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Linking Theories of Framing and Collective Identity Formation: Women's Organizations' Involvement with the Supramed Strike¹

Taylan Acar

- ¹ In Antalya, Turkey the workers of the Supramed GmbH, members of the *Petrol-İş* Union (Petroleum Chemical Rubber Workers Union of Turkey) called a strike on September 26, 2006 following an unresolved six month long bargaining process. Supramed belongs to the German multinational corporation Prescription Medical Corp (PMC), and is located in the Antalya Free Trade Zone. At the time, PMC was running its operations in 12 countries around the world, controlling over 40% of the hemodialysis filters market in Europe (Pazartesi 2007). What makes this strike interesting is the fact that 83 of the total 85 strikers were women, as well as the fact that the strike aimed to bring a trade union into an anti-union free trade zone environment (Gallin 2001).
- ² The Supramed strike lasted 448 days; in the end it resulted in the certification of the union and a considerably successful collective bargaining agreement. Over the course of the struggle, the framing of the strike extended from a labor issue to a women's liberation issue, articulating the classical unionist narratives with the gendered aspects of free trade zone employment. Over time, with frame extension, the collective identity of women workers as "Supramed Workers" transformed into "Supramed Women" as a result of a diffusion process from the workers to feminist organizations.
- ³ This paper examines how the identity "woman worker," and the understanding of the strike as a "women's liberation issue," developed over time as a result of a frame extension in the context of Turkey. Here, I analyze the dynamics of the interplay between the workers and the union with feminist organizations over time, which led to the construction of a "Supramed Woman" identity in the eyes of the public. In doing so,

I focus on the process during which the frame extension from what was originally a labor issue to a women's liberation issue took place. However, this shift did not emerge as a result of a strategic choice on the part of the workers and the union with the intention of seeking resonance within the given context, as might be suggested by scholars working on framing (Zald 1996; Snow & Benford, 1999). Rather, I argue that this frame extension took place gradually, following a diffusion process that was contingent upon factors that brought workers and feminist activists into a dynamic interaction leading to a political coalition among the labor and women's liberation movements. The diffusion of the strike as a central issue within the Turkish women's movement, and the extension of the way the strikers' concerns were framed – from purely labor related concerns to an issue of women's liberation – led to the articulation of a combined gender and worker discourse.

- 4 The next section considers the emerging collective identities of women within the changing global economy in the past few decades with a particular focus on developing countries. In the third section, I develop a theoretical argument by rethinking the framing approach in relation to diffusion and collective identity processes, and offer a contingent frame alignment approach. The fourth section illustrates the evolution of the strike over time from a labor perspective to a women's liberation one, focusing on the significant means and moments that facilitated the frame extension: initial grievances and rearticulation of them from a women's liberation angle; *Petrol-İş* Union's women's journal; the International Women's Day Celebration on 8 March 2007; and finally the formation of the Women's Solidarity Platform with Supramed Strike. Later, I discuss and outline the process by which the transition of the collective identity of women from "Supramed Workers" to "Supramed Women" took place. Finally, I point to potential implications for research into the ways in which this interaction of women workers and feminists could contribute to the feminist movement in Turkey, as well as the possibilities for establishing a new collective identity of women workers in relation to other experiences.

I. The Feminization of Labor. New Collective Identities

- 5 There has been a great deal of research on the feminization of labor and the emerging collective identities of working women (Fuentes & Ehrenreich 1983; Safa 1986; Ong 1987). However, most of this research has seen the "woman worker" identity as arising from the sole fact of women working. Later, scholars argued that these particular identities are created through the production process, rather than being preconstituted through patriarchal familial structures (Salzinger 2003). After briefly summarizing significant contributions of this literature, I will utilize a framing approach in order to analyze the processes by which this new collective identity was initially constructed.
- 6 Over the past few decades, with expanding globalization, women have increasingly become part of the labor force around the world. In the restructured global economy, an increasing number of women have become sex workers, maids, workers in export-production, or microfinance recipients (Pyle & Ward 2003: 470). The loss of a "family wage" paid to male workers was a significant factor forcing women to join the working population, while still maintaining their traditional responsibilities regarding the household (Standing 1999: 586).

- 7 In the developing world the structural adjustment programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank have affected women's lives (Sparr 1994), particularly the lives of women engaged in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors who produce for local entrepreneurs, or in the free-trade zones dominated by multinational corporations. It is worth noting that 90% of the laborers in free-trade zones, in most of which workers rights and social protection are also non-existent, are women (Gallin 2001: 538). Employers exploit what they perceive to be women's careful effort, "nimble fingers" and cheap labor, along with their tendency not to struggle and their docility. Salzinger, in her study on the constitution of gendered meanings in a set of three workplaces in Mexico, argues that public narratives about the *maquiladoras* in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, continue to elaborate on the docility and malleability of young women workers, and laziness and incompetence of their male counterparts (Salzinger 1997: 568).
- 8 Moreover, women's employment is strongly related to the informalization of work, affected by three dimensions of the economic restructuring in both North and South: the decentralization of production; gendered transitions to new employment and the "commodity chains"; and peripheral urban growth (Beneria 2001). The result is changes in job structures, underscored by an increase in low-wage, casual and temporary positions within the organization of work (Beneria 2003).
- 9 In the countries of the developing world, working women constitute the most precarious sectors of the working class (Sassen 1998). The informal activities women engage in are often not reflected in the variety of national data on labor market participation or economic structure (Cho & Koo 1983). Furthermore, only focusing on either the category of women or the category of worker when studying the struggles of female workers overlooks the other side (Jung Hae 2007). The collective identity formation among working women in these countries is a complex process of resistance not only against exploitative capitalist relations, but also against the patriarchal aspects of capitalism along with the existing male-dominated social formation in the context of the respective countries (Fuentes & Ehrenreich, 1983; Ong 1997; Acar 2007; Jung Hae 2007; Üstübcici 2009).
- 10 Depending on the contexts of the process of labor movement mobilization, women develop particular emergent identities, especially after the expansion of the special trade zones around the world. The collective identities they construct tend to be differentiated from the classical male-dominated working class identities in that they emphasize the patriarchal structure of capitalism itself (Salzinger 2003; McKay 2006). In developing countries, the emergence of global production systems and free trade zones brought the formation of new gender roles within work, especially the social exclusion of women, which came with new gender dimensions (Carr & Chen 2004: 145).
- 11 In particular to Turkey, women's participation in the agricultural labor force fell from 88% in 1965 to 65% in 1980. However, the World Bank Development Statistics of 2000 reveal that women's share of manufacturing reached a high of 25% in mid-1990s (Moghadam 2005). Özler, in her study on gender differences in employment in Turkey's export-led industrialization, argues that trade liberalization led to the feminization of the labor force because job creation for women in this sector has been significantly higher than for their male counterparts. Yet the volatility of women's jobs is also significantly higher; her large database on Turkish manufacturing firms reflects a preference for women workers in jobs that are insecure (Özler 2001). Furthermore,

