# Defending Rights Between Institutions, Identities and Subjectivities: A Gender Perspective on Civil Society

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This report is written within the context of our "Defending Others, Liberating Themselves: WHRD's experiences in Turkey" project that is being co-implemented with our partner ISHR (International Service for Human Rights) and supported by the German Foreign Office.



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## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

These three short reports, published in scope of Hafıza Merkezi Berlin's project **"Defending Others, Liberating Themselves: Women Human Rights Defenders' Experiences in Turkey"**, are the product of a long-term research aiming to analyze the gendered structure of civil society and the struggle for human rights in Turkey, and the gendered experiences of the actors in the field from a feminist perspective. The common concern of these three reports is to expose the latent gendered structure of this field, which is often defined as an undisputed "safe space", and to depict the experiences of women, queer, and non-binary subjects in the sphere. By approaching this issue from different angles, these reports aim to make a modest contribution to the gendering of human rights and to the empowerment of women, queer, and non-binary civil society actors in Turkey.

The first report, **"Women and LGBTQI+ actors as lifelines of each other: relations, alliances, disjunctures in the field of human rights"**, draws on the experiences of the actors in the field to question the disjunctions between the feminist and LGBTQI+ movement and the human rights movement and to reflect on the reasons for this distance. The report firstly discusses the ways in which women and LGBTQI+ actors who participate in political movements, work in non-governmental organizations or who are part of other activist networks and struggles in Turkey are involved in these movements and institutions. Based on these different forms of involvement, the report traces the dynamics, tensions and relationships between the human rights movement and various political movements in Turkey. The aim here is to understand what kind of impact the changing sociopolitical conditions in the country has had on the disjunctures, interactions, and relationships between movements especially in wake of the shrinking of civic spaces after 2015, and how the actors involved in the feminist, LGBTQI+ and Kurdish women's movements have developed their organizational practices and advocacy and activism strategies in this period.

The second report, **"Defending Rights Between Institutions, Identities, and Subjectivities: A Gender Perspective on Civil Society"**, aims to reveal the gendered structure of civil society and the struggle for rights, and to determine how women are affected by these gendered patterns in the field of human rights in their everyday lives. Focusing on the actors daily experiences, the report reflects on the patterns and mechanisms through which gender-based inequalities and challenges are reproduced in the field of human rights in Turkey. In doing so, the report considers the everyday experiences of women in the context of the different organizational models in which they are involved. It thus tries to show how gender-based inequalities, discrimination, and challenges —especially when combined with other social and economic inequalities based on age, class, ethnicity, and education level— become manifest in women's daily, concrete, and real experiences, and how this shapes women's lives and the way they perceive and narrate themselves.

The final report, **"A Feminist Discussion on the "Human Rights Defender" Paradigm in Turkey"**, introduces a gender caveat to the "human rights defender" discourses and mechanisms that are increasingly influential in Turkey, thus hoping to contribute to the gendering of the field and, on this occasion, to make women's gendered experiences visible. In pursuit of this goal, the report first addresses feminist criticisms of the "human rights defender" paradigm, lending an ear to the long-standing feminist struggles for the gendering of "human rights defender" discourses and protection mechanisms in different geographies around the

world. Subsequently, the report focuses on the concept of "women's human rights defender", an achievement of the feminist struggle that has assumed different meanings over time to discuss what kind of debates this concept has enabled in Turkey; how it has provoked us to think about the gendered structure of the field of human rights; what this concept means for actors of the field, and finally, whether this concept can be an empowering tool for women in the field.

For this research, we conducted semi-structured online interviews with 30 people from non-governmental organizations, the feminist movement, the Kurdish women's movement, LGBTQI+ institutions, and activist networks. In selecting our interviewees, we tried to create a diverse sample in terms of age, gender identity, sexual orientation, area of work, working style, and political or ethnic identity. Only two of our interviewees were working in the same institution, while the remaining 28 participants came from different institutions and networks in the field. With one third of the interviewees working as professionals in civil society organizations that receive funding, the remaining two thirds were involved in human rights or civil society organizations that mostly rely on voluntary support in carrying out their work or engaged in feminist or other political networks.

2015 was a turning point for Turkey, marking the beginning of a new period in which different forms of violence once again began to dominate political and daily life in the country. Meanwhile, on a global scale we have been going through an era in which authoritarian regimes and different types of racist and xenophobic movements are getting stronger, which makes defending rights, waging political struggles, and being an active subject in the public sphere more and more difficult. In other words, we carried out this research at a time when, as many individuals and institutions involved in the fields of civil society and the struggle for rights point out, civic space is shrinking. Developing the framework and the main questions of our research, we tried to take the impact of the present conditions into consideration. With increasing oppression and violence forcing everyone in civil society to withdraw into their shells, we wanted to understand how women experience this dynamic in their everyday, professional, and political lives. At the same time, however, to avoid putting our interviewees' personal safety at danger, we chose to preserve their anonymity and made sure that their identities are not revealed in any of the quotations included in the reports, even though the names of institutions are at times mentioned.

Finally, we consider it necessary to speak about the limitations of both the research process and the reports. For example, while creating our sample of interviewees in line with the above-mentioned criteria, we confined ourselves to the cities of Ankara, Istanbul and Diyarbakır. Our research therefore cannot sufficiently account for experiences that occur in other provinces. We also need to submit that our research is limited to interviews with people we already knew, albeit indirectly, as more or less public figures working on issues related to gender. We took care to include as many different movements and groups as possible in our sample, but we did not listen to our interviewees as spokespersons of their institutions. Therefore, we would like to point out that their narratives may not reflect the views of everyone in their respective fields. Bearing this in mind, we did our best to include the efforts and activities of our interviewees' institutions, networks, and movements in our reports.

In addition, since our research aims to uncover the gendered nature of civil society and human rights in Turkey and the experiences of female and non-binary actors in the field, we mainly focused on the experiences of cis and trans women. That said, we do touch upon the experiences

of queer subjects and LGBTQI+ movement/rights organizations and use the terms “female”, “non-binary”, “queer” and “LGBTQI+” together in some places. There are several reasons for this: First, our effort to gender the field of human rights is not limited to problematizing the binary concept of gender but paying particular attention to the experiences of all those who are “shut out” because their ways of being do not conform to gender roles. Subverting the ways of relating to one another permitted within the binary system, we further try to comprehend the overall gender dynamics governing the field. Therefore, our aim in using these terms together is certainly not to equate diverse experiences, but to include all those who are exposed to patriarchal and cis-heteronormative forms of inequality on a daily basis. Also, given that two of our interviewees defined themselves as non-binary, it would have been impossible for us to ignore their particular experiences in the field. Although we have only limited knowledge about the experiences of non-binary people in the field of human rights, we tried our best to discuss their experiences in our reports. Needless to say, these two interviews alone were not enough for us to present a comprehensive analysis of how the experiences of non-binary actors in the fields of rights advocacy and civil society differ from those of trans and cis women rights defenders. We might therefore say that our reports have a greater focus on the intersections between the experiences of non-binary people and cis and trans women rather than their specific experiences, given that the former too are affected by the social construction of womanhood, since a large part of our society perceives them as “women”.

We want to underline that this work, both the research and the writing, is the product of a thoroughly collective effort. We would like to thank everyone we interviewed for taking their time to share their thoughts and feelings with us in such hectic and pressing times. We also want to express our endless gratitude to Özlem Kaya and Özgür Sevgi Göral, who accompanied and supported us with their careful readings and thought-provoking comments and criticisms while we were writing these reports. We hope that the reports will contribute to opening and deepening debates on gender in the field of human rights in Turkey.

DURU YAVAN – GÜLİSTAN ZEREN – HANDE GÜLEN

# I. INTRODUCTION

The years from the early 1990s until well into the 2000s saw a significant and increasing expansion and diversification of civil society[1] around the world and especially in countries with authoritarian pasts such as Turkey, as actors and subjects with different social and political backgrounds entered this area. This expansion and diversification were driven by different objectives: supporting democratization processes, both politically and culturally; developing and advocating liberal policies vis-à-vis authoritarian governments; laying the groundwork for interaction and dialogue between different social groups; and making the voices of marginalized and silenced social groups heard in the public sphere.[2] Women from different social and political backgrounds have been among the most active subjects in this expanding field. Women have gotten involved in civil society in different ways: some through political grassroots movements and rights struggles, others through women's institutions that work to improve the social and economic conditions of women, and yet others through hybrid organizations working in the field of different social and political rights.[3] The strong participation of women in civil society has been paralleled by serious criticisms levelled at civil society by feminist scholars and activists around the world.[4] The objections raised by feminists concern both the way the field of civil society is imagined and the discourses employed within this field.

First of all, feminists have refused to adopt the prevailing perspective in the literature on civil society that views and explains the world and life through the lens of a tripartite division between the private sphere, civil society, and the state.[5] After all, the precept that "the private/personal is political", one of the prominent slogans of the feminist movement in the 1960s and '70s, precisely underscored the notion that problems perceived as personal/private were in fact political/public, implying that they should be discussed and solved on a political/public level. Another argument brought forward was that in the patriarchal order, masculine domination, whose hallmark is the subordination of women and LGBTQI+, was not only practiced by state-affiliated agents but that gender-based power relations could also be observed within civil society. In summary, feminists broke the silence about gender that prevailed in the literature of civil society, exposing the problematic nature of presuming a dichotomy between the private and the public and objecting to an approach that completely separated civil society and the state.

