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Social Reproduction: Intra-household Relations, Organizational Initiatives and Public Policies

The political economy of women's cooperatives in Turkey: A social reproduction perspective

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Abstract

The article analyzes the viability of women's participation in women's cooperatives in Turkey. The prospects are evaluated by focusing on the sustainability of the cooperatives' economic activities as well as the recruitment and continued participation of individual women members. Taking a feminist social reproduction perspective, the article seeks to understand the underlying dynamics of women's participation in cooperatives, as this perspective enables us to analyze this participation as a process and captures the permeability between women's social reproduction duties, women's relationship with the state, and the economic market. Based on countrywide, semi-structured in-depth interviews with members of women's cooperatives in Turkey, we find that familial constraints as well as governmental policies and practices challenge women's economic development aspirations in the cooperatives, while social class deeply informs the challenges faced as well as the resources available to and strategies developed by women. The resulting analysis demonstrates that familial, social, and political issues related to social reproduction need to be addressed prior to focusing on the impact of cooperatives on women's empowerment. This is essential to ensuring the success of women's cooperatives and the continued provision of meaningful opportunities for women's participation.

KEYWORDS

familial constraints, social class, social reproduction, the state, Turkey, women's cooperatives

10-12 people, we had learnt to dream.

President of a women's cooperative in Adiyaman, Turkey

1 | INTRODUCTION

This study looks at the factors that determine the sustainability of women's participation in women's cooperatives, drawing on interviews with members of women's cooperatives throughout Turkey. Sustainability of participation refers both to the ability of the cooperatives to maintain themselves over time as economically viable entities, as well as the possibility for individual women to sustain their social and economic participation within the cooperatives. While there is an extensive body of literature that focuses on cooperative degeneration and resilience (e.g., Bretos et al., 2020; Cornforth, 1995; Langmead, 2016), research on women-run cooperative sustainability and degeneration remains to be missing, which is a gap that this research attempts to address.

This study utilizes the dynamic, multifaceted, and broad lens provided by social reproduction feminism. Instead of treating the relationship between women's participation in cooperatives and their prospects for economic empowerment¹ as a bivariate one, we analyze the multiplicity of factors that influence women's participation in cooperatives and focus on the viability of women's economic activities within these cooperatives. Hence, we do not treat the emergence of the cooperatives and women's participation in them as given and instead problematize the possibility of these cooperatives to materialize as well as women's economic activities to sustain them. As we will show, such sustainability is in itself an enormous challenge given the struggle that most cooperatives endure to survive and the related difficulties women face to continue their own efforts in these cooperatives.

Introducing a social reproduction perspective to the study of women's participation in cooperatives provides a much-needed analytical depth. As will be discussed further below, the existing literature on women's cooperatives and the one on women's empowerment treat women's participation in the cooperatives as an independent variable and women's empowerment as the end result (Bacon, 2010; Datta & Gailey, 2012; Dohmworth & Liu, 2020; Jones et al., 2012; Majee & Hoyt, 2011; Oberhauser & Pratt, 2004; Peterson, 2014). For instance, Datta and Gailey (2012) show how women's participation in the Lijjat cooperative in India affected women's empowerment in the fields of economic security, entrepreneurship, and contributions to the family. Complementary to the existing studies, we propose that it is essential to first problematize the participation of women in cooperatives in a process-oriented way, with a focus both on their entry into the cooperatives as well as on familial, social, and political issues related to social reproduction. A social reproduction perspective helps us understand the common and varying challenges faced and the strategies developed by women during their experiences with the cooperatives that influence the prospect of their future in the cooperatives. Such a perspective, for example, helps us understand the intricacies of the attitudes of governmental agencies and regulations in their treatment of women's cooperatives, as well as enables us to make better sense of the varying degrees of women's participation and success in the cooperatives as they relate to their reproductive duties at home. Through our analysis, we show how women's social reproduction duties at home and within their families—along with their work and organizational capacities in the cooperatives—are intertwined with state policies, resulting in the treatment of women as the primary undertakers of social reproduction duties both by family members and by state actors, thereby diminishing their prospects of participation in the economic realm, as evident in the case of women's cooperatives. We demonstrate how familial arrangements around social reproduction duties, governmental policies revolving around the perception of women as undertakers of social reproduction, as well as the production relationships in which women are embedded due to their class backgrounds, influence their chances of participation in cooperatives and the cooperatives' subsistence. Failing to engage with this stage would leave the analysis of the potential of women's cooperatives to enhance women's empowerment incomplete, as it makes it impossible to address the fundamental barriers women face.

In what follows, we first provide the theoretical framework of our study. We then present the research setting and context and our data collection and analysis process. Next, we move to the findings of our analysis. We conclude by discussing the empirical and theoretical implications as well as the contributions of our findings.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this article, we follow the conceptualization of social reproduction, as elaborated by the feminist literature on social reproduction. Social reproduction entails biological reproduction (childbirth), the reproduction of the labor force (including subsistence, education, and training), and the reproduction of the social practices that meet human needs (Laslett & Brenner, 1989; Bakker, 2003a, p. 3, 2003b, p. 32; Bakker, 2015, p. 137). As Luxton (2006, p. 35) argues, social reproduction theory helps feminist political economy conceive “how states, markets, and households all interact in the daily and generational reproduction of an international labor force.” The interrelated nature of productive and reproductive processes informs the structure of the remainder of this article.

As Bhattacharya (2017, p. 2) maintains, social reproduction feminism moves away from the mainstream emphasis on visible facts in order to create room for processes. This point is also evident in social reproduction feminism's approach to a “worker at the gates of her workplace.” Social reproduction feminism does not approach this worker as a finished entity, but rather “interrogates the complex network of social processes and human relations that produces the conditions of existence for that entity.” In a similar vein, we agree with Arslan (2021, pp. 17–18) that we also need to analyze the mutually constructive nature of productive and reproductive labor for women from a holistic and relational perspective.

A social reproduction perspective helps us understand the everyday realities faced by women and develop a more process-oriented approach to organization and work in general, and women's cooperatives in particular. Crucially, we do not conceptualize women's lives as divided into domestic and public spheres but instead demonstrate how these two sites are permeable—as far as women's lives are concerned—since women working in these cooperatives can never leave one behind when entering the other. Women constantly negotiate and develop survival strategies in order to balance their existence in each domain. As Bakker (2015, p. 147) argues, “the daily realities of women and men as they experience the intersections of social reproduction, production and finance would go a long way toward ‘re-embedding’ economics in society.”