women working in the informal economy increased as a result of subcontracted work at home. However, those workers in the home-based piecework industry are mostly composed of “wives and mothers” revealing a division along lines of marital status. While the women workers in the manufacturing industry have been young and single, women working at home are more often married (Özar & Günlük-şenesen 1998).

- 12 The literature summarized above raises important questions for the study of the feminization of labor in the developing world with respect to the construction of a new identity of “women worker” within the context of increasing participation of women in the labor force. As I will demonstrate in the rest of the paper, in the case of the Supramed workers, the frame alignment process of labor and women’s liberation issues encouraged the emergence of the collective identity of the women workers. Yet, this process was contingent upon the diffusion of the strike among feminist circles rather than being agentic and strategic. As the strike diffused among feminist activists, the strike as well as the collective identity of the workers realigned with the gender frame without dropping the initial labor aspect. The dynamic interplay between the women’s organizations and the workers resulted in a women worker identity, which became the very identity of the striking women in the wider public.

II. Linking Framing Perspectives with Diffusion and Identity Formation Processes

- 13 In the light of the literature on the feminization of labor and collective identities of women, in this section I analyze how this collective identity formed in the case of Supramed workers. I combine a theoretical perspective drawn from the literature on framing and relate it to diffusion and identity formation processes. I develop a relational and dynamic framing perspective emphasizing the contingent factors through which the diffusion took place.
- 14 The concept of framing goes back to Goffman, who defined it as “schemata of interpretation” that enables people to “locate, perceive, identify and label” events and issues in the world (1974: 21). More than a decade later, Snow *et. al.* (1986) defined frame alignment as a conceptual bridge between social-psychological perspectives and the resource mobilization approaches to social movement analysis. They identified bridging, amplification, extension and transformation as four frame alignment processes that help people interpret their environment.² Frames are seen as a kind of tool to produce motivation and incentive for action (*ibid.*).
- 15 For a deeper investigation of frames, and more importantly frame alignments, emphasis is given to the roles of frames in the rendering of events and occurrences as meaningful, thereby functioning to organize experience and guide collective action (Benford & Snow 2000). Diffusion of innovations and practices has been conceptualized as the central aspect of framing processes (Snow & Benford 1999, 2000; Soule 2004). This notion of framing activity relies on the idea of one party taking the active role of strategic framing in order to improve the chances for adoption. Soule identifies four elements that most definitions of diffusion include: “a transmitter, an adopter, an innovation that is being diffused, and a channel through which the transmission takes place” (2004: 295). The central role of active transmitter led Snow and Benford (1999) to criticize the research on diffusion for “failing to adequately define whether or not the

transmitter and the adopter are active or passive agents” (Soule 2004: 300). Furthermore, collective action frames are distinguished from everyday interpretative frames because of their agentic and contentious character (Snow 2004).

- 16 It is important to link framing processes with processes of diffusion and identity formation. It helps to analyze the collective parties in a dynamic interaction, rather than differentiating them as active transmitters and passive adopters, thus pointing to the processes influencing both parties. Diffusion, in general, takes place as a result of imitation and social contagion, as well as through innovative organizational practices (Vasi 2003). In their discussion on coevolution, Oliver and Myers (2002) define diffusion as an inspiration to act by the example of others, and point to the fact that a variety of psychological or social mechanisms may underlie diffusion: social influence, normative pressure, or an implicit signal (2002: 10-11). Furthermore, they argue that diffusion terms may be fruitfully employed in analyses of frame shifts and collective identity construction (*ibid*: 5). Elsewhere (2000), they outlined a theory of social movements that focuses on diffusion as the central process. Soule (2004: 301) argues that Oliver and Myers (2000) theorized social movements as “a set of interrelated events and actions by a number of actors” who are mobilized through networks, which are central in diffusion processes. The important point here is that these accounts underscore the contingent mechanisms of framing processes in diffusion along networks and resonating within different parties.
- 17 The alignment of extending frames is defined as a strategic choice, with a deliberative, utilitarian characteristic directed at accomplishing specific goals (Snow & Benford 2000). Yet in my analysis, I take the caveat of Oliver and Johnston (2000) into consideration, pointing to the danger of depoliticizing social movements as if they attempt to come up with the most favorable way to frame issues in order to ensure the maximum resonance. Hence, my analysis underscores the stochastic aspect (Oliver & Myers 2002) of the extension process, rather than a strategic one, which led to a contingent collective identity formation process that came along with narratives and resources provided by feminist activists and organizations. In the case of Supramed, the diffusion processes were incorporated not as the spread of an innovative practice, but as the spread of information and ideas led to the formation of a coalition, which resulted in the resonating of the strike action among feminist organizations. Theoretically, by incorporating the dynamic processes of diffusion and collective identity formation into a systematic empirical analysis, I argue that the study of framing escapes the criticisms of descriptive bias and static tendencies (Benford 1997; Youngman 2003). This study suggests an analytical understanding of framing in relation to the diffusion processes, emphasizing the dynamic and complex nature of the frame extension that emerged during the course of a strike, taking the context and choices made by the collective actors into consideration (McAdam 1996; Gamson & Meyer 1996).
- 18 Prior research revealed that the 1987 Intifada in Palestine emerged as a spontaneous and sudden outburst of contention as the result of a gradual increase in calls for action and convergence among newspapers representing various political factions regarding a framing process of an opportunity to act contentiously (Alimi 2006). However, social forces have a significant role in constructing the framing of structural conditions (Alimi, Gamson, *et. al.* 2006). For example, the anti-dam movement in Southern Brazil started as a local mobilization with the predominant influence of the progressive

