ACTIVISTS IN ACTION: FOUNDING WOMEN`S ORGANIZATIONS AND ESTABLISHING THEIR ACTIVITIES IN TURKEY

AKTİVİSTLER İŞBAŞINDA: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ KADIN ÖRGÜTLERİ VE FAALİYETLERİ

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Abstract

This paper is about the women's organizations in Turkey. It focuses particularly on the legal structures, activities, aims and target groups of the women's organizations. Based on in-depth interviews with 33 activist women from five cities in Turkey, including Istanbul, Ankara, Van, Diyarbakır and Trabzon, it aims to understand the ways through which women get organized and form their activities, for what reasons.

Keywords: Women's organizations, women's activism, legal structure, target group.

Öz

Bu çalışma Türkiye'deki kadın örgütlerini incelemektedir. Örgütlerin hukuki yapıları, faaliyetleri, amaçları ve hedef kitlelerine odaklanan çalışma, Türkiye'nin beş şehrinden (İstanbul, Ankara, Van, Diyarbakır ve Trabzon) 33 aktivist kadınla yapılan derinlemesine mülakatlara dayanmakta ve özellikle kadınların ne amaçla ve ne tür süreçler den geçerek örgütlendiklerini ve faaliyetlerini nasıl şekillendirdiklerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kadın örgütleri, kadın aktivizmi, hukuki yapı, hedef kitle.

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1. Introduction

The focus of this paper[2] is the legal structures, aims, activities and target groups of the women`s organizations whose activists I interviewed. I divide the paper into three parts. In the first one, I examine the legal organizational models adopted by the women`s organizations and explore my participants' perceptions of those models. In this section, I argue that the activists adopt certain legal models to mobilize in order to cope with the toughness of founding a women`s organization in the particular political contexts. I then turn to their aims and activities in the second section. In the final part I look at my participants' interpretations of their target groups and analyse the methods they employed to reach them. Here, I show that the women`s organizations founded in the 1990s and 2000s are part of women`s movements focusing predominantly on rural, lower-class and uneducated women. Throughout my fieldwork, I interviewed 33 women who actively took part in the process of establishing women's organizations. I found the women in Istanbul, Ankara, Trabzon, Diyarbakır and Van. The majority of my participants were aged between 20-40 and were single. A significant number of the informants had a bachelor degree and most of them were employed. They were mostly middle-class, educated, urban women with certain political, religious and ethnic affiliations. Now I turn to the first part throughout which I focus on the legal structures of the women's organizations.

2. Founding a Women`s Organization: Legal Issues and Constraints

Although some scholarly work, mostly in the form of graduate dissertations, sheds some light on the legal models (e.g. association, foundation, cooperation and so forth) of the women`s organizations in Turkey (e.g. Kaya, 2010; Menteş, 2008; Yılmaz, 2006), there is no analysis explaining why these legal models were adopted by the organizations. Therefore in this section, I look at the factors that impacted on how organizations chose certain legal organizational models and how my participants perceived those. I argue that the models adopted by the women's organizations were determined by various factors including Turkey`s political situation and the legal frameworks available for setting up organizations.

All women`s organizations in my sample but one (the AC1)[3] were established between 1983 and 2004 when laws regarding organizing, which were established according to the new constitution adopted by the military regime following the coup in 1980, were in place in Turkey. These included various codes and regulations regarding organizing such as the Associations Code 2908, Cooperatives Code 1163 and 13195, and Foundations Code 2762 and Civil Code 4721.Through these new laws, all existing political parties, trade unions, and organizations were shut down. People involved in the latter were arrested, tortured, kept under custody for long years or sentenced to death. Briefly, with the adoption of the new laws, getting organized was made very difficult. Until amendments were accepted in 2004, these laws remained in effect (with small changes at different) dates for 21 years and they affected numerous organizations attempting to gain legal status. In this section, I discuss the establishing

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[3]All of the activists' and the organizations' names I refer to throughout this paper are pseudonyms.

process of the organizations in my sample in relation to these legal regulations before 2004 as these organizations were strongly informed by those laws.

According to the laws in question, there were four main ways in which women`s organizations could set themselves up as legal entities between 1983 and 2004. These were:

1. Associations;

2. Foundations;

3. Cooperatives; and

4. Private enterprises.

A fifth entity, a `platform`, also came into existence, but it was not identified in laws at the time. Until 2004, there was no definition nor regulation for a platform in the related codes.

Each of the types of organization above had its advantages and disadvantages in legal terms. An association, for instance, was defined by Turkish law simply as a society established by at least seven persons coming together for a common purpose excluding sharing earnings and which is not prohibited by law (Associations Code 2908, No: 18184, Article 1). But, according to the code, the associations were controlled by the police and the police had the right to investigate any organization without providing any reason (ibid. Articles 45-46). This, as I shall show in this chapter, resulted in the police`s arbitrary treatment of organizations and activists and deterred some women from adopting the association model for their organization.