The second objection raised by feminists was related to the fact that the discourses in the field were constructed as universal and seemed to imagine the field as exempt from the question of gender. In reality, they found that the practices and values of civil society were neither characterized by a universality transcending all politics and ideology, nor were they somehow

1 Here, we use the term civil society to describe a very wide field including grassroots political movements, human rights organizations, and professional civil society organizations. That said, we sometimes distinguish the field of civil society from the field of rights struggles in the following chapters in order to give a more nuanced account of the different experiences and discourses in civil society at large. Thus, while the field of civil society refers to institutional and professional/semi-professional organizations, the field of rights struggles denotes grassroots political movements (such as the feminist movement, the human rights movement, the Kurdish movement etc.).

2 For more information on the historical development of civil society in Turkey, see E. Fuat Keyman and Ahmet İçduygu (2003), "Globalisation, Civil Society and Citizenship in Turkey: Actors, Boundaries, Discourses", *Citizenship Studies,* 7:2, 219-234; Tanıl Bora (2021), "STK", *Birikim*: https://birikimdergisi.com/haftalik/10499/stk, retrieved: 19.10.2021

3 For a general portrayal of this diversity, see Asuman Ö. Keysan (2016), "Türkiye'deki Kadın Aktivistlerin Sivil Toplum Söylemleri: Alternatif Yaklaşımlar", *Mülkiye Dergisi,* 40:4, 149-191.

4 For more information, see Barbara Einhorn and Charlotte Sever (2003), "Gender and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 5:2, 163-190; Mikiko Eto (2012), "Reframing Civil Society from Gender Perspectives: A Model of a Multi-layered Seamless World", *Journal of Civil Society*, 8:2, 101-121; Sonia E. Alvarez (2009), "Beyond NGO-ization? Reflections from Latin America", Development, 52:2, 175-184.

5 Eto, op. cit., pp.101-103.

detached from gender.[6] Particularly the democratization efforts in this field were based on a Western-centered perspective[7] and articulated the entire struggle through the discourse of human rights. Berktay notes that "there is a concrete and historical content to the human rights discourse and the abstract 'human' being on which it is based. This 'human' is not just any human being, but one that is white, bourgeois, and male."[8] It was precisely this observation that showed women's problems did not simply blend in with the struggle for human rights and indicated the historical and political reasons why civil society, like all other fields, should be gendered.

Following the path opened by the political and academic discussions presented above, this report aims to look at the fields of civil society and rights struggles in Turkey from a gender perspective. Our research seeks to be a modest contribution to the endeavor of unraveling the dominant discourse in the field of human rights, which unites all its actors on the path of a "sacred mission", to bring to light the gendered nature of the division of labor, expectations, and positions in the field. In doing so, we focus on the daily experiences of women who work and struggle in different fields of civil society. By listening to their experiences, we reflect on how gender-based inequalities and challenges are reproduced in this field (as in every particle of the social structure) and understand the patterns and mechanisms that relegate women to the position of subordinate subjects.

Moreover, the study tries to understand these experiences by viewing them in the context of the different organizational models and conditions in which women are involved. The question of how the nexus between various relations and dynamics of power and domination shapes women's lives and the way they perceive and narrate themselves, their struggle, or the work they do, is essential to this study. In other words, the study questions how gender is linked to other relations of exploitation, domination, and power. Thus, our aim is to show how gender-based inequalities, forms of discrimination, and challenges become manifest in concrete and real everyday experiences, while also taking into account other social and economic variables such as age, class, ethnicity, and education level.

How can daily practices and experiences serve to portray the inequalities and challenges faced by women in different rights struggles or in civil society in Turkey and the critical and transformative efforts spent to counter these inequalities and challenges? Whether they define themselves as "women's rights defenders"[9] in line with the framework of the UN or not, what does being a woman and a rights defender mean within different organizational models? These were the two key questions guiding the fieldwork and analysis underlying this report. Likewise, they determine the report's two main axes.

The first chapter of the first part of the report, "(In)visibilities: Is Gender Still an Issue?", begins with a rhetorical question, asking why gender still merits our attention. What prompted us to ask this question was the wish to call into question the widespread opinion that the deep-seated problems related to gender equality were somehow less pronounced in

6 Einhorn ve Sever, age., s. 167.

7 Nadje S. Al-Ali draws our attention to the fact that "[i]n contrast to stereotypical depictions of Middle-Eastern women as passive victims of patriarchal oppression, women in the region have organized themselves for over a century to challenge both state authority as well as prevailing gender ideologies and oppressive practices shaping their everyday lives." See Nadje S. Al-Ali (2003), "Gender and Civil Society in the Middle East", *International Feminist Journal of Politics,* 5:2, 216-23.

8 Fatmagül Berktay (2004), "Kadınların İnsan Haklarının Gelişimi ve Türkiye", Civil Society and Democracy Conference Articles, Istanbul Bilgi University, Civil Society Organizations Education and Research Unit, 7, pp.1-2.

9 For more information on this topic, see Duru Yavan (2021), "A Feminist Discussion on the "Human Rights Defender" Paradigm in Turkey".

the context of civil society and rights struggles, where people fight for equality and rights, or that the supposedly more emphatic struggle waged here had at least done more to significantly overcome these problems. We set out from the idea that the strong presence of women in these fields does not necessarily imply that women or gender-based dynamics are directly visible. In doing so, we focus on different practices through which masculine domination exercises its power to conceal and to show. In the second chapter, "Patterns Positioning Women as Subordinate Subjects", we illustrate the different types of discriminatory behavior and attitude that women face based on their gender. These patterns, which we distilled from the common experiences voiced in the interviews, can be categorized under the following headings: *not being taken seriously, being instrumentalized, being excluded from decision-making mechanisms through formal or informal means, and constantly being aware of the impact of one's gender.* The third chapter deals with "An Unrecognized Item in the Division of Labor: Emotional and Mental Labor", which we encounter in a wide range of activities from observing interpersonal relations to following up on routine work. Here, our aim is to show how the burden of doing the required emotional and mental labor, which is not even recognized as part of the division of labor although it is pivotal to sustaining the field, is left to women.

In the second part of the report, which is titled "Different Organizational Models and Gender", we try to understand how the gendered division of labor, expectations, and positions intersect with different kinds of inequalities. Going beyond a perspective that takes the term "women's rights defender" as denoting a homogeneous group, we try to look at the flexibilities and tensions in the discursive construction of what it means to "be a woman" in this field. The chapter "Paid and Unpaid Labor: Changing Conditions and Motivations" tries to understand how the structure and conditions of different organizational models affect women's daily and practical experiences. How do different models affect women's definition and interpretation of themselves and their labor? Doing volunteer or professional work, that is, doing paid or unpaid labor in this field is examined as a variable that directly shapes both the living conditions of women and the bond they establish with the field. In the following chapter, which is titled "Agendas, Tools, and Relationships", we examine and discuss a range of issues concerning the relationship between what a routine (working) day of our interviewees looks like and how space and time are organized, what kind of output is generated, and what and/or who is included in (but also excluded from) the agenda in their respective organizations. Meanwhile, based on women's own experiences, we also attempt to question how strict the boundaries between activism and advocacy, or, for that matter, between volunteer and professional work really are. In contradistinction to the rather static nature of concepts, our aim here is to understand the dynamic nature –sometimes conflicting, sometimes complementary– of women's real experiences.

## II. CONSIDERING THE ROLE OF GENDER IN CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR RIGHTS

### A. (In)visibilities: Is Gender Still an Issue?

In this chapter, we mainly try to pin down why it is essential and in fact inevitable to view civil society and the struggle for rights from a gender perspective. As a first step, we examine the link between the invisibility of gender and the dichotomy between civil society and the state. Here, we follow the feminist tenet that civil society, which is idealized within this binary construct, cannot actually be considered free from gender-based inequalities, discrimination,

and oppression and that gender-based domination and the perpetrators/power holders in these relations of domination are situated not only on the outside but also within. Next, we attempt to make a case for gendering the abstract definition of the rights defender by invoking the experiences and bodies concealed by this definition. At the same time, we argue that the logic of masculine domination, in concealing that the definition of the rights defender is based on the fiction of normative masculinity, marginalizes those who fall outside of this definition, at times making them overly visible.

The great majority of people who work, paid or unpaid, in the fields we include for analysis in the scope of this study are women. Turkey is no extraordinary case in this respect: civil society is a particularly feminized[10] terrain in many different countries of the world today. However, during this research we observed that women's mere numerical predominance in these fields does not directly mean that gender equality is ensured in decision-making mechanisms and work routines or that gender has become a more visible issue here. On the contrary, it can be said that, in striking similarity to the findings shared by Sandra Dema in her article[11] on non-governmental organizations working on the development issue in Spain, the strong representation of women in civil society organizations can contribute to making gender inequalities invisible. The dominant discourse on the issue of gender in the fields of civil society or the struggle for rights does not oppose the demand for equality, but in claiming that equality has already been largely achieved, it obscures existing inequalities.