church, but due to changes in the political opportunity structures, aligned with the international environmentalist movement, and adopted an ecology framing (Rothman & Oliver 1999). Another example is provided by the United Mine Workers of America, who, during the strike against Pittston Coal Group in 1989-90, employed a gender frame of mining masculinities to initiate a new nonviolent strike action (Beckwith 2001). The realignment of a gender frame transformed the collective action repertoire from one that relied on conventional strike actions to one that emphasized mass demonstrations and nonviolent protest (2001: 321). The most important contribution of Beckwith's study is that it reveals that collective action framing occurs in the context of practice and experiment, not only for mobilization purposes, but with the aim of demonstrating and teaching particular actions to an already mobilized set of actors. Furthermore, the Pittston strike, Beckwith argues, suggests that established cultural frames may impose themselves upon collective action, and "gender frames may underlie political struggles and collective action choices even in movements where women have little if any political standing" (2001: 322).

III. The Development of a Strike and Feminist Involvement: From "Suprased Workers to Suprased Women"

- 19 The Suprased Strike, in which all except two participants were women, started in September 2007 by the workers organized in the *Petrol İş* Union. It ended in December 2008 with a successful collective agreement, which brought the employer's recognition of representation by the *Petrol-İş* Union. In this section I provide a detailed analysis of the evolution of the strike from a classical unionist perspective to a women's liberation one. It is important to note that despite grievances regarding womanhood (i.e. matrimony permission and pregnancy rotation) expressed by the workers and the union, the strike never rested on a "women's perspective" until the involvement of the feminist movement. The analysis here suggests the factors of frame extension such as *Petrol-İş Kadın*, the women's journal of the organizing union and its editor Necla Akgökçe as a central figure; the celebrations International Women's Day in 2007; and the formation of the Women's Solidarity Platform with Suprased strike were significant in terms of the alignment of the Suprased strike with the discourses of the Turkish feminist movement.
- 20 In the beginning, the Suprased strike was supported solely by the union. Regarding the financial burden of the strike, the union was the main actor in sustaining the strike, with additional support coming from The Confederation of Turkish Labor Union, *Türk-İş*, with which the *Petrol-İş* union is affiliated. Other unions also contributed both in kind and in cash, especially at times of religious festivities. The main discourse of the strike relied on the classical framing of a union, with underlying issues such as the working class struggle, the violation of the right to organize, precarious working conditions, pressure from the employer etc., along with grievances specific to womanhood like matrimony permission, pregnancy rotation, and scorn and harassment on the shop floor. Yet, as we will see, despite the existence of the grievances related to womanhood, the union strategy focused primarily upon the more traditional labor issues motivating the strike, emphasizing the anti-unionist attitude of the management and the concerns over working conditions. However, over the

evolution of the strike, the grievances related to womanhood found a base of resonance among feminist organizations and the wider public, leading to the simultaneous articulation of both feminist and labor concerns.

Sources of Dissent

- 21 Producing blood-sets for dialysis patients at high speed, in a stressful environment at an assembly line under the pressure of the employer, led to grievances that motivated the workers to seek to form a union. They contacted the *Petrol-İş* Union and started organizing, which was an arduous process in itself. It took more than a year for the union to file a certification after the initial contact. The head shop-stewardess Saliha explains:

This was a very long and laborious process. Every night with my older brother we were visiting the girls at their houses after work. We had to convince their parents, if they were living with them or their husbands if they were married. However in the end we were mostly able to persuade them of the necessity of the collective struggle and to join the union. Of course, the management started exerting pressure on us, and tried to convince girls not to join the union in one-to-one meetings. My brother was fired during this organization campaign.

- 22 The issues that specifically concerned the women working at Supramed included the fact that the company management was asking the workers to get its permission to get married. Yet, the most critical issue for many of the women was the pregnancy rotation. Management allowed each worker to get pregnant during a certain time period of two months. If the worker did not get pregnant during her turn, she lost her chance until her next turn. Workers were put in a rotation within which they all had a certain interval to become pregnant, so that the company did not have to give unplanned maternity leave. In general, threatened with being laid off, the workers obeyed this rule, since they wanted to have children without losing their jobs. Hazal says:

I had a baby while I was working here. It was one of the last rotated births. After me, the unionization began, and the management cancelled the pregnancy rotation to appease workers' discontent. We were given two months period. They told me that I could start "working". If you have it, you have it. If not, the turn was passing to someone else. Some of friends were getting into disputes, because they were receiving treatment to get pregnant. There was no way for them to comply with that period" (*Petrol-İş Kadın*, 2006).

- 23 Treatment on the shop floor was also an important factor in motivating the union organizing effort. The women were not allowed to talk to each other. On the assembly line, in order to track whether women talked to each other, the management stopped the usage of masks during the course of work, because they hindered visibility of workers' mouths. In order to prevent the respiratory effects caused by the nature of the work, the management switched to use of a different solution, rather than allow employees to wear masks. The management also oppressed women in terms of using the bathroom during work. Workers were asked to fill in a chart detailing how many times they left for the bathroom and what they did in the bathroom, as well as rewarding the workers who went to the bathroom the least during the day (*Petrol-İş Kadın* 2006). Finally, the management and foremen always had a scornful and harassing attitude towards workers on the shop floor related to their womanhood (*Petrol-İş Kadın*

2007a). A few workers also reported that their friends were called for meetings with manager in order to be “persuaded” not to join the union.

