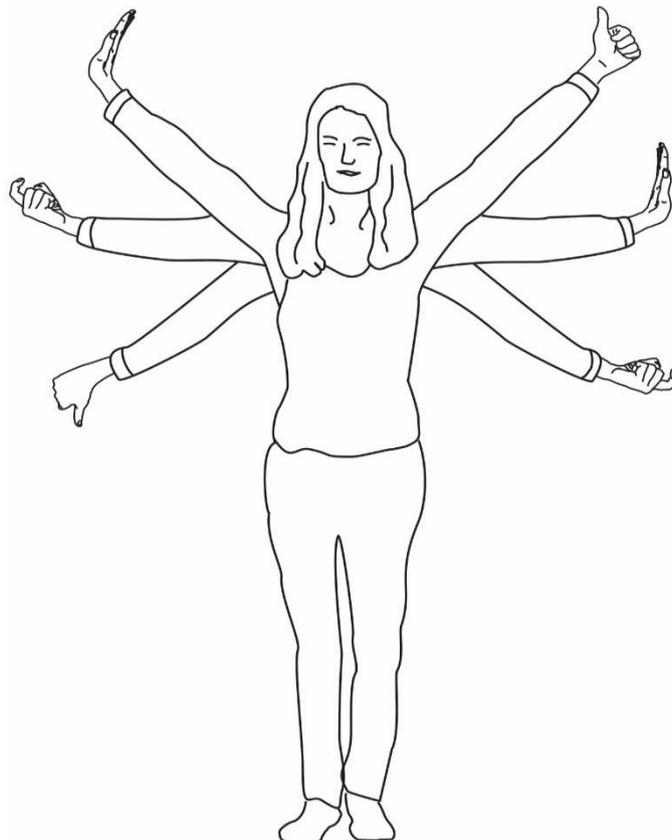


## Research Project Report “Comparing women’s movements in different cities in Turkey”

### III.3.A. Separating and unifying perspectives in the women’s movements in Turkey

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### III.3.A. Separating and unifying perspectives in the women’s movements in Turkey

The aim of this research project is to map the current position of women’s movements within different sociocultural and regional settings in Turkey. The project thus analyses the diversity of women’s movements and gender-based political positions, taking into account the complexity of the social structures in Turkey. The central question of the study is whether, and to what extent, these women's movements, despite their differences, work together and, if so, what are the common, overarching objectives that they pursue. In addition, the study also examines the networking of women’s movements beyond local, regional and national borders.

#### 1.1 Separating topics

Women’s movements in Turkey show that it is possible for them act in solidarity during their struggles despite their differences, thanks to the important coalitions that have been developed. However, there are some topics where this solidarity may falter. Güler İpek (2015: 34) of the Trabzon “Emek-Sensin” Home-Based Working Women’s Association<sup>1</sup> stated that “women, no matter the city or region, can come together when the struggle is about women’s rights or any topic relating to women; however, they can separate in the face of political or ethnical discrimination”. In the light of the data collected during the expert interviews, the topics that drive a wedge between women’s groups have been analysed under the following subheadings: ideological differences, ethnicity, religion/ conservatism, gender-sex/ sexuality/ sexual identity, organisational/ institutional differences.

#### Ideological differences

Based on the data acquired during the expert interviews, an attempt was made to map the women’s movement’s in Turkey [See: III. 2.A. Examples of Women’s Movements in Turkey

<sup>1</sup> Name in Turkish: Trabzon Ev Eksenli Çalışan Emek Sensin Kadın Derneği

taken from Research Fields (Polatdemir, 2017)]. Ideological differences were also mentioned during the expert interviews as a divisive topic. The role that these ideological differences play between the women’s movements and their various stand points will be discussed in this section. The results presented under the subheadings “ethnicity”, “religion/ conservatism”, “gender-sex/ sexuality/ sexual identity” and “organisational/ institutional differences” can be read in supplement to this section. In this section, a brief assessment will be provided of the topics that are cause for division between the women’s movements in Turkey.

Activists and academics surveyed during the field research and expert interviews mentioned that ideological and political views lead activists to adopt a variety of standpoints and can sometimes cause divisions among women’s movements (Arıcı & Anonymous, 2015: 33; Ersöz et al., 2015: 64). Political characterisations play a great role in driving these various standpoints and divisions. According to Adalet Aydın (2015: 24) of Muğla Peoples’ Democratic Party, “women are just as much affected by their political views as men”. Aydın also stated that “if the women who are involved in politics under the umbrella of the Republican People’s Party organise themselves behind the idea that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is the person who gave women most rights, other women’s movements will find another leader for themselves”. Nebahat Akkoç (2015: 57), as the representative of independent women’s foundation Diyarbakır KA-MER, gave another example of ideological differences:

Because the relationships can be damaged owing to the political description put forward by the women’s foundations that support the Kurdish movement [...] Every text and activity starts with the phrase “our leader”; you cannot get into these as an independent women’s foundation.

According to women activists (2015: 82) from Denizli Women’s Solidarity Platform “many ideological structures host their own [...] women’s movement”. In terms of political parties, “the Justice and Development Party and the Nationalist Movement Party have their own [...] women’s movements, which comply with the party ideology”. As an example, the activists pointed out that the ruling party, the JDP, adopts a “conservative ideology” and that the party’s women’s branches, who, through this conservative party ideology, have internalised the view that “womanhood is being a mother”, are participating in “the women’s struggle”

(ibid). Although Bilsen Özen of Denizli Metropolitan Municipality Women’s Council argued that politics and different ideologies separate women not only in Denizli but throughout the country, she also voiced her opinion that “when it comes to women’s movements [...] what matters is not the government’s policies but the women themselves”. She added that the Council’s mission is to eliminate this division (et al., 2015: 60–72, 83–93). Özen (2015: 83–93) expressed the view that these disagreements, which are ideological at the heart, will be overcome by breaking down prejudices, as violence against women occurs independently of the views expressed by the government, and that this problem can be solved by educating women. Following these statements, the fact of being woman is emphasised as providing a sense of partnership that prevails over ideological differences.

Mukaddes Alataş (2015: 23) from Diyarbakır Kardelen Women’s Centre explained how important it is for politically active women to be aware of women’s and gender issues:

It is possible to increase the number of women and make a quantitative change. If there are 500 seats in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, and if we have 250 women and 250 men, is it really true that we have managed to bring women to the assembly? Or do we really need these 250 women to show awareness, consciousness and the ability to stand up against men to express a female point of view when faced with patriarchal statements or potential laws and to encourage the consideration of women and of women’s place in these. We do not need women who slam their fists on the table, [...] agreeing with and supporting whatever their own [...] party leader says.

Ideological differences and varying political definitions have an impact on women’s movements with regard to defining themselves, determining their lines of activity, justifying their demands regarding gender policies, etc. Ideological clashes and political discussions affect cooperation and dialogue between women’s movements on specific topics and the development of dialogue processes and ideological standpoints can be a cause of division among women’s movements.