When we asked the question "How do gender inequalities affect your area of struggle and your activities?" during our interviews, especially professionals working in civil society organizations often responded that "women now constitute the majority in this field anyway". This fact alone seemed to be enough for us to no longer be concerned that gender-based inequalities might still exist here. In addition to this, our interviewees sometimes referred to the structural and practical characteristics of the field of rights struggles or the values that engendered the "institutional culture" of their organizations to impart to us that gender inequalities did not exist in their institutions or that they had been largely overcome.[12]

> *Well, our team is mostly made up of women anyway. You know, as in many civil society organizations... And in any case, we have our institutional policies on these issues: gender equality, non-discrimination, zero tolerance... You know, these are part of the institutional culture that we observe anyway. I mean, these things don't come from outside, they are part of our culture. The second thing I can say is, our institutional culture is based on the idea of being together despite all differences. We also embrace diversity in terms of gender and our institutional culture allows everyone to practice this diversity as they please.*[13]

Whether they take part in this field as rights defenders, civil society workers, or activists, all of our interviewees are people who demand equality and justice for society's vulnerable groups. In the struggle to claim these rights, they often enough lose their own rights or have to face

10 In this report, the concept of feminization is used to describe two interrelated processes: The first of these processes refers to the numerical predominance of women in an occupational group, labor area, or organization, while the other corresponds to the questioning and transformation of the content, methods, and conditions of work by women. For more detailed information on this topic, see Guillaume Malochet (2007), "La féminisation des métiers et des professions. Quand la sociologie du travail croise le genre", *Sociologies Pratiques*, 14:1, 91-99.

11 Sandra Dema (2008), "Gender and organizations: The (re) production of gender inequalities within Development NGOs" Women's Studies International Forum, 31:6, 441-448.

12 It is important to say that such an opinion was voiced much less frequently –to a striking extent in fact– by interviewees from feminist organizations or civil society organizations working in the field of LGBTQI+ rights, as compared to interviewees from mixed organizations and organizations that do not directly engage in issues related to women or gender.

13 Interview no. 25, 13.06.2021, online.

violence and oppression themselves.[14] For some of our interviewees, imagining or talking about the possibility that any form of inequality or discrimination could be reproduced in the fields of their activity seemed to contradict the ethical principles and approaches advocated by their organizations. Besides, such a possibility was perceived as a threat, potentially disrupting and confounding the coherent narrative of the dichotomy between the state and civil society. However, when they started to tell anecdotes from their daily lives or field experiences, most women were openly talking about the different inequalities –including those based on gender– they had faced and contended with in many different places at different times. Meanwhile, many women continue to speak up in the public sphere, posting on their social media accounts and publishing articles on other digital platforms, to raise awareness for this issue.[15] Thus, in order to move beyond the distinctions of state, civil society and the private sector, and render visible the experiences of those subject to violence and discrimination, it is important to accept that those who lead the struggle for rights can also become the perpetrators of different kinds of discrimination and violence.

Another reason for this invisibility lies in the fact that job profiles, positions, statuses, rules, and processes in institutions have been constructed without any regard for gender.[16] Here, "an abstract image of a gender-free employee blanks out real employees' bodies and obligations outside the workplace."[17] It is worth noting that the abstract employee image, just like the abstract human that we encountered in the human rights and rights advocacy literature, is actually "male".[18]

We can observe the effects of this blanking out on two different planes. Most of the time, neither the work schedule nor the workplace is organized by equally taking into account the needs of each body (e.g., menstruation, menopause, early menopause, lactation, hormone therapy, etc.). Therefore, the women we interviewed, for example, a mother who stated that she was mostly taking care of her children by herself or another woman who said she did not feel able to work at all hours of the day (she cannot work during daytime but works for 8-9 hours in the evening) because she was going through an early menopause, felt the need to underline how tolerant their colleagues were in this regard. The fact that women felt compelled to underline and express their gratitude about their colleagues' tolerance indicates that we are treading outside the boundaries of what is defined and imposed as the norm. The body whose needs are seen, taken care of, and recognized in their specificity on this particular occasion is the body that has been disregarded until today.

14 For more information on the experiences of subjects in this field, especially in the period after 2015, which is characterized by a phenomenon today mostly described as the "shrinking of civic spaces", please refer to the report "Chess, Hide-and-Seek and Determination: Civil Society in Difficult Times" by Özlem Kaya and Pınar Öğünç: https://www.anadolukultur.org/_FILES/Contents/991/aksiviltoplumraporu_full_web.pdf?v=20210201011153

15 On 5 June 2021, an article written by Kudret Çobanlı was published on the online platform *Çatlak Zemin*, in which she points out the contradiction between "staking out one's claim to democratize Turkey and not being able to tolerate that democratic practices become established in one's own office", stating that "[i]n writing this article, I hope to open up a space where we can talk about problems like mobbing, patronizing behavior, and masculinity and their manifestation and effects in the fields that we consider as relatively 'liberated' (!), such as civil society and academia." For the full article, see https://catlakzemin.com/toplumsal-faydasi-yaman-akdenizi-kurtarir-mi/

16 The question of whether women also constitute the majority of those doing volunteer work in civil society and how this circumstance is related to a social structure in which women's labor is seen as "unpaid work" may be the subject of another study. For more detailed information on the definition of unpaid labor, please refer to the article "Feminism is the Rebellion of All Women!", an interview with Gülnur Acar Savran published in the journal *Birikim*: https://birikimdergisi.com/guncel/89/feminizm-butun-kadinlarin-isyani

17 Joan Acker (2012), "Gendered organizations and intersectionality: Problems and possibilities", *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion,* 31:3, p. 218.

18 Berktay, op. cit.

This issue, which we may term a disregard for gender, does not always result in, or operate through needs being ignored. Such practices at the same time impose different forms of control on some bodies, that is, on their very existence, their vulnerabilities, their experiences, and their representation, sometimes by declaring them abnormal or inappropriate, sometimes by rendering them invisible, and sometimes by making them particularly visible.[19] In the excerpt below, we see that experiences, in which a vulnerable body is superimposed on the earlier-mentioned "abstract and heroic" image of the rights defender, seem to expose the field of human rights itself to risks of a different nature. Viewed from another perspective this means that the question of which bodies may exhibit what kind of violations in the public sphere is "decided" in the context of power relations that are shaped by different characteristics such as age, gender, and professional and political position.

> *My male fellows were upset by the fact that I was so openly talking about being strip searched. Some said that I was a woman in a position representing others and that I shouldn't "let my underwear talk".*[20]

The discourse of human rights advocacy has a strong focus on the individual actions of the rights defender. Often known as a human rights defender, s/he is depicted as a heroic figure and an agent who is engaged in a constant struggle to claim rights on behalf of the "vulnerable" and "defenseless". Only when the attribute "woman" is placed in front of it, does this image of the rights defender represent a more vulnerable or defenseless subject. Women human rights defenders are the "other" of male rights defenders.[21]

Women's invisibility also applies to the work they do as professionals in the field. The covering up of women's labor is accompanied by another dynamic: men absorb women's labor to enhance their voice, prestige, and power. Every objection raised by women against this systematic appropriation of their labor is interpreted as an expression of their "desire to occupy center stage", thus reducing the legitimacy of their request for greater visibility. While the visibility of men is the norm, that of women is an expression of personal greed that disrupts the order.

> *If someone's going to be more visible, it's almost inevitably men. You definitely have to underline the work you do, like "I wrote this", "I did that". Nobody explicitly mentions you, nobody says "She did it", for example. In every press release or decision or whatever it is, you have to fight very hard for your name to be mentioned, your face to be seen, for that microphone and for that seat, that is, for you yourself and your work to be visible. And when you fight for this, that is, when you claim what's your right, it automatically comes right back to you. You are considered the person who disturbs the balance in the group or pushes herself to the fore.*[22]

The experience of another woman we interviewed shows us that the visibility of a woman increases when she does not act in line with the established gender norms. Simpson and Lewis say that those who are invisible have power, noting that "[v]isibility, by contrast, is to be seen as different, to be marginal to the dominant group culture and to be subject to the controlling 'gaze' of the majority."[23]

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19 Ruth Simpson, Patricia Lewis (2005), "An investigation of silence and a scrutiny of transparency: Re-examining gender in organization literature through the concepts of voice and visibility", *Human Relations*, 58:10, 1253-1275.

20 Interview no. 21, 07.07.2021, online.

21 Amie Lajoie, "Challenging assumptions of vulnerability: the significance of gender in the work, lives and identities of women human rights defenders", PhD Thesis, National University of Ireland Galway, 2018, 198-199.

