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Research Project Report "Comparing women's movements in different cities in Turkey"

II. Research design for the empirical–qualitative study

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1.1 Theoretical and methodological framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on feminist-oriented social movement research, which conceptualises women’s movements[1] as greatly-differentiated and transnational-oriented social movements (Lenz, 2014), and on the research concept of intersectionality, which unites multiple social inequalities and power relations within movement communities (Walgenbach, 2012).

In theory, the social phenomenon of women’s movement(s) may be understood primarily on the basis of theories developed under the framework of new social movement research.[2] Social movements are herein generally conceptualised as an “action system based on collective identity, in which mobilised networks of groups and organisations act”, with the aim of causing, preventing or reversing “social change by means of public protests” (Neidhardt and Rucht, 1991: 450). Using this definition, an analysis may be performed of both the initiatives led by autonomous activists[3] and the actions of organisations and institutions that express solidarity, as well as the causes, mobilisation dynamics and progress of these specific forms of protest (Raschke, 1985). In addition, the relationship between women’s movements, women’s and gender policies in administrations and politics and feminist science, in particular gender research, can be understood using the concept of “velvet triangles of gender politics” (Woodward, 2001: 35). According to Wichterich, Woodward uses the concept to further describe “the interplay and the interaction of a) activists and women’s

[1] See chapter III.1.B. for a detailed explanation of the term “women’s movements” within the research context of Turkey.
[2] For an overview of the theories surrounding the new social movements, see Kern, 2008. For a particular focus on gender, see also Ferree and McClurg Mueller, 2006.
[3] When referring to participants in women’s and gender political activities and debates, the term *Akteur*in* was chosen in the original German, which in qualitative social research describes those who act socially. The term refers both to the concept of agency – i.e. the ability and power to act (Bethmann et al., 2012) – as well as to political activism, for which a distinction can be made between individual and collective *Akteur*innen.* (Translator’s note: For the English translation, the terms “activists” and “actors) were used). For a description of the distinction between the terms “activist”, “individual” and “subject”, see Lüdtke and Matsuzaki, 2011.

movements, b) female scientific experts and c) femocrats and female politicians” at the level of state institutional policy and of civil society. It is a “velvet” triangle because “the biographies of the three types of activist are interconnected and some of them switch between the three groups on one or more occasion” (Wichterich, 2007: 10).

The methodological “manner of thinking about the way to be followed”, i.e. “the questions of why, what and how concerning the research” (Sturm, 2010: 400) is of vital importance, in particular following the “crisis of representation” (Winter, 2011: 76).[4] For this reason, a (post)structuralist, feminist and postcolonial critique of US/Eurocentric and androcentric research and of the “processes of othering“ in knowledge productions was performed throughout the research process (Abu-Lughod, 1996) by, among other things, reflecting the research experience, taking into account the position and the role of the research subjects in their respective research areas. In doing so, the importance of subjective situatedness for the research interest and results was identified and included in the research process. The research results were discussed in 2016 with scientists and activists from Turkey in Ankara and Bremen, which also served to reinforce the process of reflection.[5]

To ensure the scientific quality of the study, the research process was designed based on the qualitative social research quality criteria formulated by Ines Steinke and summarised by Lüders, namely: intersubjective comprehensibility; indication of the suitability of the subject, the research process and the evaluation criteria; empirical basis in theory formation and theory examination; the limitations […] of the results; reflected subjectivity; coherence of theory; and the relevance of not only the research question but also of the developed theory (Lüders, 2006a: 81).[6]

[4] Social and cultural anthropologists in particular have, since the 1970s, discussed the “crisis of ethnographic representation” (Fuchs and Berg, 1993) in the context of the “writing-culture debate”, as well as “the textuality of ethnographies, in addition to the social meanings, roles and functions of their own disciplines” (Massmünster, 2014: 526).

[5] C.f. the term “situated knowledges” in Haraway (1996) and Harding (2004), in addition to Spivak’s (2008) postcolonial critique of knowledge productions.

[6] Despite the discussion of the assessment criteria for qualitative studies, no final consensus was reached. In addition to Steinke (2000), the quality criteria for qualitative research formulated by Mayring (2003) and Silverman (2010) and the specific quality criteria for ethnographical research set by von Breidenstein et al. (2013: 184–188) served as a basis for this study.