The law defined a foundation as a legal entity composed of properties allocated by persons for a specific and permanent purpose (Turkish Civil Code, No: 4721, Article: 101). Unlike associations, foundations were supervised and controlled by the Directorate General of Foundations which is dependent on the Prime Ministry. A cooperative, on the other hand, was defined as a legal entity established by persons along with public entities such as municipalities, administrators of villages, societies or various associations and it was entitled to provide and protect its partners' specific economic interests and needs regarding the partners' professions and maintained through mutual aid and solidarity (Cooperatives Code, No: 13195, Article: 1). Thus, unlike associations and foundations, cooperatives had economic bases, and in cooperatives there was no membership but a partnership. Private enterprises, on the other hand, were regulated by codes related business rather than organizing. This, as shown in this section, provided some activists with the opportunity to organize legally in cases where other legal entities were inaccessible to them. Finally, the gap in laws regarding `platforms` was filled by the Turkish Associations Code with changes to include platforms in 2004; this new code defined a platform as a legal temporary entity set up by associations or along with foundations, trade unions or other civil society organizations for a common purpose (Associations Code 5253, No: 25649, Article 2: f). In other words, it has institutional rather than individual membership.

Out of 17 women's organizations in my sample, eight were founded as associations, three as foundations, three as cooperatives, two as private enterprise sunder Turkish law and one as a platform. As I shall show in this section, the organizations` legal titles and their affiliations were closely related to each other. So,

before turning to discuss this relationship, I shall provide an overview of the organizations` legal titles by their political, ethnic, or religious affiliations (see Table 7).

Table 7. Distribution of the women`s organizations in my sample by their affiliations.

Type of Legal Structure	Type of Organization
Association	Secular women`s organizations, Feminist women`s organizations, Socialist women`s organization, Religious women`s organization.
Foundation	Feminist women`s organizations
Cooperative	Feminist women`s organizations
Private enterprise	Kurdish women`s organizations
Platform	Religious women`s organization

Source: Research Data (2008-2009).

All the women's organizations with secular affiliations in my sample were associations. The only socialist women`s organization included in my study was an association too. Alongside the socialist organization, some of the feminist organizations in my study were founded as associations, and also as foundations and cooperatives. The only platform in my sample (the AB3) was founded by religious women mostly gathering various religious gender-mixed organizations. Later the members of this platform left their memberships in their private organizations and became full members of the platform which then shifted into an association. Seda from AB3 explained that: `The platform was not defined in domestic law then. This made it easier for us to create a participatory and flexible organization model.` So, the legal gaps in the code made these activists organize in a relatively more flexible way than the law required for other organization models. Finally, both of the women`s organizations with Kurdish affiliations in my sample were founded as private enterprises in the first place. These were actually `private enterprises with political intent`; their main goal was getting organized to pursue women's movements activism, of which details are discussed further down in this chapter.

The laws did not impact on all the women's organizations. The vast majority of the organizations in my study had been founded between 1990 and 2004 when this law was in effect. Feminist and secular women's organizations (e.g. BA1 and AB1) were confirmed as associations in 1997, when Kurdish women's organizations were rejected. There were political and code-related reasons for Kurdish women's groups' inability to achieve legal status. The conflict between the Kurdish militants and the army rose during the 1990s. While the Turkish daily newspapers were covered with the pictures and names of Turkish soldiers who died in the conflict, the state and military pressure on Kurdish civilians living in the eastern region increased dramatically. Political pressure also increased hugely. Political parties with Kurdish affiliations were closed down one after another[4] and, with the closure of their party,

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[4] *The parties closed down by the authorities which were founded as successors of each other were the HEP (The People`s Labour Party) closed in 1991, the DEP (the Democracy Party) closed in 1994, the HADEP (The*

the Kurdish MPs lost their seats in parliament and some[5] were arrested in 1994. This strained atmosphere impacted on the Kurdish activists` mobilizations attempts in a negative way. As the Hande's narrative above makes it clear, not only forming an association but charitable status was inaccessible to Kurdish women`s groups.

The codes related to associations had specific regulations regarding their founders. One of the most important of these required the founders not to have previous experience of being involved in legally prohibited associations, political parties and the like. The article stated:

> […] those who cause the closure of a political party by the Constitutional Court decision through their own acts cannot found associations for five years after the announcement of the decision. (The Associations Law 2908, Official Gazette and the Proclamation of Prose: 7 October 1983 - Issue: 18184th)

However, the majority of my Kurdish participants, both from feminist organizations and Kurdish women's organizations, had been involved previously in at least one of the Kurdish political parties banned by the Constitutional Court. Thus, they were not allowed to lead associations.

In the activists' decisions for adopting this or that legal organization status, then, political and legal regulation shad a huge influence. This was the case in many women's organizations, not only Kurdish ones. For instance, the reason why the feminist BB3 was established as a cooperative, not an association, was that: `The police have the right to control associations at any time. Even if we do not do anything illegal, we do women`s politics here and do not want the police to interrupt our work. […] Thus, we became a cooperative. (Emine) Article 48 in the Associations Code 2908 enabled the police to access all property belonging to an association through the written permission of the civil administrator of the highest rank of a location. The code also envisaged the establishment of a `Private Control Group for Associations, *when necessary*, to check compliances of associations' activities` with the law (Article 46). The members of associations were obliged to provide all sorts of documents belonging to the associations when asked (Article 45). The latter was particularly damaging since the code also set various penalties including closure of associations or long-term imprisonment for association members having `any sort of picture, banner, poster and written document displaying regimes, doctrines or ideologies banned by law` (48:4). Hence, `becoming a cooperative` was, in a way, seeking protection from the pressure of police surveillance. This was also clear in Harika`s account: `As you may know, the associations were subjected to supervision from the police then. When they were civilianized we converted into an association.`(DA2)

As mentioned above, there were women's organizations in my sample which organized as cooperatives. Suzan explained the reason why her organization AB2 was established as a cooperative: `We thought we could also do business so that we could preserve our economic independence.` AB2 members used the biggest room of their office as a café/restaurant. They cooked and served customers who had been informed

People`s Democracy Party) closed in 2003. The reason for closure was usually that the Constitutional Court ruled that these parties aided the PKK (the illegal Kurdish Workers` Party).

