as gender dynamics within the radical leftist groups in Turkey and Iran in the afore-mentioned period. The general theoretical background of this study is a sociological approach based on a combination of social-constructionism² and relational approach.³ It also draws on several methodologies widely used and benefitted by scholars working on women's and gender history, such as oral history, history of everyday life, as well as social movements studies. Especially during the oral history interviews with the former activist women, this study benefitted from the Grounded Theory methodology.⁴ Finally, it is a comparative study in which the experiences of Turkish and Iranian women in the radical leftist organizations are compared against the historical backdrop of the radical leftist movements which were widespread all around the world in the same period taking various forms from rural guerrilla struggles to urban armed groups, in order to understand whether we can talk about a common gendered experience for women in underground revolutionary movements. To this end, this study critically examines the *radicalization* processes of the leftist organizations in the two countries and investigates the relationship

² Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Penguin UK, 1991).

³ Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identities, and Political Change* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002)., Mustafa Emirbayer, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 2 (September 1, 1997): 281–317.

⁴ Barney G Glaser and Anselm L Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).

between these processes and the similarities and differences between the experiences of the women in the two cases.

I consider and conceptualize the emergence and growth of radical leftist movements and organizations in Iran and Turkey in the 1970s as a part of above-mentioned global phenomenon, but particularly in line with the appearance of new radical left such as Red Army Fraction (RAF) in Germany, Red Brigades (BR) in Italy, Direct Action (AD) in France; as well as Weather Underground in the United States and Japanese Red Army in Japan. Despite the inspirational influence of other contemporaneous revolutionary or liberation movements such as Latin American guerrilla organizations, Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria, or National Liberation Front in Vietnam on their ideological formation, radical leftist organizations in Turkey and Iran had more in common with their Western counterparts, namely having their origins in student movements, following trajectories leading to political violence, recruitment patterns and pools, repertoires of contention and organizational features. Most importantly, it is a particular *process* that they all went through—which is referred as *radicalization* by the scholars of social movements—,⁵ that allows me to group them in the same category.

Radicalization is a term used by some social movement scholars in order to describe the transition, which certain social movement organizations experience, from moderate to violent repertoires of collective action as a result of a number of *mechanisms* recurring in various arenas of interaction between social movement activists and other political and social actors.⁶ It has been mostly used to describe the emergence and evolution of left-wing radical organizations in Western countries,⁷ but recently it has also been put into use to describe the

⁵ For the line of scholars conceptualizing and using the term of radicalization in a consistent and similar way see Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁶ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 69.

⁷ For example, see Donatella Della Porta, *Social movements, political violence, and the state: a comparative analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), Isabelle Sommier, “Revolutionary Groups after

emergence of radical Islamist and right-wing armed groups.⁸ In these lines, I adopt a multi-level and *relational* approach to the process of radicalization which in turn lets me explain the emergence and mobilization of radical leftist organizations in their political, social, cultural as well as ideological context on three main levels of analysis: 1) macro: which is larger international and national cultural, social and political context in which these social movements emerged and operated; 2) meso: which is organizational level that concerns the characteristics, structures, and ideologies of the organizations in question; and finally 3) micro: which deals mostly with individuals who were involved in these organizations, such as members and leaders, as well as their influence and role in every process of social movement activism.

In the following parts, I give a detailed explanation of what each part of this study aims to do and why each and every one of them is indispensable for the unity of the study. In the introduction, I am going to provide a brief account of the wider and narrow contexts of the 1960s and 1970s; a literature review of the previous studies on the left and women in Turkey and Iran; and finally, the outline of the chapters of the dissertation. What follows next is the discussion of the theoretical and methodological framework the study.

Last but not least, a couple of words must also be made about the reasons for my selection of Turkey and Iran for this comparative study. From the methodological point of view, they would qualify as the most similar cases for a comparative analysis for the purposes of this study. For example, historically they are the only two countries in the Middle East which have not been formally colonized by the Western powers. Consequently, they have also stood out in the Middle East for having unique relationships with the West and Western influence. Furthermore, Iran and Turkey followed very similar trajectories of authoritarian modernization in the beginning of the

1968: Some Lessons Drawn from a Comparative Analysis,” *Twentieth Century Communism* 2, no. 1 (May 28, 2010): 66–91.

⁸ See Eitan Y Alimi, Lorenzo Bosi, and Chares Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization: A Relational and Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Donatella Della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

20th century which also determined the political culture in the two countries in the following periods, especially with the formation of strong central states in both countries. Therefore, the difference in the political systems, Turkey being a republic whereas Iran a monarchy, did not set them apart to a significant extent especially until the end of the 1970s. Additionally, they have come to share common customs and traditions as long-time neighbors with similar religious affiliations and socio-cultural characteristics.

On the other hand, being able to speak the languages of both countries has also motivated me to conduct this comparative study between Turkey and Iran. However, it is not always methodological and practical concerns letting scholars make their decisions concerning research questions as well as geographical areas of interest. As a woman researcher from Turkey who has always had a personal and academic interest in women's activism and the left-wing politics, I was drawn to this topic as a result of a number of decisions and developments which would be too long to account for here. Instead, I would like to note that the above-mentioned and also other similarities between the two countries, including the history of the left and the women's movements, have always been a common knowledge and source of interest to the scholars and intellectuals of both countries. I hope this study will quench some of the curiosity in this field.

a) A Brief Historical Background and Literature Review

The forces letting a young woman in Turkey or Iran forsake her family home and join an underground movement to fight against the state for a revolutionary cause and the experiences she had during this high-risk activism can neither be understood nor explained without having a good understanding of the global 1960s and 1970s which overwhelmingly determined the political and cultural context in their countries as well as the rebellious mood, at local and global levels, in which they came of age.