1.2 Research methods

An appropriate research design for the research questions used in the study at hand was developed based on the plural-method and triangulative research concept of ethnography (Flick, 2006: 161–162; Lüders, 2006b: 151–152). A “between-method-triangulation“ (Denzin, 1977: 308) allows us to consider “the relationship between linguistically transmitted concepts and observable action strategies and structures during data analysis“ (Münst, 2010: 384). The holistic investigation approach used in the participant observation method in complement to the expert interviews makes it possible to “cross the boundaries which are inherent to an exclusively linguistic approach to the field of research and to record knowledge as well as cultural practices that are discursively unavailable“ (Münst, 2010: 384). For Pfadenhauer (2009: 113), an ethnographic research design must be included in the interview process in order to qualify the interviewer and identify the experts, thereby enabling the researcher, through the participant observation method, to acquire “a high field competency […] and a high field acceptance in the field”.

The ethnographic method of participant observation and documentation was therefore initially applied during the visits to the four research regions — Ankara, Diyarbakir, the Southern Aegean (Denizli and Muğla) and the Eastern Black Sea (Artvin, Hopa and Trabzon) — during the two-year research phase in order to create a holistic perspective of those regions’ respective women’s movements (Beer and Fischer, 2009). The programme included, in particular, participation in women’s and gender policy events held to celebrate International Women’s Day on 8 March in 2014 and 2015. Additionally, documents such as press releases, flyers, posters and newspaper articles were collected for later analysis.

Using the collected data, an interview guide for semi-openly structured expert interviews was developed, whose usability was checked in the test interviews. The practice-based instructions drawn up by Gläser and Laudel (2009: 111–196) and by Pickel and Pickel (2008: 456) were used to develop the interview guide and to structure the expert interviews.[7] The

[7] Several publications on the theory, method and evaluation of expert interviews have already been published, which served as a basis for developing the qualitative research design and for data collection and evaluation: Bogner et al., (2009); Gläser and Laudel, (2009); Littig, (2011); Meuser and Nagel, (1991, 2008, 2010); Mieg and Näf, (2006). The interview guide for this study is included in the section “IV. Attachment” for reference.

interviewees were asked questions about their organisation, the topics, activities and means of communication used by women’s movements, the importance of women’s and gender political activism in each research region and their understanding of what it means to be a woman and of what women’s movements are. The 65 qualitative interviews conducted with experts from women’s movements during field research and their audio-visual recordings constitute the central research material gathered during the process-oriented data collection stage.

In this reconstructive social research case, experts were not seen as the “objects” of the research, but rather as “witnesses” to the processes being researched (Gläser and Laudel, 2009: 10–11). According to this method, persons “who have acquired expert knowledge about these matters through their participation” are interviewed, with a view to reconstructing social matters (Gläser and Laudel, 2009: 13). Experts are responsible “for the concept, development, implementation and/or monitoring of problem-solving situations” and therefore have “privileged access to information about groups of persons, their social status, decision-making processes [and] political fields” (Meuser and Nagel, 2008: 470). Experts are of interest owing to their position “as functionaries within an organisational and institutional context” and to “the associated responsibilities, duties and activities and the experience and knowledge acquired exclusively from this position“. The “experts as representatives of an organisation or institution”, rather than their individual biographies, were therefore examined (Meuser and Nagel, 1991: 443–444).

According to Meuser and Nagel, with reference to Schütz (1972), the term “expert” refers to “the sociological differentiation between experts and laypersons and the corresponding differentiation between general knowledge and specialist knowledge”. They state that, while the development of expertise has historically been closely tied to the differentiation of professional roles, in late modern societies expert knowledge is also generated in non-occupational contexts. For example, activists in citizen initiatives, support organisations and self-help groups or volunteers in care and social work can acquire “specialist knowledge” through their activities and therefore have “privileged access to information“ (Meuser and Nagel, 2010: 377).

Based on this understanding, for this study interviews were conducted with women’s and gender policy activists who were, at the time of research, actively involved in civil society and/or were working professionally in the field of institutional women’s and gender politics and research. Through their functions, responsibilities and tasks at certain organisations and institutions, these activists bore responsibility for conducting women’s and gender policy activities and debates. At the same time, they had privileged access to information such as certain decision-making processes, which are relevant for the research question about the (im)possibility of forming coalitions (Meuser and Nagel, 2010: 377; Pfadenhauer, 2009: 100). The personal features of the interview partners, such as their profession, ethnic origin or age, therefore must reflect the heterogeneity of the women’s and gender policy activists in the field, in order to do justice to the diverse sociocultural conditions experienced in the production of expert knowledge.