22 Interview no. 20, 20.06.2021, online.

23 Simpson and Lewis, *op. cit.*: p.1259.

> *In general, being open about my sexual orientation in the office doesn't bother me, but even though I don't face any systematic violence, there were situations where I felt that people were jokingly labelling and stigmatizing me in different ways because of my lifestyle and because I am sexually active. For example, someone might be making some jokes because you were seen at the Pride party… Such things happen, right, I can't say they don't, but I just laugh it off.*[24]

One woman we interviewed, who works as a lawyer in the field of serious human rights violations, was admonished that her red lipstick was "too much", while another interviewee, who is actively involved in political groups and the feminist struggle for years, was *exposed* and condemned for drinking alcoholic beverages in a *public* place.

In this chapter, we have looked at two interrelated phenomena to understand who and what is rendered invisible and, vice versa, who and what is brought into visibility. The first instance is related to the fact that gender, which is based on structural relations of power and domination, is disregarded or generally not seen as a priority issue in this field. In this way, both the labor and bodies of women are rendered invisible in civil society as a space that is imagined as universal and gender-free. The other has to do with the fact that though ostensibly neutral, the figure of the rights defender is in fact constructed as a strong, male, and salient individual. This individual's narrative of personal life, heroism, and victimization is assumed not to contain any gendered dimensions.

## B. Patterns Positioning Women as Subordinate Subjects

After having looked at how the masculine and normative mechanism of concealing/showing works with respect to gender and being a woman, we now move on to understanding the patterns that position women as subordinate subjects in the fields of civil society and rights struggles. In different places, women are devalued through implicit practices of subordination. Even when they are visible, their strength is cancelled out to relegate them to a passive position. These patterns can be categorized under the following headings: *not being taken seriously, being instrumentalized, being excluded from decision-making mechanisms through formal or informal means, and constantly being aware of the impact of one's gender.*

No relationship of inequality, including gender, exists in isolation: the social and political context is a part of an already complex equation with many different variables such as the positions and powers of the actors and subjects of the field. Offering an analytical framework that attaches particular importance to time and place, such an *intersectional* perspective is concerned with understanding the multifaceted, complex, and intertwined nature of social positions and power structures and how their interplay shapes human life.[25] Keeping in mind the significance of this critical framework, we will try to look at the social positions created by different relations of domination. In doing so, we take care to consider how social factors such as age, class, and ethnicity affect the manifestations of the identified patterns in real, concrete, and everyday experiences.

The first pattern that we would like to address is *not being taken seriously*, a practice of subordination pointed out by a great share of the women we interviewed. This practice can come from the outside as well as from the inside and may be displayed by members of both the lower (technicians) and the higher (bureaucrats) groups of the established occupational

24 Interview no. 19, 10.06.2021, online.

25 Joan Acker (2012), "Gendered organizations and intersectionality: problems and possibilities", *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion,* 31: 3, pp.214-224.

hierarchies. The invariable rule governing this practice is that every encounter with women in these fields, which are separated/differentiated from the outside by attributing masculine values, predispositions, and privileges to them, reproduces the meaning and function of the limits of being taken seriously. Thus, the fact that women occupy higher positions appears to be subject to constant questioning. Socially speaking, then, women are forced to re-establish their legitimacy, to reassert their power and boundaries, and to demand recognition every time.

Our interviewees pointed out that women are numerically superior in the field, working in different positions across the occupational hierarchy. Some of our interviewees acted as director or chairperson of their respective institution.[26] However, the fact that women occupy positions involving a high degree of responsibility or representation does not mean that they are unaffected by inequalities, constructs, and hierarchies related to gender. When discussing equality, we need to move beyond the question of whether women can reach positions formerly reserved for men. For as long as the power relations shaped by gender hierarchies and, more importantly, the semantic worlds that play a fundamental role in the construction of these hierarchies remain in place, women are going to face discriminatory approaches even when they reach the highest positions. A woman who is the head of a nationally and internationally renowned civil society organization in a big city expresses the difficulties in having her position accepted and recognized as follows:

> *Admittedly, I'm kind of experiencing this with the technicians. Taking orders from female directors seems to discomfort them and they seem to have their own ways of resisting against these orders by procrastinating, not doing things as asked of them etc. I mean, quite often I even thought how nice it would be if women did these technical jobs.*[27]

Many of the women we interviewed stated that age was an important factor in determining how inequalities in terms of gender identities come into play. In other words, depending on the exact configuration of power relations, being young or being old will have an impact on how gender inequalities are experienced. Another woman in a managerial position, describing the difficulties she has making sure that she is taken seriously, draws attention to the impact of age stratification:

> *But I think in Turkey, the problem is being a young woman. You are not taken seriously, especially in relations with public institutions. (…) That's why, for example, I always want a male colleague with me. Sometimes they'll talk to him instead of me, even though his position is lower than mine. (…) For example, when you go to a meeting at the governor's office, you go with your shirt and jacket, wearing a corporate outfit. It's courtesy really. Of course, you will go there well dressed. But they will still treat you like a child, never as if you were representing an institution.*[28]

Ethnicity is another factor determining where, how and against whom these practices are mobilized. During a fieldwork visit to Kurdistan, two young lawyers working on serious human rights violations experienced that next to being both young and female, their being Turkish had the adverse effect of not being taken completely seriously by local male human rights

26 This may be related to the profiles of the women we interviewed and the fields we included in the sample of our field study because, although we do not have detailed gender-sensitive data on this issue, according to an article published on the online platform *Sivil Sayfalar*, the rate of female senior decision-makers in CSOs in Turkey, similar to the situation in other fields, is rather low. For more information on this topic, see https://www.sivilsayfalar.org/2020/03/17/sivil-toplumun-en-etkili-hareketinin-ozneleri-kadinlar/

27 Interview no. 2, 26.05.2021, online.

28 Interview no. 25, 13.06.2021, online.

defenders and lawyers.[29] What we want to draw attention to here, is that in some experiences, ethnic identity can become another property that is instrumentalized to exclude women. The gendered nature of these experiences becomes more understandable when we recognize that the hierarchical logic governing the power relations between subjects and actors in the field of human rights is shaped by notions like "sacrifice", "paying the price", and "heroism".[30]

Another practice of subordination that we would like to discuss can be described as *instrumentalization*. Women's existence, opinions, and agency are not considered as essential, but exploited by men for certain purposes or reduced to showcase elements.

> *Let's say there is a press release, (men) tend to be in the foreground, (...) or when there is a visit on the schedule, three or four men are ready to go, but then they'll say, "let's also take a woman with us", or things like that... I mean, it's more like decoration, they want women there seen with them. And these things have to do with the institution of co-chairmanship, you know, women being more visible in terms of representation, the political climate in Diyarbakır, the stage reached by the women's struggle... Actually, they haven't internalized this, but when they go somewhere or make a press release, they want a woman on their side...*[31]

> *When they finish writing a piece, they call you at midnight and ask you if you can make their text gender sensitive. I have personally experienced this a few times. Then I grew more and more critical of this, because... first of all, they did not think of including me in that discussion or that work from the beginning, and they think of the women's issue as just an addition. There's human rights and there's women's rights, let's add that in there... Don't say anything about any other issues, we'll sort that out ourselves.*[32]

As we see in these two examples, the fact that men need women, be it in the name of political correctness or to satisfy the requirements of their institution's policies, is a striking indicator of the political influence of the feminist struggle. However, women are expected to function as transparent shadow images, not as real subjects with real agency. The most decisive aspect in patterns of instrumentalization is the attempt to prevent women's feminist approaches from directly influencing the discourses or ideas that institutions, parties, or networks aim to disseminate to the public. While the essence of the matter is left to men, women are only expected to legitimize it.

*Exclusion from decision-making mechanisms through formal or informal means* is the third pattern that we describe to explain another form of discrimination frequently brought up by women. Particularly in mixed organizational structures with a relatively lower number of women, one of the most common ways to keep women out of the institution's general operations is to confine them to teams or commissions that work only on women or gender issues.[33] According

29 We think that these experiences are occasioned by the conflict that arises from possessing memories and affects pertaining to either Kurdish or Turkish identity. Being born with or adopting the Turkish identity, which is constructed as the dominant identity in Turkey, also means having access to significant social, economic, and political privileges. Those who reject the imaginary social contract, which is based on the acceptance and glorification of this dominant identity, and prefer to exist with their Kurdish identity face severe "punishments" at the hands of the Turkish state. A significant part of the serious human rights violations in Turkey were committed in the Kurdish region. For a detailed study on this subject, see Barış Ünlü (2018), "Türklük İmtiyazları, Türklük Performansları, Türklük Hâlleri", *Türklük Sözleşmesi, Oluşumu, İşleyişi ve Krizleri*, Dipnot Yayınları, p. 205-283.

30 For more information on this topic, see Hande Gülen (2021), "Women and LGBTQI+ Actors as Lifelines of Each Other: Relations, Alliances, Disjunctures in the Field of Human Rights".

31 Interview no. 16, 11.07.2021, online.

32 Interview no. 9, 29.05.2021, online.

33 The same logic can be observed in the division of labor that forces activists, academics, or rights defenders from non-dominant ethnic or religious groups to speak only on themselves.

to the division of labor instituted here, gender-related issues are seen as women's business, while more general issues are entrusted to men.