International, regional and national historical contexts are all essential to understand the leftist movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Turkey and Iran; but the main intention of this study is neither understanding nor analyzing the formation and mobilization of the leftist

movements in general. Instead, this study aims mostly to present the *Zeitgeist* in which the activists of the period came of age in order to have a better understanding of their view of the world around them which motivated them to participate and stay in these movements. This is the reason for the coverage of all three levels of contexts, not to be able to analyze the ideological, political or strategic maneuvers of the leftist organizations of the time. Therefore, it does not deal with whether the proponents of armed struggle were right or not when, for example, they accused Tudeh of not supporting Mosaddegh and held it responsible for the defeat of the left at the period in Iran. Neither does it aim to examine the reasons for the high number of the revolutionary organizations that came into existence in that period in Turkey, or their ideological stances, or their particular positions concerning the type of armed struggle or revolutionary path that would best fit to the case of Turkey. What really matters for the purpose of this study, and actually for the majority of the activists of the period as they made it clear in their accounts, is the general *framing* that emerged as a result of a set of international and national developments and dominated the popular leftist discourse at the time almost all around the world: *the revolutionary armed struggle against the authoritarian, repressive and comprador regimes was just and meant to be successful*. Consequently, the events and developments were only significant for the activists as long as they were complying with this assumption. There were a large number of anti-imperialist, liberationist, anti-colonialist uprisings as well as political and economic developments on the regional and international levels that shaped the worldview of the activists of the period; however, they are only mentioned in the framework of this study to the extent that they were referred by the activists as having an influence on their actions and motivations; independently from their social, political or economic implications on a more objective level.⁹

⁹ Needless to say, this approach of mine is completely compatible with the social constructivist school of thought that I subscribe to.

b) The Global Rise of the Left and Social Movement Activism

No doubt that every decade carries the legacy of its predecessors; however, 1960s is a precursor of the 1970s in a very unique sense. The non-violent student movements and popular uprisings of the 1960s began to resort to violent means or to adopt more radical agendas in the 1970s. The dynamics of this radicalization of means and objectives play a very significant and unique role in the experience of the 1970s by the activists of the period in each country. Surprisingly overlooked by both the popular culture and academic circles, the 1970s is a peculiar period of the world history for many reasons. The decade was marked by the revolutions, wars, oil crisis, coup d'états, and conflicts. Obviously, it was experienced differently in various parts of the world; however, it has several characteristics in common that would allow us to talk about a *Zeitgeist* of the period. Overall, it was the period coming right after the plethora of mass protest movements throughout the world against imperialist wars, capitalists, military or authoritarian rulers; and this very fact influenced its character deeply.

In the Global North, the 1960s had been marked by mass demonstrations, student movements, general strikes, the rise of the socialists, communists and other dissident groups with their left-wing progressive ideas and hippie culture. Civil Rights Movement, in the United State, which aimed at ending segregation and discrimination against African Americans, and Anti-War Movement against the war in Vietnam were the most prominent social movements of the period. In Europe, it was the May 1968 protests in Paris that became the symbol of the growing dissent among the students, civilians and workers. However, after the social movements of the 1960s were demobilized as a result of different policies depending on how each country handled them—in Western democracies mostly through institutionalization or selective repression, whereas in more authoritarian regimes through harsh repression, — the 1970s witnessed the emergence of far left and urban guerrilla movements. The militant groups like Baader-Meinhof, Red Army Fraction, Red Brigades, IRA, Black Liberation Army were formed one by one at the beginning of the 1970s as an

obvious sign of radicalization of protest movements of the previous decade. There was also a rise in the use of violence by these militant organizations which eventually undertook numerous bombings, kidnappings and killings.

Meanwhile, in the Eastern Bloc, the Prague Spring represented the climax of the reactions against the influence and domination of the Soviets; however, Soviets had suppressed the reform attempts and reinforced its sphere of influence immediately. The socialist bloc was shaken by the Soviet invasion of Prague but was not damaged; yet, its implications were to have a long-lasting effect for the revolutionary movements in other parts of the world.

In the Global South,¹⁰ the 1970s was more about revolutions, military coups and guerrilla warfare, along with the post-colonial thinking and Third Worldism as the popular perspectives flourishing in the intellectual circles. Social movements in the forms of student uprisings, working-class strikes, and anti-imperialist demonstrations were also common. Inspired by the Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, the young intellectuals and students in these countries resorted to military means to initiate revolution in their home countries. They formed rural or urban guerrilla groups and tried to radicalize workers, the countryside and peasants into leading the revolution.

On the other hand, particularly in Latin America, but also in many other Global South countries, in the Cold War environment, any popular leftist movement or tendency was considered a serious communist threat and the activities and operations of the leftist guerrillas provided much needed excuses for military interventions. Chile, Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay were but a few of many countries experiencing military take-overs mostly supported by the United States. Most prominent example of the CIA backed coups of the

¹⁰ I prefer to use the Global South to describe the same region which was called in that period the Third World. Hobsbawm talks about how the concept of Third World already began to crumble in the 1970s as the development levels of the countries in this group started to change dramatically due to “‘great leap forward’ of the (capitalist) world economy, and its growing globalization”. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 361–64.

period was the one of Augusto Pinochet who rose to power in Chile overthrowing democratically elected Socialist president Salvador Allende in 1973.

Overall, if we are to talk about the *Zeitgeist* of the 1970s it would be the revolutionary struggle in the form of guerrilla warfare by wide range of groups from a dedicated minority of ethnic or intellectual groups to Left-wing military staffs. The consequences of the revolutionary uprisings and the forces used by the state apparatus to repress them had been hitherto unprecedented and have determined the fate of the people of these countries for the coming decades.

Maybe the most significant change in the social life in a typical Global South country in the period since the 1950s was the migration of masses from rural areas to the cities and its consequences, most important of which was the ways in which these immigrants engaged in the economic and social life of the city. This new form of engagement resulted in the emergence of the 'informal economy' and the new middle and lower-middle classes. 'Great city' emerged as the main system of settlements both in the North and the South even though taking entirely different forms. As opposed to the central area of the Western cities, which is linked with the periphery through a very well-established public transportation system, scattered slums and shantytowns of the Global South cities could only be reached through the routes of private collective minibuses and had a completely different effect on the lives of city dwellers. Inhabitants of those cities had to spend hours on the transportation and lacked basic infrastructure which made their lives harder than where they had come from. Despite the desperate conditions they lived in they were significant because of the mere fact that they constituted the new constituency and also the base of support for the prevailing social movements.

Starting in the 1960s, the rise in the level of education was another important phenomenon in the Global South. Education was considered to be the only and almost guaranteed way to

climb the social ladder in the developing world.¹¹ Unprecedentedly high numbers of students throughout the world was commonly accounted for the great amount of student activism. Last but not least, more and more women in this period began to receive high education and joined in the work force; thereby, increasing their numbers in social movements. In terms of the sociopolitical character of the era, the increase in the presence of women in almost every area of public life was of great significance and going to have more lasting effects for upcoming periods.¹²

c) **The Revolutionary Left and the Political Violence in Turkey in the 1970s**

The late 1960s and 1970s in Turkey is a period in which political violence made the headlines and influenced not only daily politics in the country but also political and social life to an extent that it polarized the society and bring the entire political system to the verge of collapse. “The yeas of anarchy and violence” is how the period has been referred by ordinary people and mainstream media. In addition to frequent skirmishes between right-wing and left-wing groups usually resulting in deaths and severe injuries, university occupations, bank robberies, and armed attacks occurred on a regular basis. The period resulted in two military interventions, 12 March 1971 and 12 September 1980, and numerous coalition governments. Moreover, approximately 5000 people lost their lives during the conflicts between right-wing and left-wing groups, as well as with the security forces¹³ and many more were imprisoned; majority of which had not even been involved in violence.