## Ethnicity

The most important discussion considered during this research on the topic of ethnicity relates to issues regarding Kurdish identity, the largest minority group in Turkey. Women’s movements which are united in their approach to gender policies may take different stands on ethnic identity policies, in particular those involving the Kurdish movement. Hatice Kapusuz Kütküt (2014: 23) of the Association for Supporting Women Candidates (KA.DER) highlighted the difficulty of reaching an agreement “on topics [...] such as general policies and general understanding of democracy” and emphasised that “the women’s movement side of the Kurdish movement is serious”. She also stated that some points defended by the Kurdish movement clash with the core understanding held by women’s associations in the western regions. The demands put forward by the Kurdish Women’s Movement regarding equal citizenship, recognition of cultural differences and mother tongue education, as well as the activities that they carry out in parallel with the Kurdish movement under the “racial struggle” banner, were listed in various expert interviews as divisive topics among women’s movements in Turkey (Başak, 2014: 48; Üstün, 2014: 32; Cön, 2015: 22; Çicek & Gülen, 2015: 36; Şahin Güngör, 2015: 30; Üst, 2015: 14).

According to the experts, one of the most controversial topics among the women’s movements in Turkey is the use of Kurdish slogans during events (Anonymous, 2015: 43; Ülker, 2014: 30; Üst, 2015: 14). Sema Kendirici Uğurman (2014: 23) of the Turkish Women’s Union, Ankara, explained the response to the use of Kurdish slogans during the Turkish Criminal Code (TCK) rally:

For instance, [...] during the revision of the TCC we held a rally. The National Assembly was going to vote on the revision that day, it was a very important day for us [...] We were planning to walk from Kızılay to the National Assembly building. [...] It was a very important situation. We were trying to send a message to those who were inside. We came together. We had a manifesto that we read out [...]. An organisation stood up and said [...] “We also want it to be read out in Kurdish!” [...] While we were calmly discussing whether we could do that, another organisation said, “We cannot stand beside you if you are going to do it in Kurdish” [...] and they left. [...] So this

is how serious it is [...]. Three years ago, there was quite a lot of controversy about abortion, and there we were again [...] [holding] posters. Does it really matter if the posters are in Kurdish or Turkish if the message is “freedom for women, hands off my body”? However, some people left because there were [slogans in Kurdish]. The women’s struggle should be viewed from a very different perspective.

Although Kendirici Uğurman, the representative of the Turkish Women’s Union in Ankara — which was defined by some researchers and activists<sup>2</sup> as a Kemalist organisation — did not immediately dismiss the idea of using Kurdish during demonstrations such as the TCC rally that concerned all women in Turkey, saying that she was willing to discuss the issue, she noted that other groups might leave the coalition before any dialogue on the issue could begin. Similarly, Adalet Aydın (2015: 24) from the Muğla Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) explained her experience in the Aegean Region with regard to the use of Kurdish in slogans used during demonstrations about women’s policies:

Our slogan is “Jin Jiyan Azadî” — “Woman, Life, Freedom”. There were women who were against this slogan, however. Why is that? What is actually being said? They have different political views to the Kurdish Freedom Movement, they oppose [the slogan] — which is meant for women — just because it is [in Kurdish], which is a language that I don’t speak, but some other people do quite well. This is one of the main problems.

Decisions about language use during demonstrations in public spaces not only pose a serious question about the recognition of a specific group, but also must take into consideration the demand that such demonstrations serve as a platform for the recognition of an ethnic majority within the sphere of jointly developed women’s policies. The Kurdish language — as seen from these two interviews excerpts — seems to overlap with women’s identities as a sign of political identity.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, see “III.2.A. Examples of Women’s Movements Taken from Research Fields” (Polatdemir, 2017).

Serpil Sancar (2014: 34) of Ankara University explained the lines of conflict that have developed between the Kurdish Women’s Movement and the feminist movement based on the criticisms put forward by the Kurdish Women’s Movement regarding their experience of “an entirely different practice of oppression”:

On the other hand, there are serious lines of conflict between the Kurdish Women’s Movement and the feminist movement. Namely, the feminist movement in Turkey is built more or less [...] on Kemalism and modernisation; we can say that the feminist movement in Turkey is the child or grandchild of those ideas. Some women’s rights organisations have more of a middle class, [...] Turkish, Kemalist, modernist perspective. [...] The Kurdish Women’s Movement has expressed some serious criticisms [...] that they have been forced to experience a much different form of suppression. These criticisms have actually been quite important and eye-opening. In the 1990s and 2000s, a large majority of feminists took these criticisms very seriously and [...] the Kurdish Women’s Movement and the other feminist organisations started working together more often.

While Sancar (2014: 34) pointed out that feminist groups also have internal differences, she defended the fact that the Kurdish Women’s Movement creates an important political distinction by presenting both their “demand that their cultural identity be recognised” and their criticisms regarding “Turks, Turkishness” and the modernist assimilation politics of the Republic of Turkey as a whole. Sancar also stated that feminists were listening to these criticisms. She added that, although she also used to define feminists as a group consisting of mostly “middle-class white Turkish women”, she no longer holds the same opinion now that Kurdish women are also involved in the feminist movement (ibid). In the light of Sancar’s remarks, it can be inferred that the feminist movement(s) in Turkey is heterogenous in character and that it has transformed itself in the light of the criticisms received and now accepts internal differences.

Another important point regarding this area of conflict is the criticism that the Kurdish Women’s Movement does not distance itself from the issue of armed violence as a part of its ethnic identity policies, while the feminist movement considers all armed violence to be “a

type of masculine violence” (Sancar, 2014: 34). Sancar refers to this line of conflict regarding “violence, justified violence, unjustified violence and demands placed on the government for equal citizenship, as well as the recognition of cultural differences.”

Some interviewees (Arif et al., 2015: 46) expressed the view that conflict surrounding ethnicity or ethnic identity arises during the coalition process as a result of the prejudices held by both sides, as well as processes of alienation. Selen Doğan (2014: 38) of Ankara Flying Broom explained how this situation causes tension during coalition meetings:

At large meetings where women’s organisations come together, one organisation might accuse another of being nationalist, and then that organisation accuses them [...] of supporting the PKK because they defend Kurdish women’s rights.