The perspective provided by social reproduction feminism provides us with an excellent point of entry into the study of women's cooperatives. While existing studies on women's cooperatives underline many gains for cooperative members, such as increased access to and control over economic resources; psycho-social enhancements such as higher self-confidence; enhanced vision of the future; improved status in social circles; as well as betterment in organizational capabilities and skills (Bacon, 2010; Cinar et al., 2021; Datta & Gailey, 2012; Deji, 2005; Dohmworth & Liu, 2020; Eccarius-Kelly, 2006; Ferguson & Kepe, 2011; Jones et al., 2012; Onyejekwe, 2001; Peterson, 2014; Özdemir, 2013), they initiate the relationship between cooperatives and empowerment from the “women at the gates of her cooperative” to follow Bhattacharya's succinct formulation. However, we believe that it is vital to understand the preceding factors that determine the chances of women's long-term participation in the cooperatives to begin with. By focusing on social reproduction duties assigned to women by their families and the state—and contextualizing these constraints through a focus on women's survival strategies in the workforce informed by their social class—we can both make better sense of the commonalities and variations we see among women in their struggle to succeed in the cooperatives and we can also unearth the fundamental barriers in the way of the broader goal of women's empowerment.

The lack of attention to social reproduction in the women's cooperatives literature can partially be attributed to the partition of dominant research programs into the study of the global South and the global North. As Rai (2013, p. 278) points out, while the gender and political economy literature, which mostly focuses on issues in the North, is concerned with “conditions of work, equality of wages, domestic work, or migrant workers in the domestic

and sex industries" approached from a macro-perspective, the gender and development literature, which is dominant in the studies of the South, does not contain much reference to the issues of accumulation and social reproduction and instead focuses on "individual states of the South as case studies for specific development issues such as food production, violence against women, or conditions of work in Export Processing Zones" from a micro-perspective. Since the women's cooperatives literature mostly operates within the gender and development approach, it is rare to see studies that link the broader issues tackled by social reproduction feminism in the literature on cooperatives. Some recent works on women's cooperatives (Bonnar-White et al., 2013; Dohmworth & Liu, 2020; Oberhauser & Pratt, 2004; Stephen, 2005) offer a developmentalist perspective, focusing on ways in which women's cooperatives contribute to women's empowerment. Another recent body of literature on women's cooperatives (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Morgan & Winkler, 2020; Nair & Moolakkattu, 2015; Meier zu Selhausen, 2016) acknowledges patriarchy as an impediment against women, yet it fails to account for the organic ties between women's social reproduction duties, their works, and the state structures under which they operate.

Our analysis of the Turkish case can be viewed as an attempt to further the efforts of variegated social reproduction theory (Bakker, 2020; Bakker & Gill, 2019), which strives to understand "the historical and ontological variability of social reproduction—and its specific differentiations and varieties in contemporary globalized capitalism—stemming from concrete social, cultural, ecological and material practices and structures" (Bakker & Gill, 2019, p. 503). It is crucial to make sense of these variations and to understand how social reproduction operates within different contexts without losing sight of the common forces at play, case studies (Bakker, 2020, p. 167) and the study of cases "which have been relatively underexposed within English language social reproduction analysis" (Bakker & Gill, 2019, p. 512). The Turkish case provides a good opportunity to delve into the experiences of the global South which exhibit important similarities with those of the global North yet also differ from their Northern counterparts in terms of their engagement with the capitalist system and the forms of state involvement experienced (Arslan, 2021, p. 3).

The feminist political economy perspective embeds women's existence in the capitalist system and into its political, economic, and social context, and the social reproduction approach provides us with an unobstructed, continuous view of women's conditions in the workforce and organizational capacity, specifically within the context of women's cooperatives. Under neoliberalism, gender serves as "a fundamental organizing principle of the interrelated spheres of production and reproduction" based on deep-seated assumptions regarding natural differences between men and women (Budgeon, 2019, p. 1150; Walby, 2011). This, compounded by the patriarchy embedded in the conservative context, means that the existence of women in the public sphere can never be understood independently from their existence and status at the domestic level as far as the current conditions are concerned. Relatedly, the strategies women develop in order to prosper in the workplace cannot also be thought of in isolation from the domestic realm. These are closely tied with the familial constraints that are shaped in relation to women's domestic social reproduction duties, such as raising children and feeding and caring for family members, as will be shown in this article.

The second factor interfering with women's economic prospects and their participation in the cooperatives—as well as the very fate of the cooperatives' survival chances—is governmental policies and regulations. As a result, we discuss how neoliberalism and conservatism under the current rule in Turkey jointly contribute to the image of women as sole providers of social reproduction, which leads to unfavorable treatment of the women's cooperatives and their members by governmental officials, diminishing the economic prospects of both the cooperatives and their members. One of the main contributions of this study starts by taking the state seriously, not just as the enforcer of market dictates but also as the conveyor and propagator of ideas and norms. The relevant literature mostly focuses on the material role states play in regulating gender in the economic realm. Elias and Roberts (2018, p. 792) for example, aptly point to the role states play in "mediating the relations between markets and households." They note that in different times and places, states have either shouldered the cost of social reproduction or imposed this cost onto families, and particularly onto women. They also remind us of other ways in which social reproduction, state policies, and the dynamics of global capitalism interact. To this analysis, we want to add that the states' role in the relationship between production, reproduction, and gender goes beyond the spectrum of economic decisions made by the state, ranging from Keynesianism to full-blown neoliberalism. As our discussion of the Turkish case reveals, the capitalist

concerns of state actors are complemented by their worldviews, cultural codes, ideologies, as well as motivations of deriving legitimacy and gaining consent.

The fact that most of the literature focuses largely on economic motivations when explaining the role of the state in regulating the relationship between the market and the citizens can perhaps best be explained by the fact that most cases analyzed in the social reproduction literature are from the global North and in most of these cases, we see the hegemony of liberal patriarchy, in which women are treated as neutral citizens in the public and their burden in the private sphere is omitted or left unproblematicized (Pateman, 1988). The Turkish case is far from this conceptualization, as the existing literature shows (Buğra & Yakut-Çakar, 2010; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011). As Buğra (2014, p. 153) argues, “the conservative outlook, which translates sexual difference into socially defined gender roles...manifests itself in a particular understanding of the way in which women and men should be positioned in society, in both spatial and economic terms.” Not only do structural and material configurations thus shape gender relations, but assumptions and hegemonic norms regarding the gender order also shape material relations, as we demonstrate in the context of women's cooperatives in Turkey. Hence, we would like to add to Laslett and Brenner's (1989, p. 400) call to incorporate gender into macrosociological theory and our own call to incorporate gender into macropolitical analysis.

Women are not passive observers of the processes that affect their productive and reproductive efforts but are actively engaged on various fronts (Le Baron & Roberts, 2010, p. 38). As Daskalaki et al. (2021) and Mohanty (2003) argue, uncovering the coping strategies that women deploy reveals the agency, power, and resistance of women. In our analysis, we pay close attention to the tactics and strategies developed by women against the compound challenges of market forces, patriarchy, and state policies. We agree with Nunn and Tepe-Belfrage (2019) regarding the crucial role played by “extant inequalities of accumulated and dynamic resources—some of which are material and some of which are at once ethereal and embodied in the concrete laboring capacities of individuals.” We find that the challenges faced and strategies developed closely relate to the resources at hand for different groups of women. These resources (material, intellectual, etc.) are strongly informed by the social class background of the women, as will be discussed as the third finding of this study. While the existing studies on social reproduction mostly focus on homogenous groups of women, in terms of class, occupation, or educational background (e.g., Lupu, 2012), we trace how variation not only in social class but also, relatedly, in occupational background, rural/urban divide, and level of education, affects women's chances of sustaining their economic activities in the cooperatives.