The empirical data was evaluated — using MAX.QDA software — by coding and categorising the empirical material, which consisted of the interview transcripts, observational protocols and the documents collected in the field. Meuser and Nagel’s six-step evaluation method based on grounded theory was chosen as a concrete evaluation strategy for the expert interviews (Meuser and Nagel, 1991; 2008). While evaluating the expert interviews, focus was placed in particular on analysing and comparing the content of the participants’ expert knowledge (Flick, 2005: 141). When comparing the individual interviews, “the supra-individual common […] statements about representatives, shared knowledge, structures of relevance, constructions of reality, interpretations and interpretational patterns“ are identified (Meuser and Nagel, 1991: 452).

After transcribing the interviews, a summary of each interview passage was drawn up, intended to reduce the complexity and highlight the “boundaries between subjects […], experience clusters and argumentation patterns […], relationships and observation levels”. One or more headings were subsequently drawn up for each paraphrased passage. A thematic comparison of each interview followed aiming to put together the passages that dealt with identical or similar subjects and to combine (similar) headings. The process of conceptualisation helped to create a level of detachment from the terminology used by the interviewees. Through the consideration of theoretical knowledge and other empirical

studies, the findings were translated into scientific language. The goal of the evaluation, which also took into account the possibility for associations between individual concepts, is to perform “a systematisation of relationships, typologies, generalisations [and] interpretive patterns”. In the final stage, known as theoretical generalisation, the relevant theories were incorporated for each subject discussed (Meuser and Nagel, 1991: 451–466).

1.3 Research fields

Through the selection of the four research regions, this study takes into account the fact that geographically, socio-economically, politically and natio-ethno-culturally diverse regions, as well as the urban-rural divide, have had an impact on the development of women’s movements as social movements.[8] The statistics show that each research field has unique structural features, e.g. regarding the population size, its political-ideological orientation or its gender relations (KEİG, 2013; TEPAV, 2014). For example, there are big differences in terms of the level of income and education between the eastern and south-eastern Anatolian provinces and the western and central provinces of Turkey (Altınay and Arat, 2009: 67–68).[9]

The main criterion for selecting the regions for the study was to create the largest possible contrast with regard to statistically representable criteria of difference. Consultations were also held with experts in order to create an image of the widest possible range of topics, organisational forms and structures of women’s movements found in the various regions of Turkey. Pragmatic research considerations, such as access and security (in the field), also played a role when making the selection.

The observational focus of the study is not limited to “regional features”, however, since “in

[8] With the “spatial turn”, which describes a paradigm shift in cultural and social sciences, increased importance is attached during scientific analysis to space as a cultural entity (Döring and Thielmann, 2008). In the context of gender research, see Bauriedl et al. (2010). For the importance of “place”, “space” and “nation” for women’s movements, see Nyhagen Predelli (2012).

[9] Nevertheless, the research must critically reflect the fact that, since the beginning of internal migration in the 1950s at the latest, bipolar concepts such as modern/urban/secular/Turkish vs. unmodern/rural/Religious /Kurdish have been used in the context of Turkey. For example, in their representative study on the subject of violence against women, Altınay and Arat refute the theory that domestic violence is only an "Eastern issue" (2009: xi). Cf. also postcolonial critiques regarding modernisation discourse e.g. in Göle (1996).

the global era […] there can be no national or local feminisms" because all global actions and statements are inter-connected (Schulz, 2007: 14). Al-Rebholz also describes, within the research context of Turkey, the transnational orientation of the political involvement "of women activists in the context of an environment of organisational, financial, ideological and intellectual exchange and of showing solidarity with international women's movements and feminist networks is beyond national borders" (Al-Rebholz, 2011: 29). The importance of international feminist networks for the development of transnational strategies and demands and for the emergence of global feminist communication spaces was therefore considered during the analysis of regional women's and gender policy activism.

The description of the research fields selected according to specific criteria are provided below, in addition statements provided by women's and gender policy experts from each research region.[10] During the expert interviews, the most populous city in Turkey — Istanbul — rated as very important for women's and gender politics in Turkey (e.g. Kalkan, 2014: 31; Özkazanç, 2014: 40; Ülker, 2014: 36). However, as sufficiently varied and up-to-date studies already exist with regard to women's movements in Istanbul, regions that had been studied less frequently were intentionally chosen for this research project.

Ankara, the capital of the Republic of Turkey, which was founded in 1923, has a population of some five million people, making it the second biggest city in Turkey. Since 1994, the city has been governed by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) politician İbrahim Melih Gökçek. During the 2014 local elections, the Justice and Development Party was re-elected with 44.9% of the vote, narrowly beating the Republican People's Party (CHP), which received 43.8% of the vote.[11] As regards gender justice in education, political participation, employment, health and services for women, Ankara ranks 15th out of Turkey's 81 provinces (TEPAV, 2014: 9–10).

