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“We are here, we don’t fear” –

Feminists counteracting legitimizing myths and
authoritarian practices in Turkey to end violence against
women

Sofie Karlsson

Lund University

Sociology of Law Department

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Supervisor: Monika Lindbekk

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"I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own."

Audre Lorde

Abstract

Previous literature suggests that the republic of Turkey is transforming from a democracy to an authoritarian country under Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi's rule. The Turkish government has introduced and implemented a series of events that organizes around the supreme power of the President - one major being the withdrawal from the Istanbul convention. The transformation affects the feminist movement who are depicted as state enemies. This thesis sets out to explore the current political- and socio-legal conditions, under which feminist in Turkey operate, to advance their claim of ending violence against women. Through an eight-week field study in the spring of 2022, I conducted interviews and observations to seek answers to the following research questions: "What legitimizing myths and authoritarian practices can be found in contemporary Turkey?", "How do these identified myths and practices affect the issue of violence against women according to secular Turkish-, Kurdish-, and Islamic feminists?, and "How do secular Turkish-, Kurdish-, and Islamic feminists counteract the legitimizing myths and authoritarian practices to advance their claim of ending violence against women? ". My findings suggest that President Erdoğan are trying to create state feminism (in similarity with Mustafa Kemal in the 1920s). Furthermore, this thesis identify five legitimizing myths: sexism, ethnic prejudice, nationalism, political-economic conservatism, and family values which are underlying political- and socio-legal attitudes that produces the authoritarian practices of state/police violence, manipulation of information and political centralism which results in increased violence against women, oppression and a gap between the Turkish legal system and legal culture. The feminist movement, of which this thesis include three different strands, tries to counteract these legitimizing myths and authoritarian practices through different strategies (such as legal mobilization and demonstrations) to end violence against women.

Key words: Feminist mobilization, violence against women, Turkey, legitimizing myths, Authoritarianism

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Abbreviations

AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (English: Justice and Development Party)

CMK: Criminal Procedure Code

EU: European Union

HRW: Human Rights Watch

ICJ: International Commission of Jurists

I.E: That is

KHRP: Kurdish Human Rights Project

LGBTQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning +

MMA: Migration Monitoring Association

OHCHR: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN: United Nations

VAW: Violence against women

WOW: Women of the world

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Chapter 1. Introduction

In March 2021, Turkey's ruling party Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP), of which Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been chairman since 2017, announced that they were withdrawing from the Istanbul convention, ie. the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (BBC, 2021; Abdel-Monem, 2009, 4). In response to Turkey's decision, Massimo Frigo, ICJ (International Commission of Jurists) Senior Legal Adviser, stated:

Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention will deprive women and girls of the benefits of a vital, comprehensive legal framework to protect them from all forms of violence, and prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against them (ICJ, 2021).

The withdrawal is one in a series of major events under Erdoğan's rule that are transforming Turkey from a democracy into authoritarian politics (Özkazanç, 2020; Aslı Aksoy, 2021). According to Yilmaz and Turner (2019, 691), AKP has created "new judicial repression strategies", and intensified crackdowns on the "political opposition, academia, media... to suppress the emergence of any democratic alternatives and consolidate this newly rising political regime, which is organized around the supreme power of the President".

Repression strategies and intensified crackdowns are particularly notable for the feminist movement who, by Erdoğan, recently have been called "the enemy of the nation, the enemy of the azan¹, the enemy of the land, and the enemy of the state" (Cohen, 2019). Despite this, feminists are continuously trying to advance their claim of ending violence against women. This thesis sets out to explore the current political- and socio-legal conditions, under which feminists operate, and how they try to advance their claim of ending violence against women in Turkey.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to explore how legitimizing myths and authoritarian practices, that make up the political- and socio-legal realities of Turkey, affect the

¹ the Islamic call to prayer

issue of violence against women, and how feminists counteract these myths and practices to advance their claim to end violence against women. This will ultimately contribute to an identified knowledge gap.

I will approach this aim by seeking to answer the following research questions:

- *What legitimizing myths and authoritarian practices can be found in contemporary Turkey?*

- *How do these identified myths and practices affect the issue of violence against women according to secular Turkish-, Kurdish-, and Islamic feminists?*

- *How do secular Turkish-, Kurdish-, and Islamic feminists counteract the identified legitimizing myths and authoritarian practices to advance their claim of ending violence against women?*

1.2 Notes on structure and terminology

From this point, this thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 2 will provide background and context. It will also identify the knowledge gap I aim to contribute to. Chapter 3 will outline the theoretical framework which will utilize the transdisciplinary aspect of Sociology of Law. Chapter 4 presents and motivates the methodological choices I've made. Chapter 5 presents and discusses the main findings of my field study. The last two chapters, Chapter 6 and 7, will conclude my findings and suggest further research in the area.

Quotes up to thirty words will be incorporated in the text with quotation marks.

Quotes longer than thirty words will be presented in blocks. Some terms and concepts will be defined and/or explained in the text, such as terms and concepts relating to the theoretical framework, and some terms and concepts will be defined/explained through footnotes.

Chapter 2. Literature review

To get a sense of the research field, I have chosen to focus my literature review on providing a brief historical outlook on Turkey's politics and socio-legal changes, positioning the issue of violence against women and feminist mobilization in a transnational context, and presenting previous research on feminism and violence against women in Turkey. Together, these three areas make up a springboard from which my research will stem. Additionally, this chapter will identify the knowledge gap that I aim to contribute to.

2.1 The hybrid state of Turkey

Kurban (2007, 6) and Yüksel (2006, 777) highlight the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic features of the Ottoman Empire, where tolerance towards minorities such as the Kurds had been implemented. However, due to increasing nationalism and, in contrast, higher demands for equality for minority groups, a war broke out in 1915, leading to European involvement and large parts of the empire being occupied (Kurban, 2007, 6-7). In turn, this led to the Turkish revolution, or Independence War, which resulted in the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 (Kurban, 2007, 7).

The new republic, with Mustafa Kemal in the lead, underwent a reformation process, that Kemalists often refer to as the Kemalist modernization project (Yüksel, 2006, 777). This reformation project sought homogeneity in culture, ethnicity, and language (Yüksel, 2006, 777). Hence, all Muslims, including Kurds, were by the state considered "Turks", and the Kurdish identity became a target for eradication (Kurban, 2007, 7). The homogenization consolidated through laws and policies from the 1920s and onwards (Kurban 2007, 7). The Kemalist idea of creating a strong national unity lived on during the 20th century. As a result, an armed conflict broke out between the Turkish army and the pro-Kurdish party PKK in 1984, which led to over 3,000 Kurdish towns and villages being torched and destroyed by state security forces (Kurban, 2007, 7; KHRP, 2007, 77). According to KHRP (Kurdish Human Rights Project) (2007, 43-44), the Turkish state used excessive force and over 3 million civilian Kurds had to flee their homes in the 1980s and 1990s.

A central aspect of the homogenization process has been linguistic nationalism² (Kurban, 2007, 7). The Turkish language was seen as fundamental to building one national identity and therefore played a significant role in what Bayir (2016, 99) calls “Öz Türkçeleştirme (Pure Turkification)”. Kurdish became a prohibited language, and the new regime passed a law stating that publication of the legislation would only be in Turkish (Kurban, 2007,7; Bayir, 2016, 56). Even though minorities opposed it, Turkish deputies insisted that everyone should learn Turkish, and that translation of the legislation would counteract the unity of the state (Bayir, 2016, 57). Furthermore, the new Turkish regime declared that the pluralistic legal framework of the Ottoman Empire would cease to exist (Bayir, 2016, 119). The Ottoman Empire had granted minorities, such as the Kurds, the right to settle some legal matters in accordance with their cultural norms and beliefs, but legal pluralism³ was seen as a threat to the unification of the Turkish state and thus was replaced by legal centralism⁴ (Bayir, 2016, 119).

The Kemalist reformation project aimed to transit Turkey from an Islamic- to a secular society, moving the country ideologically closer to the west which according to Kemal represented the modern society (Badran, 2009, 501). A new legal system, inspired by Western countries, was applied (Acar, 2006, 152). As a country’s legal system “is considered to be within its legal culture”, this new system affected the Turkish legal culture which had until then rested upon Islamic principles (Acar, 2006, 152; Metin & Gelbal, 1994, 121). However, as argued by, amongst others, Yilmaz (2013, 151) and Cengiz (2020), unofficial Muslim law still exists and affects Turkish society and legal forum. As highlighted by Utvik (2016, 279), AKP has been inspired by the Arabic communities and especially the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt. However, in contrast with most Arabic countries, AKP has not (yet) insisted

² The term linguistic nationalism refers both to a dominant culture's use of language to exercise its power and the use of linguistics to support nationalistic ideologies (Boyer, 2006, 2).

³ Legal pluralism means that more than one legal system exists within a given sovereign territory (Turner & Arslan, 2014, 440).

⁴ Legal centralism is defined by Turner and Arslan (2014, 440) as “an ideology claiming that the state has a monopoly over law making within its sovereign space”.

on adopting Sharia law (Utvik, 2016, 279). Nonetheless, unofficial Muslim law is, to a certain extent, enforced by AKP, which is the longest-ruling Islamic party in Turkish history (Yilmaz, 2013, 151; Cengiz 2020; Kirdis, 2021, 752). Following AKP's 2002 election victory, the party was generally seen as "inclusive, cohesive, liberal, universalist, and fair" (Kaya, 2019, 1), and, according to Hamid (2005, 130), AKP was presented as the most pro-EU (European Union), pro-West, and pro-democracy party in Turkish history. However, Kaya (2019), Kirdis (2021) and Utvik (2016) highlight how conservatism and traditional interpretations of Islam are the true core of AKP. Kaya (2019, 1) also states that the party over the years has become "anti-democratic, authoritarian, and populist". Similarly, Kirdis (2021, 752) argues that AKP has utilized Islam as "populism flavoured by religion" based on a "thin theological foundation, a majoritarian rather than a multivocal interpretation of Islam, and a Muslim unity rhetoric".

What we gather from this is that due to years of secular-, Islamic-, nationalistic- and western- influences, Turkey can be seen as a hybrid state which, I argue, makes the country a particularly interesting case when addressing issues of feminism and violence against women. Also, previous research suggests that AKP's and Erdoğan's rule, has become more and more authoritarian.

2.2 Violence against women as a human's right issue

During the 1960s, the western feminist movement entered its second wave and violence against women was redefined as a power issue stemming from- and reproducing gender inequality (McMillan, 2007, 16-17). Western second-wave feminists coined the term "personal is political" which alluded that "women's lives were not the outcome of individual choices but part of a systematic patriarchal oppression" (Gupta, 2015). They demanded that domestic violence "no longer be considered something that women were responsible for, and that rape and sexual assault no longer be viewed as a sex crime with women partly to blame" (McMillan, 2007, 17). NGO activism and several world conferences on women, held in the 1970s and 1980s, paved the way for defining women's rights as human rights

(Merry, 2006, 2). Thus, violence against women became a human rights issue, and to end it became a women's rights claim (Merry, 2006, 2).