In light of these observations, this study is concerned with finding out the key factors that affect the viability of women's economic activities in the cooperatives. The theoretical framework discussed above informs our analysis of the interviews conducted with the members of women's cooperatives, details of which are provided below.

3 | METHODOLOGY

In this section, we discuss the details of our research design including our data collection and analysis process. As will be seen, our fieldwork significantly shaped the end result of this work, not only in terms of the empirical findings but also in terms of the theoretical framework that helped us make sense of the themes that emerged in the interviews.

3.1 | Research setting and context: Women's cooperatives in Turkey

The first women's cooperatives in Turkey were established in 1999 (Duguid et al., 2015, p. 16). The most recent data available, based on a World Bank report, show that 63 women's cooperatives were active and in operation in Turkey in 2005 (Ibid, p. 162). However, following the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey and the emergency rule declared in the aftermath of the coup, numerous women's cooperatives, especially in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, were closed down. While some economic incentives were introduced by several governments in Turkey, such as

exemptions on notary fees (Okan & Okan, 2013, p. 41), women's cooperatives in Turkey are still struggling in many regards. Existing research specifically underlines financial and social challenges in these cooperatives. Yet, scholarly works also highlight the "important impact of women's cooperatives on individuals, households, and communities around Turkey" (Cinar et al., 2021; Duguid et al., 2015; p. 17).

The broader political framework will be helpful in putting the case at hand in context. The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), which has been in power since 2002, fervently adopted neoliberalism, which first gained ground in Turkey following the 1980 military coup (Erman & Hatiboğlu, 2017, p. 1287; Arslan, 2021, p. 7). The AKP introduced policies, practices, and discourses that made labor more insecure, decreased public provisions, and increased the social reproduction burden on women, pushing them into insecure and home-based jobs (Acar & Altunok, 2013; Arslan, 2021; Buğra, 2012). Similar to the global trend (Chant, 2013; p. 15; Roberts, 2016), neoliberal economic conditions forced many women in Turkey to participate in the workforce without any reduction in their domestic duties.

The global neoliberal trend is experienced more severely by women in neo-conservative settings where "progress toward gender equality is less firmly grounded and the achievements of the women's movement can be more easily opened to renegotiation" (Buğra, 2014, p. 149). Neoliberalism and neoconservatism, both AKP-sanctioned policies, provide a combined assault on women's rights in Turkey (Buğra & Keyder, 2006; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011; Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017) and consolidate "the dependent status of women, informed by the perception of women as natural care providers" (Kandiyoti, 2016, pp. 106-107). Neoliberalism aligns perfectly with conservatism in enabling neopatrimonialism (Ugur-Cinar, 2017) and the instrumentalization of women's reproductive capacities as a way of fostering population growth (Acar & Altunok, 2013, p. 16) and deflecting social duties (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011; Yilmaz, 2015).

3.2 | Data collection and data sources

For this research, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with members of women's cooperatives across Turkey in 2017. We prepared open-ended questions so as not to lead our participants about the content of their responses. We aimed to let our participants have their own voice regarding the opportunities and obstacles they faced in the process of founding the cooperatives and/or participating in them. We also wanted to hear their experiences regarding the consequences of their involvement in the cooperatives (please see Appendix A for our interview questions).

It was particularly helpful to conduct our correspondences with our participants via in-depth interviews, as these interviews provide women with the opportunity to express their views in their own ways, while at the same time providing a structure that could ensure some standardization across interviews so as to derive comparable inferences to discern broader patterns at work. Our sampling strategy was non-random, purposive, and maximum variation sampling. This sampling strategy ensures that the selection of cases and participants reflect the larger population of women's cooperatives in Turkey as well as the key social cleavages (Islamist-secularist, Sunni-Alevi, and Turkish-Kurdish) and main political inclinations in the country.

We conducted in-depth interviews throughout Turkey in 23 women's cooperatives. While we contacted more than one women's cooperative in the three biggest metropolitan cities in Turkey (5 women's cooperatives in Ankara, 3 in Istanbul, and 4 in Izmir), we also conducted fieldwork in Eskişehir (Central Anatolia) (1), Konya (Central Anatolia) (2), Hatay (Southern Mediterranean) (1), Gaziantep (South-Eastern Anatolia) (1), Adıyaman (South-Eastern Anatolia) (2), Mardin (South-Eastern Anatolia) (1), Zonguldak (Western Black Sea Region) (1), Trabzon (Eastern Black Sea Region) (1), and Artvin (Eastern Black Sea Region) (1) (Numbers in parentheses show the number of interviews in each city). Based on the most recent data on women's cooperatives in Turkey, we can state that we report findings based on at least one-third (or close to half) of all active women's cooperatives in Turkey. Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of our research sites.

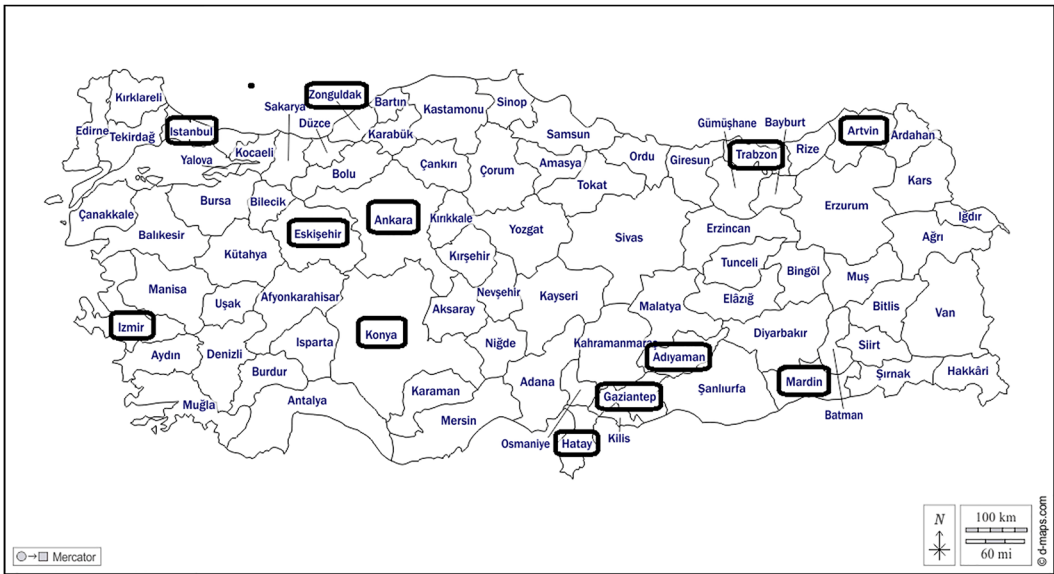


FIGURE 1 Fieldwork Map. Marked provinces show the localities in which we conducted our fieldwork. Map source: D-Maps.