In the interviews, experts described Ankara as especially important for the women's

[10] There are 81 provinces (*il*) in Turkey, which are subdivided into districts/counties (*ilçe*). In addition to their structural features and the existence of women's and gender political activism in the region, practical considerations were also taken into account when selecting which regions to study.
[11] For more information on the 2014 local election results for each region, in which the AKP won 45.6% of the total vote, followed by the CHP with 27.8% and the MHP with 15.2%, see http://secim.haberler.com/2014/.

movements in Turkey, owing to its status as the Turkish capital and the “centre” (*merkez*) of government and administration. According to some interviewees, such as Aksu Bora (2014: 37–38), women’s and gender policy activists in Ankara in particular can make critical demands regarding legislative changes in gender policies, due to their physical proximity to the Turkish parliament and various party headquarters; hence these processes)can be (better) followed-up. According to Alev Özkazanç (2014: 40), owing to this proximity, topics such as (government) policies and political participation and representation played a particularly important role in the oppositional movements that existed in the city. At the same time, most NGOs in Turkey have their headquarters in Ankara, which also hosts branches of international organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union and foreign consulates (Acar, 2014: 40; Sancar, 2014: 46). According to Nesrin Semiz (2014: 36), this makes lobbying for women’s and gender policy demands easier. Several interviewees also spoke of closer relationships between civil society structures and government entities, such as the Ministry of Family and Social Policies.

The existence of internationally renowned universities such as the Middle East Technical University, Ankara University and Hacettepe University also has an impact on women’s movement(s) in the city, which are described by Feride Acar (2014: 38), among others, as “more intellectual” (*daha entelektüel*). While Handan Çağlayan (2014: 40) denied that Ankara had its “own local dynamism” (*kendi yerel dinamizmi*), other interviewees emphasised the historical women’s and gender policy tradition of the city (Başak, 2014: 78; Kapusuz-Kütküt, 2014: 37). In Selen Doğan’s view (2014: 46), women from surrounding regions in particular have great expectations regarding women from Ankara, whom they view as their “role model” (*rol model*).

Diyarbakır (‘Amed’ in Kurdish) has approximately one million residents, making it the biggest city in the Kurdish region in south-eastern Turkey. In the interviews, the city was also described as the “capital of the Kurdish movement” (*Kürt hareketinin başkenti*) (Zin & Emek, 2015: 73) and as “the heart of the Kurdish liberation struggle” (*Kürt Özgürlük Mücadelesi'nin kalbi*) (Aktaş, 2015: 15).

In the 2014 local elections, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) — which later on joined to-

the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) — won the election with 55% of the vote, while the JDP achieved 35%. This large city has been governed by Kurdish/left-wing-oriented parties for decades, which introduced, among other things, the co-chair system (*eşbaşkanlık sistemi*)[12] and the woman's quota for city government and municipal authorities. As regards gender justice in education, political participation, employment, health and services for women, Diyarbakır ranked 33rd out of Turkey's 81 provinces (TEPAV, 2014: 80). According to the chair of an association, (Anonymous 2015: 43), many migrants with a low level of education and income reside in Diyarbakır.

Regions with Kurdish population — and especially Diyarbakır — are shaped by the ongoing armed conflict between the Turkish State and the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has raged since the 1990s. In this situation, the Kurdish women's movement, which suffers both from attacks by the Turkish State and from the feudal social order, has developed a "women's liberation ideology" (*kadın kurtuluş ideolojisi*) and has achieved a high degree of organisation (Aras, 2015: 36). Several experts (e.g. Akkoç, 2015: 67; Çiçek & Gülen, 2015: 72) described the women's movement in Diyarbakır as "very young [and] exciting" (*çok gençtir, heyecanlıdır*) and noted that its multitude of women's organisations and that female Kurdish activists provide a general example for the women's movements in Turkey.[13]

For the Aegean Region, which consists of eight provinces in the southwest of Turkey, the cities of Denizli (population ca. 350.000) and Muğla (population ca. 65.000) were selected. In the Aegean Region, focus was intentionally placed on provinces shaped primarily by small towns, in order to examine the state of women's and gender policy activism in the region outside the large city of Izmir, which is influenced by liberal–western ideologies. Although the Justice and Development Party (AKP) won the 2014 local elections in Denizli with 45.3%, in front of the Republican People's Party (CHP) with 38.7%, the CHP succeeded in beating the AKP in Muğla, with 49.1% and 29% respectively. Both Denizli and Muğla rank relatively well in the study on gender justice conducted by TEPAV (2014: 79), reaching 11th and 13th place

[12] This concept refers to the joint occupation of important offices in a political party by both a woman and a man.