- 24 Although these grievances were always present and expressed by the union and workers themselves, the narrative of the strike was not founded on a gendered perspective. The identity of “woman” had always been secondary to the identity of “worker.” The language of the union was always labor-focused, though never gender-blind. Nonetheless, women workers were at the forefront of expressing grievances with the company, and also had administrative positions within the union itself. During the process of strike, the diffusion of this collective action among women’s organizations helped the Supramed strike become part of the feminist agenda, and subsequently, the framing of the strike expanded in such a way that the articulation of gender concerns became as salient as labor concerns.
- 25 This development could be seen as an example of a change in what Tilly calls “repertoires of contention” (1995) within the Turkish labor movement, since more and more women are involved in the confrontational struggles of trade unions. Tilly defines repertoires as “the established ways in which pairs of actors make and receive claims bearing on each other’s interests” (1995: 43). The articulation of labor and women’s liberation issues in the context of the Turkish labor movement represents a new innovation that, if sustained, could extend the likelihood for mobilization.
- 26 In the following sections, I provide a more detailed analysis of the evolution of the strike over time. The data of this study relies on several sources. I visited the picket-line in May 2007, right after the 1 May Worker’s Day celebrations, in the seventh month of the strike. Before and after the visit, I was in contact with the unionists who were organizing the strike, as well as the head shop-stewardess. Furthermore, I rely on newspaper and Internet coverage of the strike in order to track the changing narrative about and frame extension within the strike. Finally, and most importantly, union’s own women’s journal, *Petrol-İşKadın*, was an exceptionally valuable primary source of information, directly reflecting the daily experiences of the workers. *Petrol-İş Kadın* was central in terms of diffusing the workers’ activism and attracting the feminist organizations in the first place. I have also been in touch with the editor of the journal, who was a significant figure in calling attention to the Supramed strike.

Extension from Labor to Women’s Liberation Struggle

- 27 In this section I first analyze the diffusion process of the strike among feminist organizations, and through them to the wider public. Then, I focus on how the frame extension is reflected in the general narrative of workers themselves about the strike and the conceptualization of it, as well as media coverage of the strike.
- 28 As stated earlier, the strike was run by the *Petrol-İş* Union from a labor issue perspective. Though the pregnancy rotation had always been at the forefront of the statements of the union, as well as of workers, the general frame rested on a labor perspective. Since the factory belonged to a German based multinational, the *Petrol-İş* union initiated an international solidarity campaign. Unions organized in 11 other countries where the multinational PMC runs its operations were active in the campaign, emphasizing the hostile attitude of management towards the entrance of the union to the factory (*Petrol-İş Kadın* 2007a). Supramed, at that time, was the only place out of 12 under the framework of PMC where the workers were not unionized.

- 29 Through the efforts of the German-based union, the socialist deputies brought the issue of the anti-union attitude of Supramed management, especially with reference to the pregnancy rotation, to the floor of European Parliament. Furthermore, during the campaign, the President of ICEM (International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions), with which *Petrol-İş* is affiliated, visited the Supramed factory in early August (*Petrol-İş* 2007c). There was a petition regarding the situation of the Supramed workers sent to the headquarters of the PMC. On the national level, the strike received solidarity visits from other unions, local NGOs, and leftist political parties and political organizations. At the time when I visited the picket line in May 2007, which was right after the initial contact between the involvement of feminists on International Women's Day, the strike was not even within the scope of the political left in general, let alone the interest of the wider public and media coverage.
- 30 Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that the *Petrol-İş* union did a really good job in the maintenance of the strike. Since there was not a union local in Antalya, the workers were organizing within the Mersin Local, another city on the Mediterranean Sea, which is an eight hour drive to the east of Antalya. In response, the union opened an organization bureau in downtown Antalya. A retired worker, Cemil, formerly employed in a battery factory, and who participated in the union struggles of 1970s stepped in to provide guidance and experience to the operation of the strike and the young and inexperienced workers themselves.
- 31 Another crucial issue was the financial burden of the strike. Although most of the women workers were young, and could be seen as secondary breadwinners to their husbands and parents, still they needed the jobs. Every month the union provided some amount of financial support to the striking women. During the religious festivities, the national labor federations, political parties and other unions occasionally visited them, providing moral support, along with donations in kind or in cash.
- 32 Moreover, the union organized the transportation to and from shifts at the picket line. At the shift changes, one of the two male strikers, Mustafa, drove the women from the organization bureau to the picket line, and took those whose shifts were over back. Aliye explains: "No matter what, we try to stay here at picket line with at least three people, the whole day. We come and go here every day in groups. We sit and chat here. Drink our tea. At first the use of bathroom was a problem. However, later they allowed us to use the bathroom in the factory".
- 33 Despite all the efforts by the union, a campaign built on the hostile attitude of the employer against the union and the fact that the factory in Turkey was the single non-unionized one out of 12 countries where PMC runs its operations, did not help to gain the certification by the union. The management was adamant about not letting the union enter the factory, no matter how *Petrol-İş* tried using international pressure both through political and union channels..