In nine of these research sites, we were able to conduct group interviews with multiple members of women's cooperatives assuming different positions in the cooperatives. Individual interviews lasted around an hour, while group interviews lasted around 2–3 h. At least two members of our research team (all co-authors of this article) attended the interviews.

Detailed information about our interviewees and the area of production of their cooperative and members' social class and age range (Appendix B) shows that we have a diverse and representative sample of interviews and women's cooperatives for the Turkish case (cf. Duguid et al., 2015).² In our sampling, we also took into account global trends and the sectoral distribution of women's cooperatives around the globe (cf. Datta & Gailey, 2012; Ferguson & Kepe, 2011).

3.3 | Procedure and analysis

In order to provide a coherent and compelling interpretation of the data (Braun et al., 2019), we followed an iterative process (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006; Levitt et al., 2018; Meliou, 2020). We conducted a thematic analysis, in which we developed initial themes in light of “prior and emergent theory” and then went back and forth between primary data and existing scholarship in an attempt to analyze data and provide novel theoretical insights from the data (Riessman, 2008, pp. 54, 66, 74). The data analysis was thus abductive, as it moved “back and forth between theory and empirical data” (Wodak, 2004, p. 200). We tried to examine the subjective descriptions of the experiences of our participants “to analyze data by identifying patterns tied to instances of a phenomenon and then developing a sense of the whole phenomenon as informed by those patterns” (Levitt et al., 2018, p. 27).

Initially, our questions were structured around two related themes in light of the extant literature: women's self-understanding of women's empowerment (cf. Goldman & Little, 2015; Janssens, 2009; Kabeer, 1999; Moghadam, 1996) and the role of women's cooperatives in women's empowerment (cf. Cinar et al., 2021; Datta & Gailey, 2012; Ferguson & Kepe, 2011; Jones et al., 2012; Koutsou et al., 2009; Majee & Hoyt, 2011; Oberhauser & Pratt, 2004). However, once we started interviewing women, we realized that the stories women told us were mostly

focused on the challenges they faced in keeping their cooperatives running and in being able to meaningfully participate in the activities of the cooperatives. The data concentrated on issues related to the domestic realm, the interaction of women with governmental actors and policies, as well as the women's social background. We were able to flesh out the subthemes of these broader themes as we were reading and discussing our findings amongst ourselves. These included, for example, the burden of taxes, childrearing as an impediment to cooperative participation, and the pressure for home-based production.

Due to the interpretive and context-dependent nature of our inquiry, we did not use a strict coding mechanism. Instead, we followed an alternative method to ensure reliability and validity: first, after having familiarized themselves with the transcripts, in a round-table meeting, all of the four researchers of this study deliberated over the interview transcripts in order to determine the major themes in the data, based on the relevant literature. Then, the researchers had at least two rounds of independent reading of the transcripts to go over the data to critically assess the determined themes. Following this process, the researchers had a second round-table meeting to discuss the potential findings. This procedure enhanced the reliability of the research findings.

As a result of this analytical process, we concluded that our empirical findings necessitated a theoretical framework that could help us make sense of our observations. The extant literature on feminist political economy and social reproduction theory proved to be immensely valuable in this regard. We delved deeply into those bodies of literature in order to make sense of our empirical findings conceptually and theoretically. Thanks to this iterative approach, we were able to align our data, methodology, and theoretical framework and address the issue of validity. In the presentation of the data, we provide emblematic quotes to provide illustrative examples and to substantiate our arguments regarding themes and patterns (Riessman, 2008, p. 55).

4 | FINDINGS

This section shares the findings of the interviews in terms of the main factors that influence the viability of women's long-term participation in the cooperatives. During our fieldwork, we were struck by the number of cooperatives that were either shut down or at the brink of shutting down, and those that were in the process of liquidation. We also heard story after story of how women strived to keep their cooperatives alive while simultaneously trying to pursue their own economic interests in the cooperatives. We found that three intertwining factors are especially significant in determining the possibilities for women to continue their economic efforts in cooperatives. These are familial constraints, governmental policies and practices, and the social class background of the cooperative members. These factors are closely held together through social reproduction dynamics, as will be discussed below.

4.1 | Familial constraints: Social reproduction duties and participation in the activities of women's cooperatives

I became a mother when I was 17. I had one child after another. I was overwhelmed and was not able to open my eyes before I raised them.

(Cooperative Member, Konya)

When the taxes became unbearable, we thought 'if everyone asks their husbands, that would mean 300–400 liras per person.' But women could not ask their husbands. The husband will say 'What happened, three days ago you were defying me, and now you are asking for money?'

(Cooperative Member, Ankara)

As evident in the quotes above, domestic social reproduction duties were constantly in the minds of the women we interviewed. In Eskişehir, we were told that the members' husbands expected them to have dinner ready before leaving for their jobs. One member told us that she bought a pack of cigarettes for her husband every time she expected to be late home. This was her way of "bribing" her husband or compensating for her absence from social reproduction duties while she was working. Another member of the same cooperative stated:

My husband cannot do a thing in the house without me. I was away for two days for cooperative work. Before I left the house, I had turned on the dishwasher to have clean dishes for my husband. After I returned, I realized that the clean dishes were still in the dishwasher. My husband did not bother to take the dishes from the washer for two full days and waited for me to do it!

(Cooperative Member, Eskişehir)

These women, like some other older women who were done raising their kids, had comparatively more room for maneuver. Those who could afford to arrive home a little late or stay away for a couple of days to deal with their work still had to assume most (if not all) of the burden of the household duties.

On the other hand, younger women, especially those with young children or whose in-laws have a say in their lives, had to put up with higher expectations of social reproduction duties on the part of family members. We were told that, as a result of the pressure from their families, many young women had to leave their jobs in the cooperatives. In an illustrative example, a member of the women's cooperative in the peripheries of Ankara stated that:

We had got in touch with every woman in our district [ilçe]. We had gone to every village in the district, got in contact with every local headperson [muhtar]. We had explained how cooperatives worked and how we could work together as a women's cooperative. The initial response was great: we attracted 33 members. However, family members and household duties have mostly stood in our way. Many husbands, mothers-in-law, other family members objected to the idea that a woman would be working outside at a cooperative. As a result, our membership has dropped to 13 members. We still work together, but with fewer members.