[5] *One of these MPs, Leyla Zana, was arrested for completing her parliamentary oath in Kurdish and saying `I take this oath for brotherhood between the Kurdish and Turkish people` and for her links with the PKK (BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7765734.stm, accessed 22 November 2009).*

about this place, usually through flyers circulated in the streets by the AB2 members themselves. The money earned through this business was used for the activities of the organization. Thus, `economic independence` in Suzan's account pointed to the organizational independence of AB2. Thanks to the café business, they were able to pay the office rent and bills, so that they did not have to seek funding through grants or donations. Such funding was considered a source of dependence:

> Working in the women's field is a very tough job. First of all you have to remain financially independent. You have to be able to stand on your own feet. We spend too much effort to pay the office rent. If we could pay the rent and bills easily, we could have put our effort to useful things. […] Now we have to do [business] otherwise we will have to depend on something (Oya).

The political, legal and economic influences highlighted above aside, the intentions behind the women's organizations prior to their founding also played an important role in the activists' decision on their organizational status. For instance, since foundation status provided women's organizations with the legal right and sources for opening women's shelters, the majority of the organizations in my sample which dealt with violence against women were established as foundations. Alongside their own earnings, foundations in Turkey are supported financially by governmental agents. This helps the shelters to survive and improve their conditions.

To sum up, restrictive legal regulations and the repressive political atmosphere during the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, the period when the activists in this research were attempting to mobilize, hugely impacted on their `legal choices` for their prospective organizations. Alongside these, economic motivations also played a significant role in some of my participants` decisions. There were also activists, as mentioned, who said that the aims and activities they wanted to take on made them decide which legal form they should adopt. And finally, the desire to be exempted from certain legal requirements also impacted on women's organization`s choice of legal status. Briefly, in getting organized as associations, cooperatives, foundations and private enterprises, the organizations were guided by three underlying motives:

- The legal and political situation;
- Economic imperatives; and
- Their aims and objectives.

I now turn to explore those aims, objectives and activities as discussed by my participants.

3. Women`s Organizations` Aims and Activities

The majority of the organizations in my sample were multi-activity based. For instance, there were organizations which worked on domestic violence and strengthening women financially at the same time which meant they did activities and campaigns on both of these issues. Participants involved in such organizations explained the reason of this in terms for following a user-led agenda. İnci said, for instance:

> [...] we did a survey around the region. The results were awful. The ratio of violence was so high. Also the number of illiterate women was very high.

> The survey showed what work was required. [...] Our work on women's employment was shaped by the requests we received.

Thus, the organization had started working on violence as the survey guided them that way. `Diagnosing the problem` before starting to work in a certain region was not particular to Turkey. For instance, Ana Mayta from ACRE (Creative Action – a Bolivian NGO working on women`s issues) describes how they first researched and observed local women`s needs and started working in the field after `diagnosing` women`s problems in the region (2003: 106).This was also the case in many other countries across the world such as India, Nicaragua, South Africa and Philippines which are also considered `third world countries` in the literature (Wallace and March; 1991). The CA1 went through a similar process: `In the end, we struggle against violence against women. The women`s submissions drew our focus in this way. We were not very clear at the beginning but the process has shown us the way we need to go.` (Meral) The CA1 had an expanded its initial aims in the course of time; although it had a multi-aim agenda already, including improving women's employment and political participation at the beginning (the CA1 Statute, Articles 2:1 and 3:2), it strengthened its activities on violence over time due to the increase in requests from women in the region regarding this issue. This highlighted the fact that the aims, as well as the activities, adopted by these women`s organizations were not static but changing. Therefore, instead of categorizing the organizations according to their aims and activities, I directly go on to analyse their aims and activities. First I discuss activities around violence.

3.1. Activities Aimed at Combating Violence Against Women

Although there is a significant amount of literature on violence against women which approaches the issue from both theoretical and practical perspectives (e.g. David, 2009; Renzetti et al., 2001; Wykes and Welsh, 2009), scholarly work looking at women`s organizations` roles in combating it lags far behind (for exceptions, see Hague and Malos, 2005). There is a lack of research on how women activists organized in women`s organization approach the issue and how they comment on their organizations` activities regarding this (for exceptions to this, see Griffin, 1995). Here, I therefore focus on the activities aimed at combating violence against women and how my participants perceived them.

The most common response in my research to the question of the aims of a given organization was the struggle against violence. Considering the fact that one in every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced to sex, or otherwise abused by a man in her life time (UNIFEM, 2006; cited in Joachim, 2007: 103) and the rate of violence against women in Turkey (see Figure 7 in the Introduction), this is not a coincidence. For instance, Melek said regarding her organization's aim:

> [...] to make women and society aware of violence against women and to create policies regarding the issue. We try to take part in the policy creation process of the government and I guess we achieve it. We also took part in CEDAW.

Melek identified awareness-raising about the issue of violence against women as the aim of her organization. According to her, cooperating with the government and CEDAW were steps towards this aim. Thus, she identified a wider operational

context for this struggle including domestic and international lobbying. How this proceeded was as follows:

> The government had given promises [regarding the issue], like enacting laws and implementing them properly and all that. But we saw that nothing happened. Then we reported it to the CEDAW Committee. The Committee pushes the government to keep its promise. This is what we did last time.