One woman we interviewed, part of a group of women who objected to being left out of most important decisions regarding their organization's general operations or policies despite occupying management positions, told us that they had decided to carry this discussion into the public arena. They announced that they had decided to participate as a separate group in the elections of the executive management for the new term. Right after this, they were accused of "acting irresponsibly" and trying to "damage the reputation" of the "well-established association". In this example as well as in the similar experience of another interviewee who had to fight for her work and herself to be seen, women were accused of acting out of personal ambitions and a will to power.

The lack of involvement of women in decision-making mechanisms may not necessarily be a result of their exclusion from these mechanisms through formal means and methods. Male solidarity among colleagues or comrades is not limited to working places and hours. While one of the women we interviewed said that this solidarity instilled an anxiety in her that "men were constantly conniving" behind her back, another woman points out that this solidarity is woven in networks of relationships built at special times and spaces that are closed to women.

> *But do you know what's going on? While I have to watch my every word and every part of my behavior, they amuse themselves at the raki tables. I am not keen on sitting at that table, what I am trying to say is that that is where relationships are built. (...) It's at that table that they get to positions where they can make decisions about you.*[34]

The last pattern we encountered in some of the interviews that is covered in this report is *constant awareness of the impact of one's gender.* If men's discourses, behaviors, and positions are presented as exempt from gender, then those of women are all the more fraught with it.

One of our interviewees, the president of a human rights institution in a city where traditional social ties and power relations predominate, repeatedly underlined the fact that she, as a woman, was heading the association. During the interview, she mentioned the overwhelming preponderance of men at meetings and institutional visits and the general absence of women in representative positions. This observation was not only meant to point out her place as a woman, but also to question what role her gender played in her work. In this respect, she highlighted the uneasiness she felt when she was all alone in the office during new applications, the emotional connection with female applicants, and the care work she did that was not part of her job profile. Other women we interviewed feared that any mistakes they made at work would be directly attributed to their being women, therefore feeling a pressure to be much more careful than their male counterparts.

Given the limitations of the field in which we conducted our interviews, it is certainly difficult to arrive at any general conclusions, but in summing up this chapter, we would nonetheless like to add that we observed considerable differences in the experiences of women occupying top/decision-making positions and living in Turkey's major cities and women occupying the same positions in organizations in more peripheral cities. The pressure of conservative social relations was experienced more pronouncedly by women in the peripheral cities, where the patriarchal world on the "outside" could intervene more openly on the "inside". Consequently, we may say that women's strength is not solely defined by the boundaries of their institutions

34 Interview no. 27, 25.05.2021, online.

or their job profiles. We also need to account for the networks by which they are surrounded, the power and influence of the feminist movement in the fields in which they are situated, and the specific configuration of social power relations. Although our focus is on examining attitudes and practices of gender-based discrimination that are (re)produced in specific fields, namely civil society and rights struggles, it is worth remembering that these areas are not isolated, sterile spaces.

## C. An Unrecognized Item in the Division of Labor: Emotional and Mental Labor

In this chapter, we examine the nature of the division of labor in civil society and the struggle for rights from a gender perspective. The division of labor in various organizations and institutions in these fields, as is the case in many areas of social and economic life, is not free from gender-based discriminations, presuppositions, and expectations. On the contrary, we can say that women working in this field are obliged to take on a workload that is not recognized as such either in employment contracts or in social relations more generally. It is very important to state that this workload, which we describe as *emotional and mental labor*, is not a secondary item but, on the contrary, a prerequisite for reproducing the most basic practices that sustain the field, such as arranging interpersonal relations and finalizing and following up tasks.

Reflecting on emotional and mental labor in civil society, we mainly draw on the feminist literature on the care work performed by women both in the household and in the market economy.

> *(...) Care means both giving one-to-one care to a person or looking after and caring about another person, and beyond that, to take care of and care for the environment, the world, and all living/inanimate beings together with others... In the broadest sense, care is any activity carried out for the flourishing, development, and well-being of life.*[35]

It is not only the patriarchal order but also the capitalist system that contributes significantly to rendering this form of labor invisible: "Capitalism... acknowledges productive labor for the market as the sole form of legitimate 'work,' while the tremendous amount of familial as well as communitarian work that goes on to sustain and reproduce the worker, or more specifically her labor power, is naturalized into nonexistence."[36]

First of all, most of the women we interviewed mentioned that it is up (or left) to them to both spot any conflicts and disagreements that arise in interpersonal relations within or outside the institution or movement and to find solutions for these conflicts.[37] One of our interviewees commented on this situation, saying that "the boys can't really sort these things out". Another

35 This passage is quoted from an article written by Gülnur Acar Savran, who has been thinking about the concept of "unpaid labor" for many years, on the book *The Care Manifesto* written in 2020 by a group of authors working as the Care Collective in England. For the full article, which was published on *Çatlak Zemin*, see https://en.catlakzemin.com/the-crisis-of-care-social-reproduction-and-beyond/

36 Battacharia, Tithi (2017), "Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory", in T. Battacharia [ed.]: *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (1-20), London, Pluto Press, p.2

37 Interviewees from feminist organizations or LGBTQI+ institutions stated that beyond the distinction between men and women, other, more plural identities, privileges, and positions came into play in this regard. Again, it can be said that in both types of organizations inequalities are addressed more openly and awareness of the fatigue caused by emotional and mental labor, as well as well-being practices are relatively more common.

woman we interviewed told us that repairing the damage caused by male employees in relationships in the field was a central part of the job for female employees. Similarly, in field studies conducted with subjects who suffered severe human rights violations, it was observed by other women that women were more engaged, more contemplative of, and more emotionally invested in these relationships. A further aspect of this emotional labor that we have to consider is being aware of the emotional needs of one's co-workers and comrades. Women are more likely than men to take responsibility for working things out when someone is getting disconnected from work, falling behind, or wavering.

Another important phenomenon we encountered in the interviews was that women were tasked with following up the different stages of any job and completing it. Many women had to "pick up after" their male co-workers.

> *In terms of gender roles, who I work with means a lot, it makes a lot of difference. If you're working with men, once you're working with men, the entire secretarial work of any job, that is, the editing and compiling of attachments, almost all of the important work, such as writing, research, etc., all of this is on you.*[38]

> *Mostly, women embrace both their work and their clients. You know, starting something from the beginning and taking it all the way to the end... I mean, we just don't think like "okay, let's leave it like that" or "someone's going to pick it up". (...) Since we know that it is a bad thing when someone's got to clean up after you, we usually don't leave things behind in a messy state. (...) But I mean, for example, when I hand out tasks, I try to distribute them equally but ultimately one has to pick up after the other.*[39]

It is also important to note that both of the phenomena mentioned above, that is, emotional investment and picking up after others, are narrated through different discourses. While some women, without specifically articulating it, thought that women were more prone to do emotional and mental labor, based on a division of labor that was not the result of any negotiations, others specifically emphasized that this was due to the fact that the social power relations were tilted in favor of men and the gendered logic of the social division of labor.

The struggle to achieve gender equality can be seen as a part of this burden.

> *These things are really tiring. When such things happen, four or five women come together to confront the man who did it and then we spend two hours explaining to him why his behavior is problematic. And this comes down to me spending two hours of my Sunday every week outside any regular meeting trying to get my message to this man in the softest way possible. It makes you very angry to spend half of this time trying to explain these things to such a person and moreover, to feel that this extra work that you do is not seen.*[40]

One of the women we interviewed described her fear that any work-related mistake would lead to her immediately being thrown out of the field or that her labor would be rendered invisible as "a psychological stress sometimes almost weighing heavier than fighting against the state." Other women emphasized that being forced to make a decision between focusing on the content of their work and fighting for equality led to a strong feeling of being trapped.

38 Interview no. 6, 27.05.2021, online.

39 Interview no. 25, 13.06.2021, online.

40 Interview no. 23, 05.06.2021, online.

> *Actually, I've got to criticize myself in this regard. I really tried to focus more on work. (...) I mean, I had a purpose in that association. I thought I needed to work, do something useful. I didn't air much of my grievances. But other female colleagues also had strong reactions and criticisms. There were discussions on this topic in some of our meetings, for example. The women said that there was an overall lack of consciousness regarding women or gender and that we should consider receiving trainings in order to change this mindset. The men said "yes, yes, you are right" or something like that or just ignored it and just continued to act as if there was no problem at all.*[41]

We may further argue that the outcome or course of such conflicts is directly affected by the social conditions surrounding women and the political influence of the feminist struggle/intervention. While this burden caused some women to leave their institution or the initiative they were affiliated with, it led other women to decide to part ways with male employees. This also applies to the experiences of women who are not part of an institutional structure:

> *Do female and male screenwriters make equal efforts? Or let's say I am collaborating with a male colleague, do we do the same amount of work? Even when it's just about writing... some habits are just so entrenched! About two weeks ago, I think, I quit a job, parting ways with a male colleague whom I had believed I would be able to work with equally. But in reality, you turn into someone who has to arrange his whole life, I mean, he is kind of demanding that from you without actually being aware of it. Luckily, thank goodness, thanks to a raised awareness, thanks to the achievements of feminism, and thanks to the teachings of the women's movement, I have developed a reflex against these things today.*[42]

Undoubtedly, the fatigue and weariness caused by working on difficult topics and struggling under ongoing conditions of traumatic stress contribute to exacerbating the burden of emotional and mental labor in this field.[43] As a result of the pressure brought on by intense working conditions and constant preoccupation with serious rights violations and traumatic experiences, women experience serious physical or mental collapses. Two women we interviewed mentioned that they had to undergo months of treatment in hospital. In fact, almost every woman we interviewed had received physical or psychological support at one point in their working lives.