Merry (2006, 1) argues that even though local actors conceive social justice different from global human rights activists, global human rights law are valuable sources for local social movements (Merry, 2006, 1). This is illustrated in the creation of The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention. The starting point of this convention is the case of *Opuz vs Turkey*. (Abdel-Monem, 2009, 4; Pope, 2014, 600). In 2002, Opuz filed a case before the European Council of Human Rights, claiming that the state of Turkey had violated three articles of the European Convention on Human Rights by failing to protect her and her mother against domestic violence (Abdel-Monem, 2009, 1). In 2009, the court ruled in favour of the plaintiff, agreeing that the Turkish government had violated Article 2: the right to life; Article 3: the prohibition of torture and inhuman treatment; and Article 14, the prohibition of discrimination (Abdel-Monem, 2009, 1). The ruling is a landmark for feminist activists and women all around the world as it “recognizes that domestic violence against women is a systemic problem reflecting a fundamental imbalance of power” (Abdel-Monem, 2009, 3). The ruling spurred international feminist collaboration (Abdel-Monem, 2009, 4; Pope, 2014, 600). Or to use Merry's and Lewitt's (2017, 213) terminology, it started a process of vernacularisation. Vernacularisation means the translation of ideas and practices developed in cosmopolitan centres, such as UN's (United Nations) conferences and international court decisions, “into terms appropriate for local contexts” (Merry's & Lewitt's, 2017, 214). Hence, to draw on Merry's (2006, 1) arguments, the Istanbul convention is an example of when “people and ideas are circulating transnationally to transform the world we live in”.

On the 11th of May 2011, Turkey became the first state to sign the convention, and as of July 2021, 34 European countries have ratified the convention (OHCHR/ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021; Government Offices of Sweden, 2021). However, as mentioned in the introduction, Turkey withdrew from

the convention in 2021. AKP's motivation to do so was their claim that the convention has "a hidden agenda to normalise homosexuality" that is "incompatible with Turkey's social and family values" (AFP, 2021). Following Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul convention, local feminist NGO's and UN Women Turkey has pleaded to the government to reconsider this decision, and to consult academia, civil society organizations and society at large regarding violence against women in Turkey (OHCHR, 2021). In the wake of the withdrawal, different feminists are still trying to advance ending violence against women as a women's rights claim, and as stated in section 1.1, one of my questions is: how?

2.3 Feminism and violence against women in Turkey

Kemalist state feminism

Kemal aligned modernization with Westernization, and in his quest to create his vision of a modern Turkey, he imposed de-hijabification/unveiling (Badran, 2009, 501). Hence, the unveiled 'liberated women' became a strong symbol for the new Turkish secular society (Badran, 2009, 501). Diner and Toktaş (2010, 41) state that "the Kemalist ideal of becoming a Westernized society required legal equality between all citizens irrespective of gender". Thus, central feminist issues became women's political rights, such as voting and being elected, and women's opportunities to education and work (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 41).

The Turkish regime took these issues to heart and created new work- and educational opportunities for women (Badran, 2009, 501). However, the government was restrictive, interfering and did not allow independent women's rights movements (Badran, 2009, 501; Ahmed, 1982, 157). Attempts to create independent women's rights movements and political parties were shut down by the regime (Badran, 2009, 501). For example, in 1923, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası (Women's Public Party) was founded but was soon banned due to "inappropriate objectives" (Badran, 2009, 501). Hence, the kind of feminism that emerged with the new republic is often

referred to as “state feminism⁵”, meaning that the male government ‘gave’ women rights which is seen by many as a display of patriarchal power (Badran, 2009, 501-502). (Lönnå, 1996, 273). Ecevit (2013, 187) reflects upon this Kemalist state feminism:

The state has been one of the most powerful actors affecting women’s rights. The position of the state, however, has been volatile and appears to be self-contradictory. On the one hand, the state has taken a para-feminist stance and opened up new opportunities for women through legislative and administrative reforms. On the other hand, it has supported the conservative role of women within the family, pursued pro-natalist policies, and maintained women’s dependency on men.

In similarity with Ecevit (2013), Ahmed (1982, 156) and Diner and Toktaş (2010, 44) argue that the state consolidated the role of women as homemakers and mothers whose primary role were to raise new citizens according to the Kemalist ideals.

Yet, in 1924, Türk Kadınlar Birliği (the Turkish Women’s Union) was founded (Hanso, 2021). Six years later, in 1930, women in Turkey were granted voting rights on a municipal level, and in 1934 women were also granted voting rights on a national level (Hanso, 2021). However, the women’s union became a threat to national interests due to being ‘too independent’ and was shut down in 1935 (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 44). This marked the end of the first wave of feminism in Turkey (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 44). The first wave of feminism did not affect all women in Turkey, “the more modest strata, provincial and rural populace were left out of the circumstances of the new westernized modernity” (Badran, 2009, 502). For those women, the Islamic culture that Kemal rejected lived on (Badran, 2009, 502).

Second wave feminism in Turkey

In 1980, a military coup was launched in Turkey against the government, which is today remembered “for its torture, civilian mistreatment and human rights violations” (Sabbah, 2020). This coup, along with the influences of global feminist mobilization and human rights activism, sparked second-wave feminism in Turkey, where, just as in the western countries before, issues related to gender-based

⁵ The term state feminism was coined by Hernes (1987), and can be defined as feminism created or approved by the state

violence and gender equality became centralized (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 45). The focus areas were ending men's violence against women, lifting the female oppression within family, stopping the misrepresentation of women in media and stopping virginity testing, which involves "the physical examination of a woman's hymen for tears to determine whether the woman is still 'a girl'" (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 41; Lasco, 2002, 10). The second wave was manifested in Turkey through a protest march on the 17th of May 1987 titled "Say No to Battering" and again on the 4th of October 1987 with a protest march titled "Career Women's Fest" (Kocacık, Kutlar & Erselcan, 2007, 699). It was also manifested through adopting the slogan "personal is political" (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 41).

The second feminist wave in Turkey was not a single movement (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 42). Rather, three different strands emerged: the secular Turkish-, Kurdish- and Islamic feminist movements. (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 42).

Kurdish feminism – arising and struggles

As a result of the intensified armed attack launched by the Turkish government against Kurdish identity in the 1980s, Kurdish women were unified and marginalized both due to their gender and ethnicity (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 47-48). Hence, the Kurdish feminist movement was created to strengthen the fight for Kurdish rights and gender equality which both became important components of the Kurdish movement's ideology in the 1990s (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 48; Merdjanova, 2021, 185). Klein (2001) describes the initial role of Kurdish feminists:

Demonstrating the distinctness of Kurdish women vis-à-vis Turks, Arabs and other Muslim-Ottoman groups was an important part of the Kurdish nationalists' attempts to denounce and reject arguments and policies that claimed otherwise and to prove to the world that the Kurds deserved official recognition of their special status as a separate nation (as cited by Merdjanova, 2021, 184).

The Turkish/Kurdish conflict escalated again in July 2015, after a two-and-a-half-year long ceasefire (Crisis Group, 2022). Since this, "violence has devastated communities in Turkey's majority-Kurdish southeast" which has entailed the conflict's entrance to "one of its deadliest chapters in nearly four decades" (Crisis Group, 2022). As a result of this conflict, Kurdish women are being subjected to

violence both because of their gender and their ethnicity (KHRP, 2007, 26). It is also harder for Kurdish women to access the legal system, one limiting factor being language (KHRP, 2007, 26). This is illuminated in, for example, a 2007 report by KHRP – a Kurdish, female victim of domestic violence who sought protection at the police station in Istanbul was ordered to “go home and come back when you have learnt Turkish!” (26).

Furthermore, several reports both from the world of academia and established newspapers allude how Kurdish women are being subjected to violence by those who should be protecting them, i.e., the Turkish law enforcement (Merdjanova, 2021; Bodette, 2021; Kurtay & Briy, 2019). In 2019, a Kurdish research team for MMA (Migration Monitoring Association), supported by the EU, conducted a large study by interviewing 480 Kurdish women on their experiences since 2015 when the armed conflict once again escalated in the Kurdish provinces of Turkey. This study (2019, 12) states that “Violence against women is used as a tactic of war in wars and armed conflicts. Women’s bodies, just like colonized territory, become target of male colonizers”. Additionally, during the Turkish military-imposed curfews in 2015 “many instances of violence against women, recognized as war crimes, took place” (MMA, 2019, 12). State violence has, according to MMA (2019, 13), had a tremendous impact on Kurdish women. Hence, previous research and news reports indicate that not only are Kurdish women highly exposed to violence but also have limited means to protection due to language barriers and ethnic discrimination. Additionally, in many cases, the person(s) subjecting Kurdish women to violence is part of the Turkish law enforcement or military.

Islamic feminism – an alternative feminist framework

Whilst Kurdish and secular Turkish feminists wanted a movement similar to Western feminism, Islamic feminists sought to create a movement within an Islamic framework (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 42). Islamic feminism emerged from areas in rural Turkey that had not profited as much from the Kemalist reformation project (Badran, 2009, 508). In these areas, people still practiced Islamic culture which by the Kemalist nationalist was referred to as “backward” (Badran, 2009, 508). Second wave secular feminists were aware that the feminist arena in Turkey was constituted

by state feminism (Badran, 2009, 510). They and Islamic feminists alike, knew that the female body had been used to symbolize the Kemalist vision of modernity (Badran, 2009, 510). To oppose this, the second wave secular feminist rallied and flamed the discussion of violence against women whilst Islamic feminists reclaimed the hijab/veil which Kemal had forced them to take off (Badran, 2009, 510). Secular feminists supported Muslim women reclaiming the hijab (Badran, 2009, 510). Moreover, by using a new lens on sacred Islamic texts, Islamic feminists advocate Islamic modernity for women (Badran, 2009, 511). As described by Cervantes-Altamirano (2013, 76), Islamic feminism “has emerged to counter historical patriarchal interpretations of Islamic theology and liturgy, and to reclaim womanhood, gender, and sexuality within Islam’s sacred texts”.

The LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning +) movement is according to Çetin (2016, 6) allied with the feminist movement in Turkey. Some of their main objectives are ending homophobia, racism, and violence against women (Çetin, 2016, 6). The LGBTQ+ movement and Islamic feminism have historically differed in fundamental opinions (Diner & Toktaş, 2010, 42), but according to authors such as Cervantes-Altamirano (2013, 77), LGBTQ+ questions can be discussed within an Islamic framework. This thesis will mention but not include an elaborate discussion on the LGBTQ+ movement due to time- and space limitations.

Some VAW statistics of Turkey

Since the 1980s, the target point for feminists in Turkey, regardless of ethnicity and religion, has been to end violence against women. Hence, some VAW (violence against women) statistics is needed to get a general outlook on the extensiveness of the issue in Turkey.

Even if they are few, existing studies on violence in the private sphere such as studies by Ilkcaracan (1998), Mayda and Akkus (2004) and Sahin and Sahin (2003) conclude similar findings. The main one being that women in Turkey are highly subjected to domestic violence. This is also, for example, shown in the large 1997s study by the Foundation for Women’s Solidarity in which 46.8% of the female

informants reported to be subjected to “mild” forms of domestic violence, 34.6% stated that they were being subjected to “medium” forms of domestic violence and 15.6% reported being frequently subjected to domestic violence (Kocacik, Kutlar and Erselcan, 2007, 700). Similar results were shown in an official 2013 survey in which 42% of the participating women reported to have been victims of domestic violence (Pope, 2014, 600).

In 2009, Arat, conducted a nationwide survey with a qualitative approach on women’s experiences of domestic violence. The most important findings in this study were that one in three women reported to had been subjected to domestic violence, that nine in ten women did not think that the violence could be justified and that the issue actually is a public matter (Arat, 2009, 2). That (at least) one in three women in Turkey are subjected to domestic violence is also supported by the results of Kocacik’s, Kutlar’s and Erselcan’s 2007 study (713).

Also in 2009, a report by the Turkish Ministry of Justice concluded that femicides⁶ increased by 1400% in Turkey between 2002 and 2009 (Tekkas Kerman & Betrus, 2018, 1). After releasing this report, the Turkish government “stopped releasing VAW statistics, and nongovernment organizations started to keep and share the records of VAW” (Tekkas Kerman & Betrus, 2018, 1-2). According to a non-governmental national survey in 2014; 40% of women in Turkey has been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence, 30% are married before the age of 18, 48% of girls married before the age of 18 are subjected to physical violence, only 10% of women/girls subjected to violence turn to an institution for help and 90% of human trafficking victims in Turkey are women (UN Women Turkey, 2022).

