

Women's and Gender Studies at Universities in Turkey: Institutionalization and Transformation

The first Women's and Gender Studies Centres at universities in Turkey were built up in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Istanbul and Ankara. The founders were academics who felt attached to or were involved in women's movements as social movements. However, many of today's centres were established as independent teaching and research units following incentives by the Turkish state since the middle of the 1990s. The Directorate for the Status of Women, for example, recommended the founding of Women's Studies Centres in 1995. In 2016, about 70 Women's and Gender Studies Centres at public and private universities existed in Turkey, both in big cities like Izmir, Gaziantep, and Antalya and in small ones like Aydın, Çorum, and Bingöl.

This project investigates self-conceptions, aims, and research topics of the institutionalized Women's and Gender Studies through discourse analysis. It compares if and to what extent they can be located through the framework of or are connected to state effects, independent research, and civic resistance. Expert interviews accompany and complement the data collection.

Through the cooperation between academics at the University of Bremen and Istanbul University, and through comparing academic discourses about Women's and Gender Studies in Germany and England, the project aims to contribute to the research on the relationship between state, civil society, and science and initiate a "Blickwechsel" concerning the following questions:

- How can the vast variety of topics and the related diverse self-conceptions of centres be explained?
- To what extent does this variety reflect specific developments within academic and political discourses in Turkey?

- To what extent are institutionalized Women's and Gender Studies in Turkey influenced by the apparatus of the Turkish state and current governmental policies?
- Even under conditions of state control, which impulses can researchers set on their own?

Given the political circumstances in Turkey, debates on democracy, minority rights, and gender justice raise controversy and lead to academics taking a political stance or having one assigned to them. What kinds of settings for those discussions do the different Women's and Gender Studies Centres at public universities, which were funded under completely different political and administrative conditions, provide?

Are Women's and Gender Studies still possible at all under the current political conditions for science – e.g. the state repression against the signatories of the petition by the "Academics for Peace" (*Barış için Akademisyenler*) – and if so, which subjects do the researchers deal with?

In order to contribute to public awareness on this topic, the project will conceptualize and implement a travelling exhibition. The exhibition "100 Years of Women at University: The Women's University 1914 – 1919", which was conceptualized by the Istanbul Women's Museum (*İstanbul Kadın Müzesi*) is supplemented by a photo exhibition of women's and gender researchers in Turkey and will be shown at different universities in Germany, England, and Turkey in 2018 and 2019.

Seminars by the cooperating partners and a summer school on the topic for young academics are another part of the transfer from theory into practice in the framework of the project, which aims to contribute to a differentiation of the picture of Women's and Gender Studies in Turkey.