According to some feminist activists (Anonymous, 2015: 90) from the Denizli Women’s Solidarity Platform (Denizli Kadın Dayanışma Platformu), “some women bring the women’s struggle to a halt as soon as the Kurdish issue and the Kurdish movement is mentioned”. Nurber Güldal (2015: 32) of Trabzon Life Women’s Centre Association stated that, despite the prejudices held and the alienation that can occur, women came together for the sake of women’s issues, even if they were not quite able to tackle the issues at hand. She argues that people divided into different groups, but that this has been recently overcome and that it is possible to meet on common ground. Mukaddes Alataş (2015: 38) from Diyarbakır Kardelen Women’s Centre expressed the view that the prejudices mentioned by Sancar have been partially overcome thanks to the continuous contact:

Now we collaborate quite often with women’s movements in Turkey. In the past, they used to look at us [differently]: PKK members, terrorists [...] for instance, we meet with women’s organisations twice a year. We have a mutual anti-violence platform. [...] They gained their first impression of us through that platform. We used to conflict on many issues, very serious ones. In other words, they thought that we were vulgar and that we knew nothing, which is exactly how the media, the Government and the system

depicted Kurds. These prejudices have been partially overcome [...] This prejudice still exists in the Aegean and Black Sea Regions, but [people] in central [Anatolia] have started needing the Kurdish Women’s Movement more. They have seen that, in reality, this organised force is capable of many things.

These remarks show that there are differences in the perception of the Kurdish Women’s Movements in Turkey as to whether it is a potential coalition partner or a movement that should be avoided. Although in the expert interviews, ethnicity appeared to be a divisive topic for women’s movements in Turkey, according to Alataş this perception is changing because of the organised struggle being made by the Kurdish Women’s Movements on women’s issues. Over time, the prejudices propagated by the media about “Kurdish women” have been overcome thanks to meetings and direct contact between the parties, and greater emphasis is being placed on the mutual problems regarding women’s policies. The critical and social assessments of female equality in Turkey offered by the Kurdish Women’s Movement have started to be taken seriously.

### **Religion/ conservatism**

The statements made in the expert interviews regarding religion/ conservatism show that women’s movements hold a variety of views and positions regarding Islam and conservative values. Considering “the general polarisation in Turkey”, the issue of “pan-Islamism” can be seen as “one of the societal discussion points [...] where dialogue within women’s movements [...] is brought to a halt” (Atasü Topçuoğlu, 2014: 27).

With regard to the relationship between the religious/ conservative women’s movement and the conservative ruling party, the JDP, we have already discussed the view that “it has become increasingly difficult for Islamist women to question their position by separating themselves from the party”, in the section focusing on the variety of the women’s movements in Turkey (Acar, 2014: 26). Sevinç Hocaoğulları, who gave an interview on behalf

of Ankara Halkevci<sup>3</sup> Women, stated that they prefer not to meet with “Islamist women’s organisations” through the platforms. She also mentioned that “they are trying to find a balance and to not assume a divisive position regarding women’s issues pertinent to all women” (2014: 18). Hocaoğulları (2014: 18) argues that these organisations “assign a secondary role to women” and do not or cannot object to “the JDP Government, which is responsible for the increase in violence against women”, adding that these organisations “defend the secondary status of women”. Nurcan Ay Katırcı (2015: 36) of Artvin Women’s Solidarity Platform explained that they had had to part ways with women who supported the JDP and Education and Science Workers’ Union, a union known for its conservative stance, while setting up their platform. These examples and statements show that this section not only includes the conservative attitudes that promote the secondary status of women, but also the relationship of activists with the ruling party, the JDP.

According to Feride Acar (2014: 26) of Middle East Technical University, there are points of disagreements among the women’s movements in Turkey with regard to religion/ conservatism, in particular as regards abortion and the existence of women as individuals and family members. Sema Kendirici Uğurman (2014: 23) of the Turkish Women’s Union described an incident that took place during a coalition demonstration regarding women’s sexual and physical freedom involving a clash of perspectives with religious/ conservative women:

We were marching and holding signs [...] on which we had written “You cannot touch our body or our sexuality!” [...] A so-called religious group [...] — at least that is how they refer to themselves — [...] came and said, “We don’t want this sign!” Why? They said, “We cannot march under this.”

The distance that women activists who base their motivations on religious values place between themselves and topics such as sexual freedom or the right to self-identification was also mentioned by a professor working at Black Sea Technical University. Şahinde Yavuz (2015: 15) stated that some women who follow religious/ conservative values cannot stand

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<sup>3</sup> Literal meaning: “Women for People’s Housing/Community Centres”.

behind every slogan regarding women’s physical freedom adopted by women’s organisation. She gave the slogan “My body! My choice!”<sup>4</sup> as an example:

Some women are not willing to expose their bellies and say “My Body! My choice!” and I do not expect that from them. Some people are not able to stand behind the slogan “My body! My choice!” because they are against abortion and they are conservative. [...] Women’s movement can be divided in the face of such decisions, which push the limits of conservatism.

Selen Doğan (2014: 38) of Flying Broom expressed the view that some active members of the religious/ conservative women’s movement do not attend demonstrations in support of rape victims who were raped because “they dressed in an inviting way” because those activists support patriarchal opinions (as exemplified by the statement “You should not have dressed that way then”). It can be concluded from these examples that religious and conservative values can act as a hindrance for some groups with regard to their efforts to, among other things, free women’s bodies and sexuality from the patriarchal mentality. It may also be argued that this situation makes it more difficult for women’s movements in Turkey to collaborate during events held in public spaces or to react to various social and political incidents.

The issue of the hijab was mentioned by many participants as another divisive topic among women’s movements with regard to religion/ conservatism (Anonymous, 2014: 21; Üstün, 2014: 32; Can, 2015: 13). According to Serpil Sancar (2014: 34) of Ankara University, when it comes to the “hijab issue, the religion issue”, the question of “whether covering oneself is an issue of freedom or a requirement of one’s faith” is painful for many people. Citing the hijab as an example, İlknur Üstün (2014: 32) of the Women’s Coalition summarised the tension between women’s movements regarding the freedom to wear the hijab in primary schools and high schools and the various positions that those movements held:

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<sup>4</sup> For this campaign, women photographed their naked stomachs with the slogan “My body! My choice!” and published the photos online. Hundreds of thousands of women across the country mobilised in response to the proposed tightening of the abortion law planned by the JDP Government in 2012, which they managed to prevent.

A by-law was passed to allow students to wear hijab at school and everybody became as tense as an arrow. People read into the intentions behind the law and they could not decide whether it was a government practice or a freedom issue. Although some women’s organisations involved with a certain women’s movement could say with confidence that “this is absolutely a good thing”, a claim was also put forward that this practice has naturally added to the climate of conservatism and has stoked fears [...] and worries concerning the future.

The fact that a government that represented religious and conservative values had lifted the ban on the hijab was considered by women who did not identify as religious to be a policy set out by the official and religious-patriarchal Government based on traditions and rules, rather than representing a step towards freedom.

Drawing attention to the fact that that minors are considered to be children according to international agreements, Sema Kendirici Uğurman (2014: 23) did not agree that giving school-age children the right to wear the hijab was a step towards greater freedom. She did, however, express support for the freedom to wear the hijab at university, which is an important example of coalition among women’s movement with regard to promoting greater freedom. According to Kendirici Uğurman, who works to prevent child marriage, conservatism is built on issues that involve women and girls. Another striking example provided by Uğurman (2014: 23) regarding religion/ conservatism is that religious women prefer not to stand in solidarity with LGBTI activists and they base their decision on religious teachings. According to Uğurman (ibid), the group she refers to “could stand alongside with LGBT groups if they tackled women’s issues [...] and approached their understanding of freedom with a humanist and universal perspective rather than a religious one”.