(Cooperative Member, Ankara)

The head of an Istanbul cooperative told us that her husband said that she should raise her children first and then she could work. When we asked her why women left the cooperative, she told us that some had new children or grandchildren and had to look after them and some got married. Many other women told us that they were only able to join the cooperative once they had raised the kids. Similarly, the KEDV (the Foundation for the Support of Women's Work)³ representative of Izmir stressed the need for the availability of day-care at the women's cooperatives. She stated that:

All of the women's cooperatives have to have day-care centers for the members' kids. Elderly women are mostly done with those duties but young women are not. A young woman could and should come here with her kid and join us. It is the only way to ensure young women's participation.

(KEDV Representative, Izmir)

The head of a woman's cooperative in Ankara seconded the urgent need for day-care centers at the women's cooperatives. She stated that:

I wish we had the money to have a day-care centre for our members' children. We would then be able to tell them 'You could come and join us. You could bring your kids!'. We should definitely have affirmative action policies for women's cooperatives. For instance, women's cooperatives in Italy not

only have their day-care centers, but they also operate many day-care centers throughout the country. It should exactly be the case for our country too.

(Cooperative Chair, Ankara)

All members of the cooperatives recognized that cultural and institutional norms assign women primarily social reproduction duties and see them as primarily familial beings. The reactions to this perception differed widely across cooperatives. Some tried to educate women to change the relationship with their husbands and families. A cooperative in Ankara, for example, educated women through academics and civil society actors so that some left abusive marriages, whereas others changed some of the terms of their relationships with their husbands. Many members of women's cooperatives underlined the importance of solidarity networks within the cooperatives to help women escape from these abusive marriages. For instance, the chair of a women's cooperative in Eskişehir stated that:

Many women faced problems when they decided to join our cooperative, many had major arguments with their husbands. I told them: 'Gals, do not fret! If your husbands kick you out from your houses, I will let you in and this cooperative will be your new home.'

(Cooperative Chair, Eskişehir)

A cooperative in Izmir also tried to raise consciousness by asking its members to make a budget that makes the value of women's social reproductive work more visible. As a result, a member of the cooperative said:

For years, I had an inferiority complex because I thought I was not contributing to the family budget but it turns out, I made a monthly contribution of around 5000 liras.

(Cooperative Member, Izmir)

Another cooperative in Ankara made a schedule for the members to be at the cooperative taking turns, to make sure that women would physically leave the confines of their homes. In a cooperative in Istanbul, members also stressed the importance of physically coming to work. In most of the cooperatives, the type of production necessitates certain machinery or workshops, which ensures that women come to the cooperatives for production.

In more conservative cooperatives, women tried to work within the confines of the patriarchal family system. For instance, in a cooperative in Konya, the president told us that their cooperative prided itself on not interfering with the 'familial role of their members.' She stated that most of their members prepared their products from home and brought the products to them when needed. A member of the cooperative stated that they were determining their own working hours. The president then added that they were doing their best not to make women work till late in order not to disturb the family routines. She said that⁴:

For example, if a woman has a little child, they will be deprived. So, we give the work to her home. This is both profitable and logical. Our mayor [the patron of this cooperative] also thinks the same way.

(Cooperative Chair, Konya)

The very nature of the women's cooperatives also transformed some of the women's relationships between social reproduction duties and labor. In a cooperative in Eskişehir, interviewees told us that solidarity among the members encouraged them to relax their relationships with the family. Over time, most of the members' husbands got used to the fact that their wives worked at these cooperatives. Also, in an Ankara cooperative, the head of the cooperative told us that families were more willing to send women to work in women's cooperative since these places were composed of all-women. In many cases (in Hatay, Mardin and Izmir, for instance), women had to fight their way

but when they started earning money, their husbands started to accept the situation. For instance, the chair of a women's cooperative in Hatay stated that:

Women's cooperatives have a potentially very positive and transformative role for their members. Our members are not well-educated and socioeconomically privileged. Yet, many have started to feel more confident, observe positive changes at their homes, become more visible in social life, enhance their statuses in life. We see ourselves as a catalyst for our members and their potential.

(Cooperative Chair, Hatay)

One should be careful not to overstate the success stories, as many women dropped out as a result of their social reproduction duties and family expectations. Even for those women who continued to work in cooperatives, because of the primarily domestic and reproductive roles assigned to them, most of the women face a "double burden" both at home and at work (Öneş et al., 2013; Altan-Olcay, 2016, p. 393). They also felt as though they may fail and that they have to prove themselves when it comes to public work. This situation had nothing to do with the women's innate characteristics and had everything to do with the uneven distribution of social reproduction duties. Because women generally entered the public work force later in their lives, they lacked the necessary knowledge and expertise, therefore facing huge fines. Or even if they started earlier, they were never able to fully dedicate themselves to their work, due to the pressure of social reproduction duties as primarily domestic caregivers. At the beginning, most cooperative members were inexperienced in bookkeeping and taxation, which made them vulnerable to fines, making the cost unbearable. For instance, an Istanbul cooperative faced two legal trials because it was late to hold its general meeting and because of an accounting error due to inexperience. Similarly, women at a women's cooperative in Eskişehir stated that:

We had major problems at the outset: problems about marketing, problems in taxation. We did not know how to write invoices or how to calculate value-added tax. These were serious obstacles at the beginning.

(Cooperative Members, Eskişehir)

Even women who said that their husbands supported them were still walking on thin ice. For instance, women shared that they were afraid to ask their husbands for financial help because they thought that this would prove they were unsuccessful. In an Istanbul cooperative, women told us that their husbands objected to their efforts at the beginning, arguing that they were putting themselves at risk because of the official papers they signed. In a cooperative that had to shut down afterward in Ankara, the members did not ask their husbands for money precisely because of that. In another cooperative in Eskişehir, the president and two other members took personal credits from a bank (the system did not allow them to take credits as a cooperative) but hid this from their husbands because they were afraid of the reaction they would face. They all mentioned that their husband had warned them beforehand about signing documents and taking legal responsibilities.

4.2 | The impact of social class on the women's future in the cooperatives

In order to compensate for not being able to function in the workplace with the same entrepreneurial networks and resources as men, women turned to their assets in hand. These assets, and the strategies developed based on them, differed along the lines of class and occupational status. The variation was clearly visible on the basis of what Ruiz Castro and Holvino (2016, p. 330) call "class markers," by which they refer to indicators of socio-economic status such as type of education, level of English proficiency, and household composition and arrangements. Cooperative founders and members who had occupational backgrounds such as financial consultant, business manager,

accountant, and retired teacher of handicrafts referred to social capital as an asset either explicitly or implicitly. Their occupations gave them both organizational skills and legal knowledge, but also a social network.

The head of a women's cooperative in Ankara explicitly mentioned that her social capital (*sosyal sermaye*) came from her educational and occupational background. For instance, when her cooperative produced caper plants, she talked to a friend of hers who was in charge of a big corporation, and he agreed to buy their products. The head of a cooperative in Konya, who is a retired teacher of handicrafts, stated that she had a very wide group of acquaintances due to the fact that, as a teacher, she knew more than 5000 students. She argued that the fact that she was born and raised in the same city and had worked there her entire life had also helped. In an extreme example, the head of the cooperative in Artvin was a local journalist, a shopkeeper, and the head of a civil society organization. She used her connections to the benefit of the cooperative. The head of a women's cooperative in Izmir similarly noted that her social network (including the mayor and business people) is her biggest strength.