The two decades from 1960 to 1980 marked a unique period for the leftist movement in Turkey, especially “considering that prior to 1960 [...] a legal socialist movement actually did not exist, and that after 1980 it was again forbidden to operate within the law.”¹⁴ From the first military

¹¹ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 297.

¹² Nikki Keddie, *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, 102-166.

¹³ Ertuğrul Kürkçü, “Türkiye Sosyalist Hareketine Silahlı Mücadelenin Girişi (The Entry of Armed Struggle to Turkish Socialist Movement),” in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce: Sol* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007), 508.

¹⁴ Igor P Lipovsky, *The Socialist Movement in Turkey 1960-1980* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 2.

intervention in 1960 until the one in 1980, which crushed down the left ruthlessly, Turkey experienced cycles of left-wing contention diffusing, escalating and representing the most serious challenge to the state authority in Turkey's modern history until the PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê - the Kurdistan's Worker's Party) have taken over from the 1980s on.

Naturally, this period aroused a good deal of intellectual interests from various fields. However, the existing studies on the 1960s and 1970s in Turkey suffer from several shortcomings. The conventional perspectives define the period as one of terrorism and chaos, and strive to find the reasons for the gradual increase of violence by looking into the structural, institutional, ideological, legal, cultural, social characteristics and changes in the country individually and most of the time in isolation from each other. Unable to move beyond a narrative account of the period and mostly suffering from a retrospective point of view, majority of the accounts of the period engage in a sort of blaming game for the intense violence; rather than systemic analyses of this contentious period in its global, historical and social context.

Mainstream accounts of political violence and the radical left in Turkey during the 1970s focus on questions such as: "why did political violence emerge and escalate in the first place?" or "why did radical leftist organization resort to violence?" rather than on how and when political violence becomes the dominant performance of repertoire of action for these activists. Therefore, they look for the root causes and essentialist reasons for adoption of violence. Similar to the early approaches of social movement studies, these studies point to grievances, institutions or even cultural or traditional features that are allegedly prone to violence in the society in explaining the reasons for political violence. This was also a natural result of exceptionalism they assume for the Turkish case in their studies. However, similar processes of radicalization taking place at the same time in other parts of the world with different cultural, political and economic characteristics would necessitate a new approach to this episode of contention in Turkey.

Previous studies usually focus on one or two factors to offer an explanation. Sometimes it is 1) the ‘unduly liberal’ constitution of 1961, and the infant democracy of Turkey,¹⁵ or 2) the rapid structural changes, and nonconforming ‘feudal culture’¹⁶ accounting for the political violence; at other times 3) the incapability and authoritarianism of politicians,¹⁷ or 4) the extremist ideas and ideals of the revolutionary leaders and groups.¹⁸ Despite playing somewhat significant roles at some point in the process, none of these factors could solely provide a satisfactory explanation for the emergence and persistence of left-wing political violence in Turkey during ‘the years of anarchy and terror’.

Not only the focus but also the approach of these studies could be misleading. For example, some view the left-wing opposition in 1970s as a law and order issue causing social and political instability.¹⁹ This line of studies defines political violence of the 1970s as a case of terrorism and tries to analyze it as an isolated case from its historical, social and political context. They pay limited or no attention to the causal dynamics such as state repression, excessive and unfair police violence or contra-guerrilla attacks as push factors.²⁰ According to this perception, the 1961 constitution had given either ‘all the rights’ that a legal left-wing opposition might demand,²¹ or rather ‘too much rights’ for the current state of Turkish democracy that they were

¹⁵ Michael M. Gunter, “Political Instability in Turkey during the 1970s,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 9, no. 1 (1989), <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/viewArticle/14835>.

¹⁶ Şerif Mardin, “Youth and Violence in Turkey,” *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 19, no. 02 (November 1978): 229–254, Dogu Ergil, *Türkiye’de Terör ve Şiddet (Terror and Violence in Turkey)* (Ankara: Turhan Kitabevi, 1980), Ruşen Keleş and Artun Ünsal, *Kent ve Siyasal Şiddet (City and Political Violence)* (A.Ü.S.B.F. basın ve yayın yüksek okulu basımevi, 1982), Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey, The Making of the Middle East Series* (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁷ Sabri Sayari, “Political Violence and Terrorism in Turkey, 1976–80: A Retrospective Analysis,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 2 (2010): 198–215, Ihsan Bal and Sedat Laciner, “The Challenge of Revolutionary Terrorism to Turkish Democracy 1960-80,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13, no. 4 (2001): 90–115.

¹⁸ Lipovsky, *The Socialist Movement in Turkey 1960-1980*, Ergil, *Türkiye’de Terör ve Şiddet (Terror and Violence in Turkey)*, Mardin, “Youth and Violence in Turkey.” Bal and Laciner, “The Challenge of Revolutionary Terrorism to Turkish Democracy 1960-80.”

¹⁹ Sayari, “Political Violence and Terrorism in Turkey, 1976–80.”, Sabri Sayari, “The Terrorist Movement in Turkey: Social Composition and Generational Changes,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 7, no. 1 (1987), <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/viewFile/14744/15813>, Gunter, “Political Instability in Turkey during the 1970s.”, Bal and Laciner, “The Challenge of Revolutionary Terrorism to Turkish Democracy 1960-80.”

²⁰ Sayari, “Political Violence and Terrorism in Turkey, 1976–80.”, Sayari, “The Terrorist Movement in Turkey.”

²¹ Bal and Laciner, “The Challenge of Revolutionary Terrorism to Turkish Democracy 1960-80.”

doomed to be abused by the oppositional movements.²² The law on autonomy of universities or the right to unionize and strike guaranteed by the 1961 Constitution are presented as excessive freedom allowing extremist groups to organize and mobilize. Some even blamed amnesty in 1974 for the increased violence.

For example, Şerif Mardin (1978) and Doğu Ergil (1980) are among those trying to find the reasons for and origins of the violence in the cultural and traditional features of the Turkish society. Mardin views the increase of student violence as a result of rapid structural transition of Turkey, from a traditional peasant society to an ‘urbanized but not civilized’ one, in the previous decades and the economic, social and cultural stresses it created for the people but especially the youth. Mardin calls this transformation “ruralization of the city” and claims that those migrants brought the ‘feudal culture’, such as blood feuds and respect for authority —particularly that of elders, — to the cities they dwell know. With the influence of populist policies of right-wing governments this violent and authoritarian culture could spread and contributed to a great extent, if not caused it in the first place, to the violence among the youth.²³ While Ergil acknowledges the presence of other left-wing organizations in the world resorting to violence as a strategy, they both do not see Turkish case as a part of a global phenomenon.