[13] For more details on the relationship between the Kurdish Women's Movements and other women's movements in Turkey, see Text III.2.B.

respectively.

In Denizli, where many textile factories are located, female employment is high. Bilsen Özen et al. (2015: 137-139) spoke during the interview of a “spirit of entrepreneurship” among women in Denizli, which is expressed through active socio-political engagement. According to Hilal Can (2015: 23-25), women in Denizli are “strong” (*güçlü*) und “valuable” (*değerli*). She justifies her statement by citing the history of the city, which had previously been named after women on three separate occasions — Laodicea, Hierapolis and Aphrodisias — and referred to the tradition that women from Denizli would not get married to people from outside the city.

On the other hand, the province of Muğla, where Lale Aytaman held office in 1991 as the first female governor of Turkey, is shaped by agriculture and tourism, as well as by immigration from EU countries and the Russian Federation. The activist Zeze (2015: 48) described Muğla as a “holiday region” (*tatil yöresi*), in which the residents were rarely socio-politically active. Gaye Cön (2015: 52), however, emphasised that the first independent women’s political structure outside the large cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir had been founded in Muğla in the late 1980s, in the form of a women’s solidarity group. Dilek Bulut (2015: 41) and Özlem Şahin Güngör (2015: 44) referred to the particularly close relationship between the feminist-oriented women’s movement and the environmental movement that has developed in the mostly rural area of Muğla.

The Black Sea Region in the north of Turkey consists of 18 provinces, among which the Trabzon and Artvin -in the northeast- were selected. In both provinces, the AKP won the local elections in 2014 with 59.5% and 46.3% respectively, beating the CHP, which gained only 24.9% and 36.9% of the vote. With regard to gender justice in education, political participation, employment, health and services for women, Trabzon stands in 10th place when compared with the remaining 81 provinces of Turkey, while Artvin takes the 32nd place (TEPAV, 2014: 79).

Women from Trabzon, a city of some 300.000 inhabitants, were described as “strong” (*güçlü*) by several experts during the interviews. Emine Altuntaş described the high status held by

woman, in particular thanks to their economic independence. Due to the poor economic conditions, many men in the Black Sea region have been forced to migrate, leaving behind their women and children (Altuntaş, 2015: 33-36). Bahar Bostan (2015: 46–48) spoke of a female structure on the Black Sea coast that was “more individual” (*daha birey*) and “stronger” (*daha güçlü*) than that in Ankara. She also added that women in this region had a “fabulous fighting spirit” (*müthiş mücadeleci bir ruh*) and “a great energy” (*güzel de bir enerji*). This is made apparent by the dedicated resistance shown against the environmentally dangerous hydroelectric power plants planned by the Turkish government, protests against which are commonly led by women from the countryside (Arduç et al., 2015: 35). Pelin Şirin (2015: 35), however, describes a “nationalist, closed structure” (*milliyetçi, kapalı bir yapı*) in the region, which was attested by interviewees such as Şahinde Yavuz (2015: 27), who described the existence of serious male, patriarchal codes.

In Artvin province, expert interviews were conducted both in the city of Artvin, which has a population of around 35.000 inhabitants, and in the district of Hopa, which has around 30.000 inhabitants. In both locations, the interviewees complained about the lack of female political consciousness among women who live in Artvin (e.g. Arıcı & Anonymous, 2015: 95; Vayiç Aksu, 2015: 9). For Nurcan Ay Katırcı (2015: 70), this has to do with the idea that the inhabitants are “relaxed people” (*rahat insanlar*), who exert less religious and political pressure and have a comparably low rate of domestic violence. According to Ay Katırcı (2015: 68-70), women can walk around the streets of Artvin in the evenings without danger and many shops are run by women. Özge Zeynep Arıcı (Arıcı & Anonymous, 2015: 90) referred to the geographical location of this small, isolated mountain town, where few options for recreational activities exist for women.

Owing to its proximity to the Georgian border, Hopa is shaped by a “prostitution sector” (*fuhuş sektörü*) (Vayiç Aksu, 2015: 9). On the other hand, one special feature of Hopa is its leftist tradition, which arose in this small coastal town during the military coup of 12 September 1980 (Arduç et al., 2015: 34). For example, Hopa had once been governed by mayor Yılmaz Topaloğlu of the left-oriented Freedom and Democracy Party (ÖDP).

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