Another topic assessed under the subheading “religion/ conservatism” is the prejudices held against women who wear the hijab. According to the activists interviewed on behalf of Denizli Women’s Solidarity Platform (Anonymous, 2015: 101), women who wear the hijab experienced oppression in the name of secularism, but they fought back and they won. When speaking about conservatism and women’s struggles, feminist activists representing the

platform (Anonymous, 2015: 101) cited as examples Konca Kuriş, the author who started discussions about the triangular relationship between women, feminism and Islam in the 1990s, and Sibel Eraslan, a prominent actor for women’s issues during the period of the Welfare Party (RP). These activists, who made the accusation that the feminist movement is “bourgeois”, expressed the view that the relationship between the feminist movement and “religious” women is problematic (Anonymous, 2015: 101).

Nesrin Semiz, the spokesperson for Capital City Women’s Platform, which can be described as religious, said that the women’s movement “considers having a religious sensitivity and perspective — i.e. living religiously — to be the biggest hindrance that women face” (2014: 23). According to Semiz (2014: 24), feminist women “claimed that the headscarf was forced on women by men and that you could not both wear the headscarf and be a feminist or be involved in a women’s movement, and later, the feminist movement realised that [what they were doing to religious women] was oppression”.

While the continued religious–secular tension causes division and polarisation within women’s movements in Turkey, it can also hinder dialogue or prevent dialogue from starting altogether. The hijab issue remains the most important part of this discussion for the parties involved. In fact, the definitions of “Islamic woman” and “secular woman” determine the line of the women’s struggle regarding this discussion. Given the opposing natures of the women’s movement in Turkey, the most important criticism expressed about the religious/ conservative women’s movement while discussing religion/ conservatism was their failure to take a real critical stand against the JDP Government, which reproduces conservative perspectives thanks to its position as the ruling party. It should be noted that this summary of the religious/ conservative women’s movement was based on statements provided by “others” i.e. activists who do not consider themselves to be involved in the religious/ conservative women’s movement. The women who define themselves as religious and are activists in the women’s movement perceive this situation as a form of exclusion exercised by the feminist movement. Likewise, some feminist movements that hold this point of view do not — or do not want to — accept the fact that religion plays a positive role in identity and that religiousness — and the hijab as an expression of religion — is a personal choice. Among the data collected during the expert interviews, original statements by representatives of

religious/ conservative women’s movements are quite limited, owing to the difficulty experienced when attempting to contact these groups and the low number of interviews conducted with them as a result.

### **Gender-sex/ sexuality/ sexual identity**

In the analysis of the expert interviews, another title mentioned as a separating factor among the women’s movements in Turkey was gender-sex/ sexuality/ sexual identity. Another interesting aspect of this title is its contact with the topics tackled and analyzed under the title religion/ conservatism.

Dilet Bulut, who participated in this research from the Muğla Karya Women’s Association, illustrated the factors complicating the process of bringing the different actors working on women and gender politics together, which are caused by the radical feminism regarding their view on certain topics related to sexuality:

The fact that radical feminists [...] speak about sexuality and their sexuality too comfortably, their mentality of sexuality and the theme of freedom, as well as the way they express and [...] explain this makes it difficult for them to connect with the people who define themselves as [...] doubtful feminist (2015: 24).

According to Bulut, one of the reasons for this distinction is that the radical feminist demands seem too excessive for those women “who are aware of the psychological violence they suffer at home, see the violence on the street, see the femicides and who physically partake in women’s struggle because the problems they go through in their lives are more vital” (2015: 27).

The different perspectives regarding how women’s movements talk about and tackle the topics of sexuality and sexual freedom also present themselves in the LGBTI movement. According to Fırat Varatyan, a LGBTI activist from Trabzon Purple Fish, while sexual revolution is a concept that involves the freedom of sexual identity, it is being reduced to sex, which is a physiological need, “something you do in a bed [...] with the sense of ejaculation” Moreover,

Varyatan thinks that “women’s movements keep this more confidential and private” (2015: 26).

Slogans regarding sexuality, homosexuality and the gender issues are also controversial in coalition events, which is parallel to Bulut’s remarks. According to Gülsen Ülker of Ankara Women’s Solidarity Foundation (KDV), the remarks made by LGBTI regarding homosexual freedom, as well as some feminist slogans related to sexual freedom disturbed many women from leftist organizations, and caused some actors to retreat (2014: 30). The fact that the religious/ conservative women did not want to march under the sign “Hands off my sexuality” mentioned by Sema Kendirici Uğurman under the title religion/ conservatism can be given as another example of the situation about the slogans (2014: 23). According to Dilek Bulut, this situation is a point of separation in Muğla: “the slogans that are going to be chanted by vegan or radical feminists regarding gender and their sexuality” in the events that are organised collectively by many different groups, such as 8 March or 25 November, invoke curiosity and worry, while other groups “want to hear those slogans” (2015: 31).

Another important and controversial topic analyzed under this title alongside with sexuality is the view on LGBTI and homosexuality. In the interviews, especially the LGBTI activists consider the homophobic/ transphobic reactions given by the women’s movements in Turkey to be a point of separation (e.g. Arif et al., 2015: 24- 28; Çiçek & Ceylan Gülen, 2015: 6; Kandok, 2015: 38; Zeze, 2015: 34). Activists from women’s movements mentioned the tension experienced in the joint activities where different groups came together regarding the LGBTI activists in 1990s and 2000s. Reyhan Atasü Topçuoğlu of Hacettepe University shared the instances where lesbian women representing KAOS GL in the mutual meetings were faced with homophobic reactions in Ankara, in the early 2000s (2014: 27). According to Atasü Topçuoğlu, the level of the dialogue achieved between the LGBTI and women’s movements is “a distance that has been covered” since the 2000s (2014: 27). According to Ayşe Balkanay of the Denizli Supporting Entrepreneur Women Association (GİKAD), LGBTI-related topics are a kind of a taboo, and offered the following explanation as to the reason why: “when an individual talks about LGBTI, they think that maybe what they have to question is themselves” (2015: 42). Zeze, who identified herself a rather new member of Muğla Vegan Feminists, emphasized that the LGBTI movement should be involved in the

network so that the essentialist womanhood oppression exercised by the women’s movements who are influenced by patriarchy can be broken down so that the issues of sexism and homophobia can be tackled:

I am very new in this movement. What I have observed is this: yes, in essence, we are all women and [...] as women, we are affected by patriarchy similarly. However, [...] we tend to forget about the people with a different sexual identity from ours quite easily [...] while we enhance our womanhood. [...] This seems very homophobic and transphobic to me. For example, [...] during demonstrations, someone suddenly [...] chants an anti-slogan about trans individuals. It is shocking and makes you think where you are and [...] what is happening [...] there. It is very bad when that happens, [...] I think people should do more reading on queer feminism, workshops or critics [...] language is very crucial at this point. One of the organizations we will collaborate with in Turkey, or globally, [...] is the LGBT movement. [...] As feminists, we cannot do anything without them [...]. We do not question if the language is [...] sexist and homophobic, [...] or our masculinity in this movement. Actually, we do not question the hierarchy, [...] the hunger for power, [...] that ambition we [...] have. [...] it is great to go out on the streets, but it is very important to be able to build the network within, as well (2015: 28).