It was those cooperatives whose founders and members were from more modest classes or occupational backgrounds that were most vulnerable to the fines and legal sanctions discussed earlier. In the absence of such ties, some women turned to those in their own social reproductive circles, primarily family members.⁵ For instance, in one cooperative in Ankara, after a lot of internal conflict within the cooperative, the head of the cooperative decided to make her daughters and relatives members of the cooperative and create a smoother working environment. She stated that, because these people knew her from before and because she had never misguided them, they trusted her.

For those who lacked a "civic network"—due to the lack of formal higher education or trained skills—being from the same location (*hemşehrilik*) also worked as an important asset for those who lacked a "civic network," due to the lack of formal higher education or trained skills. But such networks were also sometimes used by the educated and middle class. In the same Ankara cooperative mentioned above, the head of the cooperative told us that she was trying to reach business people who were originally from the same village as her and who were now in Ankara and in Istanbul. She also said that the head of the association for business people in her city was her relative, and she met with him in relation to the cooperative work. Similarly, in Artvin, the president told us that because she came from a local Artvin family, she could actively seek help from people.

Those cooperatives whose founders and organizers had a university degree and participated in the formal workforce had better opportunities in spearheading efforts to build solidarity among women's cooperatives. For instance, the head of a cooperative in Ankara, who was a white-collar professional before founding the cooperative, stated that:

We provide consultancy to many other women's cooperatives free of charge. It makes a huge difference to touch other women's lives. Since we do not have hierarchical ties or relationships in these meetings, it makes great difference and attracts many women.

(Cooperative Chair, Ankara)

Similarly, another cooperative in Ankara shared their experiences with a newly founded cooperative in the same city. In a cooperative in Izmir, we were told that the national meetings of cooperatives were useful in this regard. Members of the cooperative told us that they had benefited from dialogue and experience sharing with cooperatives coming from different parts of the country. While the aforementioned cooperative members came from relatively well-to-do family backgrounds, cooperatives could also bring about opportunities for those with fewer economic resources. In a striking example, a member of a women's cooperative in Ankara, situated in a poorer neighborhood, stated that:

We try to always stay connected to other women's cooperatives in Turkey. For instance, a women's cooperatives in Nevşehir [in Central Anatolia] sell our produce during the high tourism season. We sell the olive oil, which is produced by a women's cooperative in Hatay [a province in the Mediterranean region]. Solidarity also helps us break our taboos in our minds. We had planned a visit to a women's

cooperative in Diyarbakır. Many of our members had their doubts since Diyarbakır is mostly populated by the Kurds. Yet, one of our friends, who is actually a supporter of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP, a right-wing, nationalistic party) attended this visit, stayed there for 4 days, and totally shattered her biases against the Kurds.

(Cooperative Member, Ankara)

In addition to these solidarity networks, the main support from domestic actors comes from the KEDV, which is an important source of knowledge, information, education, coordination, communication, and marketplace. KEDV convenes meetings, gives education on issues such as women entrepreneurship, leadership, women's rights, pre-school education, and organizational skills. Nearly all cooperatives that we talked to (in Istanbul, Izmir, Gaziantep, Hatay, Trabzon etc.) utilized the KEDV's services. The chair of a women's cooperative in Eskişehir underlined the KEDV's role by stating:

We attended the KEDV's meeting in Seferihisar (in Izmir). We have seen that we have got common problems-such as taxation, marketing, transportation etc. It was good to see that we are not alone.

(Cooperative Chair, Eskişehir)

On a similar note, the chair of a women's cooperative in Izmir stated that:

We have close ties with the KEDV, which supports us immensely. Whenever we run into a problem, we get in touch with them. They have got the most updated info about women's cooperatives.

(Cooperative Chair, Izmir)

Foundations built by some businesses, such as the Sabancı Foundation, also give support to women's cooperatives. Women's cooperatives in Eskişehir and Trabzon received grants from the Foundation. NGOs and INGOs are also crucial to ensure support networks for some women's cooperatives. Two cooperatives in Ankara and one cooperative in Istanbul received EU funding, one cooperative in Mardin, and one in Gaziantep received UN funding for the start-up costs and for building a workshop. In Gaziantep, cooperative members were able to reach EU and UN funds, thanks to having university graduates amongst their members.

For other less connected cooperatives, support from the EU or the UN was very much desired, but out of reach. Here, in addition to class background, location in metropolitan cities also played a key role. In particular, those cooperatives whose members were university graduates and who resided in Ankara and Istanbul were much better informed about such grants.

4.3 | Women's cooperatives and governmental policies and practices

Our fears grow due to our legal setting. Every time the local government changes, we have our hearts in our mouths. Just when they get to know us, those in power change.

(Cooperative Chair, an Istanbul Cooperative)

I told them so many times, the bureaucrats and all. They did not listen...What they want is: produce at home, work till dawn if necessary and finish the job, but do not become visible.

(Cooperative Chair, an Ankara Cooperative)

Members of women's cooperatives in Turkey suffer a two-fold challenge as a result of governmental policies and practices based on neoliberalism and neoconservatism. On the one hand, they suffer from the neoliberal policies that

reduced the state's obligations vis-à-vis its citizens (Bakker, 2003b, pp. 71–72). With the unrestrained move of transnational capital and the state's stance to keep such capital within its borders (Brodie, 2003, p. 56), universal welfare is replaced by targeted aid (Weyland, 1996). In many countries, this takes a means-tested form, which furthers the burden on the shoulders of the citizens, particularly women. Neoliberalism in Turkey meant the shrinking of the conservative welfare model previously adopted in Turkey at the expense of informal and sporadic provisions distributed with clientelistic goals rather than a universal entitlement. Poor women outside the labor force were special targets of such provisions (Buğra & Candaş, 2011). As the accounts gathered from women's cooperatives reveal, such practices worked against the endeavors of most of the women's cooperatives.

For example, a cooperative in Ankara had trained women in patient care. The trainees received EU certificates as a result of this training. Despite high demand, most trainees were unwilling to work because they were afraid that they would lose aid from the Metropolitan Municipality or the district governor. The head of the cooperative told us that:

These women are in fact rejecting about 2500 liras and social insurance for the fear of losing 200–300 liras of aid money from the municipality.

(Cooperative Chair, Ankara)

She added that such policies were in fact preventing women's employment. The president of a cooperative in Artvin made a similar comment. In another cooperative in Ankara, the president of the cooperative told us that the main difficulty for them in reaching locals was that the locals were hesitant to join the job market and had no incentive to learn new crafts because they did not want to lose the financial benefits they received from the municipal government. By not joining this cooperative, women missed other opportunities such as acquiring or improving reading and writing skills.