Indeed, the omission of the global contexts is a common shortcoming in the literature. Neither the successes of revolutionary movements and the popularity of the writings of revolutionary leaders and intellectuals, which proved to be inspirational for the youth all around the world, nor the widespread diffusion of violent repertoire of actions as successful methods in revolutionary struggles have been credited while providing explanations for the motivations of the youth engaging in political violence. But it is one of the first things one hears from the activists of the period regarding the factors pulling them to the left-wing movement. Their unmistakable belief in the possibility of revolution, righteousness of their anti-imperialist cause and methods could not be comprehended without an understanding of the global revolutionary spirit of this

²² Gunter, “Political Instability in Turkey during the 1970s.”

²³ Mardin, “Youth and Violence in Turkey,” 245.

generation of activists. This is a shortcoming most common in the conventional perspectives which do not take into account the social movement actors and their subjective perception of the world around them as an influential and important factor in the mobilization and organization of social movements.

Bozarslan (2004), however, does not agree with above-mentioned positions. He claims the level of violence witnessed in Turkey during the 1970s cannot be explained through historical legacy, culture or religion either. First of all, from 1923 to 1968, with the exception of the Kurdish regions, violence in Turkish society occupied a marginal place. Other than couple of exceptional cases, such as Menemen incident, even the 1960 military coup did not bring about massive violence.²⁴ Instead, he argues, the power relations and subjective perceptions of leaders and activists about the surrounding world could better “explain the resort to violence”. I adopt a similar but more complex approach to study the political violence experienced in Turkey in the 1970s.

Closely related to the above-mentioned lack of interest in the perceptions, feelings, and motivations of activists, none of the studies actually ask and try to answer why fairly well-educated young women and men with bright prospects all of a sudden in late 1960s decided to risk their education, future, even their lives and joined such a high-risk activism. Instead, most of the attention is paid in objectively observable grievances such as frustrations that might be caused by unemployment, high-inflation, economic inequality, or what Ted Gurr called ‘relative deprivation’²⁵ as the main reasons for the contentious activism of the youth. This quite old approach, which is even refuted by Gurr himself, has already been dismissed by many social movement scholars who have demonstrated the absence of social movement mobilizations in each and every case in which relative deprivation is a pressing issue. So, even though playing a

²⁴ Hamit Bozarslan, *Violence in the Middle East: From Political Struggle to Self-Sacrifice* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2004), 62.

²⁵ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why men rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

part, the grievances alone cannot account for the emergence of collective action, let alone a high-risk activism.

Finally, the causal mechanisms, which I discuss below, have been pointed out by the scholars of political violence as playing a significant role in the radicalization process of not only the left-wing but also, right-wing, ethnic or Islamist militant organizations, are still missing in the studies on the Turkish case in the 1970s. Not a single study has so far analytically examined the causal mechanisms operating in dynamic and interactive arenas between different actors of the left-wing contentious politics such as deadly clashes with counter-movement organizations, competition amongst the left-wing groups and organizers, ‘tough repressive’ policing of especially leftist protests, state’s unrelenting repression of legal and parliamentarian left, contributing to the left’s radicalization process. This study aims to fill this gap and contribute to political violence literature flourishing in social movement studies.

I refrain from lengthy narrations and descriptions of the events and actors of this contentious episode in modern history of Turkey. Those can be found in the above-mentioned relevant studies. What is conspicuously missing in the accounts of the contentious episode of the 1960s and 1970s, however, is women’s participation and experiences. Since social movements literature is limited in the analysis of the gender dynamics in the context of contentious politics, I turn to other disciplines for better methods and approaches to examine this phenomenon which I explain below.

d) The Left and Guerrilla Struggle before the Revolution in Iran

In addition to what I have already mentioned about the shortcomings of the studies on the political violence in the case of Turkey, the scholarly literature on the 1960s and 1970s in Iran has further been shaped under the weight of the 1979 Revolution. Consequently, the activism of the left and its consequences are mostly studied and evaluated vis-à-vis the role they played during and aftermath of the Revolution. Therefore, as the editor of the *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran* points out, most studies on the Iranian left focuses on its

failures, and dismisses or forgets the challenges it faced,²⁶ let alone its successes. This approach is so common in the studies on the Left that one can even talk about a ‘literature of failure’.

The Iranian Revolution which took place in 1979 and the Islamic Regime which emerged as a result of it still, even 40 years later, serve as a source of inspiration for scholarly production as well as controversy among the scholars of Iran; especially with regards to the reasons and conditions that had paved the way for it in the two decades preceding: the 1960s and 1970s. Numerous books and articles, from various theoretical and methodological perspectives, were devoted to analyzing the period in particular and Pahlavi era in general to illustrate the factors preparing the ground for one of the most unexpected and but successful social revolutions of the 20th century. While some have come to emphasize the structural conditions,²⁷ or political and economic²⁸ factors, others focused on social,²⁹ cultural and ideological³⁰ aspects paving the way for the revolution. Yet, regardless of one’s method and perspective, what is particularly challenging seems to be able to study the pre-revolution period independently from the inevitability of the revolution.

In the same vein, theories of revolution tend to dismiss the actors and factors in the previous periods if they did not become victorious or influential after the revolution. That is in part why the left in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s has been ignored except couple of limited studies.³¹ For example, Foran’s *A Century of Revolution: Social Movements in Iran* does not have a section

²⁶ Stephanie Cronin, ed. *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 5.

²⁷ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1982).

²⁸ Robert E. Looney, *Economic Origins of the Iranian Revolution* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), Homa Katouzian, *Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*. (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

²⁹ Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), Nikki R Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006).

³⁰ Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse University Press, 1996), Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³¹ Cronin, *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran*.

on the leftist movements in the 70s like many others.³² Despite the lack of sufficient studies employing the methods and approaches of social movement studies, compared to other methods and approaches they are less teleological and help us better examine the movements in their historical context. Therefore, rather than focusing on the Islamist movement led by the politically active clergy and its social, political and cultural bases; this study draws attention to a course of socio-political mobilization with a longer historical legacy and a more established intellectual heritage in Iran: the secular left. In the case of Iran too, I do not seek the answers to questions like why did the left fail to own the revolution. Instead, to be able to historicize and contextualize the emergence, mobilization and radicalization of the leftist organizations in Iran during the 1960s, I aim to analyze the evolution of the secular leftist opposition having the greatest influence on, or even paving the way for the Marxist-Leninist guerrilla groups in the 1960s and 1970s.