According to Melek, the CA1's target here was that the CEDAW Committee should in turn push the domestic law makers. And it was initially important for her organization to convince the international body of its rightfulness. Thus, it was able to gain international support and use this support to put pressure on the domestic policy makers. In her two comments above, Melek thus identified multiple target groups for her organization which included women, and foreign and domestic policy bodies. The organizations in my sample which worked on violence, on the other hand, usually identified the violence sufferers as their target groups.

Out of 17 women's organizations in my sample, 11, including feminist, socialist, religious and Kurdish women's organizations, dealt with various forms of violence against women, including violence against sex workers, domestic violence, and violence from the police. This highlighted the fact that violence against women exists across every social groups regardless of their ideological, political or ethnic backgrounds.

All the organizations, no matter what their affiliation, undertook similar activities to combat violence against women. These activities included providing psychological and legal advice, moving the sufferer to a women's shelter, and to free medical treatment. There were also activities about violence which were open to all women, not just the victims. The most common of these were awareness-raising workshops. For instance, İnci said:

> [The DA1's purpose] is to create awareness about violence and to create a way which will enable women to fight against it. [...] we aim to make women aware of what we have become aware of through these workshops.

İnci established a parallel between the awareness-raising process that she had been through and the workshops provided for the women. She also indicated that, alongside struggling against violence, her organization aimed at creating strategies through which women could fight violence themselves. She described how those workshops proceeded:

> They usually take 10-12 weeks, 3-4 hours a week. 10 to 15 women gather here in this room and we hold the workshops. Those are women who do not know each other at all. We discuss a different subject every week. We have run this since 1997. We talk about everything, we talk about communication, we talk about discrimination, we talk about violence. [...] We do a definition of violence together with the women. Violence is so much naturalized that they take it for granted. We become aware of this fact here.

During these workshops, members of the organizations and women from outside, usually from the immediate neighbourhood of the organizations, meet in the organization offices and share their experiences and views regarding various issues,

usually domestic violence. Although women were usually from the immediate environment, the organizers were cautious in preventing access of those who knew each other to the same sessions. This was because violence, by its nature, was a difficult and painful topic to talk about and those who suffered from domestic violence did not want their acquaintances to learn about their violent experiences. So the organizers of the workshops tried to separate women who lived in close proximity into different groups.

Directing women requiring protection from domestic violence to women`s shelters was an important activity. In AB2's case, for example, women who got away from their families were mostly directed to professionals and women's shelters. Oya said, for instance:

> We have volunteers and partners. We direct women who come to us to those volunteers. […] We also direct women to shelters or there is this [another women`s organization] which has more facilities to help such women; we mostly direct women coming to us to that foundation.

However, as the law does not permit women`s organizations to pursue the process after a violence sufferer is taken away from her family, the activists were not allowed to get involved with the process further. A report by KAMER, a women`s organization working on the issue, shows that some of the rescued women were found by their family, some were made to marry the men who had raped them, some were injured and some were forced to go back to their family house (2006).So, despite all efforts, the women's organizations' effectiveness wasso me times limited by the law and the cultural practices of the region.

Providing legal and psychological advice to women requiring help and holding awareness-raising work shops were regarded as significant activities by my respondents because they showed the sufferer women that they were not alone in experiencing such problems. As Hande put it: `[Women] overcome their loneliness and see that they can share their problems here. `They shared with each other and with the activists. For instance, Hacer, talking in the 3rd person about herself, said:

> Hacer listens to problems of women here. She shares those problems and understands them. But at the end of the day she is not a professional. She is not trained in those issues. Then I have to refer them to professionals. That is what I do. Refer them to psychologists etc. But what happens here is that we have an environment of trust. They know that they are listened to and that they are not alone in what they have been through.

Hacer's account indicates that sharing violent experiences established an emotional bridge between the activists and female clients which made the clients feel not alone. Listening to these women was as important as providing them with professional advice. She also said that this sharing helped them in solving their problems: `Our sharing here is not like complaining but centred on solution-seeking. Makes us think about what one can do about it.` According to Hacer, then, solution-seeking came through a process of sharing similar experiences which, in her case, became possible through the workshops on violence with women clients and the activists.

Building trust was clearly important. I had the opportunity to observe this. At the BB1 in Istanbul I was told that the normal procedure during a consultancy at this organization was to provide a volunteer lawyer or a psychological counsellor to clients or families. In one case, I followed the process that took place. When I was there to interview my participants, four men and a woman came into the office. As I was to learn afterwards, one of the men was a neighbour, and the woman and three other men were members of the same family. One of their female relatives, who was the woman`s daughter, had committed suicide according to the police. The family, on the other hand, believed that the young woman had been murdered by her husband. They had come to the women`s organization for a free legal consultation provided by the volunteer lawyer members of the organization. But before the family`s visit, a group of activists from the BB1 had heard of the incident, visited the young woman`s house after her death, introduced themselves and tried to talk with people in the neighbourhood in order to seek evidence to clarify the incident. When they gathered in the office, every time the lawyer asked the mother a question, the men interrupted the mother and responded to the questions themselves. The volunteer lawyer got irritated by this attitude of the men and she asked them to let her speak. One of the men then said she was ignorant and Turkish was not her mother tongue. But the lawyer insisted on her speaking and the rest of the conversation about the young woman, who was this woman`s daughter, took place between the lawyer and the mother, half in Kurdish and half in Turkish. Thus, the mother who had not been allowed to speak by her male relatives was given the chance to participate in the investigation process regarding her own daughter.