## III. DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS AND GENDER

### A. Paid and Unpaid Labor: Changing Conditions and Motivations

In the second part of the report, we expand on the gender focus adopted in the first part and look at how different relationships of power and domination shape women's everyday experiences and the bond they form with the work they do or the struggles they wage. In fact, the main purpose of this part is to try to understand the experiences of women by embedding them in the conditions of the organizational models they are part of, which differ from each other in terms of their social and economic capital, the political movements/ideologies they are

41 Interview no. 16, 11.07.2021, online.

42 Interview no. 27, 25.05.2021, online.

43 For a study that draws on the experiences of Egyptian female human rights defenders to show the intensity of the emotional labor demanded in these areas, see Yara Sallam (2019), *Even the Finest of Warriors*.

associated with, and their fields of work. In this way, we want to comprehend how macro issues such as the structural conditions of different organizational models (e.g., whether they are based on professional or voluntary labor) and their political attitudes (e.g., their perspectives on conducting fund-raised work) shape women's individual narratives, their ways of working, the meanings they attach to their field, and the positions they occupy within the field.

In order to understand what "defending rights" means as an experience that occurs in a real and concrete place and time, we asked all our interviewees to tell us what a routine day looked like for them. We hoped that this question would allow us to see the established and repetitive day-to-day routines and practices that make up a significant part of the labor of women rights defenders. Each individual response we received varied depending on the conditions of the interviewees' daily lives, their position in their organization or movement, and their economic, social, and symbolic capital. Irrespective of all differences, their answers pointed to the following fact: the way our interviewees made sense of and talked about their daily practices and experiences, and the meaning they ascribed to their work were significantly shaped by the conditions and agendas of the fields in which they were engaged and by the tools utilized in this field.

Both in the wider social and political space and in the fields of civil society and rights struggles, labor is divided into paid and unpaid labor, respectively. The conditions that led to and partially reproduced this division not only directly affect the social and economic conditions of women working in this field, but also shape the meanings they attribute to their work and their positions in the field.

While some of the women in these fields defined their work and/or struggle as a form of volunteering or activism for which they do not receive any monetary compensation, others see their work and/or struggle as a professional "job" with regular returns. In other words, whether or not they are paid directly affects how women describe and give meaning to what they do. In this chapter, we are interested in understanding how these changing descriptions and narratives affect the way women explain and interpret their own motivations and bond with the field.

The majority of the women and non-binary people we interviewed were employed as paid workers in this field. Those who did not receive any wages for their labor or received an amount too small to live on drew special attention to this fact, stating that this was precisely what motivated them to be active in the field.

> *Fields of work like ours do not generate a lot of resources. So rather than producing material resources, what motivates us is the love for this kind of work, to sort of observe society and develop knowledge about it, and then to idealize, cherish and care about the thought of giving this knowledge back to society. Other than that, most of us are not in a position where we can create the conditions for our material satisfaction, especially when we think about the developments in the last few years. In fact, a significant part of us have to work for no more than minimum wage.*[44]

> *I mean, I used to get much higher salaries until I started here. But we all say it doesn't matter, because we can work elsewhere for more money, everyone here has various competences and qualifications. But leave the money to them, we are able to survive after all. And I actually feel like I'm doing something much more meaningful here.*[45]

44 Interview no. 29, 12.07.2021, online.

45 Interview no. 10, 02.07.2021, online.

The fact that people received either no wages or insufficient wages in return for work that occupied large parts of their daily lives, consuming much of their available time, made it necessary for them to either work in another job or rely on financial support from their families or relatives. One interviewee, who is the director of an association whose staff fully consists of volunteers, told us that their team included lawyers and cafe owners. She added that she has been unemployed since the day she was dismissed from her previous job and that she had moved back in with her family together with her daughter. Another mental and emotional burden is being more dependent on relationships of care and assistance and the difficulties this imposes on organizing one's private life, particularly in terms of taking more into account the social, economic and moral expectations regarding gender roles. However, while voluntary labor comes with greater economic vulnerabilities and disadvantages, it also creates a ground on which different forms of solidarity can prosper:

> *Unfortunately, all this activism is also due to the fact that I have no other form of social support. I get no support from my family, nor is there anyone else who I could just go and stay with.*[46]

Women who were doing unpaid labor and defining themselves as activists essentially highlighted two main reasons when talking about and explaining their basic motivations: the "affectional bond" they had established with the issues in which they fought for change, and the effort to "find personal fulfillment" through their work. They gave the impression that it was unethical to think of these fields as potentially generating income.[47] At least what they did was much more than that. A feminist lawyer we interviewed mentioned that she had followed a range of cases voluntarily, laughingly commenting, "If I'd charged for my services, I would be rich now", to make an important distinction between herself and especially male lawyers, who tend to advertise such volunteer work as a form of social aid from their social media accounts to make themselves known. She, in turn, emphasized the importance of "being involved, also emotionally, not as a spectator, but as a subject". As another woman we interviewed underscored, the important thing is to witness efforts made as part of a collective struggle progress towards a goal. Whether this goal is the erosion of male domination, the emancipation of a people, or the overthrow of the capitalist order, there is a political agenda to which women's lives are directly linked:

> *We don't simply follow lawsuits as some kind of social activity. At the same time, we are discussing what this effects and changes in our own lives, in women's lives, in the judiciary, in relation to male violence, and also where we should go from there. That's why I'm talking about feminist politics.*[48]

Here, we would like to stress that the main distinction between those doing paid and those doing unpaid labor when it comes to talking about their motivations is not that the former see this field as a source of income, while the latter perceive it as a space of ethical or political activity. The majority of paid laborers profess quite similar motivations when describing their bond with the field. Moreover, we will show further below that the wage earners in fact also problematize the distinctions and inequalities that arise between volunteers and professionals in these fields.

46 Interview no. 10, 02.07.2021, online.

47 A similar distinction can be observed in the fact that some of the people we interviewed refer as activism to the labor done in fields of which they were immediate subjects, while referring as professional work to the labor done in fields to which they had a relative distance.

48 Interview no. 20, 20.06.2021, online.

Now, we would like to look at how women who see themselves as CSO workers describe their motivations for involvement in this field, and to examine the role the debate around the dichotomy between paid and unpaid labor plays in their narratives. A significant part of the women we interviewed emphasized that remuneration for labor was pivotal to ensuring the continuity of people's efforts in the rights struggle. According to them, someone had to earn their living from this work, especially when it came to continuous tasks requiring special knowledge and skills, such as the monitoring, archiving, and reporting of violations or presenting the final product in a format that satisfies international standards. Here, the focus is no longer on presence (acting as a subject in the streets/protests, court, neighborhood, etc.), but on the political function of specialized knowledge and skills producing adequate content in terms of both method and strategy. Also, this narrative seems to presuppose a secretly agreed upon division of labor between those on the street and those at a desk.

> *We don't do too much clamoring, like press releases or Twitter campaigns. We go about things more calmly. Everyone has their own area of expertise. If I also did Twitter campaigns, I couldn't bring a good case. I am not an expert in the other thing, I'm in my own field and it feels better to just stay there and continue doing things following a certain method. I think the important thing is that everyone can work in their own [area] of expertise, in the area they know and with the approach they know. And what's key, as I said, is collaboration."*[49]

As mentioned above, those working in professional civil society organizations never completely lose sight of the conflicts and distinctions between professional and volunteer work, between being on the street and being at a desk, either. As civil society and the rights struggle become more and more professionalized, new inequalities, rivalries, insecurities, and vulnerabilities emerge for the people involved in these fields.[50] Moreover, the affectional or existential bond with any given issue alone is no longer sufficient in employment decisions; other qualifications are sought: "For example, that person also needs to know English."[51]

In Turkey, 406 academics were dismissed from their universities by decrees issued during the state of emergency after they signed the petition "We will not be a party to this crime" to call for peace in the face of escalating violence in the Kurdish provinces in 2015-16. Increasing authoritarian pressures on universities, not limited to dismissals, led many of the dismissed academics or others who were planning to pursue an academic career shift towards civil society, which posed a freer and safer alternative.[52] Drawing attention to this recent trend, one of the women we interviewed suggests that it has increased civil society's value, but also imported other values, ways of working and hierarchies into civil society and the struggle for rights.