The lack of a formal standing sanctioned by governmental agencies, both local and national, contributed to the unpredictable climate under which the cooperatives were operating and proved to be anxiety-inducing for its members. Some cooperatives preferred to keep a distance from local governments, whereas others (such as a cooperative in Konya, with close ties to the AKP mayor, and cooperatives in Izmir with close ties to Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP)) welcomed such collaborations for the provision of material resources, expertise, and markets. Even if a cooperative had established good ties with the municipal government, a change in those in office after an election could prove to be disastrous for the cooperatives. This was the case in Nevşehir, where the new mayor from the opposing party asked the cooperative to vacate the facility the former mayor had provided.

The lack of a firm legal standing and universal entitlements for women's cooperatives was at the core of the members' complaints about governmental policies and practices. This was most visible when women discussed their most pressing problem, namely high taxation, the primary reason so many of the women's cooperatives shut down. In the Turkish taxation system, cooperatives are defined as corporate taxpayers subject to taxation. Cooperatives are subject to Corporate Taxes (22% of profit), Income Taxes, and Value Added Taxes as well as other contributions, including Stamp Duties, Chamber of Commerce dues, General Assembly Fees, and contributions for insured staff (Duguid et al., 2015, p. 65). Cooperatives (excluding consumers' and transportation cooperatives) can be exempt from corporate tax if they meet certain conditions.⁶ However, in practice, almost all of the cooperatives suffer under the burden of various taxes and fees. According to a survey of women's cooperatives conducted by SIMURG, 98% pay corporate taxes at the same rate as for-profit enterprises (Duguid et al., 2015, p. 65).

All of the cooperatives we visited were hurt by the regressive and gender-blind tax system. Respondents found it unfair that they were judged under the same taxation system as, say, cooperatives in the construction business or truckers' cooperatives, even though they did not possess any capital, given all the contributions they were making to people's lives. Having to deal with the costs of taxation, convening general meetings, accounting etc. while other women were producing in the informal economy without any such costs, made it impossible for them to compete.

Women requested some measures that will help their cooperatives grow and produce more steadily before having to face the burden of heavy taxation. For instance, a member of a women's cooperative stated that:

We have got in touch with many bureaucrats on this issue [taxation], we went to the Parliament to explain our problems. Whatever you do, this unfair taxation problem stands devastating against all women's cooperatives, including ours.

(Cooperative Member, Ankara)

Even the members of women's cooperatives, who were sympathetic toward the ruling AKP wanted affirmative action policies on taxation issues. For instance, the head of the women's cooperative in Konya stated that:

We want support on the issues of taxation and insurance. We indeed would like to pay our taxes but the government should be more lenient and understanding to women's cooperatives, especially at the beginning, since we have social duties and pay-offs to the members of our society, especially those who are underprivileged.

(Cooperative Chair, Konya)

Despite these demands, many women stated that they were not able to change the conditions through negotiating with public institutions. Members of a cooperative in Istanbul, which was among the first in the field, told us that they did not see any substantial change since the beginning. The head of an Ankara cooperative complained that the Ministry of Family and Social Policies was unresponsive to her demands to convene women's cooperatives to share their problems and find solutions. She made propositions to bureaucrats multiple times. Such proposals included 5-year initial tax-exemptions; calling cooperatives proto-cooperatives initially and treating them accordingly, and giving warnings before punishment, but 'they would not listen.' Members of another Ankara cooperative faced hostile reactions from public officials such as 'Why are you whining? You talk, talk, and talk, but all is empty' and 'Well well, these have become feminists!' when they pressed for tax exemption for women's cooperatives on the grounds that they contributed to the society.

The president of an Izmir cooperative and that of an Artvin cooperative had both asked the Ministry and the Minister herself, yet nothing came out of it. The latter was given the answer 'this is the law.' A member of the Eskişehir cooperative interpreted the reaction of state officials to the problems voiced as "goes in one ear and out the other."

As a result of meetings with state officials, cooperatives obtained some limited gains such as the installment of membership dues, the right to obtain services without becoming members of the cooperatives, reduction of the dues to 100 Liras (initially planned to be 1000 Liras), and receiving credits from Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization (KOSGEB)⁷—previously not available to women's cooperatives.

In our encounters with the members, we observed that the state showed a preference for keeping women at home and making them produce within the confines of patriarchal norms. The president of a cooperative in Ankara told us that she argued with Fatma Şahin, the then Minister of Family and Social Policies on the issue of home-based production:

I accused her of not wanting to see women as citizens. In one occasion, I objected the minister on the grounds that she made assertions that confine women to their homes. I stressed that the minister was encouraging informal production leading to tax evasion, which is a crime.

(Cooperative Chair, Ankara)

For the cooperative president, the envisioned production model of the government was to make women produce day and night at home but remain invisible. Instead, this cooperative advocated a production model that would take women outside the confines of their homes, make them visible, and provide social security. Conveyed to us by most

of the cooperatives was a sense of the government's lack of willingness to take steps for the viability of women's cooperatives, which put women in a situation in which they could not compete with market forces, especially when their formal responsibilities—such as taxes—were considered.

5 | DISCUSSION

In our analysis, we found that women's chances of achieving economic success through women's cooperatives are tightly shaped by gendered family constraints, gendered governmental policies and practices, as well as the social class in which their productive and reproductive duties are embedded.

Our findings shed light on some of the key gaps addressed at the beginning of this article. By showing the role familial social reproduction duties play in the prospects of women's participation in cooperatives, we account for the higher likelihood of older women to join cooperatives compared to younger ones. The fact that older women are more likely to join cooperatives is aptly identified in the statistics on women's cooperatives (Aazami et al., 2019; cf. Meier zu Selhausen, 2016). Our article offers answers as to why this is the case. Based on our interviews, we find that for many women, it is only when they are 'done with childcare' (i.e., when their children have grown up) that they will be set free by family members (particularly their husbands) to join cooperatives. At that moment, they are mostly left behind because they do not have the necessary education, skills, or experience. The situation is true both for those who join the cooperatives late and for those who join relatively earlier, since the latter group also constantly has to juggle domestic duties with those of the cooperative. Social reproduction analysis helps us make these constraints visible and attests to the need for a more interrelated and holistic look at women's endeavors in cooperatives to understand the prospects and challenges of women's cooperatives. Our work reinforces Roberts' (2016) observation that "neoliberal forms of social provisioning are premised on an ontological erasure of gender, as women and men are presumed to be equally capable of participation in paid work, while the work of social reproduction remains invisible." Our finding is that the construction of womanhood as defined through social reproduction duties puts women in a late-comer position, characterized by a lack of skills and practices in the workplace, for which they are punished constantly.