This anecdote is significant because it highlights a couple of important points. Firstly, it showed the family`s lack of trust in the police investigating the incident and the public prosecutor judging that it was a suicide. It also highlighted that, instead, the family trusted that the BB1 could solve the situation. They believed in the activists of the BB1 and came to seek legal advice. The organization in turn made its own efforts in getting involved in the incident. As mentioned above, it was initially the BB1 itself that went to the place where the incident had taken place, visited the family and informed them about their willingness in getting involved in the investigation. This also indicated the importance of the activists' own efforts in contacting the victims to be part of the solution.

A similar case took place in Van. Here, an 'investigation commission' was formed by the CA1 over Nazime Alir`s murder through burning by her husband in 2004. This informal commission, composed of activists from the CA1, had gone to the village where Alir had lived and talked to the *muhtar* (local government official), the provincial district governor and Alir`s brother whose story of what had happened to his sister was published in the organization`s newsletter. The organization demanded a public inquiry into Alir's death. Here, it is particularly important that the public inquiry was demanded by CA1 which heard about the incident as an outsider and made the decision to be involved in the case. It also took the responsibility for exposing the incident by publicizing it. These two cases showed how and to what extent the women`s organization should be involved and intervene in uncovering

violent crimes against women, and raise awareness about such incidents.[6]These two women`s organizations took on the responsibilities of both the police and public prosecutors on the one hand, and the media on the other.

These proactive interventions were developed immediately in response to particular İnci dents. This sort of proactive practice occurred often in the women`s organizations. Although in the cases discussed above the activists got involved in the process only after the violent incident had already happened, there were also cases in which some women`s organizations were involved in a preventive way, before violent crimes were committed, through proactively created solutions. İnci from the DA1 said, for instance: `Since 2003, many women have come to us with the fear of being killed in the name of honour by a family member. It must be around 200 women to this date [2008]. They are all alive now. `As İnci`s story highlights, the activists` getting involved in the cases in a preventive way was possible when women appealed to them beforehand. İnci also explained `new ways occurring spontaneously sometimes within the work itself`:

> We have created two methods for dealing with these appeals. The first one is, if the woman appealing to us tells us that she believes that her family will be convinced if they are talked to by a professional, we do that. So we have created a rapid reaction team composed of the mayor, the mufti, the birth registration office for women who do not have an ID because sometimes one official institution needs the applicant's ID and she does not have one. So we immediately call the birth registration and get a birth certificate for the applicant. Then small-scale research is conducted about the woman`s family and if the family is thought to be religious, we go to talk to them along with an officer from the mufti or if the family is thought to be political, we contact the political party leaders and ask them to visit the *aile meclisi* [family council[7]] with us.

This method had evolved from the experiences of the DA1 with its clients and it highlighted the significance of collaboration between state agents and women`s organizations in preventing violent crimes against women. As the quote shows, the process developed after the woman`s appeal whose life might be in danger. It required a complex and delicate mechanism during which the activists supported the potential victim.

The other method was described by İnci as follows: `The second method is that if a woman says that there is no way to convince the *aile meclisi*, we get her away from the city through the support of the social services.` These methods were determined according to the particular cases that the organization dealt with. The particularities of clients` and activists' own observations then contributed to the process of determining the activities of their organizations. As İnci said:

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[6] *Although the interviewees did not mention this in particular, their stories regarding these cases highlighted that they approached these two cases with the assumption that they were `femicides` - `the killing of females by males because they are female` (Russell, 2001: 3), possibly some form of honour killing.*

[7]*Aile meclisi, literally `family council`, is an informal group composed of family members who decide on issues related to other members of the family. The aile meclisi is usually presented in the news as responsible for encouraging honour killings.*

> [The DA1] does not have a pre-packaged program that [we] introduce to every woman appealing to the organization. Sometimes women come here in a state of absolute confusion. We listen to them and then try to direct them in a proper way.

İnci emphasized that every appeal required a different approach and different ways of dealing with it. According to her, this was what the DA1 did through its responses to women`s appeals.

Although it was mostly individual appeals in relation to violent cases which created the need for immediate responses, sometimes national disasters mobilized activists. For instance, during the 1999 earthquake in Turkey, both the AC1 and AB1 mobilized and sent its members from different branches to the earthquake zones and thus contributed to the aid work. Sevim, one of the activists who participated in this, told me about their activities:

> We actually went there to offer legal advice but also did psychological advice and any sort of help that we saw was required. […] Women suffered there more than anybody. Incest had become widespread because large families began staying in the same tents with a single room [after the earthquake destroyed their houses]. We took psychiatrists there with us. We held training and workshops on this issue. We offered workshops and advice regarding how women could protect their children and themselves from violence.

Sevim`s quote highlights the fact that in the case of disasters, the classic view of aid being only about delivering food and shelter to victims of disasters is far from meeting the needs of women and girl children and protecting them from harassment. Thus, the AB1 diversified its activities according to the requirements of the particular situation. This also showed the need for women's organizations` intervention in a disaster zone. Similar to the violent incidents mentioned above that the women`s organizations were involved in through providing legal support or forming informal investigation commissions, in this case too the women`s organizations took on the responsibilities of government agents that should have prevented harassment crimes against women.