Zeze stated that the women’s movements in Turkey cannot find a common ground regarding the LGBTI issue, and that the inclusion of LGBTI-themed slogans in the events is problematic (2015: 34). According to Halil Kondak, an activist of the Denizli LGBTI and Their Families (Denizli LGBTİ ve Aileleri) although women’s movements appear to be libertarian and equalitarian on the outside, “they have internalized heterosexism, as well” -confirming Zeze’s remarks- (2015: 38). Kandok emphasized the point of “submissiveness to the heterosexist structure” in the libertarian approaches (2015: 38). LGBT activists of KESKESOR Diyarbakır also shared the prejudices they faced. According to their observations, some women’s organizations in Diyarbakır think that all that LGBTI organizations aspire to achieve “is to live their sexuality freely” (Çiçek &Gülen, 2015: 6). Such views impact them as an organization, while Çiçek and Gülen think that the reason lies on the fact that homophobia and

transphobia are influential in those organizations (2015: 6).

Other separating topics that are considered to be heteronormative, transphobic and homophobic attitudes coded under the title gender-sex/ sexuality is trans individuals and sex work. In the interviews, activists of the LGBTI Organization, Hebung, Diyarbakır, gave the discussions that took place in the 8 March demonstration organized in 2008, in Diyarbakır as an example. Öykü defines the meeting held by women’s organizations to decide whether to allow trans women walk alongside with them in the women’s cortege, “quite painful” (Arif et al., 2015: 24- 28). Öykü explains her experience as a trans woman:

Think about it, you are a woman and they evaluate you only [...] according to your organ. [...] it was very painful, I did participate in that demonstration [...] but that meeting hurt me a lot, to be honest. We just made them [...] face our existence, but women’s organizations still [...] do not accept sex workers, or even us, in their essence. I think they only pretend to accept these, because they are involved in the feminist movement (2015: 24- 28).

With this remark, Öykü emphasized the perceptions of sex and gender. As she identifies herself as a woman, due to her belongingness she wants women’s movements to see trans women as a coalition partner, rather than being evaluated by her physical aspects attributed by her sex, she also highlighted that basing one’s definition of others’ identities on biological sex can be controversial.

According to Öykü, sex work, alongside with trans identities, is another controversial topic in coalition events. Other LGBTI activists also confirm her remarks regarding sex workers. Dilan Çiçek and Ceylan Gülen, activists of Diyarbakır KESKESOR LGBT organisation, stated that the term sex work and the use of it is quite controversial among women’s movements and feminists:

This has always been discussed fiercely in the panels. [...] How do we define sex work? Should we call it sex slavery? Should we call it ‘prostitution’?

What does survival sex mean? Is there a version of it that is voluntary? [...]

These are the topics that are constantly discussed (Çiçek &Gülen, 2015: 56).

The point that becomes clear with this statement is that approaching new concepts and categories may cause worry and doubt in women’s movements in Turkey regarding “the unusual states of womanhood”, and that the breaking points in the society take effect within the women’s movements, as well. Çiçek and Ceylan mentioned that women in Diyarbakır are as divided as women in Turkey regarding this topic (2015: 56). Arif of Hebun Hebun LGBTI argued that feminism and women’s movements have their own serious positions, while asking the question “How many women’s movements” in Turkey or Diyarbakır “talk about, or listen to, or face the problems women working in brothels experience” (Arif et al., 2015: 29-34). According to Öykü and Arif the concept of sex work is entirely a taboo for some groups in women’s movements and people avoid uttering the word: instead, they use word “fuhuş” (prostitution) (Arif et al., 2015: 29- 34). Çiçek and Ceylan think that the first most important factor in being against sex work and avoiding the term is religion and the second one is morality and the judgement “are women commodities to be marketed?” (2015: 83).

Apart from the LGBTI activists expressing the separating points regarding sex work especially in Diyarbakır, Zin of Diyarbakır Selis Women’s Association said, “We have problems such as being dragged into prostitution” (2015: 52). This comparison can be the evidence of various positions taken regarding sex work. While the LGBTI activists prefer the term “sex work”, as it can be also seen in the remarks of Zin, sex work is depicted as a problem by using the term “prostitution”, which has moral implications.

The separating topics among the women’s movements in Turkey under the title gender-sex/sexuality are diverse. As seen in the interviews, important points of separation were mentioned by the activists, such as women’s sexuality, women’s sexual freedom, homosexuality, the trans issue, sex work, heteronormative values, transphobia and homophobia. These points of separation not only affect the answer of the question which actors will join the coalitions -as in the example of trans women-, but also cause withdrawals in demonstrations and events because of various slogan contents.

## Organisational (structural)/ institutional differences

In terms of institutionalism, independence, project feminism, collaborations with public institutions, relations with the ruling party (JDP), and other political parties, coalition/ collaboration with men, presented themselves as divisive and controversial topics under the title organisational (structural)/ institutional differences as a result of the analysis of the expert interviews.

### *Project feminism*

Project feminism,<sup>5</sup> which was criticised as a divisive topic under the scope of organisational (structural)/ institutional differences by women’s movements, was discussed in detail in many cities where the field research was conducted (i.e. Üst, 2015: 2, 14 in Trabzon; Karakış, 2015: 45 in Denizli; Anonymous, 2014: 21 in Ankara). The discussion about project feminism gained momentum at the same time that women’s movements started to organise as civil society organisations (CSOs) and the negotiations on Turkey’s candidacy for the EU began. According to Serpil Sancar of Ankara University, project feminism is another step in the transformation process that feminist organisations in Turkey have been going through since the 1980s. Sancar considers that the rise in institutionalisation as well as the structure that is called project feminism, feminist agency lost its effectiveness on the street (2015: 32). Sancar argued that, while women’s movements advance through project feminism, they also retire in their shell, they continue their work within the frames of the project topics, and can rarely come together (2015: 32). Sancar, who considers project feminism to be a growing tendency not just in Turkey, but also in the world, considers that a new step is needed to be able to follow the results of the projects that are conducted in the light of project feminism: Monitoring (Sancar, 2015: 32).