One of the most well-known studies on the subject is *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran*. The title indeed summarizes the author's perspective. Like many others, Behrooz views the history of the left from the perspective of a success / failure dichotomy.³³ Therefore, even though he acknowledges that "Iranian communism has played a notable, sometimes determining, role in the country's history", in the bulk of the study what is most emphasized are the mistakes, miscalculations, and misunderstandings of the left rather than the reasons, context, and analysis of the so-called mistakes, let alone the contributions of the Left. Also, by "the Left" Behrooz mostly means the Tudeh Party as he allocates more space for the discussion of not only the Tudeh's policies and activities but also inner conflicts and speculations, even during the 1970s when the guerrilla groups played a more important role than the Tudeh did. Just like his counterparts working on the leftist groups in the 1960s and

³² Also see Stephen C Poulson, *Social Movements in Twentieth-Century Iran: Culture, Ideology, and Mobilizing Frameworks* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2005).

³³ Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999).

1970s, Behrooz emphasizes the role and rising influence of international Marxism: guerrilla or otherwise, and the Soviets.

Behrooz uses the term ‘Stalinist’ too ‘liberally’ without providing a definition, and bases the undemocratic, secretive and strict structure of the guerrilla groups on their Stalinism without emphasizing enough on the unique conditions in which they were organizing and operating in Iran. In this sense, Vahabzadeh³⁴ does a better job of defining inner workings of these groups; and tries to explain the reasons for this type of a structuring in that period by referring to the other factors, such as the severe repression applied by the regime through SAVAK. Furthermore, the reasons Behrooz points out for the “failure” of the left seem more relevant to understand and explain the ways in which they organized, operated and formed their organization rather than why they failed to seize the power after the revolution. For example, repression of the state that concentrated on the leftist groups while leaving the Islamist opposition relatively free could be considered in this regard.

Also, as a contradiction to the claims about the Marxists’ inability to create a strong base among the working class of Iran, it is documented in many studies how both the Tudeh and then Fadayian was popular not only among intelligentsia but also among working classes. They showed their support in the demonstrations both during and after the revolution by taking to the streets in hundreds of thousands.³⁵

The works on the period and the left differ from each other on the methodological and theoretical grounds. For example, Abrahamian uses a neo-Marxist methodology; therefore, not only does he analyze socio-economic grounds of the rise and fall of the left and its ideals in Iran, he also takes into account the ethnic and regional differences and concerns in Iran in this period. Vahabzadeh, on the other hand, focuses more on the discourse analysis of the

³⁴ Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and the Fadai Period of National Liberation in Iran, 1971-1979*, 1st ed (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

³⁵ Behrooz mentions that right before the revolution just Fadayian had over a half million supporters. See Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 105.

writings and publications of the leading figures of the Fadaiyan in specific, and the left in general. His conclusion is that the ways in which “revolutionaries” of the period think, perceive and project, as well as the instruments they resorted to, did not differ much from those of the rulers. Thus, Vahabzadeh detects the “mistakes” of the Fadaiyan not in its failure to understand the Iranian society, but in its inability to catch up with the fast-changing demands of the newly emerging groups in socio-political arena, such as women, students, and ethnic minorities. This is why, Vahabzadeh argues, the left could not present a more democratic and inclusive alternative to the regime of the Shah.

Vahabzadeh also rejects the premise that seizing the state power should be the sole target for social movements or means to measure their success. Even though the Left could not come to power per se, for Vahabzadeh, its ideals and critiques paved the way for many future social changes and intellectual expansions in Iranian society. It is in this perspective that, I argue, the Left in general and the revolutionary guerrilla organizations in particular, like Fadaiyan, should be analyzed. Furthermore, as I stated earlier, other political actors and their actions should also be taken into account; and thereby, the reasons and characteristics of the Left’s activism could be understood better.

e) Women in the Leftist Movements in Turkey and Iran

Women in Turkey and Iran have always been active in the popular movements in their countries since the 19th century. Their activism in the ranks of the constitutionalist, nationalist, and women’s movements have been documented by the scholars of both countries.³⁶ Despite being barred from pursuing their agenda on various grounds from

³⁶ Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği (Revolution without Woman: Nezihe Muhiddin, Women’s People Party, Woman Association)* (Istanbul: Metis, 2003); Drude Dahlerup, *The New Women’s Movement: Feminism and Political Power in Europe and the USA* (London: Sage, 1990); Şirin Tekeli, “Emergence of Feminism in Turkey,” in *The New Women’s Movement: Feminism and Political Power in Europe and the USA*, ed. Drude Dahlerup (Sage, 1986), 179–99; Şirin Tekeli, “Türkiye’de Kadının Siyasal Hayattaki Yeri (Women’s Position in Political Life in Turkey),” in *Türk Toplumunda Kadın*, ed. Nermin Abadan-Unat and Deniz Kandiyoti (Türk Sosyal Bilimler Derneği, 1979), 393–413; Nükhet Sirman, “Feminism in Turkey: A Short History,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 3 (1989): 1–34; Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini* (New York, N.Y.: Praeger, 1982); Parvin

religious to nationalist and patriarchal, women in both Turkey and Iran have found ways defend their grounds and claim a space in the political, social and cultural spheres through at times patriarchal bargains.³⁷ However, their independent movement and active participation in political life of their countries was ended, through either institutionalization or suppression, by the authoritarian regimes of Atatürk and Reza Shah with the establishment of the central nation states in Turkey and Iran during the first half of 20th century. Therefore, it is hard to observe an independent women's movement activism both in Turkey and Iran until the 1980s.³⁸ This, of course, does not mean that women were idle and did not participate in popular movements at all during this period. On the contrary, starting from the beginning of the student demonstrations in the 1960s, women joined the new social movements of the 20th century in vast numbers. Even though they were faced with similar attitudes, this time not from the religious leaders or nationalists but the leftists of their countries, they were equipped with new negotiation skills.

Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in the Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Authority and Agency: Revisiting Women's Activism during Reza Shah's Period," *The State and the Subaltern: Modernisation, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran*, 2007, 159–179; Aynur Demirdirek, "In Pursuit of the Ottoman Women's Movement," *Deconstructing the Images of "The Turkish Woman,"* Ed. Zehra Arat (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 1997, 66–71; Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi (Ottoman Women's Movement)* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1996); Camron Michael Amin, "Globalizing Iranian Feminism, 1910–1950," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4, no. 1 (2008): 6–30; Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, & the Origins of Feminism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Deniz Kandiyoti, "Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1987): 317–338; Ali Akbar Mahdi, "The Iranian Women's Movement: A Century Long Struggle," *The Muslim World* 94, no. 4 (2004): 427–48.

³⁷ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender & Society* 2, no. 3 (September 1, 1988): 274–90.