It's important to keep in mind that a lot of national-, as well as global- and local-, statistics on violence against women are hidden (NCK, 2022). Hence, the above-mentioned statistics are just an indication.

⁶ Femicides is a form of violence against women with deadly outcome (WHO, 2012, 1) The difference between homicide and femicide, is that the victim of femicide is murdered due to being female (WHO, 2012, 1)

Identifying a knowledge gap in studies of feminism and VAW in Turkey

When reading existing literature on feminism and violence against women in Turkey, something most scholars mention is a knowledge gap in the research area. For instance, Turkish-speaking scholars such as Arat (2009, 2) and Kocacık, Kutlar, and Erselcan (2007, 669) highlight that even though millions of women in Turkey are subjected to violence, and that this violence comprises a constitutive dimension of these women's lives, relatively few studies have been made on the subject. Also, the ones that do exist often have a quantitative approach (Arat, 2009,2). Furthermore, authors such as Galip (2021, 509) and Yüksel (2006, 778) explain how even fewer studies have been made considering the Kurdish feminist perspective. It is just during the recent decade that researchers have started to show an interest in Kurdish women (Galip, 2021, 510). However, studies about Kurdish women have, according to Galip (2021, 509-510), contained “theoretical and methodological inadequacies” due to not including Kurdish women in the studies, resulting in an orientalist approach and a “monolithic misrepresentations of Third World women”. Additionally, the existing studies rarely include the perspective of Islamic feminism (Arat, 2016, 125). One common misconception, according to Arat (2016, 127), is that Islamic feminism is not concerned with the issue of violence against women. This could be a reason why this group is not usually included in studies of violence against women. However, as argued by Arat (2016, 127), violence against women is a central issue within Islamic feminism. Hence, there seems to be a general knowledge gap and that more research on feminism and violence against women in Turkey is much needed.

When searching for previous literature on the research area, it is possible to find some publications that either highlight the issue of violence against women in Turkey, such as Arat (2009), or describe the different strands of feminism, such as Kocacık, Kutlar, and Erselcan (2007). However, in general, there are little studies made on the research area after the withdrawal from the Istanbul convention, a decision that might highly affect feminist mobilization and the issue of violence against women. Furthermore, there is no current research available that includes the three different strands and how they navigate through the current political- and

socio-legal landscape to advance their claim of ending violence against women. At least not published in English. Hence, to explore this seems like an opportunity to contribute to a knowledge gap.

Even though I will point out some points of convergences and divergences between the different feminist strands, this is not a comparative study. Rather, by including informants from the different strands, I hope to provide a nuanced picture, avoid the pitfalls of theoretical and methodological inadequacies that Galip (2021, 509-510) speaks of, and the assumption that Islamic feminists are not concerned with violence against women, which Arat (2009) claims is incorrect.

Chapter 3. Theoretical framework

Drawing on information from my literature review, I have chosen to construct a theoretical framework that, firstly, can contribute to an understanding of the political- and socio-legal realities that affect the issue of violence against women in Turkey 2022. Secondly, can give insights on how the feminist movement navigates through these conditions to advance their claim of ending violence against women. This chapter will now further present *Social Dominance Theory (SDT)* and *Authoritarian Theory in Sociology of law* which constitutes this framework.

First developed in 1993, social dominance theory (SDT) “focuses on both individual and structural factors that contribute to various forms of group-based oppression” (Sidanius et.al, 2004, 846). It addresses different kinds of known group-based oppression and discrimination that display the tendency to “form and maintain group-based hierarchy” (Sidanius et.al, 2004, 846). Group-based oppression is supported by what (Pratto et.al, 1994, 741) refers to as legitimizing myths. These myths work as oppression stabilizers and support ideologies that produces group-based hierarchies (Pratto et.al, 1994, 742). Examples of legitimizing myths are sexism and nationalism (Pratto et.al, 1994, 742, 744). This thesis will use SDT to identify legitimizing myths and discuss how they affect the feminist movement and issue of violence against women in Turkey.

By applying SDT, one applies an intersectional lens (Sidanius et.al, 2022, 1). Sidanius et.al (2022, 1) argues that studies of racism and sexism are “fundamentally incomplete without an appreciation of how race and gender intersect and interact”. Intersectionality is a term first coined by Crenshaw (1991, 1245), who, in similarity with Sidanius et.al (2022, 1), argues that gender and race must be treated as intersecting factors – which in 1991 was Crenshaw’s claim that normative feminist discourse did not. Crenshaw (1991,1245) acknowledges that gender and race are not the only intersecting factors that should be considered when addressing social and legal issues - religion and sexuality are other significant factors, according to her. Hence, by applying SDT and thereby an intersectional lens, this thesis will highlight different feminists’ experiences of advancing their claim to end violence against women through the current political- and socio-legal realities of which legitimizing myths are cornerstones.

Legitimizing myths are attitudes that in different ways can be put into practice, both on an individual and institutional level (Barkan, 2016, 387; Sidanius et.al, 2004, 847). How they come into practice, I argue, is to some extent dependent on the political climate. Scholars such as Bakiner (2017), Kaya (2019), Pope (2017), Özkazanç (2020), Aslı Aksoy (2021), Yilmaz and Ertuk (2021), and Baser and Öztürk (2017) claim that Turkey has become an authoritarian state under AKP’s ruling. Political scientists have had issues with constructing a general definition of authoritarianism but have outlined its main features as:

non-acceptance of conflict and plurality as normal elements of politics, the will to preserve the status quo and prevent change by keeping all political dynamics under close control by a strong central power, and lastly, the erosion of the rule of law, the division of powers, and democratic voting procedures (Furio, 2017, 17).

Other disciplines, such as mass communication, journalism, and social psychology, have utilized the concept of authoritarianism to construct a theoretical standpoint. For instance, in 1956, Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, presented the four theories of press, one of which was the authoritarian theory, “under which the press, as an institution, is controlled in its functions and operation by organized society through another institution, government” (10). Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956, 10)

relate this theory to social control, of which “law and its enforcement is a cornerstone” (Johnson & Falchetta, 2019, 603). Hence, I argue, it is possible to apply a similar interpretation of authoritarian theory in a broader socio-legal context. In this case, to investigate how feminists in Turkey try to advance their claim of ending violence against women under the ruling of a government that uses authoritarian practices as strategy. Authoritarian practices are defined by Glasius (2018, 515) a “patterns of action that sabotage accountability to people over whom a political actor exerts control, or their representatives, by means of secrecy, disinformation and disabling voice” – a definition I will use. Examples of authoritarian practices are violence (Svolik, 2012, 23) and manipulation of information (Guriev & Treisman, 2019, 123). Authoritarian practices are, according to Yilmaz and Erturk (2021, 1524), used by AKP to maintain social control which they refer to as authoritarian stability.

There are, according to Buechler (1999, 46), no all-around theory on new social movements⁷ such as different feminist movements. What theories on new social movements do have in common, is that they set out to explore different aspects of movement culture and action (Kendall, 2005, 553). As I aim to investigate feminist movement culture and action under authoritarian conditions, my interpretation and usage of authoritarian theory could be seen as belonging to new social movement theories. To investigate social movements under authoritarian conditions is, according to Chua (2019, 356), particularly fruitful.

Authoritarian theory relates to, but is not covered, by SDT as SDT discuss authoritarianism within a social psychology framework. Thus, to combine SDT and authoritarian theory that draws on communication scholars’ interpretations of it makes for a cohesive theoretical framework. The combination of these theories allows investigation of both attitudes and practices which affect the issue of violence against women in Turkey, and the feminists attempts to advance their claim of

⁷ Social movements that emerged from the 1960s and onwards are generally considered new social movements (D’Anieri, Ernst, & Kier, 1990, 445)

ending it. To be able to draw on theories from other fields is, to me, one of the strengths of sociology of law as it utilizes the transdisciplinary aspect of the field.

Chapter 4. Methodology

This thesis is based on an eight-week field study in Istanbul during the spring of 2022. This chapter will present and motivate the methodological choices made in this field study.

4.1 A qualitative approach

According to Ahrne (2015, 10), the method of a study should be determined based on the research question(s) and purpose of the study. The purpose of this study is not to generate measurable data, but rather to explore abstract phenomena such as thoughts, feelings, and experiences of feminism and violence against women in Turkey. Hence, a qualitative method was considered most suitable (Ahrne, 2015, 14).

It is not rare that socio-legal studies are accused of being Eurocentric (Nunn, 1997, 323) and western centralistic (Caserta, 2021, 321). Authors such as Galip (2021, 509-510) raise awareness of methodological inadequacies and orientalism that have been prevalent in previous western studies as they have not included the women that the research has targeted. Hence, by conducting an eight-week field study in Turkey, meeting and including the women of which this research revolves around is an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of eurocentrism, western centrism, and orientalism. My goal was to tell the story of feminists from different perspectives without occupying or co-opting it. Atkinson and Shaffir (1998, 42) argue that the greatest benefit of a field study is that the research stems from the target group's point of view which in this thesis was illuminated through the methods of observations and interviews.

4.2 Reliability and validity

Validity is defined by Yardley (2008, 257) as a measurement for how legitimate and correct the study is according to the general standards of research and thereby how useful it is. Reliability is according to Kvale and Brinkman (2014, 295) simply put how reliable the study is.

There are different ways to prove reliability and validity in qualitative studies. Bryman (2011, 369) state that it is possible to reach “moderate generalizations” in qualitative studies by relating them to similar environments and/or previous studies of the problem area. Hence, the literature review of this study functions as a way to raise reliability and validity as it relates and positions this study amongst previous research in similar environments/same problem area. Another way to raise reliability and validity is to combine different methods (Davis et al, 2011, 467; Abowitz & Toole, 2010, 1). According to Davis et al (2011, 467), by using more than one method, results are “more robust and compelling than single method studies”. Hence, by combining interviews and observations, this study reaches higher reliability and validity. Furthermore, the following chapters on methodology will include how reliability and validity were considered throughout this study.

4.3 Sampling strategy and informants

Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling which, according to Mason (2018, 60), is practical and often used by qualitative researchers. This strategy is described by Bryman (2011, 194) as a way to assure unity between the informants and the purpose of the study. Probability sampling is, on the contrary, based on the principle of randomization. My sampling strategy can best be described as semi purposive. Due to difficulties to access the field, participation requests were sent to a wide range of feminist organizations and other relevant informants such as lawyers. Hence, a random aspect of which informants responded and would participate existed. However, there was a purposive aspect as the request was only aimed at informants that I thought could have valuable knowledge on feminism and violence against women in Turkey, and some organizations with close affiliation with AKP, such as Kadem, was not targeted due to the tense climate which I will expand on in upcoming sections.

Before sampling, a sample size was determined. As Ahrne and Svensson (2015, 42) state that a minimum of six informant is needed to achieve saturation, it was decided that at least six informants would be interviewed. Saturation is according to Ahrne and Svensson (2015, 42) a way to identify patterns in the interviews which is an important step in thematic analysis which will be elaborated below. Additionally,

saturation raises reliability (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015, 42). With regards to time, a maximum of ten interviews was also decided.

To start sampling, I sent requests by e-mail in October 2021 to different women's rights organizations in Turkey, for example see appendix 1. One organization located in Istanbul replied positively. A visit to the organization and an interview with one representative of this organization was preliminary booked in the spring of 2022. By February 2022, a total of ten interviews were confirmed and booked with informants representing secular Turkish-, Kurdish- and Islamic feminism from different backgrounds/roles in the women's rights movement such as lawyers, shelter volunteers, professors, and activists.