As my participants`s tories highlight, their activities mostly focused on domestic violence. However, violence against women was not always committed by insiders but also by outsiders. For instance, Melek and her friends from the CA1 had accompanied some women who could not speak Turkish at their request to the hospital in the Kurdish region. They had seen this:

> We accompanied [the clients] when the complaints increased. In the hospital nurses were shouting at women who were about to give birth. Nurses were shouting at them angrily just because the women were crying out in pain. They told them to shut up using many insulting words (Melek).

3.2. Activities Aimed at Women's Financial Empowerment

In certain cases, violence stories came out from behind some of the appeals for employment. This intersection was reflected in the activities of the women's organizations. For instance, the DA1 which worked on violence against women opened restaurants in which only women were employed and the income gathered

from the restaurants was used in the struggle to support the women. Also, the staff positions in the women`s organizations` offices functioned as an employment opportunity for women who appealed to the organizations. Demet said, for instance:

> Women initially demand financial support. It is mostly women with economic problems who come here. If a woman has a women's organization close by, she goes there and says, let me produce and you sell it.

According to Demet, the geographical proximity of the women's organizations to women seeking help determined the applications they received. The women who came were in need of financial resources. The most common activities to deal with this were providing advice and professional courses, help with preparing CVs and researching the employment opportunities in the region.

The women's organizations aiming at women's financial empowerment sometimes ran activities in the form of 'projects' which were mostly funded by domestic or foreign or international donors. For my participants, a project was a systematized activity which was mostly set up the women's organizations themselves and through which these organizations received money to run activities that they found of particular importance for women living in a certain region. Figen said, for instance: 'We first conduct surveys [asking women what they need] and then run projects according to that.' Thus, as was the case for violence-oriented activities, financial empowerment-oriented projects were also embedded through diagnosing the needs of local women in the first place. Indeed, this was the way to start a community-based activity which was advised by the project activists since the early 1990s when such activities began spreading across the world. One of project advisors who worked in the late 1980s and early 1990s with certain women`s organizations in the third world, for instance, said that such an activity `ought to begin with an investigation into the needs of the target group, both by considering the needs which are implicit to their situation, and by asking them about their felt needs and priorities` (Hlupekile Longwe, 1991: 149). Thus, my participants followed a commonly applied method to start an activity.

The majority of activities (projects) mentioned were in the form of professional training. Such training usually included sewing, hair-dressing and arts and crafts. A typical description of how such training started and proceeded emerges in Figen's account:

> We knocked on the doors one by one and asked them [women] what they needed the most. Most of them asked for jobs. We wanted to work with young women particularly. So we thought of starting workshops and courses for specific professions like hair-dressing and making bracelets and earrings and things like that which we thought young women would be interested in. We thought they could find jobs after the workshops.

In Van, then, unlike in Istanbul, it was not clients who applied to the organization but it was the activists who reached their target groups which, in this case, were young women. The content of the activity was determined by the possible interest of the target group. Alongside professional training, increasing the participation in that training was also mentioned as an aim by the activists.

Some of my participants` comments showed that they interpreted those activities as creating `opportunity for women to explore new approaches` in relation to their social context. For instance, according to Figen, their professional training `seemed a very tiny step but was very important for` their clients, because, alongside its financial effects, it also empowered them psychologically. She said:

> After the [professional] courses, girls found strength in themselves. One of the girls even refused her family who had forced her to marry a guy she did not want. She told them that she would sue them if they forced her further. The family had to step back. I mean, you see this happening and you think that your effort is not wasted.

Thus, Figen suggested a link between the professional training and the young woman's courage to challenge her family which, according to Figen, was an extraordinary behaviour in the Süphan district context. According to her, this happened thanks to the training sessions which were often not limited to professional training. Figen told me what else happened during the training: 'During that project [of professional training] period, we took them to the cinema, theatre and picnic which happened for the first time in their lives. We achieved taking them out of their houses.' These were, indeed, solidarity-raising activities among local women. Thus, these quotes highlight the fact that `feminist` and `feminine` activities do not necessarily exclude one another.

3.3 . Activities Aimed at Getting Women Organized

A considerable number of my participants identified their purpose as getting women organized. One of these said for instance:

> What we mainly aim at through the AA1 is to make women recognize the importance of getting organized, to understand the power of organized women. Through getting organized we aim to make women understand that women can mobilize, women can gather, understand each other and create solidarity. We want to make people understand that women do exist (Sezen).

Getting organized here was an aim that had significance in its own right. According to my participants, this was important because the struggle for gender equality required the mobilization of women for their own rights. Vildan said for instance: 'We have to get organized for gender equality, for women's seeking their own rights. That is why we set up [the AB1].'

The organizations in my study undertook a wide range of activities to achieve this purpose. Selling magazines, providing training to groups of women eager to establish women's organizations, and exchanging organizational experiences were among the common tools they used. For instance, the DA1 did a series of activities to trigger women into women`s movement activism. Similarly, through a project in three cities in the east (Bitlis, Hakkari and Muş) the CA1 aimed to mobilize women to establish women's organizations working on violence. In these activities, women from these cities participated in workshops by the CA1 and were informed about the process of founding a women's organization in legal terms. Similarly, AB5 conducted activities to support new women's organizations. Nazan from this organization explained how this was expected to work: `We will write letters to those who

participated [in our workshops about women's human rights] from other cities and ask them to establish their own organizations and conduct similar training in their own area, when the training here is over.` Thus, in AB5's case, women were expected to participate in the women's movement after awareness-raising workshops. Awareness-raising could address different kinds of issues including, for instance, awareness-raising in relation to one's legal and human rights.