The Women's Journal and Diffusion of Strike

- 34 In May 2007, seven months after the strike had begun, the strike was still unknown to the broader public, except for the unions and a few leftist organizations. However, it slowly already started diffusing among feminist circles through *Petrol-İş Kadın*, the women's journal of the union itself, since all official publications of the unions and political parties are distributed among the leftist and feminist circles. This journal has

been published bimonthly as the union's central publication since 2003, focusing on topics such as where class and gender identities overlap, exclusively feminist issues, or gendered aspects of the existing labor and union struggles. *Petrol-İş Kadın* and the editor, Necla Akgökçe, had an important role in the diffusion of the strike to the feminist circles. It was an important means of circulating the news about the women's strike in the political center of Turkey, Istanbul, where progressive and radical politics are primarily located. The feminist organizations received the latest news about the strike through the women's journal of the union, a process that in the end led to the formation of the Women's Solidarity Platform with the Supramed Strike.

- 35 *Filmmor* Women's Cooperative is a women's NGO founded in 2003 aiming to increase women's participation and self-expression in cinema and the media as well as to expand non-sexist representations and experiences of women. Feryal and Güliz learned about the Supramed strike from *Petrol-İş Kadın* and decided to render visibility to the strike (*Petrol-İş Kadın* 2008). In February 2007 they came to Antalya in order to shoot a documentary about the strike. They conducted interviews with workers and their families, and visited the picket line. The documentary they produced was later exhibited for the first time at the celebrations of the first anniversary of the strike and around the country.

International Women's Day: "Violation of Women's Human Rights"

- 36 In 2007, the Supramed strikers gained important visibility at the March 8, International Women's Day celebrations in Istanbul. One of the main slogans of the meeting was "We burnt to death in Bursa; drowned in Ceylanpınar; resisting at Supramed." In addition to the Supramed strike, this slogan referred to the death of five women textile workers burnt to the death in a fire while they were locked in the workshop during the night shift, and to another eight women who drowned in a river after the bus that was bringing them to work was in an accident. At the March 8 celebrations, the Supramed workers were able to share their experiences with the women's organizations and feminists in Istanbul (*Petrol-İş Kadın* 2007b). This was one of the first significant contacts between the Supramed women and Turkish feminist activists. After March 8, a message sent to the "Women's Convention" [*Kadın Kurultayı*] website called Emel Armutçu's, a feminist journalist, attention to the issue. The strike entered the agenda of the mainstream media with the publication of a full-page interview with Supramed workers in the Sunday issue of one of the mainstream newspapers, *Hürriyet*, with a particular focus on the forms of domination related to being women such as pregnancy rotation, marriage permission and bathroom restrictions (Pazartesi 2007: 6). The editor of *Petrol-İş Kadın*, Necla Akgökçe, said that even for her it took two months to realize all strikers were women, pointing to the shift in the narrative of the strike:

It all happened after March 8. The Supramed strikers attended International Women's Day celebration in Istanbul under the banner of "What happens in Supramed is the violation of women's human rights." After this point the discourse of the strike changed. With the support of a few feminist journalists there has been coverage on the mainstream media. After the summer [of 2007] a friend of mine told to me that we should do something about the strike; as feminists. We summoned a meeting, but the attendance was poor. On the second meeting, there were many feminists from various backgrounds. There we founded the Solidarity Platform. Later, more and more people joined the Platform.

Formation of Women's Solidarity Platform with the Supramed Strike

37 These processes enabled the resonance of the strike among women's organizations, and further, by the wider public. Moreover, it led to a more organized intervention of women's organizations and feminists in the Supramed issue. On 3 September 2007, when the first anniversary of the strike (26 September) was approaching, women from a variety of background, representing feminist organizations, NGOs, unions, and political parties formed the Women's Solidarity Platform supporting the Supramed Strike in Istanbul. Soon after, the Platform then expanded to seven other cities around Turkey (Bianet 2007). The Solidarity Platform organized a large-scale campaign in order to render more visibility to the strike during the September 15-25 period, corresponding to its first anniversary. For this purpose, the media and international relations commissions of the Platform worked to call an increasing amount of attention to the strike. Petitions were signed, leaflets were distributed, and solidarity cards were sold to assist the workers financially; at the national level, the strike was brought to the attention of the wider public. Furthermore, the Platform asked for support from women deputies and ministers. Subsequently, the representatives of the pro-Kurdish, Democratic Society Party were present at the forums and meetings that the Platform organized.

On 22 September the Istanbul section of the Platform convened a forum with the main title, "The Patriarchal Face of Capitalism." On the 25th women held a demonstration under the banner of "First Anniversary of Supramed Strike: Women resist against male dominance and capitalism." In fact, it was a farewell festivity. Following the marches, talks and songs, the women departed for Antalya in order to participate in the first-anniversary celebrations. Not only did they participate, but they underscored the narrative of celebrations with the impressive visual presence of their colorful and lively clothing, flags, banners and songs (Pazartesi 2007).

On the same day in Antalya, the first anniversary celebration opened with the documentary of the Supramed strike shot by *Filmör* Women's Cooperative. It continued with a forum titled "Supramed Strike: An Experience of Union Solidarity and Women's Solidarity." In the morning of the 26th, the striking Supramed women and the women from Solidarity Platform around the country had their first opportunity to spend time together. They met outside the free trade zone, along with the women representatives from other trade unions and other political parties (*Petrol-İş* 2007d). Furthermore, a delegation from ICEM – this time from Women's Committee – was present at the celebrations in Antalya to express the support of the international unionism. Later, a group composed of the ICEM Women's Committee, *Petrol-İş* Union Leaders and women from the Solidarity Platform, along with the members of the press entered the zone in order to visit the picket line in front of the factory. Later in the afternoon, the women from the Solidarity Platform and the Supramed workers gathered at an auditorium in order to share their experiences. The Supramed workers told of their one-year old strike experience, and listened to the struggles of the feminist activists (*Petrol-İş* 2007d). At the end of the day, the buses left Antalya towards various cities around Turkey, full of women who had taken part in the closest coalition of women's liberation organizations and workers. From that point on, the trajectory of strike changed dramatically, and opened a new space of resistance in terms of combining labor and women issues for future struggles.