4.4 The setting of the interviews and observations

By conducting interviews in places that feel natural to the informants, they feel safe and relaxed which affects the conversation positively which in turn affects what Bryman (2011, 50) refers to as ecological reliability. Bryman (2011, 50) explains ecological reliability as means to spur a natural conversation by for example choosing an appropriate environment. Hence, the interviews took place at locations familiar to- and chosen by the informants.

Most of the interviews were conducted in personal meetings using for example a conference room at the women's rights organization that the informant was associated with. The interviews with Kurdish feminists took place in Stockholm. These informants have just recently got asylum in Sweden but are still active feminists in Turkey/Kurdistan from a distance. The Kurdish women refer to south-east Turkey as Kurdistan. Even though this thesis recognizes the Kurdish fight for independence, focus lies on women within current Turkish borders. Kurdistan reaches across what is currently several different countries and to be clear about what area this thesis focus on it will only refer to Turkey. Two interviews were conducted online by video calls using the programme Zoom. These informants were at home. Due to using video calls, I did not miss nonverbal communication of the informants such as body language and facial expressions. No technical issues affected the online interviews.

The observations took place at the women's marches on the 8th of March 2022 in Istanbul, at the WOW (Women of the world) festival on the 19th of March 2022 and during visits at different women's rights organizations in Istanbul and Stockholm.

4.5 Format of the interviews and observations

The main benefit of using qualitative interviews as method is, according to Mason (2018, 60), that it brings social explanations and arguments with depth, nuance, and complexity to the study. Also, according to Bryman (2011, 369), qualitative interviews allow the researcher to be active, reflexive, and flexible in the process of collecting data. Furthermore, qualitative interviews are a time efficient way to gather data about societal questions (Bryman (2011, 369). With regards to the limited time of this study, time efficiency was a great benefit.

The interviews were semi-structured. They were structured using an interview guide (see appendix 2), which is recommended by amongst others Bryman (2011, 415), but also flexible by considering the informants background and interests with the possibility to adapt the questions and follow up (Patel & Davidson, 2011, 82-83). For example, some informants were lawyers – they got questions of their legal background and specialisation whilst some informants were not lawyers and instead got questions considering their background (for example how they became politically active). A way to raise validity, according to Patel and Davidson (2011, 102-103), is to discuss the interview guide with a qualified party. The interview guide in this study was discussed and approved by a qualified supervisor which raises this study's validity.

Mason (2018, 120) recommends dividing the interview questions into themes. A recommendation this study followed. Thus, the interview guide consisted of four themes: background, feminism, violence against women and legal framework. The questions of the interview guide in this study were open but were when needed followed up by more targeted questions. This does not only practice the flexibility of using interviews as method but also, according to Kvale and Brinkman (2014, 295), raise the reliability of the study because targeted questions test the interpretations of the researcher. One practical example of this was starting with the open question "How would you describe the legal system (in Turkey)?" which when needed was

followed up by “What do you think of Law No.6284?” which in turn when needed was followed up by “Is Law No.6284 sufficient/clear/implemented well?”. To achieve well documented interviews, they were audio recorded. To audio record the interviews is according to Bryman (2011, 428) a means for the researcher to focus on the conversation and according to Patel and Davidson (2011, 104) a way to raise reliability. Patel and Davidson (2011, 104) states that by audio recording interviews, the researcher lowers the risk of missing/forgetting parts of the informants’ answers which makes the study more reliable. However, according to Mason (2018, 133), audio recording should only be seen as a means for partial reconstruction. By using only audio recording, it's hard to recreate visual factors such as the surroundings and the body language and facial expressions of the informants (Mason, 2018, 133). Therefore, as a complement, I took notes of what was observed during the interviews such as display of emotions by for example tears, strongly shaking their head, hand gestures etc.

There are different types of observations that could be used for scientific purposes (Ciesielska et.al, 2018, 34). For the purpose of this thesis, non-participant observations were chosen with regards to time- and language limitations. Non-participant observations means that the aim is not to immerse with the target group but to observe the participants without actively participating (Ciesielska et.al, 2018, 43). This form of observation can be particularly advantageous when studying for examples rallies and demonstrations (Ciesielska et.al, 2018, 40) which I did. As highlighted by (Ciesielska et.al, 2018, 41), there are numerous ways to conduct observations. I followed some of Ciesielska’s et.al (2018, 41) general guidelines such as choose a focus area, make notes, make descriptions not judgements and note details such as appearances, smells and behaviours.

4.6 Being an outsider

As I am not a Turkish citizen, do not speak Turkish or Kurdish on more than a basic level and do not have family in Turkey – I was without a doubt an outsider wanting a glimpse of one aspect of Turkish society. The issue of being an outsider is often presented in ethnographic studies. Even though this thesis is not an ethnographic study, the outsider state of the researcher entails similar issues.

The first potential issue of being an outsider considered was my lack of knowledge of the Turkish and Kurdish language. To hire a translator was considered but a translator entails potential threats to the validity of the study (Kapborga & Beterö, 2002, 52). One threat using a translator arises when the Swedish speaking researcher addresses a question in English to the translator, another during the translation by the translator from English to Turkish/Kurdish, and again when the translator translates the interviewee's Turkish/Kurdish responses to English (Kapborga & Beterö, 2002, 52). Also, the researcher does not know whether the translator has summarized and/or modified the responses (Kapborga & Beterö, 2002, 52). In addition, this thesis is a fairly small field study and limitations must be made. If it would be a larger ethnographic study where the time limit would be years and funding larger - different choices such as learning the language or hiring a translator would be more motivated (De Fina, 2019). Hence, finding informants who could speak English seemed like the most appropriate choice. To conduct interviews in English might delimit the sample group (excluding non-English speakers) but it was soon clear that the target group could speak English on an advanced level which meant that communication and interviews could be held in English.

There is always a risk of misunderstandings and words getting lost/mixed in translation when not conducting interviews in the informants' native tongue (De Fina, 2019, 155). However, as I originate from a country that is a non-native English-speaking country (Sweden) and this thesis is produced in English, translation in some form and the risk of misunderstanding/misinterpretation is inevitable - even if I could speak the informants' native tongue the translation into English is a risk factor (DeFina, 2019, 155). To reduce the risk of misunderstandings, I have used follow up questions to ensure that my understanding is correct, and some direct quotations will be presented in the result/discussion.

4.7 Ethical considerations and risk assessments

Feminism, women's rights, violence against women and legal mobilization are all topics that can be considered sensitive. Both in a political/social context but also for the individual informant. That is why this study did not start taking form in October 2021 when the requests to participate was sent, but in September 2020 - I wanted time to create an ethical and inclusive thesis.

I started working on this thesis in September 2020 by consulting a professor whom herself did feminist research in Turkey. The starting point was “violence against women in Turkey” from a bottom-up perspective. The first step to reduce the risk of ethical overstepping was to exclude minors as possible informants. The next step was to identify a target group who could be relevant and provide a bottom-up perspective - who could give valuable insights of how violence against women in Turkey is exercised. One possible target group could be women who have been subjected to violence in Turkey but then there would be a risk of retraumatizing the informant. Thus, the target group became women who work and/or fight for women who have been subjected to violence in Turkey such as lawyers, women’s rights organizations, and feminist activists. In this way it was also possible to investigate how the violence is resisted. With help from the professor, I got in contact with women in Turkey who did not want to participate in a study but were willing to give advice and a general current outlook on the problem area. They also gave helpful advice of how to approach the women’s rights organizations so that the intent and ethical framework of the study were clear for those receiving the request.

This study has followed the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council. The guidelines consist of an ethical framework considering awareness, consent, confidentiality and how the data will be stored and used (SRC, 2020). In the beginning of the interview the informants informed verbally of the ethical guidelines of this study. Before starting the interview, I also got consent by the informant to audio record the interview. The informants in this study will in accordance with SRC’s (2020) ethical guidelines be anonymous. They will have false names, not at all relating to their actual names. Consent was given, and I was encouraged to use the organization names in this thesis. Besides to cohere with general standards of research, the information sheet and oral information was presented because when the respondents know their rights, the background information and have the chance to develop a mutual bond, the result will according to Israel (2014, 3) be more fruitful and honest.

I made risk assessments throughout the study both with regards to the Covid-19 pandemic and potential personal safety risks due to the sensitivity of the subject. I kept myself informed of updates concerning the Covid-19 pandemic and followed

local rules and restriction such as always wearing a face mask in public places and washing hands carefully. The political climate in Turkey had far more tensions regarding feminism than expected. Also, I became informed of police violence and brutality targeted against feminist agendas which this thesis has. Hence, due to the sensitivity of the subject and risk for my own safety, I did not discuss my project with anyone else than people associated with Lund University and the informants.

4.8 Thematic narrative analysis

As pointed out by McAllum et.al (2019, 359), thematic- and narrative analysis share some epistemological and ontological premises. Some of the epistemological and ontological convergences of thematic- and narrative analysis are the portrayal of the participant's actions, giving voice to the participant, and interpretation of the participant (McAllum et.al, 2019, 369). These points of convergence open for drawing on both analytical approaches to create an analytical framework (Butina, 2015, 193). Butina (2015, 193) refers to this as thematic narrative analysis.

I started to analyse my data by transcribing the audio recorded data to organize it (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 94; Butina, 2015, 193). Each interview was transcribed in an individual document which was saved on a separate crypted USB. To transcribe semi-structured interviews can be time-consuming (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015, 14). Hence, the limitation of ten interviews was beneficial. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, 94), it is also important to note initial thoughts when transcribing the data. I made notes in a separate document whilst transcribing. The next step was to obtain a general sense of the data by sorting the data into groups by highlighting the most interesting aspects (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 94; Butina, 2015, 193). To me, the most interesting aspects at this stage were descriptions and experiences of state violence, the relationship with-/view on the government, different form of feminist mobilization, relevant laws, view on feminism, and legal institutions. I noted both similarities and contradictions between the different informants. I then proceeded by using these groups to outline themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 96). I re-read the transcriptions and listened to the audio files several times to construct themes because it is important to assure that the themes can be seen as a red thread in the data, and that they are representative of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 98). The analysis process was not linear, and the themes were named and re-named

several times to make sure I captured the essence of my material. A guideline from Braun and Clarke (2006, 99) that I had in mind throughout the process was that the name of the themes should be easy to relate to the study's research questions and purpose.

Thematic- and narrative analysis also diverge in some ways, for example, concerning if the researcher takes a primary or secondary role in presenting the findings (McAllum et.al, 2019, 369). So, when the analysis process came to creating a concise and interesting story (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 100), a choice had to be made – do I take a primary or secondary speaker voice when presenting and analysing the data? This question leads to questions of epistemology. As mentioned in section 4.1, my goal was to tell the story of feminists from different perspectives without occupying or co-opting it. Hence, I wanted to draw on feminist epistemology which Anderson (1995, 50) defines as “the branch of naturalized, social epistemology that studies the various influences of norms and conceptions of gender and gendered interests and experiences on the production of knowledge”. By drawing on feminist epistemology, I could highlight the stories of those oppressed due to intersecting factors such as gender, ethnicity, and religion (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006, 37). In 1986, Harding (25) conceptualized three basic variants of feminist epistemology, one of which is feminist standpoint epistemology. This form of feminist epistemology relates to interpretivism, i.e., the standpoint that assumes that social reality is not “unitary or fixed, since the social world is made sensible – that is, made to make sense – by the order that human beings impose on events, situations, and circumstances” (Harding, 1986, 25). In this thesis, I wanted to highlight the interpretations of different informants on questions relating to feminism and violence against women in Turkey. However, as argued by Winther-Jørgensen and Philipps (2000, 28-29), all researchers have previous experiences and knowledge that affects how they interpret and understand their findings. Thus, to answer the question: do I take a primary or secondary speaker voice when presenting and analysing the data? I have chosen to take a primary role. The analysis will be based on the informants' experiences, knowledge, and opinions, but I also want to be clear with what is my own interpretations and experiences in this study. By taking a primary role and present representative data extracts (such direct

quotations from informants), the analysis will be able to answer the research questions more richly and fully, according to Kiger and Varpio (2019, 8).