4. The Target Groups: Organizing Women for Activity-Participation

In my participants` stories, mobilizing target groups for particular activities was different from getting women organized. In their stories, `mobilizing target groups` was about the action which usually aimed at triggering local women`s groups to participate in the organizations` activities. `Getting women organized`, on the other hand, was rather about `the process of building a mobilizeble community` or `community organizing` (Stall and Stoecker, 1998: 730). `Community organizing`, as described by Stall and Stoecker, is a process of forming a stable network of people `who identify with common ideals and who can act on the basis of those ideals.` Therefore community organizing also involves the process of `identifying issues, mobilizing around those issues` and even sometimes building an organization (1998: 730). The term target group, on the other hand, referred to the `audiences` that the women`s organizations attempted to reach (Hsiung et al., 2001: 186). As shown in this section, women who were identified as target groups did not need to hold common ideals, nor did they need to be involved in the process of identifying issues to mobilize around and act together as an organized power.

Compared to my participants` comments on getting women organized, their narratives regarding their target groups and how to reach them were more diverse and complex. Some participants even avoided defining a target group. Yet, even in those cases, they pointed to certain groups of women through the methods they adopted to reach those women. For instance, when they said they reached women through community centres located in urban areas, they in fact identified women with certain social, cultural and economic backgrounds. Similarly, those who said they worked with women participating in Koran courses in the mosques in fact pointed to women with Islamic affiliations as targets for their activities. In this section, I analyse how my participants identified and perceived their organizations' target groups. I also investigate how they talked about their methods to reach those groups.

As mentioned above, my participants identified different target groups. There were those who said that their target group was 'all women', those who said they targeted women suffering from violence, some women identified illiterate women, and some identified immigrant women as their target groups. Some identified their target groups as including more than one of these variables, such as 'women who are immigrant and poor' (Filiz). The common feature of the majority of those target groups was that they were the poorest and the most disadvantaged groups of women. In this respect, these target groups were very similar to the women targeted by development-oriented organizations in the 1990s in third-world Muslim countries such as Yemen, Sudan and Somalia (Gascoigne, 1991: 303).

A considerable number of my participants identified women suffering from violence as their target groups. Nazan said, for instance: `[It is] women who are

subjected to violence, I can say.` Such women usually appealed directly to the women's organizations dealing with the issue. On the other hand, there were also cases in which the organizations themselves decided to work with a certain group of women. In those cases, defining a target group and defining the methods to reach those groups intertwined. For instance, when some of my participants who avoided identifying a target group, said that they employed 'district meetings' as a method to reach women, they actually identified women living in certain locations (districts) as their target groups. Indeed, one of the most popular methods to reach a target group (12 out of 33) was going to the *mahalle*s ('districts') and talking to women face to face. As the word *mahalle* has certain cultural and economic connotations in the Turkish context, those participants who identified their target groups as 'women living in *mahalle*s' indicated that those women were coming from certain cultural and economic backgrounds.[8]Thus, even though some avoided identifying a certain target group, they actually did, when they said they reached women through house meetings in *mahalle*s. Hande said for instance:

> We mostly work with immigrant women or if not immigrant, women with lower-class backgrounds in the *mahalle*s. We try to be open to every woman and particularly to those who have problems. We do not aim at poor women in particular. But I mean, as we see that women's problems are more intensive in the areas where immigration and poorness are observed, we primarily go those places.

Thus, although Hande`s organization was `open to every woman`, it was mostly women living in *mahalle s*under poor economic conditions that they worked with. This highlights correlation between women's social and economic conditions and the problems they face due to their gender. Similarly, when I asked Hacer why they worked with the women in a certain *mahalle*, she said:

> The women [here] are not independent financially. Even if they have a job, those jobs do not provide them with social security. It is usually part-time or daily jobs. [...] Most of them work as domestic cleaners. They work in houses and offices.

District women`s poor economic conditions was thus a significant criterion in determining this target group.

Where activists reached their target groups through `house meetings`, those meetings usually proceeded as described by Nazan: 'We create work teams. These teams go to the *mahalles* which are determined beforehand and they arrange house meetings and invite women from the neighbourhood to the meetings.'Nazan's organization created teams responsible for reaching the target groups, and gathering them in a house. These houses were usually ones of a woman living in that district, or sometimes a local association office or any available location close to the district. As

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[8] *Although one can generally translate the word mahallein Turkis hinto 'district' in English, the connotations of the term are distinguished from a district, in the way my participants referred to it, particularly when talking about their target groups. According to Amy Wills, the mahalle in the Turkish context refers to a traditional lower-class neighbourhood which `is a space [that] extends the interior space of the family to the residential street; it is a space of belonging and collectivity. The most important practice for creating and sustaining the familiar spaces of mahalle life is neighbouring (komsuluk), which makes home spaces open to neighbours. The cultural practice of neighbouring is gendered, relying in part on traditional gender roles for women as wives and mothers which place them at home during the day` (Mills, 2010: 336).*

Hande put it: `In the *mahalles*, we get together in a woman's house who we meet through our friends in [the BB1] or if there is a local association around, we go there.` This focus on the local was an important aspect of organizing successfully.

However, reaching target groups was not simple. The activists sometimes faced problems due to the cultural and religious structures of the *mahalles* in particular. It was hardest when the activists faced opposition from the families of the women they wanted to reach. As Figen said:

> Getting women out of their houses in such places is such a hard thing. You need to persuade the mother, you need to persuade the father and if it is a big family which is very common, you need to persuade everyone like uncles, grandparents. It is like that. (Figen)

Here women were monitored not only by their immediate family members but also by the local community as Sezen revealed:

> Women have relations only to other women who live in the same block with them. If a woman leaves her house and walks towards [the organization office] everyone around sees her. Everyone knows everyone here. So this creates a kind of pressure on women.