IV. Emergent Collective Identities as Women Workers

- 38 The important thing in the situation described above is that the frame extension of the strike through diffusion processes had contingent effects on the collective identity of the women workers. In other words, the dynamic interplay between the workers and women's organizations led to a new framing of the strike, which also shifted the collective identity of the Supramed strikers. In this context, the specific concerns of the workers' potential base aligned with the feminist narratives (Della Porta & Diani 1999) resulting from the connection built upon by the *Petrol-İş Kadın* women's journal and the March 8 celebrations in Istanbul.
- 39 Hunt and Benford argue that collective identities include a trio of concepts: commitment's emphasis on individuals, the solidarity on collectivities, as well as "highlighting broader, macrosocial structures and dynamics that go beyond movement collectivities" (Hunt & Benford 2004: 450). The evolution of collective action encourages continuous redefinitions of identity (Fantasia 1988), implying that identities never remain static, but constantly take new forms. The processes of constructing a collective identity are an integral component of collective action (Melucci 1995). In this sense, della Porta and Diani (1999) state that identities are constructed through various processes. They emphasize that static, gradational and fixed conceptualizations of identities should be avoided, pointing to the fact that identity is a social process, rather than a property of social actors (1999: 91). Narratives also play important roles for the construction and maintenance of individual and collective identities (Polletta 1998). The collective identities of actors are influenced by the particular contexts and their interactions with other actors as well as how the resonance occurs among related actors (Marx Ferree 2003).
- 40 The interaction between the Supramed workers and the feminist organizations not only shaped the framing of the issue in the public space, but also contributed to the change in the collective identity of the workers themselves, transforming them from "Supramed workers" to "Supramed women," leading to a coalition between the Turkish labor and feminist movements. Although the workers' narratives involved grievances about the reproductive processes of womanhood, they were not systematically articulated as a women's liberation issue. As more and more the workers interacted with the feminist organizations, the public identity of the workers (Johnston *et. al.*: 1994) and the public perception of these workers also started to change in the process. Most importantly this identity was one with which the wider public was sympathetic, in contrast to the stigmatization of women workers employed in the free trade zones that has occurred in other cases (Fuentes & Ehrenreich 1983; Ong 1987; Salzinger 1997: 2000).
- 41 Following the usage of the concept by Fantasia (1988: 17), this new identity is an emergent one in the sense that it is critical and oppositional to the existing worker identity, and raises questions about the patriarchal aspects of capitalist production. In order to show a clearer picture of the change in the collective identity among Supramed workers, consider two quotations from the main shop-stewardess Saliha, who was practically the most important figure among the Supramed women both during the organization of the union and during the strike itself;

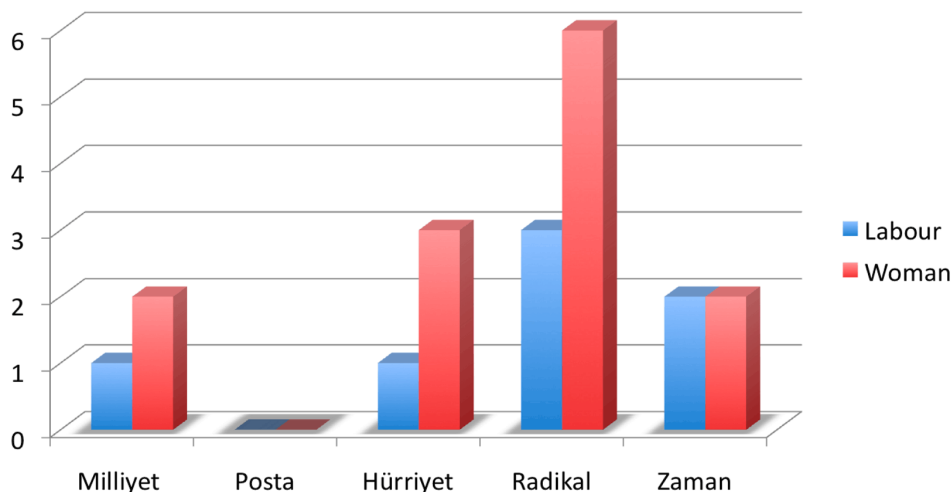
Of course, I want to get married someday and settle down and have children. Yet, it is not the right time for this. Right now we are in the midst of a big struggle. And I

bear a great responsibility against my fellow workers. I am a woman, however here as a shop-steward, I am primarily a worker. And I have to think about maintaining our strike right now. (Personal interview, May 2007)

[Getting in contact with women's organizations] is a very nice thing. Lots of women told us that we were the reason that brought them together. I was proud for us. I hope this cooperation persists. Maybe our strike is over; however women still suffer in other places from other problems. The support of women's organizations earned us publicity and enabled us to conclude the collective agreement. That was crucial for us. I hope this continues in the future. Solidarity is always favorable, and the solidarity of women with women is much more so. (Petrol-İş Kadın, March 2008).

- 42 These two quotations from a central figure of the strike reveal how the identity of the workers became articulated with womanhood over time. The first one is from my personal interview with Saliha, when the diffusion of the strike among feminist circles had not yet occurred. The second quote is from an interview with her conducted four months after the victory of the strike with a successful collective bargaining agreement. The self-identification in the two quotes is significantly different in terms of the relationality of the strike with women's organizations, and how this affected the workers' identity. Furthermore, a projection about the future solidarity between working class women and feminists underscores a new dimension to collective mobilization in a coalition of unions and women's organizations. Since the temporal contexts of the interviews are different, they clearly reveal the change in narrative about the strike by the leading figure herself.
- 43 Newspaper data reveals the impact of the new framing of the issue and the shift in the collective identity. As stated earlier, the strike entered the agenda of mainstream media, as well as that of wider public, after the process of diffusion of the strike among women's organizations. The way the media covered the strike was mostly from a women's perspective, which helped the strike escape being trivialized in the public – something that often happens in the Turkish context. Figure 1 shows the perspective of coverage of the strike by five mainstream newspapers.