4.9 Transparency and reflexivity

Several authors such as Ahrne and Svensson (2015, 19), Noble and Smith (2015, 35) and Winther-Jørgensen and Philipps (2000, 175) put emphasis on transparency and reflexivity as means to raise reliability and validity.

Transparency is to continuously present and motivate the research choices which according to Ahrne and Svensson (2015, 25) is important considering reliability and validity. In similarity, Noble and Smith (2015, 35) and Winther-Jørgensen and Philipps (2000, 175) emphasizes the importance to present every step of the research process in a transparent way and to be reflexive. Winther-Jørgensen and Philipps (2000, 175) describes reflexivity as the researcher being aware of potential bias and how previous knowledge might affect the result of the study. Before this study, I have written papers on gender-based violence and Turkey but not gender based violence in Turkey. Some previous knowledge of the research area existed but was limited. Also, by being inclusive and interview women from different perspectives, I lowered the risk of the study being biased. Additionally, the methodology chapter of this thesis and the appendixes are presented as means to be transparent and thereby raise this study's reliability and validity.

Chapter 5. Results and analysis

Firstly, this chapter will set the scene by describing my observations on the 8th of March 2022⁸ in Istanbul and provide an outlook on the current feminist movement in Turkey as described by the informants. It will then proceed by presenting and discussing the main findings during my field study. To make this chapter easier to follow, here is a list of the informant's false names and roles in the feminist movement:

Didem – Kurdish feminist activist. Representative of Amara.

Tuba –Islamic feminist. Representative of Musawah.

⁸ International women's day

Zerah – Kurdish feminist activist. Representative of Amara

Alya –Islamic feminist activist. Representative of Havle.

Pervin – representative of Mor Cati, Secular Turkish feminist.

Zeynep – has a law degree in Turkey but are studying gender studies abroad. Secular Turkish feminist.

Damla – professor gender and law in Turkey.

Ecrin – Kurdish feminist activist. Representative of Amara

Irem – licensed lawyer. Secular Turkish feminist.

Nerin – representative of We Will Stop Femicides Platform Turkey. Secular Turkish feminist.

5.1 8th of March 2022, Istanbul

There is tension in the atmosphere and a lot of police – both policemen in ordinary uniform and younger men in everyday clothes and red vests saying “police”. I do not see any female officers. It looks like the police brought in all available enforcement. Why? Because two days prior to this Tuesday 8th of March 2022, the governor of Istanbul prohibited the yearly women’s march. The governor’s office stated that they

Have banned the unlawful events such as meetings, marches, press, statements, sit-in-protests, opening of stands, setting up tents, distributing leaflets, etc. within the Beyoglu district on March 8, 2022, Tuesday with the aim of protecting rights and freedoms and preventing the committal of crimes (Bianet, 2022).

I have heard that women will be marching anyway so I take a taxi to get to Taksim where the yearly women’s march takes place. When arriving, I see metal barricades. The taxi driver informs me that today women will be protesting and that it’s a “big problem”. I act as if this was news to me. We drive slowly around the metal barricades and suddenly we get stopped by a policeman. He asks the driver in Turkish what my business is, and the taxi driver answers “tourist”. The policeman says that I cannot be here, and that Taksim Square has been shut down for hours. I ask the taxi driver to let me off at a café nearby. He is not allowed to stop for approximately ten minutes. During the drive, I notice that a lot of women, not protesting, are wearing purple hats and scarfs. I now know that purple is

characteristic colour of feminism in Turkey. The purple hats and scarfs could be a coincidence, but I don't think so, I think it's support. After having a quick coffee, I walk towards Taksim. I see a lot of women in purple. It seems like they are organizing in the small streets leading up to Taksim. I see large banners saying, "we are not afraid, we will not back down" and "we are here, we don't fear, we won't obey!". It's too advanced Turkish for me to understand at the moment but I write the messages on the banners down to translate later. My plan is to just keep distance and see how things play out. However, after a few minutes, a policeman comes up to me. He asks in perfect English where I am going. The first thing that comes to mind is answering the area where I live, which is approximately an hour from Taksim. He stops a taxi, tells me to get in and tells the taxi driver where I live. I feel disappointed at myself, but I don't dare to oppose. The feminist in me wants to join the brave women, support them. But the rationalist in me says that that is not why I am here, I am just here to observe. Also, I have stories of police brutality, torture and sexual abuse from some of the informants close in mind. I am more on edge than I expected to be. So, I get in the taxi. The taxi driver asks me "what have we taken from these women?". I smile and say "I don't know. What are they saying that you have taken?". The taxi drivers laugh, maybe at my bad Turkish, and then answers "Anyways, today they have taken traffic from us. Big traffic problem today".

My observations on the 8th of March were not as fruitful as I had hoped as they were cut short. However, it gave a brief insight to what conditions feminists in Turkey operate under.

5.2 The feminist movements in Turkey: organizations and points of convergence and divergence

Organizations

We Will Stop Femicides Platform Turkey is a secular feminist organization established in 2010, Nerin informs. The organization focuses on ending femicides and violence against women, but also on ending child abuse and promoting LGBTQ+ rights. They are often present in court hearings of femicides and violence

against women to mobilize law and they use press, social media and demonstrations as tools to engage the public in feminist issues, Nerin explains. We Will Stop Femicides Platform Turkey publish monthly rates on femicides and violence against women (StockholmCF, 2022). In March 2022, We Will Stop Femicides Platform Turkey's records show that 25 women were victims of femicides (StockholmCF, 2022). In 2021, the organization were granted the Finland International Gender Equality prize (Bianet, 2021).

Mor Cati is the first feminist organization established in Turkey; Pervin informs. It was founded in 1990 with the objective to combat violence against women as a result of second wave feminism in the 1980s mentioned in chapter 2.2. Pervin says that *Mor Cati* is the only NGO in Turkey that provides a solidarity centre and women shelters. Their main work consists of sheltering and supporting women who have been subjected to violence, Pervin explains. They are not directly involved in the women's legal processes but do collaborate with lawyers who can give women legal advice. Several other informant stresses that women's shelters are crucial for women subjected to violence. Zeynep and Irem say that married women in Turkey are often financially reliable of their men and that their family support system is depending on the man. Hence, an abused woman needs support from societal functions such as women's shelters, they conclude. *Mor Cati's* shelter does not have a limit for how long a woman can be there, Pervin explains. All cases are unique, she says. Some women just spend a week on a shelter, and some stay up to a year getting help from social workers and legal advisors.

Amara is a Kurdish-Swedish women's right organization based in Stockholm. It has branches in other parts of Sweden and affiliations with women's right organizations and Kurdish feminists in Turkey. *Amara* mobilize for political and legal reform by for example protesting and spreading awareness. They also help women from all origins who have been subjected to violence by for example financial aid and education.

Havle is an Islamic feminist organization which was formally established in 2018, Alya informs. However, she says, Muslim feminist scholars have mobilized for feminist issues in Turkey since 2013 by for example running campaigns which ultimately led to the founding of *Havle*. *Havle* works to create a feminist space where Muslim women's experiences and needs are heard and met. The organization name comes from the expression "La Havle" which means "it's enough", Alya state. *Havle* collaborates with *Musawah* which is an international Islamic feminist organization. The word *Musawah* is Arabic and means equality. *Musawah* was founded about ten years ago and a part of their work is to support local actors and to "demystify the idea that Islam is oppressive", Tuba informs.

A women's organization, not represented in this thesis, that is worth mentioning is *Kadem*. This organization is highly associated with AKP. For example, Erdoğan's daughter Sumeyye Erdoğan is vice president, and the organization consists of pro-AKP women only. I will elaborate on their position and meaning in upcoming sections.

Points of convergence and divergence

Irem says that a point of convergence within the feminist movement, regardless of being secular Turkish, Kurdish or Islamic, is the objective of "living. Not being beaten. Not being killed. Not being pushed from a building. Feeling safe". She says that the feminist movement in Turkey right now is about "survival". In similar ways, Alya say that the feminists in Turkey are in "survival mode", and Damla expresses that feminism has become "a matter of survival". They all argue that the conditions for women, and for feminists especially, are very hard under AKP's ruling. Zeynep emphasise that the main point of convergence for the somewhat diverse feminist movement right now is to end violence against women.

Tuba state "In Turkey, there is a very, very strange space I would say. This conversation and this idea of feminism". With this, she alludes the history of feminism in Turkey from the Kemal Nationalist state feminism to the Islamic feministic wave in the 1980s, and how the influences of secularism and conservative, patriarchal interpretations of Islam affects the feminist space, as

described in chapter 2.3. These influences have to some degree polarized women and feminists in Turkey, Tuba explains. This polarization is somewhat accentuated by the secular informant's standpoint, both Turkish and Kurdish, that the Islamic feminist movement is not compatible with feminism and the claim of ending violence against women. This is, for example, expressed by Irem saying that "Islamic feminism isn't feminism to me". Irem's point of view is that on an individual level it might be possible to identify as both Muslim and feminist but, "from an ideology point of view it's not coherent at all". Irem is not the only secular informant with a critical outlook on Islamic feminism. When asked about how she thinks the Islamic feminists counteract violence against women, Ecrin answers, "I don't think they do. Islam is allowing and actually encouraging violence against women... the men have a right to beat their wives according to Islam". In relation to this, it is important to bring forward the information I received from the Islamic feminist informants. They explain that there is a distinction between what they call conservative Islamic women activists who are allied with AKP and adhere to conservative, patriarchal interpretations of Islam, and the reforming Islamic feminists who want re-readings of the holy scriptures to create a modern feminism within an Islamic framework. In general, the non-Islamic informants, seem to view Islamic feminism as a unified movement and connect it with Kadem, the pro-AKP women's organization, but there are key differences. For instance, Alya underlines that reforming Islamic feminists versus the Turkish government's interpretations of Islam are fundamentally different. She says that one of Havle's main interests is to create a more inclusive feminist space in Turkey. "The government's Islam represent the one that is mainstream patriarchal, that not really discuss capitalism and the system around Islam", Alya adds. Furthermore, reforming Islamic feminists want to create a safe space for people from different backgrounds and different ideologies, which Alya says stands in strong contrast with the current Turkish government that promotes national- and ideologic unity. Hence, this analysis will separate conservative Islamic women activists (such as Kadem) from reforming Islamic feminists (such as Musawah and Havle), even if the secular informants not always do so. The scepticism toward Islamic feminists could be read as legacy of the Kemalist reformation project, described in chapter 2.1. However, Alya feels like the

feminist collaboration improves successively by for example participating on the same conferences and vocalising demands for ending violence against women.

To answer how the feminist movements in Turkey can find even stronger collaboration and united mobilize towards common goals is difficult, Tuba says. However, she says that even though different strands of feminism have diverse worldviews, they all want to “destroy the patriarchy” and that “sometimes, we just need to agree to disagree and find a way to collective care”.

5.3 Legitimizing myths in Turkey

This chapter will provide an overview of what legitimizing myths, as presented by Pratto et.al (1994, 741-743), can be found in Turkey’s political- and socio-legal realities, how they affect the issue of violence against women, and which impact they have on feminist mobilization against VAW.

Sexism

Pratto et.al (1994, 748) state that sexism is a legitimizing myth clearly related to group-based hierarchy. Sexism relates to gender stereotypes, power and hierarchal thinking that especially affect women negatively (EIGE, 2022). Barkan (2016, 400) describes feminism and sexism as “different sides of the same coin”. Feminism refers to

the belief that women and men should have equal opportunities in economic, political, and social life, while sexism refers to a belief in traditional gender role stereotypes and in the inherent inequality between men and women (Barkan, 2016, 400).