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'project feminism' describes the struggle of women's and gender's policies carried out by women's organisations such as NGOs through the projects sponsored by external funds, and can also be used in a critical way. According to Deniz Kandiyoti, as a result of "a process of and technocratic NGO-ization ", experienced by women's movements, "project feminism, on the one hand, limits women's empowerment within a market mentality by being fed by both internal and external funds, and on the other hand, it provides financial opportunities for urban and educated women to reach out to the less educated, poorer women, as well as women of different ethnicity than theirs" (Kandiyoti 2015).

Reyhan Atasü Topçuoğlu of Hacettepe University stated that discussions about “saloon feminism” began following the arrival of EU projects in Turkey (2014: 49). Sevinç Hocaoğulları of Ankara Halkevci Women argued that, although the discussions regarding self-power and its involvement in carrying out the organisation and struggle within women’s movements during Turkey’s EU process do not play a divisive role, they are often discussed in her organisation (2014: 20). Figen Aras, board member of Diyarbakır Women’s Academy Association, expressed the tension between self-power and project feminism, as well as her criticism of project feminism:

We criticise the women’s movements who constantly create projects and exist through projects, for instance. What we should actually do is to unveil our self-power. The projects from Europe actually reflect neoliberal politics. You constantly [...] receive money and do work as the money comes in. However, there is a dependency in the work that is being done: if there is money, there is work; if there is no money, there is no work. Hence, we approach the EU projects and many others with caution. As an organisation, we receive many project offers, but we reject them. It can be very well done, we can carry out some trainings and surveys and somehow finalise a project, but we view these projects as a great danger which threatens our ability to unveil our own self-power. We also criticise the women’s movements that advance thanks to the support provided by the office of the governor and do not speak up and are too cautious. This has nothing to do with completely ignoring or opposing them. However, women’s own identity, colour, will power fail to come to light because of such projects, and we are careful in that sense (2015: 12).

Apart from the dependence it creates on financing, project feminism can also jeopardise the self-sufficiency of the women’s organisations that are only sensitive to calls for projects and continue their women’s and gender struggle through these. In this sense, what Aras finds problematic is not the participation in these projects, but the dependency that comes with project financing. Project feminism can also damage the self-identity and visibility of women. Correspondingly, Pelin Şirin from Trabzon also argued that, as projects come with their own financing, they cause dependency, and that these projects divide and hinder women (2015:

23). According to Şirin, accepting projects from ill-favoured groups in this dependency relationship causes this hindrance. Öykü of Hebung Diyarbakır also claimed that some women’s movements participate in projects in order to retain their employment and decide on their agendas according to the project calls (Arif et al., 2015: 150). Another activist from Diyarbakır who is a member of Women’s Association Hands with Henna drew attention to another problem: Projects are left half-finished or do not reach a conclusion at all (2015: 32–34). According to this activist, as long as there is information-sharing about projects among organisations, groups working on different topics can provide support for each other (2015: 32–34). Even if women’s movements are ready to work together in the light of certain parameters, in the field and at events, some groups do not want their independent working conditions to be threatened.

Apart from continuing activities with self-power, another important view shared on the topic of project feminism was following an independent policy while doing so. An activist of the Socialist Feminist Collective (SFC), Ankara, explained how they started to publish the magazine ‘Feminist Policy’ independently, as part of the SFC’s goals:

The SFC essentially aims for independency from men, capital and government. After all, we continue publishing our magazine and our other activities on our own, without accepting money from any institution (Anonymous, 2014: 20–21).

Being financially autonomous and continuing activities through “own self-power” is quite an important topic for many representatives of women’s movements.

### *Collaboration with public institutions*

Activists of women’s movements in Turkey have different perspectives regarding government and collaboration with public institutions. Seçin Tuncel, LGBTI activist of Ankara KAOS GL, shared her observation that women’s organisations (such as associations) that are in contact with public institutions more frequently, do not (or cannot) display enough opposition compared to the other women’s movements which are active on the streets (2014: 24).

However, according to Tuncel, women activists who work for or interact with the

government can observe many government-related problems in a better light and Tuncel finds these activists’ experiences valuable (2014: 24).

Some activists report, however, that, despite the criticisms, collaboration with public institutions can also be carried out without problems. Nurber Güldal of Trabzon Women Life Centre Association stated that when they come across “understanding”, “educated” people with a “women’s perspective”, their collaborations run smoothly (2015: 46). Nebahat Akkoç of Diyarbakır KA-MER stated that they work with neighbourhood representatives and imams in the villages of the cities of Batman and Siirt and that their visits to public institutions are effective (2015: 20). Akkoç explained that they collaborate with public institutions to voice their problems rather than to educate, and that they find support regarding violence and honour killings and emphasised that they have achieved a genuine and sustainable relationship (2015: 20). According to Akkoç, collaborations with public institutions help public officials to gain awareness (2015: 20).

Considering the examples above, it can be concluded that some women’s movements increase their sphere of influence at various levels through their collaborations with public institutions and this creates awareness within the public institutions. As can be seen in the interviews conducted during the field research, in some areas (i.e. the East Black Sea Region or smaller cities and rural areas), public institutions can act as a side that is picked to collaborate with in order to raise gender awareness and to work on the topics of gender equality.

### *Relations with the ruling party JDP and other political parties*

Serpil Sancar of Ankara University not only defended the view that organisations retreating into their shells through project feminism creates results such as depoliticisation and technicalisation, but also raised the following questions:

What will feminists and women’s rights defenders do in formal representative politics, what kind of policies will they follow? What is their action plan against the increasing conservatism of the JDP? How will they

follow the international agreements and legal rights which the government promised to apply? How will they ensure the functionality of the mechanism that prevents violence against women, and that of the government? (Sancar, 2014: 36).

Activists and academics who were interviewed regarding these questions expressed different views on the relations between women’s movements and the ruling party. Generally, some activists consider the independent women’s struggle to be separate from political parties, while others do not think that it is problematic to collaborate with the groups that have ties with political parties regarding a certain and limited set of topics. According to some other groups, however, taking an opposing stand against the JDP is a prerequisite for the independence of the women’s struggle. If a political party is supported or represented by certain actors, some groups consider this to be a crucial reason not to collaborate with those actors.

Aksu Bora, who was interviewed in Ankara on behalf of the magazine ‘Amargi’, “where -in Turkish geography- actors of feminist movement place themselves”, both physically and humanely, is important (2014: 24). Some people view opposing the JDP to be an important topic on the agenda, however, as putting the JDP in the centre is considered wrong, this does not apply in Amargi (Bora, 2014: 24). Mukaddes Alataş of Diyarbakır Kardelen Women’s Centre emphasised that there are women’s organisations and associations with whom they do not agree regarding the legislation and changes in legislation carried out by the JDP government. She stated that there are disagreements because the groups that support the government are backed up by the system and they do not want to speak out against these policies (2015: 21). Pelin Şirin of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), Trabzon, has a critical perspective on collaborations with JDP municipalities and the governor’s offices – as public institutions – although she considers these collaborations to be important in terms of enforcing demands and forming a resistant front (2015: 23). At the time of the interview, Denizli Metropolitan Municipality Women’s Council stated that they continued their activities and programmes with the JDP’s metropolitan municipality without any difficulties (Özen et al., 2015: 45–47). In light of these remarks, it is quite difficult to make a general inference regarding the (lack of) collaborations between the women’s movements in Turkey and the

ruling party.