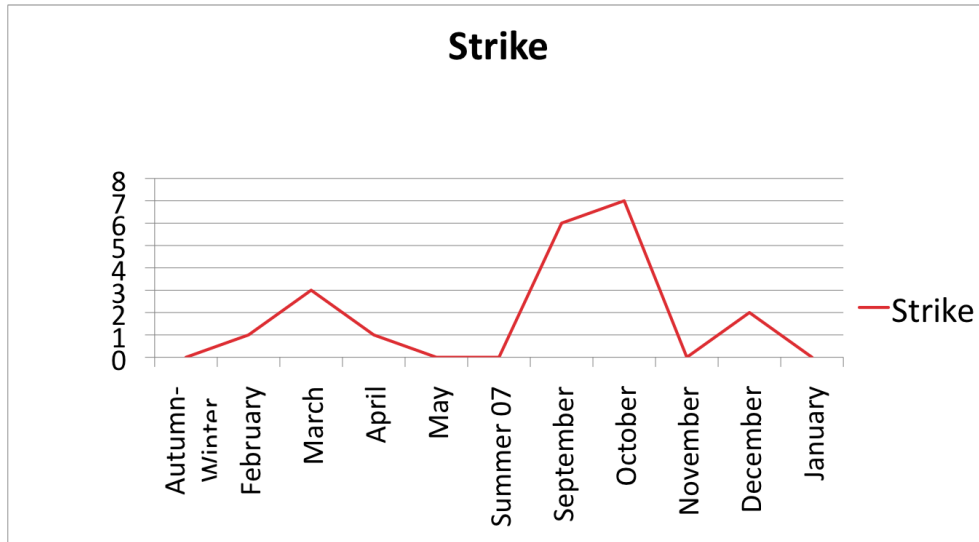
Figure 1: Five Mainstream Newspapers' Coverage of Strike, Labor and Women Perspectives



- 44 More importantly, Figure 2 shows how this coverage of the strike by the mainstream media changed over time as both the labor and women's perspective became analyzed together. The first peak in the graph is related to the March 8 International Women's

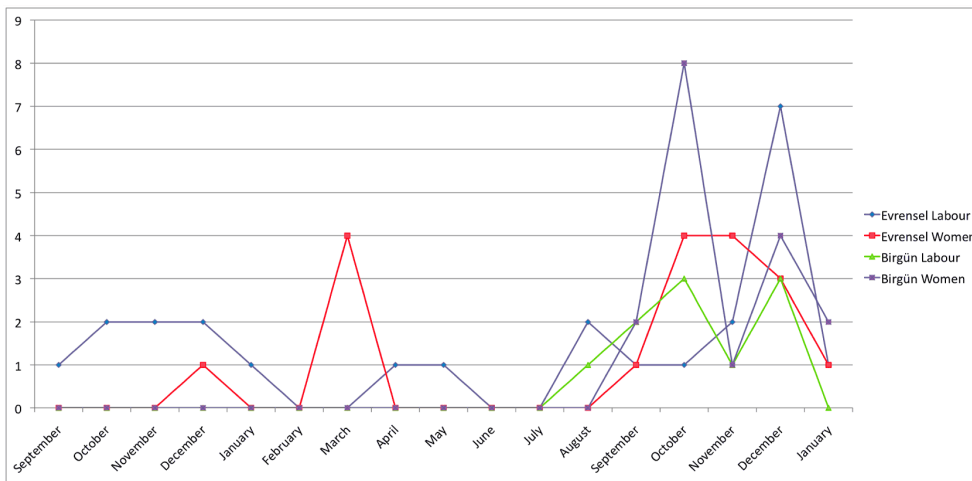
Day celebrations, while the second, larger peak, is the first-anniversary of the strike, and is arguably related to the activism around the Solidarity Platform, followed by the conclusion of the collective bargaining agreement in December.

Figure 2: Labor and Women Perspectives together, the coverage of strike by five mainstream newspapers over time Autumn 2006-January 2008

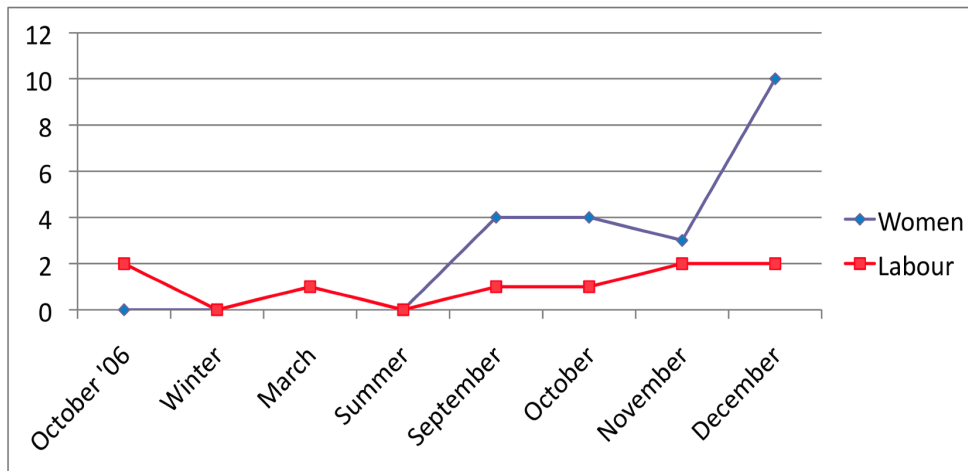


- 45 Even if we look at the two left-wing newspapers (*Birgün* and *Evrensel*), the coverage of the strike differs across time, both in absolute terms as well as in terms of the women’s perspective (Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Two Left Wing Newspapers’ Coverage of Supramed Strike, September 2006- January 2008.