In this study, all the informants expressed that sexism is a prevalent part of Turkish politics, and socio-legal domain. They often refer to it as patriarchal structures. For instance, Zerah says that she became a feminist to fight the patriarchal structures that is treating women as property to men. Women are defined as daughters, sisters, wives, mothers, but not as autonomous individuals, Zerah explains. On a similar note, Zeynep express that women are seen as belonging to the private sphere, and men to the public. This dichotomy of female private / male public results in men having more experiences and rights to talk to authorities which lead to unequal

access to political-, social-, and legal institutions. Moreover, Irem stresses that women are generalised in two categories, “evil and cynical and gold-diggers or very innocent and stupid”. She insists that a more individualistic perception of women is crucial to develop a more equal and just society, “there are so much prejudices about women. I sometimes think men actually fear women because they have an unreal idea of women”.

Damla states that Turkey is a very interesting country to study from a socio-legal standpoint as patriarchal structures are prevalent in both society and law. For instance, both on a social and legal level, and regardless of adhering to secular or Islamic beliefs, women’s sexuality is connected with honour. “Culture conservatism is quite dominant in Turkey whether you are secular, whether you are religious or Kemalist and that culture conservatism usually works in reference to girls and women”, she elaborates. Damla exemplifies by saying that regardless of a being secular or Islamic, families treat daughters and sons differently concerning matters such as being out late, having sexual relationships before marriage and introducing new partners to the family. Hence, culture conservatism, or sexism, works across classes, ideologies and ethnicities in Turkey, Damla argues.

Ethnic prejudice

Another legitimizing myth correlating to group-based oppression is ethnic prejudice (Pratto et.al, 1994, 742). Ethnic prejudice is defined by Barkan (2016, 337) as “a set of negative attitudes, beliefs, and judgments about whole categories of people, and about individual members of those categories, because of their perceived race and/or ethnicity”. According to all informants, the Turkish state’s ethnic prejudices towards Kurdish women are apparent. For instance, Zeynep describes how Turkish media often (wrongfully) portray a picture of Kurdish women as women who doesn’t work, has a lot of children, and burdens the society which creates prejudices.

Furthermore, ethnic prejudices are one intersecting factor that affects women's risk of being subjected to violence in Turkey. For example, Trembley (2020) states that Kurdish women "are increasingly becoming targets of arbitrary arrests, strip searches, sexual violence in detention, insults and threats of rape". Additionally, Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2017) report on "police torture and abductions" targeted against Kurdish citizens - both men and women.

As mentioned in section 3.2, personality- and social psychology scholars have long investigated authoritarian personality traits, and according to Barkan (2016, 338), "one of the first social-psychological explanations of prejudice centred on the authoritarian personality". Some authoritarian personality traits are being conservative, oppressive, and egocentric (Pratto et.al, 1994, 744). This, I argue, can also be translated to an institutional level. In the case of Turkey, the governmental traits seem to be similar to the traits described in authoritarian personalities. Just like within authoritarian personalities in a social psychology context, the authoritarian traits of AKP co-relate with having, especially ethnic, prejudices (Pratto et.al, 1994, 751).

Nationalism

A lot of previous research conclude that nationalism is widespread in Turkey (see for example Bayir, 2016; Kurban, 2007 or Kirdis, 2021) which is another legitimizing myth (Pratto et.al, 1994, 742). Pratto et.al (1994, 742) describes nationalism as "attitudinal bias in favour of the national in-group". In Turkey, it seems like the legitimizing myths of nationalism and ethnic prejudices are very closely related as they both mainly, but not exclusively, target Kurds. Several informants raise nationalism as an issue. For the Kurdish women, Turkish nationalism oppress and try to eradicate their Kurdish identity. Several informants state that Kurdish feminists are often labelled as terrorists and/or separatist due to being seen as a threat to the Turkish national unity. This is expressed by most

informants saying that Turkish women in general are treated better in Turkish society and legal system than Kurdish women.

Another aspect of nationalism, mentioned in section 2.1, is linguistic nationalism. To the Kurdish informants, it is important to protest in Kurdish – a language that has been officially and unofficially banned in Turkey since 1924 when Directorate of Religious Affairs ran a “Citizen, speak Turkish”- campaign (Kurban, 2007, 7). However, they also protest in Turkish so that the government and Turkish people understand them, Didem and Zerah explains. At the Kurdish feminist activist meeting hall, there is a large colourful sign with the Kurdish word “Jineoloji”. I ask what it means. Ecrin explains that ‘jin’ is Kurdish for ‘woman’ and that jineoloji means ‘women’s ideology’. It is closely related to feminism but to use the term jineoloji is important as it is Kurdish expression, Ecrin explains.

Political-Economic Conservatism

Several informants describe the Turkish government as ‘conservative’ and ‘capitalistic’. One slogan used during the women’s march 2022 was “Down with the male dominated capitalist system!”, Tuba informs. Pratto et.al’s (1994, 743) description of political-economic conservatism and its relation to group-based hierarchy is two dimensional. The first aspect is capitalism versus socialism. According to several informants, the current government promotes capitalism. Individuals and groups that promote capitalism have a higher ‘social dominance orientation’ which means they have a higher desire to be socially dominant (Pratto et.al, 1994, 741, 743). The other aspect relates to the tendency to think that women belong in the private sphere and men in the public (Pratto et.al, 1994, 743), which, as mentioned under *sexism*, is prevalent in Turkey’s political- and socio-legal realities. This dichotomy of female private / male public is also a source of financial violence, Nerin argues. She says that women are limited at the labour market and states “if you’re not having economic freedom, you will have to depend on a man and his economic power which makes you fragile for violence”.

“Family values” as a contextual legitimizing myth

According to Kocamaner (2018, 37), the rhetoric of “family values is rooted in its broader vision about the family’s central role in confronting Turkey’s political and economic challenges”. “Strengthening the family” is centrally positioned in AKP’s political vision and their party program state, “the family constitutes the foundation of society,” and “despite all the negative developments and economic problems, Turkish people owe their survival as a nation to their strong family structure” (Kocamaner, 2018, 37). According to Zeynep, “Family values is the most used phrase for legitimizing anti-feminist ideas”. She elaborates, “the family values is like a virus in Turkey, really, I mean it’s legitimizing everything”. From this perspective, I argue, family values can be seen as a contextual legitimizing myth, as in Turkey, family values seem to be an oppression stabilizer (Pratto et.al, 1994, 741). For instance, the notion of family values affects the tendency to report/not report domestic violence, Zeynep explains. To report domestic violence is seen by many in Turkish society as going against family values and being dishonourable, she says. In similarity, Zerah refers to family values and honour as legitimisers to oppress and be violent against women. Women are expected to be quiet; she explains. Zerah also describes how women aren’t allowed to make their own decisions but are expected to leave all decision making to the family when she is unmarried and to the husband when she is married. She says that a woman who stands up for herself and says that she wants to decide over her own body and life choices, regardless of being Kurdish or Turkish, is considered a dishonourable woman.

The source of family values and honour-based discourse is according to the secular Turkish- and Kurdish feminists due to Islamic culture. However, the notion of family values and traditional gender roles is according to Tuba manifested by conservative, patriarchal ideas which is manifested by the AKP and conservative Islamic women activists. According to Kocamaner (2018, 36, 39), family values rhetoric is “often peppered with religious references”, but this rhetoric is mainly aimed at the Kemalist legacy which AKP finds undermining “the traditional Turkish family”. Erdoğan often publicly encourages early marriages and having many children (Kocamaner, 2018, 37). He, and other AKP members, are also referring to

abortion as murder, even though voluntary abortions have been legal since 1983 (Kocamaner, 2018, 37). Even though AKP's pro-natalist and anti-birth control stance are influenced by religious sensibilities, it is mainly formed by their "contentious view on global family planning policies as well as demographic and economic rationales that inspire concrete national population policies" (Kocamaner, 2018, 37). In contrast with their political precursors, AKP view birth control methods "as a Western conspiracy against the Turkish nation aimed at curtailing its productivity, development and prosperity" (Kocamaner, 2018, 37).

Legitimizing myths through legal institutions

The national law on violence against women in Turkey is law 6284/Law to protect family and prevent violence against women. Law 6284 was ratified on March 8th, 2012, and for instance states:

The aim of this law is to protect the women, the children, the family members and the victims of stalking, who have been subject to the violence or at the risk of violence, and to regulate procedures and principles with regard to the measures of preventing the violence against those people... The cautionary decisions taken for the victims and perpetrators of violence are implemented with respect to human dignity and honour... The special measures taken within the scope of this law to prevent the gender-based violence against women and protect the women from the gender-based violence cannot be interpreted as discrimination.

Pope (2014, 602) highlights that law 6284 concerns both "family" and "women". According to Pope (2014, 602), this illuminate the strong family institution and how women are seen as mothers, daughters, or spouses, not as autonomous individuals. This is a viewpoint shared by most informants. For example, Zeynep thinks that some aspects of law 6284 is a good base for a national legal framework,

but at the same time, it's about protection of the family, it just makes me feel a bit you know suspicious because protection of family is always used against feminists in Turkey.

Moreover, Irem highlights that law 6284 separate married from non-married women regarding domestic violence. This distinction in the law means that women who are not married but subjected to violence by their partner will not be seen as victims of domestic violence. The case will instead most likely be labelled as violence between "equal partners".

According to my informants, one major issue concerning violence against women is implementation of law. Especially implementation of law 6284. Implementation of law is, according to Acar (2006, 152), the most crucial aspect of creating/adopting laws. Several informants agree, stressing that for laws on violence against women to work, they must be implemented and practiced which, they argue, is not the case in Turkey right now. This is, for example, expressed by Pervin, “There is a very serious problem for implementing law. There is a growing gap between the law on paper and how it is implemented”. In similarity, Zeynep, who has chosen not to practice law in Turkey anymore, says:

I don't believe in law anymore in Turkey. For political reasons. If you know someone in the right place, then law is practical for you but if you don't... law is just on paper. Especially regarding women's rights.

The implementation problem displays the classical gap problem which according to Nafstad (2017, 249) has two dimensions – “one concerning the gap between state law and the rules people adhere to in their everyday lives, while the other distinguishes between state law and what legal institutions actually do”. In relation to the first dimension, several informants mention that male offenders feel more confident and relaxed about abusing women due to AKP's conservative ideals and that they don't get punishments in proportion to their crimes. Especially since Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul convention which, according to my informants and global responses, signals to the abusers that they will not be held accountable for violence against women (The Advocates for Human Rights, 2021, 5). In relation to the second dimension, the distinction between what the law states and what legal institutions actually do, I will begin by looking into descriptions of how the police treat women reporting violence. Most informants stress that a huge aspect of the implementation issue is that the police do not take cases of violence against women seriously and/or demands that the victim should be her own investigator. Zeynep elaborates this saying that a woman reporting violence must “prove that you are that victim who did everything to stop that violence... you need to be a pure woman who didn't do anything wrong”. This is supported by Alya saying that “you need to force to the law, you need to know about these laws” to have a chance at a legal process. Zeynep exemplifies by saying that in cases of domestic violence, the police try to mediate between the spouses and get the women

to stay in relationships that are dangerous for them with reference to the legitimizing myth of family values, instead of investigating a possible crime. The unwillingness to investigate cases of violence against women is also present in cases with deadly outcome, i.e., femicides. Zerah tells a story about a Kurdish woman opening the door for the Turkish police. When the police entered, the woman asked that they would wear shoe covers because she had just cleaned her house. In response, the police shot the woman, and no one was convicted of murder, Zerah says. She also tells me about a case where a Turkish man stormed an HDP-meeting and killed a woman. A case that despite having many eyewitnesses did not even make it to court because the police did not want to investigate it. Nerin also illuminates the unwillingness to investigate violence against women by saying,

Women are falling from higher buildings and also most of the time they are with a man which they are related to, like their husbands or boyfriends. The police write them off as suicides or accidents.