> *In the past, working in an association in civil society, being a rights defender was not something you would pride yourself on, but suddenly it has become field of struggle with great value. Being a rights defender has really become something that people write on their resumes. The field gained a lot of prestige when the dismissed academics or academics, like myself, who could not find a place for themselves in the academic field started gravitating here. For one*

49 Interview no .25, 13.06.2021, online.

50 For a discussion dealing with the different aspects of the professionalization of civil society in Turkey, see https://www.sivilsayfalar.org/2021/07/27/turkiyede-sivil-toplum-calisani-olmak-4-sivil-alana-ozgu-bir-profesyonellesme-olmali-mi/

51 For most of the interviewees, the different inequalities in the field were condensed in the requirement to be proficient in English. But while some were critical of this requirement, others saw it as inevitable for their work to satisfy the standards of the profession and achieve recognition in the international arena.

52 During this period, many attempts were made to strengthen cooperation between civil society organizations and academia, to establish solidarity networks with the academics who were dismissed from their jobs by the state and deprived of many social and economic rights, and to offer them new places in the public sphere. For example, see https://tihvakademi.org/hakkimizda/ or https://insanhaklariokulu.org/.

*thing, this created an incredible supply of human resources. It's really incredible, the field is becoming more and more populated by people who see it as a sector in its own right. And by the same token it is actually starting to be closed to people who have a real tie with the field, who are activists, activists in the field.*[53]

The experience of another woman we interviewed demonstrates that the expectations and choices brought about by performing professional work in the field of civil society and a system that works by including people with these qualifications for once and excluding others is not a permanent "elimination-selection" mechanism. Even if someone were at some point able to enter these fields, which are becoming increasingly more professionalized, they may occupy an unequal position among equals. Our interviewee mentioned that although she had found a job in the field today, she was struggling with a double anxiety because she did not think that she met the qualifications sought in current job postings in civil society: Besides the economic concerns that she had because she believed that it would be impossible for her to find another job in the field if she lost her current one, she was feeling socially and professionally anxious and distant at her association because she was directly excluded from some areas requiring special expertise such as project design and reporting.

*I went through a long period of unemployment. As you know, civil society is quite a white-collar area, so I wasn't able to find any job in this field. I really tried my luck a lot but to no avail: foreign languages and master's degrees are real barriers for us. So no matter how much you are in the field, there is not much left if you are going to do monitoring and advocacy. I was probably complaining about being unemployed again on social media, when I received a message saying, "Hey, we're looking for a colleague". I checked the qualifications... they were looking for something like Allah. So I said, no, it will be very difficult for me to get in (...) And if I should leave this association one day, it's almost impossible for me to find a job in another NGO.*[54]

But when we look beyond these clear-cut and at times rigid boundaries and positions that emerge at the discursive level, we see that the women working in this field often traverse different fields, adopting different identities and definitions and transgressing the boundaries of rigid concepts. In other words, while names and definitions might appear as quite static, real experiences are never so pure and intransigent. On the contrary, they intersect, clash, and sometimes complement each other. Along with these objections and distinctions regarding working through funding, different forms of professionalism, and relations with political movements, it can be said that the experiences of many women who participate in the field transgress these boundaries. We are certainly not trying to say that these distinctions lack any equivalence to reality, on the contrary, they often indicate clear-cut political positions and attitudes. This should however not lead us to ignore the multiple identities and experiences women adopt and go through in their struggles and lives.

In fact, many women are involved in several institutions, networks, and movements at once, which are characterized by their own conditions, agendas, and social profile. These women see themselves as more of an activist or rights defender in one place and as professionals or civil society workers in another. Of course, this is not to say that they do not experience any conflicts:

*For example, I see myself as a subject of the LGBTQI+ movement and feel more comfortable talking about these kinds of issues, or issues related to the feminist movement or the women's*

53 Interview no. 24, 06.06.2021, online.

54 Interview no. 30, 25.06.2021, online.

*movement. But for example, I don't think I have the right, from where I am at, to draw on my own personal experience to say anything on the Kurdish issue. It seems more appropriate to position myself as a CSO employee here. Of course, I would advocate for the Kurdish movement, for peace, but these are two different things I suppose. First of all, I am not a Kurd, I am not the subject of the movement, I feel like all I can be is an ally, I don't know, there is this kind of identity conflict.*[55]

*(...) in fact, I find it most difficult to talk about environmental issues without being an environmental activist myself. I do not feel any stress when it comes to thinking about solutions for or commenting on human rights issues (...) as a human rights activist I can talk about these things. (...) But I can never be enough of an ecology activist. You know, I feel like I have to do everything perfectly in order to be able to say anything about it.*[56]

In concluding this chapter, we think it is important to take to heart a new perspective on this conflict that is inspired particularly by the feminist and queer struggles. Instead of problematizing or ignoring inconsistencies and conflicts, such an approach stresses the importance of embracing them, and changing our perspective on what it means to be associated with or nourish a feeling of belonging to a movement or organization. This was also often mentioned during the interviews. Thus, when it is no longer necessary to choose between different identities, attributes, and attachments, we can start moving across borders to learn from each other. In other words, by privileging fragmented states of being instead of the notion of subjects with holistic and homogeneous identities, the field of rights struggles itself can move away from being a fixed space, and turn into a constant process of collective and subjective construction.

## B. Agendas, Tools, and Relationships

The discussions and conflicts regarding the differences between paid and unpaid labor and professional and volunteer work, which we examined under the previous heading, also play an important role in shaping the agendas and tools of institutions, initiatives, and platforms. In this chapter, we try to take a closer look at how these agendas and tools are decided upon. What we are trying to understand here is not the meaning of certain agendas, tools, and relationships in terms of different organizational models, but the way they manifest themselves in women's daily experiences and constructions of subjectivity.

Whether our interviewees were talking about a routine day at work, about how space and time were organized in their organization, or about the projects carried out in their field, we were always able to notice a direct link between who and what was included in or excluded from the agenda of their organization, and their own agenda. Roughly speaking, the agendas of organizations can be divided into those determined by urgent needs and those based on strategic planning. Organizations that predominantly or entirely rely on volunteer work, work in more disadvantaged regions, and/or directly interact with more disadvantaged groups and/or grassroots movements, prioritize responding to the urgent needs arising from political and social conditions. Conversely, in organizations mostly made up of professionals, which produce information and written material for national and international institutions rather than for the actual subjects of their work and rely on funding to ensure their sustainability, strategic planning according to the specific conditions of civil society is key. In other words, while the

55 Interview no. 19, 10.06.2021, online.

56 Interview no. 26, 24.05.2021, online.

former is based on a work-labor relationship built around a care and solidarity economy, this relationship is built around the final product and its dissemination.[57] The following two quotes serve well to sum up these two different approaches.

> *Actually, we did not originally intend to take applications from victims of violence, but over time we did because we saw that there was a great need and women started coming, asking for support. Thinking about what we could do about the situation, we realized that it was very difficult to deal with it on our own. At that time, all institutions working on this topic had been closed by the trustees. That's why we established a network, the Network Against Violence.*[58]

> *In general, I do my best to try and follow what is going on in the field. In other words, I read a lot about who is doing what in our areas of activity and also in other areas, I have to read the analyses. This is not about jumping at every issue, but it helps us to figure out what we want to do. It may end up more or less properly defined, but eventually I am trying to work out a main strategy for our association together with the board of directors and its members.*[59]

Some women occupy more privileged positions in the field (thanks to both the conditions offered by their institution and their own professional qualifications). Compared to others, they have a wider room to maneuver when it comes to determining their areas of work according to their institutional and individual interests and priorities. Where a closer relationship with the subjects of the work is a key determinant in the first type of organizations, the relationships with institution managers, funders and experts in the field have greater priority in the second type of organizations.

On the other hand, these two different approaches and the fact that these two approaches have become established in different ways in different types of institutions do not always create sharp divisions between institutions. Sometimes we may also encounter such a differentiation in the internal division of labor between the different working teams or individuals of an institution. This division of labor determines who is working with whom (i.e. with the victims of rights violations or the subjects of a struggle or with professionals and/or representatives of national and international institutions) and who is in charge of which part of the "work" (i.e. who is carrying out organizational, mostly repetitive tasks requiring emotional labor and who is researching, strategizing, and generating knowledge).[60] Thus, this distinction also determines who is going to be a decision-maker and director in an institution and who is going to be in charge of implementing the decisions made by others.

> *I can probably do mental labor with greater peace of mind. I am already doing a PhD in the field that the institution I work for is active in. I can bring a lot of stuff to the organization's agenda in this respect, create links, or see more immediately how this relates to what's going on in the world out there. (...) Some among us don't have these kinds of resources. That's why perhaps they feel that they cannot contribute that much to the work of the institution, or maybe we are quite dominant and commanding.*[61]

57 In the first chapter, we have tried to understand how the unpaid labor power, which performs the emotional and mental labor that keeps this care economy going, is neutralized in terms of its gender identity.

58 Interview no.1, 03.07.2021, online.

59 Interview no.11, 07.05.2021, online.

60 It should also be noted that this distinction often implies a hierarchy. The second group of tasks requires several competences such as a solid educational background, foreign language skills, project management skills, and being member of a prestigious profession.