³⁸ There were no women's movement or women's organizations in Turkey and Iran during the 1960s and 1970s except the women's branches of revolutionary organizations in Turkey, the most famous of which was İlerici Kadınlar Derneği (Association for Progressive Women - IKD) of Communist Party of Turkey. However, like its counterparts not only in Turkey but also in other countries, IKD, as a women's branch of a communist party did not identify itself as feminist and subscribed to the dominant discourse arguing that all the problems of women would be solved after the revolution, like those of others suffering under capitalist system. See Muazzez Pervan and İlerici Kadınlar Derneği, *İlerici Kadınlar Derneği (1975-1980): kırmızı çatıklı kadınlar'ın tarihi (Association for Progressive Women (1975-1980): the history of women with red headband)*, 2013, Emel Akal, *Kızıl Feministler: Bir Sözlü Tarih Çalışması (Red Feminists: An Oral History Study)* (Istanbul: Türkiye Sosyal Tarih Araştırma Vakfı, 2003).

As it has always been the case with women's history, the historical resources concerning women's activism in the ranks of leftist movements are very limited. It is even more so when it comes to the everyday lives and experiences of women in the underground organizations. A limited number of testimonies along with the studies on the clandestine revolutionary organizations in the period are written mostly by men, and usually in the form of organizational histories or memoirs revolving around 'more important' issues such as ideological differences of the revolutionary organizations, male revolutionary leaders, their sacrifices and heroism, operations, training, and so forth. Even in the memoirs of male activists, personal dimension and their everyday life is hard to find.³⁹

So far only a few works on the participation and experiences of women in the radical left have been published by scholars of Iran and Turkey namely Hamid Shahidian, Heideh Moghissi, Fatmagül Bertay, and Yaprak Zihnioğlu.⁴⁰ Almost all of them are former activists involved in the leftist activism in one way or another, and in a sense, insiders writing on the subject with various motivations. However, their works are limited because the main focus in these studies has been mostly either the Left's approach to female participants or its perspective on women's issues in general. Testimonies from former activist women, on the other hand, are even fewer if not nonexistent. The very few books written by the former activist women have come to focus only on their experiences after the end of activism and are mostly about either the prison period or difficulties with adaptation to the society after being released from the prison. What can be categorized as prison literature has been

³⁹ For an exception see Gün Zileli, *Yarılma: 1954-1972 (The Split: 1954-1972)*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), Gün Zileli, *Havariler: 1972-1983 (The Disciples: 1972-1983)*, (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: İletişim, 2002).

⁴⁰ Heideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1996). Fatmagül Bertay, "Has Anything Changed in the Outlook of the Turkish Left on Women?," in *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader*, ed. Şirin Tekeli (Zed, 1995), Hammed Shahidian, "The Iranian Left and the 'Woman Question' in the Revolution of 1978-79," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 02 (1994): 223-47, Yaprak Zihnioğlu, "Türkiye'de Solun Feminizme Yaklaşımı (The Approach of the Left to Feminism in Turkey)," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce. 8, Sol* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007).

especially common among the Iranian activists,⁴¹ whereas the memoirs or novels became more popular in Turkey creating their own genre.⁴² Notwithstanding these individual endeavors to record their history, we still lack a great amount of information and insight concerning many aspects of women's experiences in radical leftist activism.⁴³

Almost all the recent studies written on the topic of women and the Left in Turkey and Iran are critical of both the Left's lack of genuine interest in women's issues in society and women's

⁴¹Ashraf Dehqani, *Torture and Resistance in Iran: Memories of the Women Guerrillas*, 1973; Vida Hajebi Tabrizi, *Dad-e bidad: nakhostin zendan-e zanan-e siyasi (Memoir of Iranian Women Fedai Guerrillas)*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Enteshrat- e Baztab- Negar, 2003), Azadeh Agah, *We Lived to Tell: Political Prison Memoirs of Iranian Women* (Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2007), Parvaneh Alizadeh, *Khub Negah Konid, Rasteki Ast: Guzarish-e Zendan (Look Carefully: This is Real: Prison Report)* (Paris: Antesharat-e Khaveran, 1987), Parvin Khosravi, *Yadha va didgah-ha: Khaterati az zendan-ha-ye jomhowre-ye eslami der dehe-ye 60 (Memories and perspectives: The Memoirs of Prison under the Islamic Republic in the 1970s)* (Köln: Furugh, 2008).

⁴² Those written after and about the second coup in 1971 are called 'Novels of March 12'; whereas those after the coup in 1980 "Novels of September 12" referring to the exact dates of the coups as they are remembered in the collective memory. Some of the most famous ones are: Oya Baydar, *Sıcak Külleri Kaldı (What Is Left Is Its Warm Ashes)*, 3. basım. (Istanbul: Can Yayınları, 2001); Sevgi Soysal, *Yıldırım Bölge Kadınlar Koğuşu (Yıldırım Region Women's Prison)*, 1. basım. (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1976); Füzuzan, *47'liler (The 47ers)* (İstanbul: Milliyet, 1979); Sevgi Soysal, *Şafak (Dawn)* (Ankara: Bilgi, 1985); Pinar Kür, *Yarin ... yarin ... (Tomorrow...tomorrow)* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayinlari, 1976); Adalet Ağaoğlu, *Bir düğün gecesi (A wedding night)* (İstanbul: Remzi kitabevi, 1980).

⁴³ Examples of some insightful testimonies directly about the activism and experiences of women from Turkey must also be mentioned: Ayşe Yazıcıoğlu, *68'in Kadınları (Women of 68)*, (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2010); Mukaddes Çelik, *Üç Dönem Üç Kuşak Kadınlar : Demir Parmaklıklar Ortak Düşler (Women in Three Periods Three Generations: Iron Bars, Common Dreams)*, (Sirkeci İstanbul: Ceylan Yayınları, 2005); Oya Baydar and Melek Ulagay, *Bir Dönem İki Kadın : Birbirimizin Aynasında (One Period Two Women: On the Mirror of Each Other)*, 1. basım. (Istanbul: Can, 2011); Gülfer Akkaya, *Sanki Eşittik : 1960-70'li Yıllarda Devrimci Mücadelenin Feminist Sorgusu (As If We Were Equal: A Feminist Inquiry of the Revolutionary Struggle in the 1960-70s)* (Istanbul: Kumbara Sanat Atolyesi ve Toplumsal Dayanışma Derneği, 2011). From the Iranian women there is almost nothing, with the exception of Tabrizi's oral history book with former activists which still revolves mostly around the prison experience rather than the activism years. See Hajebi Tabrizi, *Dad-e bidad: nakhostin zendan-e zanan-e siyasi (Memoir of Iranian Women Fedai Guerrillas)*.; and a couple of articles written by women and published on BBC's Persian web site on the anniversary of Siahkal. See Melihah Zehtab, "Yad mandeh-ha-ye az zendegi-ye cheriki (Memories from the guerrilla life)," BBC News Farsi, accessed August 1, 2018, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2011/04/110411_siahkal_malihe_zahatab; Maryam Satvat, "Der khane-ye timi: ya'ni vaqt-e an ettefaq-e bad rasideh? (In the Safe House: So, has the time arrived for that bad incident?)," BBC News Farsi, accessed August 1, 2018, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2011/02/110207_142_siahhak_30_maryam_satvat; Nahed Qajar, "Zenan va sazman-e cherik-ha-ye fadai-ye khalq (Women and the Organization of People's Fedai Guerrillas)," BBC News Farsi, accessed August 1, 2018, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2011/02/110204_113_siahkal_nahid_qajar; Mastureh Ahmadzadeh, "Az Seyahkel ta enqelab: pishzemineh-ha va peyamed-ha (From Siyalkal to Revolution: the background and the consequences)," BBC News Farsi, accessed August 1, 2018, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2011/02/110203_142_siahkal_part_four.