Irem gives another example of how police fail to protect women. She says that a lot of women subjected to violence have asked the police to confiscate their husbands' illegal guns. The police have confiscated a lot of guns but in some way, the gun always returns to their owner and the women who sought help gets murder by them, she states. When talking about this, Irem seems upset. Then, she smiles and say, "women are women's home". This expression means that the only ones looking out for women are other women, she explains.

If I die on the street tomorrow, nobody, not the government, not the police, will investigate my case. It's going to be the women who is going to try to put my case to the media's attention (Irem).

Next, I will look into the example of court verdicts. Zeynep states that courts in Turkey "always find a way to reduce the sentence". This is supported by Tuba saying that offenders can get reduced sentences for "good behaviour during their trial". Nerin points to a specific factor being used as a legitimiser to reduce sentences in cases of femicides: passion. If a man murders a woman in a "state of passion", for example if the woman has been caught cheating and the man became overwhelmingly jealous due to his love for her, this is used by the courts to reduce his sentence. This, I argue, is a display of the legitimizing myth sexism in the Turkish legal domain. Sexism is also displayed in other ways in Turkish courts. For

example, through victimization. According to several informants, victimization works differently depending on several intersecting factors. For instance, virginity and divorce are two factors that have an impact on victimization.

As a divorced woman you face many challenges because of this virginity idea. Once you are divorced you are used so to say and you are also open to abuse in their eyes (Irem)

Victimization relates to victim-blaming⁹, something that Irem has witnessed, for example, when attending court hearings in cases of femicides. In one these hearings, the judge referred to the defendant as “my son” and said, “I trust you like I trust my son”. The judge calling the defendant “son” could be viewed as an expression of family values. As described in previous sections, men/sons are generally more trusted and have more freedom than daughters who are generally more controlled by the family. Even so, Irem was shocked to hear a judge address a defendant as a son - “I just kept thinking, you are a judge, you literally have to be impartial by constitution and how can you say something like that”. In similarity, Tuba and Pervin say that victim-blaming often occurs in Turkish courts. They say that focus often lies on how the defendants were ‘provoked’ to act violent. Pervin says that “unjust provocation” is often used as an argument by the defendant and considered by the courts. She says that the defendant might say:

she insulted my manhood, or she wasn’t behaving womanly, she wasn’t cooking, she was flirting with other men. These kinds of sexist comments they provide to the court and then the courts take it in their decision.

This also relates to the legitimizing myth of family values, as it asserts power to men and manifests the ideal role of women as innocent, dedicated caregivers. In relation to victim-blaming, Zeynep highlights how the courts view female victims differently depending on the woman’s background and the circumstances at the time of the crime,

a woman who was going to school is a nice victim. A woman who is beaten by her husband, yeah also kind of good but also husband has rights and maybe that woman did something wrong. That kind of discourse... so, state is also choosing some ideal types of victims I believe. A trans woman, or a LGBTQ+ woman or a woman who

⁹ “Victim-blaming is a devaluing act that occurs when the victim(s) of a crime or an accident is held responsible — in whole or in part — for the crimes that have been committed against them” (Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, 2009).

is against the regime, they are not ideal victims, it's like they deserve that, they deserve to be victims.

They also use victim-blaming through questions such as “but what she did do at that place at that time and they ask what she was wearing, if she had a short dress and stuff like that”, Zerah elaborates. The descriptions of sexism and victim-blaming in Turkish courts are consistent with Christie’s (1986) theory of the ideal victim. Christie’s (1986) theory highlights how different intersecting factors make or break the legitimacy of victim-claiming. Tuba states that victim-blaming as a defence strategy has increased notably after Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul convention. Similarly, Damla says that the Istanbul convention provided a greater legal protection against violence for women in Turkey and that after the withdrawal, “we can actually see an increase or more like relaxation among courts about decisions that they deliver on cases of violence against women”. The behaviour and decisions described by the informants, could be seen as institutional discrimination as it “occurs when an institution’s rules and procedures have discriminatory effect” (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999, 127).

Several informants also describe how the legitimizing myths of ethnic prejudices and nationalism affect courts when dealing with cases of violence against women. For instance, Zeynep explains that courts are more likely to label Kurdish women as terrorists or separatists whilst Turkish women are more likely to be seen as being “on the wrong place at the wrong time”, if subjected to violence. According to all informants, Turkish courts do not offer the same rights to Kurdish women as they do Turkish women. This is shown in several ways pointed out by Bayir (2016). For instance, the Turkish state has refrained and is still refraining from employing Kurds as judges, especially in the Kurdish provinces (Bayir, 2016, 171). To not allow “select groups to access certain jobs, activities, or resources, dominant groups facilitate the maintenance of their own access and privilege” is institutional discrimination, according to Cunningham and Light (2007, 1). Furthermore, as stated in chapter 2.1, the legislation is only written in Turkish even though 20% of the population are Kurds (BBC, 2019). To only write and allow publication of the legislation in Turkish restricts understanding of- and communication through the

legislation for those with other linguistic origins. This is alarming considering Crenshaw's (1991, 1250) argument that women of ethnic minorities need information to be "targeted directly to them in order to reach them". A part of The New Criminal Procedure Code (CMK) of 2004 was meant to ensure that people who do not understand or speak Turkish have the right to a translation of "essential parts of the public prosecutor's indictment and the defendant's lawyer's defence" (Bayir, 2016, 230). However, the CMK and Turkish courts consequently refrain from referring to Kurdish as Kurdish. It is instead referred to "as an 'unknown language' (bilinmeyen dil), or 'not-understood language' (anlaşılamayan)". Pervin says that it is not possible for Kurdish women to get public services such as legal service in their mother tongue which she argues is a great problem. Didem says she knows a lot of Kurdish feminists who have been prosecuted and have not understood a single word of the prosecution. Her statement is supported by amongst others Amnesty International. For instance, in 1996, Fatma Tokmak was arrested on suspicion for association with PKK (Amnesty, 2000). She did not speak or understand any Turkish, so the police forced her to sign her statements with her thumbprint, not knowing what she was signing (Amnesty, 2000). The workings of ethnic prejudices and nationalism in courts illuminate Olsson's and Luchjenbroers (2014, 437) argument, that some people are particularly vulnerable in courtrooms due to social, cultural, and/or ethnic discrimination.

Damla underlines that even though there are implementation issues, it is important to continue to invoke law 6284 and to use legal institutions. If women subside to the feeling of hopelessness, she says, it will only benefit the state. Therefore, she says it's important to highlight that there are successful outcomes – "there are protection decisions delivered every day also. Some women are actually using 6284 effectively and they are actually being protected from violence".

Based on the above stated findings, legitimizing myths seem to generate what Cunningham and Light (2007, 1) describes as "prejudicial practices and policies within institutions that result in the systematic denial of resources and opportunities to members of subordinate groups". Besides creating and reproducing group-based

oppression, my interpretation is that the identified legitimizing myths also contribute to a gap between the Turkish legal system and legal culture. This gap has previously been identified by for example Yilmaz (2016, 148-149), who refers to it as official law versus sociolegal realities influenced by unofficial Muslim law. The concept of legal culture and how to use it has been long debated (Silbey, 2018). I find Cotterell's (1992) definition, as explained by Silbey (2018, 426), most clear and comprehensive -namely that legal culture is a concept where law is understood in relation to the social context of it and as an expression of culture. Hence, the identified legitimizing myths are part of the social context, and law in Turkey must be understood in relation to them. Also, through action and decisions by legal institutions, these legitimizing myths can be seen as an expression of the conservative, patriarchal culture promoted by AKP. It could also be seen as institutional discrimination where dominant groups use institutions to maintain power and privilege (Cunningham & Light, 2007). To counteract, feminists try to "push the mechanisms and remind them (the state) of their responsibilities towards you as equal citizens", as Damla expresses it.

5.4 Authoritarian practices and feminist counteraction

While the mobilization of independent feminist organizations since the 1980s has been challenging in Turkey, the relationship between civil society organizations and the state has been further complicated in recent years. Feminist NGOs are increasingly the target of criticism and government crackdown. This chapter aims to identify some authoritarian practices that AKP use to contour the socio-legal realities and how feminists counteract these practices to advance their claim of ending violence against women.

Conservative women's activism as state feminism?

In her book "Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences", Badran (2009, 501), argues that Islamic feminism in Turkey exists in a "highly-secularized landscape" and is widely seen as an "ominous move backward". However, her

brilliant work is thirteen years old. I would like to argue that the past thirteen years, under AKP's ruling, have shifted parts of Turkey's view on Islamic reversion. Drawing from the informants' stories, conservative Islamic women activists are favoured by the government as they share ideology. Could this be a modern attempt at state feminism? In similarity with Kemal in the beginning of the 20th century, is Erdoğan 'giving' Muslim women rights to create and control the feminist arena? There is, I argue, evidence that suggests so.

For instance, Tuba says that the conservative Islamic feminist movement "kind of act as a front for the conservative Islamic patriarchal party". She says that conservative Islamic women activists and AKP share the idea of moving the feminist arena from a western- to a conservative Islamic framework which she says, "is more threatening of women's rights than anything". She, and other reforming Islamic feminists, also want to create a feminist space, separate from western standards. However, not based on conservatism, but rather on new readings and non-patriarchal interpretations of Islam. Furthermore, Tuba says that the conservative Islamic feminist movement is constituted by the women's branch of AKP, "and we know that it serves as a conservative Islamic think tank that supports the ruling party". Tuba also points to Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul convention and underlines that not any women, not even conservative Islamic women activists, had anything to say about it. Zeynep and Nerin says that even conservative Islamic women activists close to Erdoğan didn't want Turkey to withdraw, but according to Tuba, they quickly conformed. Tuba describes conservative Islamic women activists as "mouthpieces of a political pawn which has been produced by the AKP party".

As mentioned in chapter 2.3, the Kemalist government did not allow an independent women's right movement but shut down any attempts for independent female parties and women's rights organizations (Hanso, 2021). The current attack on the feminist movement by AKP could be seen as a similar attempt to shut down the independent women's rights movements and only provide state feminism that supports the government's patriarchal ideas. This becomes especially evident as during my field work, AKP start a legal process to shut down one of the organizations represented in

this thesis; We Will Stop Femicides Platform Turkey (StockholmCF, 2022). The prosecutor's office filed a lawsuit stating that the organization acts unlawfully and immorally (Buyuk, 2022). Discourse such as "immoral", "against family values" and "illegal/unlawful" have been used by the Turkish government since Kemal's time at office to ban and shut down independent women's rights organizations, as described in chapter 2.3. This discourse is also used to attack people that the government see as deviant, such as feminists and LGBTQ+ people which, for instance, could be seen in the propaganda on the LGBTQ+ movement when the decision to withdraw from the Istanbul convention was presented, also mentioned in chapter 2.2. We Will Stop Femicides Platform Turkey, has written a statement that meet these latest allegations,

These petitions consist of written applications claiming our association has been 'disintegrating the family structure by ignoring the concept of the family under the guise of defending women's rights', a claim not based on any concrete facts (Buyuk, 2022).