Our findings on the relationship between families and the economic prospects of cooperative members bring nuance to the existing findings on this relationship. Like Meliou (2020), we also find instances in which women rely on family members for crucial supporting roles in their entrepreneurial efforts, yet we mostly find that family members, particularly male ones, serve as impediments to women's entrepreneurial goals. Meliou (2020, p. 230) acknowledges that all of her research participants had at least a bachelor's degree and invites future research to "direct attention to diverse groups of entrepreneurs in crisis economies." Like Meliou, our article hopes to encourage a line of research that will further investigate under what conditions and in what contexts family members play a positive or negative role in women's entrepreneurial and organizational capacities.

Our analysis of the financial difficulties facing women due to their positions as late-comers and/or partially committed professionals (due to their social reproduction duties) concurs with other research (Le Baron & Roberts, 2010; Roberts, 2016) in showing how the financial process is a gendered one, despite the fact that neoliberalism (and most developmentalist projects) tend to neglect the gendered burden of women. As is seen in our findings, like markets and workplaces, governmental policies and practices treat women as context-free individuals, instead of recognizing women's cooperatives' efforts for women's empowerment and acknowledging the double burden women carry as primary providers of social reproduction duties. Such policies and practices treat women as clients when it comes to revenue generation (as is the case with the regressive and gender-blind tax system) and treat them paternalistically when it comes to service provision (as evident in the dealings of women with their municipalities). In the absence of governmental policies addressing the difficulties of operating under neoliberalism (that keeps wages down and encourages production at the cheapest cost possible), members of the women's cooperatives find it increasingly hard to stay competitive—as far as the informal market and cheap important goods are concerned, and when the

costs of operating within the formal sector are considered. The lack of such policies, along with the encouragement of home-based production, further pushes women to informal jobs in which they will not be bothered with paying taxes or keeping books, but in which they will not benefit from the gains of participating in the formal work force either. Moreover, the fact that many cooperatives go into liquidation further discourages women and reinforces their husbands' stereotypes of women as primarily domestic beings, solely responsible for social reproduction and auxiliary to men. As a result, women remain exclusively responsible for unpaid social reproductive labor. Given the condition of most of the women's cooperatives and the complaints voiced by their members, more macro-level transformations are needed in which sporadic, non-systematic, and patronage-based support on behalf of political actors needs to be replaced with a universal, legal framework that encourages women to join cooperatives.

In addition to the gendered social reproduction constraints of the familial realm and the treatment of women by governmental agencies as primarily undertakers of social reproduction duties, the path-dependent production relationships in which women are embedded further influence the prospects of economic empowerment of women through their participation in women's cooperatives. As in other domains related to women's agency (Bakker & Gill, 2019; Beşpınar, 2010; Lupu, 2012; Nunn & Tepe-Belfrage, 2019), the prospects of women's organizational capacity in cooperatives are not only bound by gender, but also by class.⁸ Our findings align with Ruiz Castro and Holvino's (2016, p. 341) study of career advancement practices in professional service firms, which shows that career trajectories are shaped by "formal and informal organizational practices embedded in an already raced, classed and gendered societal context and culture." Our data informs us that the challenges faced by women, the resources available for women, and strategies developed by them are strongly influenced by class and occupational background, which are, in turn, connected with the cultural and political orientation of women. With these findings, we second the call of Bakker and Gill (2019) and Bakker (2020) for deepening the analysis of variegated social reproduction. Further studies could usefully delve deeper in understanding how the prospects of women's economic empowerment vary in relation to factors such as class, race, and ethnicity, as well as the nature of political institutions and governmental policies.

Our findings thus show that judging the prospects of women's cooperatives is not possible without a holistic and empirically grounded analysis that re-embeds women's conditions into the dynamics of production and reproduction. Women's prospects for economic empowerment through cooperatives are closely intertwined with these factors in determining the trajectories followed by women's cooperatives. The literature on women's cooperatives in particular—and the literature on women's empowerment in general—has to consider this process-oriented nature of women's participation in economic activities so as not to make the error of focusing only on those women who are already in the position to overcome the high threshold of entry. Failure to consider the familial, governmental, and class barriers to the entry of women into the economic realm will also lead to incomplete policy proposals and solutions. This means that we need to endogenize women's participation in cooperatives instead of treating it as an independent variable whose effect on empowerment is measured. What is more, given the gender-specific challenges faced by women in the sustainability of women's cooperatives as illustrated in this study, it is also vital to introduce a gender perspective into the study of the degeneration and resilience of cooperatives. We show in this article that the challenges of keeping a cooperative alive and ensuring long-term participation in it are compounded by issues related to gender, class, and other social factors, which interact with the political and cultural context at hand.

6 | CONCLUSION

Women's cooperatives are very important for women, and even the modest income generated cannot be underestimated under challenging neoliberal conditions. In addition, the nonmaterial gains facilitated by the involvement of these women in the cooperatives are also very significant. As a result, their founding and success needs to be encouraged. In the unfriendly climate of the Turkish context, their resilience is commendable.

At the same time, women make their story, but not under the conditions of their choosing. They are bound by political, social, and familial ties, which are centrally related to the allocation of social reproduction duties in a given time and space. To what extent, women will succeed depends not only on their personal efforts, but also on collective efforts that can change the conditions under which they operate. Even the most heroic stories of many women, including those we have conveyed, should not divert us from the fact that so many of the other women's cooperatives have either shut down or are seriously considering it. In the spirit of social reproduction feminism and this special issue informed by it, we thus call for a more holistic lens in understanding and furthering the efforts of women's cooperatives that takes into account the interrelated nature of productive and reproductive processes in the cases of the global South and North.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Women's empowerment is understood as the process through which women acquire the ability to make strategic and effective life choices and come to use this ability effectively for positive change (Moghadam, 1996, p. 13; Janssens, 2009, p. 975; Kabeer, 1999, p. 435; Goldman & Little, 2015, p. 763; Cinar et al., 2021, p. 780).
- ² The average number of women who benefit from women's cooperatives in Turkey, be it financially or through the provision of other goods and services such as health care provision or legal advice, is estimated to be around 7206 annually (Duguid et al., 2015, p. 81).
- ³ KEDV is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the social and economic conditions of low-income women and to 'strengthen their leadership in local development'. It supports the creation of women's cooperatives through consultancy services and also provides training programs. See the KEDV's website at <http://www.kedv.org.tr/?lang=en>.
- ⁴ The mayor of the district is from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which is a religiously conservative party.
- ⁵ On women entrepreneur's mobilization of familial resources, see (Meliou, 2020).
- ⁶ These conditions are: 1. No profit sharing based on capital contribution 2. No shares granted to the board members and the head of the board 3. No sharing of reserve funds 4. Business restricted to the partners of the cooperatives.
- ⁷ KOSGEB is a semi-governmental institution affiliated with the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Its main mission is to provide support for SMEs to increase their competitiveness in the market and to encourage a culture of entrepreneurship. See OECD 'Supporting Small Business Development in the Province of Manisa, Turkey: The Role of KOSGEB', 2013.
- ⁸ For a discussion regarding the need to incorporate class further into the study of management and organization studies, see the recent special issue of *Gender Work and Organization* (Romani et al., 2021).

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