positions in the leftist organizations.⁴⁴ Actually, these critics are quite in line with and very much similar to what has been described as the role and experiences of women and the approach to women's issues in similar movements, from the nationalist liberation movements of the turn of the 20th century to the guerrilla movements in Latin America. Accordingly, women in the revolutionary activism both in Turkey and Iran, were expected either to comply with their traditional roles and responsibilities while active in the organizations, or forgo everything reminding their female identity and sexuality and act like "one of the men".⁴⁵ Yet, these undoubtedly true but at times overgeneralizing accounts of women's revolutionary activism underestimate the agency of women as well as the multiplicity and diversity of their experiences. Indeed, almost none of the revolutionary organizations of the period prioritized women's issues or considered them independently from the revolutionary struggle. For example, the Iranian revolutionary organization, Fadaiyan, never took a strong position concerning the women's rights from its inception in 1971 until the Revolution.⁴⁶ It is almost impossible to find a specific document published by any of the Turkish revolutionary organizations of the time on the women's rights, issues, position in society or simply their policies regarding women, other than paying lip service here and there to arguments of generic Marxist literature assuring women of freedom and equality after the revolution.⁴⁷ Like their counterparts in other parts of the world, in other words, they never viewed women's oppression as a separate issue from the general

⁴⁴ Berktaş, "Has Anything Changed in the Outlook of the Turkish Left on Women?", Zihnioğlu, "Türkiye'de Solun Feminizme Yaklaşımı (The Approach of the Left to Feminism in Turkey).", Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, Hammed Shahidian, "The Iranian Left and the 'Woman Question' in the Revolution of 1978-79," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 2 (May 1, 1994): 223-47, Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in the Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 169-72.

⁴⁵ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in the Twentieth-Century Iran*, 1997, 172, Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 2015, 248, Berktaş, "Has Anything Changed in the Outlook of the Turkish Left on Women?," 251.

⁴⁶ The OIPFG has been criticized for not taking a stance against the obligatory veiling after the Revolution on various occasions. Even though the organization did not endorse the policies of Islamic government regarding women, the leadership advised its "female members to dress moderately and wear a scarf as a sign of respect to the masses and for their own protection." Eliz Sanasarian, "An Analysis of Fida'i and Mujahidin Positions on Women's Rights," in *Women and Revolution in Iran* (Westview Press, 1983), 100.

⁴⁷ Berktaş, "Has Anything Changed in the Outlook of the Turkish Left on Women?", Zihnioğlu, "Türkiye'de Solun Feminizme Yaklaşımı (The Approach of the Left to Feminism in Turkey)."

oppression of lower classes. As a rule, it was accepted that women's oppression was to be overcome automatically after the socialist revolution which would destruct the class system and give women equal rights. Pursuit of a separate women's rights activism, let alone feminism, was seen as a petit-bourgeois venture and so dangerous that it would potentially harm the revolutionary struggle.⁴⁸

The revolutionary organizations in Turkey and Iran were more of a middle-class phenomenon like their counterparts in the other parts of the world, including Europe, Japan and the US.⁴⁹ So, what marks the perception of and approach to gender and sexuality of these radical leftist organizations in the period in general? Aside from the left's common perception of feminism as a threat to class unity and revolution at the time, many leftists coming from the middle classes were more than willing to adopt the values of 'the oppressed toiling masses', also with regard to gender roles, in an effort to look and be more like them. Thereby, gender relations in an Italian Maoist revolutionary organization could be as discriminatory and conservative as those in its counterparts in Turkey.⁵⁰ Obviously, practical repercussions of this distorted perception could be very oppressive on the lives of activist women in these organizations. For example, one Italian Maoist organization forbade miniskirts and shorthair for women for being immoral, and prescribed "the prohibition of masturbation, anal intercourse and, partially, of oral sex." There was also a "stigma against those who were 'excessively' attracted by the opposite sex" for being the "symptoms of a

⁴⁸ Haideh Moghissi compiles the examples of anti-feminist quotes from even the communist women of the period from Clara Zetkin to Kollontai, warning communist men and women against the danger of feminism and some of its demands. See Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, 88–93.

⁴⁹ For the discussion of the rise and characteristics of the radical revolutionary organizations after 1968 in other parts of the world see Sommer, "Revolutionary Groups after 1968.", Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, "Unwanted Children: Political Violence and the Cycle of Protest in Italy, 1966–1973," *European Journal of Political Research* 14, no. 5–6 (1986): 607–632, Gilda Zwerman, Patricia Steinhoff, and Donatella Della Porta, "Disappearing Social Movements: Clandestinity in The Cycle of New Left Protest in The U.S., Japan, Germany, and Italy," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (March 1, 2000): 85–104.

⁵⁰ Eros Francescangeli, "The Bride in Red: Morality and Private Relationships in the Italian Revolutionary Left – the Case of the Maoist Group Servire Il Popolo," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 22, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 101–19.

petty-bourgeois lifestyle.”⁵¹ In the same vein, as we will see later in the following chapters, a number of women from both Turkish and Iranian sides mentioned similar examples of objections and accusations from the leadership of their organizations to their demands to improve some aspects of their living conditions under the pretext of being bourgeois affectations. Therefore, there is no doubt that the orthodoxy in the ideological stance of these organizations played an important role in their approach to gender and women’s issues. Aside from its schism and factionalism, discrimination against women and regulation of sexuality seem to be what leftist and revolutionary activists had in common all around the world. Yet, it should still be the responsibility of a researcher working on any period and aspect of women’s history to ask if it is the whole story.