61 Interview no. 23, 05.06.2021, online.

> *Some of our teams never visit the field: the communication team, the executive staff or those who are in charge of financial affairs… They are not affected by the field at all. That creates a strange imbalance. At least that's what I sense. For one thing, we are an institution working in the west of the country and made up of employees who have many advantages due to their background, and I think that inevitably creates, how can I put it, an asymmetrical situation. So, when working on violations in the Kurdish provinces, I think it is particularly important to be in contact with the field (…). But not everyone develops that contact to the same degree and there also is a lack of awareness that comes with the advantages of being Turkish and so then they may not be able to properly make sense of many things. I can see these kinds of divisions.*[62]

In fact, these two approaches, which seem to be located at opposite poles, often intersect in people's subjective experiences, sometimes even manifesting themselves as a conflict in their lives. One of the women we interviewed said the following about the impact of working more closely and directly with the subjects of the field: "At different moments I had to face my own whiteness, all that theory, books, reading etc." In other words, one's readings are always tested by the field, causing people to question themselves, the way they work and their approach, thus creating a feeling of unease. But they can also enable a certain distance from the field, allowing people to broaden their horizon and adjust the way they engage with their field. However, the first caveat we want to add here is that not everyone has equal access to these two areas, while in a second instance, the "risk" of being affected and transformed by the field is not equally embraced by everyone. One of our interviewees mentioned that her colleagues, whom she considered as mainly motivated by professional ambitions, were more averse to certain risks, remarking that such differences in attitude essentially were a political issue. In more explicit terms, this means that the relations, close or distant, which people involved in civil society establish with grassroots movements determine people's actions in their respective areas of activity in civil society, and what risks they are willing to take and to what extent.

In this context, many of our interviewees pointed out the delicate nature of the choices that had to be made between collecting and documenting information and data and building relations with those who are the subjects of this data. However, this dilemma transpires not only on the personal but also on the institutional level:

> *Now, when everything turns to reporting, you don't have much to do with your field. There is something wrong about this, that's what I don't understand. You cannot work all distant from your field, that's simply impossible. You've got to be in touch with your field. How are you going to report on poverty when you are not in the streets, when you can't get close there… and given that they won't immediately accept you, you need to build trust first… so will the available statistics be enough? (…) I attach great importance to civil society and advocacy, to monitoring and advocacy, I really do. But I think things are slowly going off the rails. It seems to me that there is a danger of this whole thing heading somewhere where we only write reports and collect information.*[63]

Many funded civil society projects in Turkey today essentially revolve around collecting data on a certain topic and supporting and empowering organizations in writing a report based on this data that will satisfy the standards of international institutions. For some individuals and institutions in the field, this raises concerns and questions liked those quoted above. Some interviewees talked about professionalization as a process that transforms civil society

62 Interview no. 19, 10.06.2021, online.

63 Interview no. 30, 25.06.2021, online.

actors' relationship with those groups that were exposed to rights violations, discrimination, and violence. It seems that rather than long, detailed narratives of the subjects, what is now prioritized is quantitative data about them.

Another issue brought up by those who opposed funded projects carried out in line with professional methods and criteria is independence. They presented the decision not to carry out funded projects as a matter of ethical and political choice (i.e., securing independence from certain ideologies, maintaining purity, and not compromising one's principles) and spoke of a process of "elite formation" as the root of the conflict between two different forms of engagement with the field. According to this view, organizations choosing to carry out projects which no longer rely on voluntary labor would necessarily create their own elites in order to fulfill their commitments vis-à-vis the funding institution.

The intricate relationship between staying independent and doing one's work in line with the principles of the struggle for rights on the one hand and sustainability on the other, also occupies an important place on the agenda of institutions that currently receive funding. In this respect, we once again encounter some important inequalities between different institutions. These inequalities have to do with both the social and economic power of institutions and the disadvantaged positions of the subjects who are carrying out or are addressed by their work. Drawing attention to this circumstance, one of the women we interviewed indicated that the institutions which provide the economic means that sustain civil society work were actually trying to ensure that they will be able to decide and determine which areas, identities, and subjectivities will be considered legitimate.

> *The consulates certainly support us, especially when it comes to gays. But we've also heard and experienced things like this: Let's say we are organizing an event about sex workers. They'll say, we can support you, but wouldn't it be possible that no actual sex workers attend your event? They don't want to be mentioned in the same breath with them. So, they want to be seen as progressive, but at the same time, they don't want their name mentioned next to yours in public. As if all this was not enough, you have to deal with countless penalties on top of that.*[64]

We have seen that in addition to the gendered mold of civil society and the struggle for rights, different types of inequalities and discrimination play a decisive role in shaping women's experiences. Those who wage their struggle in a more direct relationship with the field and as part of organizations based on voluntary support, given the precarious conditions of their work, face more diverse risks and have to come up with urgent responses to instant needs arising from unstable political conditions. On the other hand, there are institutions and individuals in relatively more privileged positions who can afford to determine both their working areas and tools and their agendas without worrying too much about sustainability.

64 Interview no. 10, 02.07.2021, online.

## IV. CONCLUSION

> *Women and/or LGBTQI+ rights defenders' struggle has to be against both the sexism within their own movements and the sexism of those who attack these movements, while also tackling with the problems they are concerned with... There are many layers to this struggle...*[65]

The fields of civil society and rights struggles are often imagined as gender-free. In particular, the *human* figure at the center of the dominant human rights discourse seems to be far from having a gender. However, in the structures, procedures, and divisions of labor of organizations and institutions in the field, just as in all other fields of the social structure, there are gender-based inequalities and forms of discrimination that mostly operate implicitly, combining with other forms of inequality (e.g., based on class, age, ethnicity, education level) to reproduce themselves.

But for as long as the issue of gender remains unaddressed, we should first of all wonder what happens to those other *subjects* that fall outside the heteronormative male construct of the rights defender? What we witness is that the bodies, labor, and practices of female, queer, and non-binary subjects in these fields oscillates between being overly visible and being rendered invisible. Two interrelated processes are at work in producing this invisibility. On the one hand, "old", "female", "queer", and "vulnerable" bodies that do not fit the male construct of the abstract and heroic human rights defender are disregarded or marked as abnormal. On the other hand, men reinforce their position of power by preventing women from receiving public credit for their labor at desk jobs or in the field (e.g., during a press release or meeting), that is, by appropriating their labor.

When viewed from a gender perspective, another striking aspect of these fields is the gendered nature of the division of labor. Most women in this field perform a vast amount of emotional and mental labor. On the one hand, they take care of interpersonal relations and the well-being of their colleagues, and on the other hand, they have to pick up after men, clearing tasks that the latter do not follow up on or leave incomplete or in disarray.

Furthermore, there are different patterns and mechanisms in the fields of civil society and rights struggles that relegate women to the position of subordinate subjects. These patterns have been categorized in this report as *not being taken seriously, being instrumentalized, being excluded from decision-making mechanisms through formal or informal means*, and *constantly being aware of the impact of one's gender* to show how gender-based inequalities and forms of discrimination manifest themselves in concrete experiences.

The second question that preoccupied us in this report was what kind of role different types of inequalities (e.g., based on age, class, and ethnicity) play alongside gender in the experiences of women who act within the structural conditions of different organizational models. How do these inequalities shape women's motivations and constructions of subjectivity? In civil society, some of the women are part of organizations that rely more heavily on voluntary labor or activism, while others work in organizations predominantly relying on paid professional labor. The conditions of these different organizational models do not only concern issues at the macro-level. On the contrary, they significantly shape women's individual stories, their way of working, and the meanings they attribute to the struggle for rights.

65 Mülakat no. 5, 04.05.2021, çevrimiçi.

Women who perform unpaid labor highlight their "affectional bond" with their issues, stating that their work allows them to experience themselves as political subjects. In turn, women working as professionals stress that information and written outputs produced by employing expert skills and methods were an important tool in the struggle. Parallel to this distinction, the former group of women maintains close relations with the subjects directly affected by rights violations and their agenda is largely determined by the needs of the field, while the latter group prioritizes relations with national and international institutions and networks, setting their agenda in line with long-term institutional strategies. Meanwhile, it is important to emphasize that neither institutions nor individuals are working under equal conditions. The different inequalities and privileges within civil society are reproduced on both levels. Besides facing challenges posed by the patriarchal order and political violence, some women therefore have to wage their struggle from relatively more disadvantaged and vulnerable positions.

For us, as subjects of civil society and rights struggles, this study is of particular significance. Seeing how gender-based inequalities and other types of inequalities based on ethnicity, class, and age are baked into the common grounds from which we mostly contest the powers "out there" or "at the top", has shown us how essential and valuable contestations on the inside are. There is great value, we think, in increasing our efforts in this field to understand whose visibilities we are compromising, how we can overcome ways of working taught to and imposed on us by the established and dominant culture, and how we can abandon notions of sublimity and bravery and instead devise ways of being involved in the field that pay tribute to our real states of being, allowing us to feel vulnerable, take breaks, and even give up at times. This study is also meant to remind us once again of the insistence of the feminist approach on creating different modes of working and being by way of being aware of ourselves and each other and fostering practices that are based on solidarity and mutual support. In this sense, as many feminist voices have underscored, *telling* and *listening* is a practice of struggle and empowerment in its own right. We hope this study has fulfilled this purpose to some extent.

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