Bilsen Özen of Denizli Metropolitan Municipality Women’s Council argued that women’s movements divide in Denizli when politics comes into play (2015: 83–93). Regarding political parties, participants in every city that was included in the field research stated that this issue is a separating factor. According to Sema Kendirici Uğurman of Turkish Women’s Union, regardless of which party, activists who continue their women’s struggle in political parties move away from the women’s issue and ensure that they do not speak about the topics outside of the party’s programme, “although they do not believe in it” (2014: 29). According to Kendirici Uğurman, these separations are caused by political views (2014: 29). Arif of Diyarbakır Hebun stated that women’s branches that belong to political parties cannot be independent and that they comply with the views and policies of these parties (2015: 46).

According to Şahinde Yavuz of the Black Sea Technical University, the participation of political parties in the demonstrations organised by their women’s branches, such as the demonstrations regarding the abortion issue, is a crucial point (2015: 25). This can cause opposing parties to try to gain popularity through women’s movements (by criticising the government), and even though the activists participating in demonstrations are not interested in the policies of these parties, they find themselves in a position where they appear to be supporters of these parties (Yavuz, 2015: 25). Yavuz emphasises that this occurs most frequently during the pre-election period (2015: 25).

Nefise Yenigül, socialist feminist of the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), who was interviewed in Artvin-Hopa, considers that it is important for the women who are active in political parties to put their political identities aside and go onto the streets, and fight alongside other NGOs (2015: 15). In the region of Artvin-Hopa, although there were activities aiming for women to organise independently, they did not yield any results. Yenigül thinks that the reason for this is that the activity and variety which is observed in large cities is lacking in Hopa, but it is still possible to assemble despite the limited variety (2015: 15). Hence, in terms of larger and smaller cities, the independent women’s organisations’ area of influence, the local power of the women’s movements working on women’s and gender policies, as well as their capacity for struggle can vary according to their region.

According to Figan Erozan, a radical feminist representing Bodrum Women’s Solidarity Association, political parties disapprove of the association of the women who are active under their roof with women’s movements. Erozan considers that the reason for this is the demand put forward by the women in the political party that they take over the areas in the party that belong to women (2015: 2). Erozan put forward that, because political parties are considered to be male-structuring, the women working in the parties are thought to occupy a secondary position:

Hence, women there cannot make policies for themselves, but act as tools [...] in the process of internalisation of the already existing policies. [...] Can this not be transformed? If there is a strong women’s movement on the street, the lives of these women in these political parties, their policies and statements can be transformed. However, it is out of our hands, because if there is no independent structuring, the discourse is controlled by men (2015: 10).

According to Erozan, in order to achieve a transformation, a women’s structuring that is independent from men is both crucial and necessary. The male-dominant power relations within a political party can also be transformed through women’s movements. In other words, the stronger the independent women’s movements are, the stronger the positions and rights of women under a certain power structure, i.e. as in the example provided by Erozan of women in political parties, can become. The independent women’s movements are the source of power that women in political parties hold. This point is related to yet another controversial topic: coalition/ collaboration with men.

#### *Coalition/ collaboration with men*

Another controversial point that falls under the title organisational (structural)/ institutional differences is coalition with men and the continuing women’s struggle with mixed-gender organisations.

According to an activist of the feminist student group in Ankara, Women Belong in Politics (KIPS), there is disagreement between two views: whether to organise as a mixed-gender organisation or to reject this type of organisational structure altogether (Anonymous, 2014: 38). March 8 events can be given as an example of the discussions on organising events and carrying out activities with a mixed-gender structure. Sevinç Hocaoğulları of Halkevci Women explained how this discussion unveils itself in the left-wing:

It has almost been overcome recently, but [...] the discussion about whether 8 March events would be all-women or mixed has been going on for 10 years in women’s platforms. Now it is organised thanks to women’s participation. However, there are still places where this discussion is relevant: “No, it should actually be mixed because [...] independence of women depends on the independence of labour, which requires a joint struggle” and such. Although the discussion about whether the women’s struggle should be independent or part of the socialism struggle is not as current or popular compared to in the past, it still continues beneath the surface. For instance, independent organisation of women, the faith in or need for the women’s struggle may act as separating factors. We think that the women’s struggle should be carried out in independent channels. We believe that even if it is in a mixed organisation, channels should be created to strengthen the autonomy of women’s organisation, i.e. the women’s subjectivation process, and that mixed-gender organisations and labour organisations should act with the acknowledgement of the distinctness of the women’s struggle (2014: 20)

According to Hocaoğulları, the crucial points are as follows: the autonomy of the women’s organisation within in a mixed-gender organisation, as well as the formation of channels that support women’s subjectivation process, and the acknowledgement of the distinctness of the women’s struggle by mixed-gender organisations (2014: 20).

Erozan of the Bodrum Women’s Solidarity Association (BKD) strongly criticised, however, the participation of men in the 8 March events and demonstrations regarding the murder of

Özgecan Aslan.<sup>6</sup> She thinks that women protest for themselves, and that they have a learned and earned way of protesting: “They protest without men, because men are what we are fighting against because they enjoy the advantages of this system” (2015: 12). According to Erozan, men’s participation in the demonstrations organised by women is equal to emptying the women’s movements from inside out. Erozan highlighted that she would go into the streets with men, as an indisputable political principle (2015: 12).

Generally, two perspectives provided in the expert interviews draw attention regarding stands taken against collaboration with men. Firstly, a radical perspective can be mentioned. This view considers men to be an entity against which they carry out a struggle. Following this view, it is impossible to form coalitions with the side which is fought against. The second perspective is more of an action-based pragmatism: The agency of the women’s movements is an arena where no attacks by men can take place and this can be accomplished by carrying out the activities freely from men.

To illustrate the second perspective, Jülide Keleş Yarışan of Denizli Soroptimist Club highlighted that all-women protests and events create a better environment for the struggle. According to Keleş Yarışan, this makes it easier for women to become involved in the organisation, as she mentioned that it is more comfortable for women to participate in the independent women’s organisations without having to worry about “how they will be harassed [by men]” (2015: 14). However, Keleş Yarışan also stated that the mixed events held by Denizli GİKAD (*Supporting Entrepreneur Women Association*) help men to gain awareness regarding women’s and gender issues (2015: 14).