Indeed, as I have mentioned above, despite all the challenges, women were very much present and active in the revolutionary movements of the period: In Iran, “[w]omen participated in peaceful and violent mass demonstrations; they dug trenches and fought in street battles; they joined strikes, boycotts and stoppages at work; they participated in the activities of local militia groups, and took part in guerrilla attacks against government installations.”⁵² Furthermore, they registered their presence in every sphere of militant activism as well including armed operations. “Constituting 11 percent of the dead [guerrillas], [... these women] scored a number of firsts in Iranian history—the first woman to face a firing squad, die under torture, take cyanide to evade capture, lose her life in a street shootout, and write her prison memoirs.”⁵³ In Turkey too, despite being ridiculed, shamed in the media, arrested and tortured in prisons, and even raped, for their participation in the ranks of revolutionary organizations, women stayed present and kept playing critical roles in all the crucial events and periods in the history of the left in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Francescangeli, 108.

⁵² Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran*, 117.

⁵³ Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 103, 104.

⁵⁴ Gülfer Akkaya, *Sanki Eşittik : 1960-70’li Yıllarda Devrimci Mücadelenin Feminist Sorgusu (As If We Were Equal: A Feminist Inquiry of the Revolutionary Struggle in the 1960-70s)*, Baydar and Ulagay, *Bir Dönem İki Kadın*,

All in all, in order to go beyond the mainstream representation of women's participation in the leftist and revolutionary movements in the literature in general and in Turkey and Iran in particular, which is almost always one of discrimination and repression, and to do justice to their agency especially under these hard conditions, I prioritize and focus, in this study, on their individual accounts through their life histories in these revolutionary organizations. As a matter of fact, they tell a different story.

1.2. The Outline of the Chapters

The first chapter presents the methodological and theoretical framework of this study. For the analysis of the dynamics of the contentious politics in the 1960s and 1970s in Turkey and Iran, which involved the use of political violence, I employ the methods and theories of the Social Movement Studies (SMS) in general. For this, I heavily rely on the approach and the concepts developed by the prominent scholars of the SMS, such as Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow. Since I conceptualize the period as a process of radicalization of the left-wing movements in the two countries, I explain the details of the 'processes and mechanisms' approach in the first part of this chapter. In the second part, I present the methods and the specific approaches that I employ in order to analyze micro-mobilization of the women in the radical leftist organizations, namely oral history, history of everyday life and gender.

In the second chapter, I briefly describe the general features of the political regimes in Turkey and Iran from their foundations early in the 20th century on with a particular focus on the ways in which they were seen and interpreted by the leftist activists of the period in order to better explain the reasons for the emergence, mobilization, radicalization and diffusion of the left-wing contention in the 1960s and 1970s in the following chapters. In addition to the analyses of formation of political actors, identities and institutions, I explain the historical relationship between the state, other relevant political actors and institutions, as well as challengers to make a

Bedri Baykam, *68'li Yıllar : Eylemciler (The Years of 1968: The Activists)*, (Kızılay Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1998), 373–403, Çelik, *Üç Dönem Üç Kuşak Kadınlar, Yazıcıoğlu, 68'in Kadınları (Women of 68)*,

better sense of the political regimes and initial conditions in which the armed struggle became a viable option for a number of dissidents in the two countries.

The contending political actors of the period, however, are mainly presented in the third chapter. I discuss the political, economic and social structural changes in Turkey and Iran, — a new constitution, rapid industrialization, urbanization, and land reform, rapid development, institutionalization respectively— as well as the opportunities and threats that paved the way for the emergence of a new left-wing opposition. The mobilization networks on which the left wing activism relied to organize during the 1960s, and also before when it is relevant, constitute the framework of the chapter. It is followed by the fourth chapter, which covers the framing processes through which the activists perceived and made sense of these threats and opportunities. Following Tarrow and Tilly⁵⁵ I conceptualize this period as the ‘new coordination process’ which was composed of three main mechanisms: *brokerage*, *coordinated action*, and *diffusion* in Turkey; and *repression*, *institutionalization* and *disillusionment* in Iran. In order to explain each mechanism, I identify the political actors who played critical roles for each mechanism, emerging collective identities that created solidarity among the activists, and finally the repertoire of action that they adopted to challenge their regimes. In the second part of this chapter, I focus on the ways in which a number of activists in both countries resorted to violence as a result of certain events and dynamics in the domestic politics.

In the fifth chapter, I move on to take a closer look at the 1970s and conceptualize the period as the radicalization and persistence of the armed struggle as an outcome of both the contention during the 1960s and the causal mechanisms influencing the process during the 1970s. Following its emergence, growth and diffusion, the outcome by the end of the 1960s was an escalation, or better put, radicalization of left-wing contention in Turkey and Iran, rather than a demobilization through possible means conventionally used by states such as

⁵⁵ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*.

institutionalization, co-optation, selective or indiscriminate repression to end contentious mobilization. During the 1970s, the armed contention either diffused among the students or at least sustained in the face of police repression or right-wing attacks. This period of the leftist contention in Turkey was characterized mainly by two developments: the clashes with the right-wing radical groups and an acute form of competition between the radical leftist organizations in Turkey; whereas, in Iran the armed struggle ironically both diffused and dissociated further from the masses due to extreme repression of the SAVAK.

The next two chapters are devoted to the individual life histories of women who joined and had various experiences in the ranks of the radical leftist organizations and groups in Iran and Turkey during the late 1960s and 1970s. The first chapter deals mostly with their life stories and the recruitment processes as a result of which they first became involved in the radical leftist activism. The following chapter concerns their everyday life in the semi or full-clandestine conditions with a special focus on their gendered experiences from division of labor to relations between male and female members.

In these chapters, I focus on a number of fundamental questions: What were the socio-political backgrounds of the women participating in the radical leftist organizations? What were the formal and informal networks through which these women participated in the radical leftist organizations? What were the emotional, social and political factors determining their motivations to join the revolutionary activism? How did the high-risk activism affect their emotions, perceptions, and commitments? And finally, in what ways did various mechanisms of radicalization of the leftist organizations have an influence on the experiences of women in revolutionary activism?

In the last chapter on “Heroic Life vs. Everyday Life” I focus on the women’s everyday lives, which revolved around organizational activities, daily chores, and responsibilities for disguising the house, analyzing the characteristics of gender roles and relations between men and women along with the sexual relations. With a comparison of Iranian and Turkish cases, I question if we can talk about a common gendered experience for women in clandestine

oppositional organizations in the countries which have certain characteristics in common, such as religious, cultural, political or regional. Thereby, I also aim to shed light on the differences in their experiences as a result of the causal relational mechanisms I discussed in the earlier chapters.