- 46 The coverage of the strike increased during the time of formation of the Solidarity Platform and the campaign initiated by the Platform in September and October 2007. The later increase of coverage in December was, again, related to the conclusion of the collective bargaining agreement between the employer and the *Petrol-İş* Union. Finally, the coverage by the leftist *Bianet* News Portal reveals a similar distribution with peaks at the months of September and October (Fig. 4).

Figure 4: Coverage by the *Bianet* News Portal, October 2006-December 2007

Conclusion

- 47 Can it be argued that the formation of the Women's Solidarity Platform and alignment of the strike as a women's liberation issue caused the victory of the strike? It is impossible to know whether the feminist support, and the identity formation that resulted from this support, led to the strike's success, as there were many other factors involved in the process. However, the workers believed this process was crucial to their success. Moreover, it is clear that the diffusion of the strike among feminists, followed by the strike entering into the agenda of the wider public, and the framing of the strike as a woman's issue, contributed positively to the public identity of these women workers. When the strike ended, the public consensus was that "Supramed Women" had won.
- 48 One factor in the strike's success was the persisting support of the union in terms of sustaining the strike despite the weakness of the union movement in general and financial burden of the strike, including the enabling the international support and pressure on the employer. Furthermore, the dependence of the employer on the workers, expressed by the workers themselves, could have also been a contributing factor. Nagehan says: "After we went on strike, they had to reduce the shifts from three to two. The management hired 60 new people; however they could not meet the necessary orders. We heard that more and more products are returned because of the poor performances of the newcomers. They need us. We are going to win this, sooner or later. We all believe this will happen."
- 49 Yet, the purpose of this paper is not necessarily to identify the specific causes for the success of this strike. Rather, my focus has been the analysis of how the process of aligning labor and women's liberation issues contributed to the emergence of a new collective identity of women workers, which relies on a narrative of struggle against capitalism along with the patriarchal aspect of production relations. More importantly my focus has been on *how* this identity emerged rather than *what* it is. It goes without saying that this identity has an aspect of differentiation of the female workers' experiences from those of male workers. In this sense, this case study fits with the existing literature on the feminization of labor and the emergent collective identities of

women. However, in this case, the public identity of the female workers was not stigmatized in a negative way as a threat to the “traditional familial values,” “easy women” or “stealers of men’s jobs”; on the contrary the emphasis placed on womanhood increased the visibility of the workers in the public eye, which arguably contributed to the success of the strike in the end.

- 50 The story of movements is, della Porta and Diani argue, “the story of the ability of their members to impose certain images of themselves” (1999: 92). The image of the Supramed workers as “striking women” differed from the usual collective identities of struggling workers. I argue that this identity formed over time as a result of a mutual interplay between the workers and women’s organizations. The workers did not learn to give a feminist flavor to their worker identity, but through contingent processes the strike found resonance among feminists. The dynamic interaction between the workers and women’s organizations led to a the articulation of a new female worker identity, constructed as a consequence of diffusion processes through the women’s journal of the union, the March 8 celebrations, and the formation of the Solidarity Platform. This newly emerging identity has the potential to be sustained over time, and result in the mobilization of more women workers around these lines, and may lead to interaction in other experiences, depending on how the diffusion processes take place.
- 51 Finally, this study suggests an important issue for the Turkish feminist movement in general. On the day of the conclusion of the collective agreement, the editor of the *Petrol-İş Kadın Journal*, Necla Akgökçe said:
- It is very important that this result is achieved. I am so happy! The union never stepped back throughout the process, it insisted on its point. The role of women’s liberation movement was very influential in this process. To reach an agreement with the employer was unlikely. However women’s organizations claimed the resistance of women workers, rendered visibility to this struggle in the media, chased this and brought it to an end. After a long time the women’s movement cooperated with women workers, and proved a great solidarity with them. Women’s organizations realized that the female workers are also part of the women’s movement; this was colossal. (*Uçan Süpürge* 2007)
- 52 This raises important questions for the future study of the feminist movement in terms what can be learned from the relationship with female workers. The issue of particular importance is whether the feminist movement will be able to bring the worker back into its agenda, particularly in a context where the participation of female labor in non-agricultural sectors, both service and manufacturing, has increased dramatically. In order to maintain the newly emerging collective identity, the coalition of the Turkish feminist and labor movements should be extended to other sites of collective action. One way to accomplish this may be through the analysis of various experiences of women workers’ struggles in order to encourage the future study of women as part of the Turkish working class.

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NOTES

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2. As part of the discussion on strategic processes of framing with a deliberative, utilitarian and goal-directed initiative, Snow et al. (1986) and Snow and Benford (2000) introduced these four frame alignment processes. In short, frame bridging refers to the linking two or more congruent but unconnected frames; frame amplification means clarification or invigoration of existing values or beliefs; frame extension is the extension of frame beyond its primary interests and articulation with another issue; finally, the frame transformation refers to alteration of old meanings and generating new ones.

RÉSUMÉS

Framing, in social movement studies, has been conceptualized as a strategic attempt of movement actors to make claims that resonate within the existing context. This led to criticisms of the framing approach for having a descriptive bias and static tendencies, as well as for lacking systematic empirical studies. Linking framing theories with the diffusion and identity formation processes, this paper develops a theoretical understanding of the framing approach with more space for contingency and relationality. Relying on a case study on the Suprmed strike in a free trade zone context in Antalya, Turkey, where all but two workers were women, I analyze the frame extension of the strike from a classical unionist narrative towards a women's liberation one. The main purpose of the paper is to understand how the collective identity of "working women" was constructed through the diffusion process and feminist activists' involvement with the strike. I argue that the frame extension to a women's liberation perspective took place as a result of mutual and dynamic interaction between women workers and feminist organizations, which was contingent upon various factors, such as the women's journal of the union organized in the factory; the March 8 International Women's Day celebrations, which provided the initial contact between the workers and feminists; and the formation of the Women's Solidarity Platform.

INDEX

Keywords : identity, women, Trade Unionism, trade unions in Turkey, strike

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