Here the women could not go out without permission from their close relatives or without being monitored by their neighbourhood which in turn created pressure on them. Activists had to be highly sensitive to this. For instance, İnci said:

> The ways we reach women vary according to the places we work. Every district has its own habits and traditions. In one district women are not even able to go out whereas those living in another district go everywhere without facing any challenge. So, if there is a community centre in the location where we work, we go there and start our activities there, as women can easily go to those centres.

Thus, alongside *mahalle* and house meetings, the activists reached their target groups through certain community centres. Some of my participants told me that they reached their target groups through ÇATOMs (Multipurpose Community Centres)[9]. Demet said:

> There are these community centres in poorer areas. We announce our activities in those places. We inform them like, we are having training on a particular topic. So they come. It works like this most of the time.

Research on the profile of the participants of community centres, e.g. ÇATOMs, highlights the similarities between the target groups described by my respondents and community centre participants in terms of illiteracy, economic conditions and

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[9] *ÇATOMs are located in eastern and south eastern cities and certain disadvantaged districts in western cities. They have been established by the Turkish state (the first one was established in 1995) as part of the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) aimed at the social and financial development of the region. The centres provide literacy courses, health services and arts and crafts training to women living in the region. In this respect, ÇATOMs are quite similar to the community centres which were built as a part of the planning project that was called `Urban Aid Programme` which was set up by the UK government during the 1970s and 1980s (Community Development Projects, 2008: 36-37). However, the ÇATOMs are accused, particularly by Kurdish feminists who are critical toward the Turkish state's treatment of Kurdish people, of seeking to assimilate Kurdish women through birth-control measures and Turkish language courses (Arat, 2008: 415).*

immigration status.[10] Community centres made it easier for the activists to reach their target groups as they provide them with the opportunity to meet all those women gathered in the same place.

As my respondents' experiences regarding access to women in the districts revealed, different locations required different methods to reach the women. If for instance, the situation was that a woman simply going out of her house to participate in training workshops by women's organizations was an issue that required all the family members' permission, the activists did this: 'So, as we were not able to talk to everyone one by one we thought of talking and persuading the imam [the local religious leader] in the mosque.' The activists there fore initially approached people who were known and respected by the locals, that is community leaders of one kind or another, and reached their target groups through that person. Meral said, for instance: `We met a woman there who was popular among the residents. When we convinced her to participate in the workshops, the other families sent their daughters too because she was coming. […] People heard from one another and came along.` (CA1) Thus, the activists developed different outreach strategies according to the locations` cultural structures. If the district was traditionally patriarchal, then the activists talked to the men living in the location in advance and told them about their aims and asked them to permit their wives and daughters to participate in the training. If the district population was religious, then they would initially talk to the *imam* to persuade him to give a brief speech to the male listeners regarding the issue after Friday`s sermon in the mosque.

The target groups discussed so far were mainly defined through social and economic terms. There were, on the other hand, activists in my sample who described certain female client groups in political and religious terms. For instance, Nuray described a group through the location where they held the activity that had religious connotations. She said: 'We found the women in Koran courses which were held in the mosques. We provided them with some education regarding hygiene, reproduction health, child care and women's legal rights.' Thus, Nuray`s religious organization held some of its activities in Koran courses and mosques with women who followed religious rituals there already.

There were also religious interviewees in my sample who mentioned that their target groups varied according to their activities. Helin, for instance, identified women with *türban*s among their target groups, particularly because the issue was on the rise. Thus, target groups, according to her, were not stable and fixed. Similarly, another participant identified women who were 'sensitive about the Republic' (Vildan), meaning secular women, as their target group. Thus, these two women regarded their political and religious affiliations as significant factors in determining the target groups.

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[10]*Sema Genel`s study on the ÇATOMs in four southeastern cities with 186 participants shows that of the woman participants, 14% were illiterate, 28% were literate but had been unable to complete primary education, 37% were primary school graduates (completed the first five years); the families of 9% have recently migrated from the village. Another 8% have migrated from one city to another, either from a city in the west back to the southeast or from one city to another within the same region; and of all the participant women 11.5 % had no regular income in their families, and 28.4 % had daily or seasonal income (2002: 151-153).*

Briefly, my participants identified different groups of women they targeted through their activities. The methods they applied to reach those groups also varied according to the socio-cultural and economic conditions of their target groups.

In conclusion, there were five legal models of organizing adopted by the organizations in my sample. These were associations, cooperatives, foundations, platforms and private enterprises. My findings in this section highlighted that mobilizing was particularly tough for women with certain ethnic and political backgrounds. In such cases, certain legal models became a strategy to cope with the prohibitions around founding a women`s organization. I also investigated the perceptions of the activists of their organizations' aims and activities. My research showed that the activists rarely perceived their organizations as single-issue ones. They mostly identified multiple activities. My data showed that the activists derived these activities from women's actual needs. In the last section, I investigated the target groups of the women`s organizations. My research here showed that the activists perceived `mobilizing target groups for certain activities` differently than they perceived `getting women organized`in general. The majority of my participants identified their target groups with economic references, e.g. `poor women`, `women with insecure jobs`. There were also those who identified their target groups through religious and ethnic references.

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