Zin and Emek of Diyarbakır Women’s Association Selis explained that the Kurdish Women’s Movement educate men in gender-related topics “in order to give them a self-critical approach and to create a change in their view on women” (2015: 46). Figen Aras of Diyarbakır Women’s Academy Association defined men as “those who stand over us as little sovereigns”, and pointed out the fact that despite “comradery” and “friendship”, they can

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<sup>6</sup> The university student who was killed for resisting the rape attempt by a minibus driver on 11 February 2015 in the Tarsus district of the city Mersin.

still express themselves as “men” (Aras, 2015: 36–42). Aras argued that women need to be a “pushing power” as men will not be willing to “give up their dominance” and stated that they offer “authentic trainings in women’s issues” for men (2015: 36–42). At this point, the most striking difference is sharing, not teaching. Aras, who mentioned that “men experience difficulties in their practices”, emphasised that the participants have become aware of the patriarchy of the system as a result of these trainings (2015: 36–42).

An activist from Women’s Association Hands with Henna stated that “men must become aware” for the sake of the struggle against women’s issues and emphasised that they consider men to be their target crowd in their projects (Anonymous, 2015: 21).

In parallel, according to Aksu Bora of ‘Amargi’ magazine, the topic of collaboration with men is very controversial among the women’s movements in Turkey (2014: 24). Bora, who mentioned that male authors were not hired for the magazine for a long time, stated that the “gender issue is not that easy to comprehend” by providing the example of a trans author writing for the magazine (2014: 24).

In light of the interviews summarised above, it is clear that the topic of collaboration with men is a controversial point for the women’s movements in Turkey. The views cannot be categorised in a clear-cut fashion. Restarting dialogues and discussions regarding collaboration with men in various environments can qualify as a general result.

## 1.2 Unifying topics

Despite the separating factors that are discussed and presented above and based on the expert interviews, the women’s movements in Turkey act in solidarity and assemble in common areas of struggle not only nationwide, but also in the regions where the field research was conducted, and they tackle the women’s and gender policies within the frames of gender equality.

The most important line of struggle that leads to solidarity and coalitions within the women’s

movements is **violence against women**, which is the common denominator of many women’s movements. According to Pelin Kalkan of Ankara Feminist Collective, “The issues which everybody works to overcome are usually very dreary, unpleasant, and are related to violence” (2014: 25). Selen Doğan of Flying Broom stated that, according to her observations, violence and issues related to it create an arena to develop a common reflex:

I am talking about violence in its classical sense, beating, rape, murder, femicide, ‘honour’ killings, etc. Women’s organisations can and do get together regarding all these. (2014: 38).

Dilek Bulut of Muğla Karya Women’s Association considers the issue of violence against women “a point of contact” among the women’s movements in Turkey:

Femicides have increasingly become wild. Hence, the women’s struggle based on this issue continues quite strongly and there I notice this: People start to stand against Kurdish, Turkish, feminist, lesbian, LGBT murders, as well. Thus, the issues of violence and murder seem to be the only point of unity for the women’s movement in Turkey (2015: 27).

Apart from these statements, many activists who were interviewed pointed out that women’s movements put their ideological differences aside and *definitely* unite regarding issues such as violence against women (i.e. Başak, 2014: 48; Doğan, 2014: 38; Hocaoğulları, 2014: 20; Kalkan, 2014: 21, 25; Sancar, 2014: 34; Akkoç, 2015: 57; Aktaş, 2015: 13; Alataş, 2015: 21; Arduç et al., 2015: 29; Arif et al., 2015: 22; Balkanay, 2015: 37–42; Bulut, 2015: 27; Can, 2015: 22; Eren, 2015: 18; Karakuş, 2015: 35; Zin & Emek, 2015: 48). Violence against women, which is a unifying topic for various women’s movements, was discussed in detail in the expert interviews: “Beating, rape, murder, femicide, ‘honour’ killing” (Doğan, 2014: 38), “domestic violence” (Vayic Aksu, 2015: 19), “misogyny” (Kenanoğlu, 2015: 33), “massacres of women” (Anonymous, 2015: 94–95), demand for women’s shelters (Çağlayan, 2014: 32).

Another unifying topic is **human rights of women and hence the struggle against the subordination of women**. According to Aksu Bora, who was interviewed in Ankara, the factor

“which unifies everyone, be it feminists or non-feminists, is the knowledge of women’s subordination and suppression” (2014: 24). Güler Can from Jin Women’s News Agency stated that “what is mutual for women’s movements is actually the perspective that women are the second-class race” and “the struggle for women’s rights and to break this mentality” is the common ground for all women’s movements (2015: 22).

**Women’s employment and participation in professional life** is an issue that leads many different women’s movements to form coalitions. For instance, Nurten Karakış of Denizli Association of Women’s Rights Protection emphasised that employment is an issue that brings the women’s movements in Turkey together (Karakış, 2015: 17; Akgün, 2015: 20). Emine Altundaş of Trabzon JDP’s Women’s Branch gave entrepreneurship courses as an example of the activities carried out regarding employment (2015: 14). Pelin Şirin, who was interviewed in Trabzon, defines “revision of the laws in the legal process and gaining rights in the legal process” as a line of struggle (2015: 23). Özlem Şahin Güngör of Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University emphasised that due to labour studies, a partnership has emerged between “the organisation of home-based working women” and “the women involved in the labour process as a part of a union” (2015: 32).

**Oppression at the governmental level or exercised by the government** can cause women’s movements to develop a common reflex. Bahar Bostan of Trabzon Bar Association/ Women’s Rights Commission assessed this unifying topic:

Normally, the state and government are different entities, but right now we consider these two to be one within the other and when faced with any oppression towards women which comes from the state or the government, aiming to narrow down the habitat of women. Especially if the government intervenes with our territory, Islamist women, Kurdish women, Turkish women, Socialist Feminists and the Turkish Women’s Union, we all assemble (2015: 18).

Parallel to Bostan’s remarks, Şahinde Yavuz of Black Sea Technical University pointed out that “the patriarchal practices in law” and “subjective interpretations” hurt women a great deal

and, according to her, women unite in this process. According to Nesrin Semiz of Capital City Women’s Platform, “the stand against the government” is a point that brings the women’s movements in Ankara together and leads them to act collectively (2014: 27–28).

**Early marriages**, i.e. “child brides”, **women’s participation in the political arena**, **signing and developing international treaties** such as The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or the Istanbul Convention, the special days regarding **the women’s and gender struggles**, such as 8 March, International Women’s Day, and 25 November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women are the factors that widely unify the women’s movements in Turkey. In light of the interviews, issues regarding **abortion, birth, fertility** and **women’s sexuality** as part of **body politics** can be added to the set of unifying topics for the women’s movements in Turkey on a narrower scale. These unifying topics play an important role in the examples of coalition observed in the field research, which was carried out in the cities of Ankara, Diyarbakır, Denizli, Muğla, Trabzon, Artvin’s city center and Hopa district, as well as different women’s movements’ coalitions made in the name of women’s and social struggle.

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