Furthermore, Tuba state that AKP has appropriated on Islamic feminist discourse, not to better the women's positions but their own. Consequently, conservative Islamic women activists "illustrates this shift in discursive strategies about women", she states. She explains that this is visible in texts and speeches they produce,

while they claim to improve the social status of women and increase their participation and education, the labour force or politics or what have you, it's still maintained in their programme that it is supported by the AKP. So, whatever it is, we know that there is this hidden agenda supporting the AKP. Political ideology can be seen as the outcome of adhering to legitimizing myths which are "societally-known prescriptions of how people should and should not act or be" (Prati et.al, 2021, 4). By adhering to conservative, patriarchal ideology, conservative Islamic women activists to some extent support oppression. As described by Pratto et.al (1994, 758), institutional discrimination relies on individuals and groups to support their norms to maintain the hierarchy. Hence, using conservative women activism can be seen as authoritarian practice. By collaborating with conservative Islamic women activists and 'giving' women rights, the government can control feminist demands, position themselves better in an international context, and let's not forget – everything 'given', can be taken back.

State/police violence

Many informants describe the Turkish police as AKP's extended arm. Damla says that the functioning of the police force right now is not public service and protection, but to uphold the conservative, patriarchal norms, and beliefs of the government. One way of which they do so is through violence. State violence such as police violence is a form of institutional discrimination and a common authoritarian practice (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, 127; Svolic, 2012, 23).

Didem tells me about when she and her husband was arrested due to Kurdish political- and feminist activities. The police even took their four-year-old daughter in custody. They put Didem and her daughter in one cell, her husband in another.

I held my daughter in my arms and then a policeman took her. I didn't react. I couldn't. If I get upset, crying, begging them not to hurt my child, they know that what they're doing is working (Didem).

When they took her daughter, all Didem could think of was that her four-year-old would be raped. The police took Didem's daughter to her father's cell and threatened to abuse and rape his daughter if he didn't say what they wanted. After a while, the police opened the door to Didem's cell.

He had these large boots you know... he kicked her with it. I saw my daughter flying across the cell, hitting the wall. And me, stupid mom, just worried about her being raped. I opened the diaper to check for blood. There wasn't any. I don't think that they raped her. But many years later, a nurse told me that there is something wrong with my daughters back. I immediately thought of this moment when he kicked my daughter with that boot, Didem says.

Zerah gets emotional when she describes the Turkish police. She uses a very strong Turkish word which is hard to translate but is close to 'a curse'. She elaborates by saying that the Turkish police isn't really describable, they are worse than imaginable. To not add stress and risk retraumatizing Zerah, I ask if she wants a break and then if she wants to continue the interview or stop. She wants to continue and says that the worst thing that the Turkish police ever did to her was using electrical chocks on her son in front of her. She also says that she has been sexually abused by the Turkish police. Didem says that Erdoğan has given the police "free hands", meaning that there are no consequences for their behaviour which according to Didem and Zerah is very dangerous. No one is allowed to question the police, Zerah explains.

Tuba stresses that the more violence and ignorance that the government and police are using, the stronger feminist mobilization will become. Even though feminist mobilization is met with violence, the feminist activists don't back down. Zeynep reflects upon this saying "I find them really brave. Even though all those things are happening, all those attacks by the police, they are still doing their best to ... show them that they exist". Damla agrees saying,

if they, you know, throw out the Istanbul convention or press charges against women or arrest women protesters or use pepper spray on them, it's not going to change anything because women in Turkey and organised women's movements they are angry, they are fed up and they will do whatever it takes in order to hang on to their rights.

Demonstrations

One way to advance the women's right claim of ending violence against women, is to protest/demonstrate (Rojas, 2006, 2147). A tactic all informants addresses and reflects upon.

The feminist movement in Turkey protests against VAW on specific dates such as the 8th of March and 25th of November, but also spontaneously and as a reaction to, for instance, political choices and court decisions. The three different strands of feminists, represented in this thesis, engage in demonstrations – some are organised separately and some together.

To organize protests often entails constructing slogans. Zerah says that one of the most common slogans used by Kurdish feminists is 'Let women live free!'. Ecrin says that when protesting, Kurdish feminists often use the slogan 'men's violence is political' which bears some resemblance with 'personal is political' (mentioned in chapter 2.2), the difference being that the modern Kurdish version targets who is doing the violence. The Kurdish informants living in Sweden explain how they still organize demonstrations for women in Turkey. For instance, they organized a large protest in Stockholm when Turkey announced that they would withdraw from the Istanbul convention, Didem says. Didem tells me about another protest which focused on the murder of a Kurdish woman by the Turkish police. According to

Didem, the police stripped the woman of all her clothes and threw her naked body on a public square. As a reaction, in Sweden, Didem wore a bloody bodysuit and laid down at a public square whilst her allies shouted “Murderer!”. Ecrin also says that they organize protests against sexual violence and often use ‘No means no’ as slogan. On the topic of protests against sexual violence, Irem says that in 2018, as a response to the Irish case of a man being acquitted of rape due to the victim having ‘sexy underwear’, the Turkish feminists put sexy underwear on their banners along with the text ‘this is not consent’. The response to legal cases abroad, again display how Turkish feminists are a part of a wider, global network. Moreover, while doing observations on the 8th of March 2022 in Istanbul, I observed some feminist slogans. Many of them focused on not backing down and not being quiet. For example, ‘we are not afraid, we will not back down’ and ‘we are here, we don’t fear, we won’t obey!’. Something that distinguish secular Turkish feminists are slogans and campaigns that emphasise on secularism. Something that, according to Irem, secular Turkish feminist has done more and more in recent years. For example, she tells me about one recent campaign that said “Directorate of Religious Affairs, do us a favour and bring us some tea. The women are planning a revolution”, she informs. She explains that the message was that secular feminists are doing something on a higher level and that they do not care about what Directorate of Religious Affairs say about them.

The authoritarian practice of state violence is especially prevalent when feminists demonstrate in Turkey. Zeynep says that women who demonstrate against violence are often met by violence by the law enforcement, “its normal. Nobody is expecting a peaceful protest. They wish for it, but they always get ready for the gas for example... if the police attacks, they are always prepared”. Several other informants agree, saying that the Turkish police and military is often violent against women – especially women who mobilize. Irem says that the government’s and law enforcement’s attitude towards feminist mobilization such as protests, and meetings has worsened and intensified the past three-four years. This is an outlook shared by Alya and Pervin. I meet Alya at the WOW festival in Istanbul on the 19th of April 2022. The festival has brought different feminist and LGBTQ+ organizations under

one roof. They offer information, pamphlets, and merchandise. For example, one organization supports local female artists by selling their art. Alya and I take a seat. I say that the atmosphere on the festival is really nice and that it's very different from March 8th. Alya informs that the women's march on March 8th has been accruing since 2002 and was not resisted by the state up until 2019. It is just in recent years that the march has been banned which have entailed police violence and arrests, she elaborates. For example, the metal barricades and the size of the police force deterrent to stop the march has increased, Alya and Nerin informs. For the first time, in 2022, the feminists could not force through the police and barricades to reach Taksim Square which is the place intended for the march, Alya says. She also says that a few years back she was comfortable bringing her then 3-year-old son to the march. This year, she didn't dare to bring him - "It was too dangerous. We had gas sprayed around us, we had the police violence". In this dissertation, I argue that this reflects increasing state resistance which contrasts with the early years of AKP rule. The perception of increasing state resistance is supported by Pervin's description,

For the past three years we have tried to come together on a specific street and this year was highly different because in the previous years they had some barricades and said we cannot meet there but we somehow did. So, they kind of allowed it at some point. But this year there was a very strong position to like not allow this march.

When reflecting on why the police attack feminist demonstrations, Zeynep says it's because the state think that the feminist is anti-regime and threatening the family values so strongly incorporated in Turkish society. This is supported by Tuba who says that feminist mobilization and especially demonstrations are very powerful. Hence, it threatens the governments and law enforcements "ego and status". "When people are out on the streets, the police and authorities are the first ones that would feel you know... afraid of it", she elaborates. She also says that demonstrations are a "movement building tactic" and as the movement grows, the more threatening to the system they become. That's why, Tuba says,

The system, and the police especially in Turkey, has made it a battle of the sexes when it's not a battle of the sexes. It's literally one group of people asking you to change the law so that we feel protected and safe.

Damla reasons in a similar way saying,

they actually see the feminist movement as the number one enemy because it is actually the most effective and resilient opposition existing in Turkey, so they are afraid of women and what they are capable of.

Irem state that people in Turkey, including feminists, have a constitutional right to demonstrate. Freedom of assembly is safeguarded by the Article 34 of the Constitution which state “Everyone has the right to hold unarmed and peaceful meetings and demonstration marches without prior permission”. Additionally, in 1983, Turkey adopted law 2911/Law on Meetings and Demonstrations which state that “real or judicial persons” has the right to demonstrate “to enlighten people and to create public opinion” (Terdjman & Cosmos, 2013, 3). Hence, when demonstrating, the feminists are mobilizing law which scholars such as Burstein (1991, 1201) recognizes as a social movement tactic. Unfortunately, it is not that simple to claim ones right for demonstrations in Turkey. The implementation of law 2911 is regulated by law 2559/Duties and Discretion of the Police, law 3713/The Prevention of Terrorism Acts and law 5326/ Misdemeanours. These secondary legislations contradict international standards as they,

establish arbitrary limitations like execution of the notification obligation in the form of permission or granting police forces with excessive use of power or delegating governors’ the authority to decide whether the protest is lawful or not before the free exercise of the freedom of assembly.

This is in line with Cunningham’s and Light’s (2007, 1) argument, “as dominant groups possess control over social institutions, policies and practices will favour the interests of these groups”. An example are the arrests made on International Women’s Day. At least 38 women were arrested on this day 2022, and the year before, the police arrested 17 women. When asked if these women were/will be prosecuted, Irem answers “Women are not being prosecuted for being feminists obviously, but they are being prosecuted for organising a political gathering or even some of them for being terrorists”. Hence, even though the state through constitution and law 2911 opens for demonstrations for advancing women’s right claims, the current government use secondary legislation to counteract in form av authoritarian practices such as violence.

Manipulation of information

Manipulation of information is a form of authoritarian practice (Guriev & Treisman, 2019, 123; Chen & Xu, 2015, 163). One way to manipulate information is through propaganda¹⁰ (Chen & Xu, 2015, 163). During his time in office, Erdoğan has made several public comments on feminists. Zeynep refers to the recent speech by Erdoğan where he said that feminists are “the enemy of the nation, the enemy of the azan, the enemy of the land, and the enemy of the state” (Cohen, 2019). He has also said that feminists reject motherhood, and that he wants to re-label “International women’s day” to “International Childbirth Day” (Stelinvorth, 2012). Furthermore, as mentioned in previous sections, the state continuously refers to feminist activities and organizations as “unlawful” and “immoral”. As expressed by Ehrhart (2022) “Under Erdoğan’s rule... Turkey has been waging a war against feminist voices and gender equality”. Most of my informants describe a discursive battle between AKP and the feminist movement concerning the terms “gender” and “equality”. AKP are trying to replace the term equality with “justice”, Damla explains. “The pro-government women’s organizations that are established by the women of the government or pro-AKP women, they’re trying to replace gender inequality with gender injustice”, she states. Justice relates to traditional Islamic culture, Damla explains, which is also mentioned by, among others, Hascall (2011, 38). To treat someone just are highly different from treating someone equal, Damla argues. The practical effect of this is that men isn’t really

opening up the space for her where she can exist as an individual in the public sphere, on equal terms with men and it is another way of really keeping the women in the domestic sphere because this goes parallel with conservative family policies.

On a similar note, Pervin says that the government uses the term “gender” as a way to explain what they refer to as biological differences which by their point of view means that there can’t be gender equality, only justice. Damla states that inequality requires state action as the state is responsible for eradicating inequalities – “it doesn’t really promise to deliver justice, but it has to be able to treat its citizens equally”. Pervin also emphasises on the issue of naming and defining violence.

¹⁰ the dissemination of information—facts, arguments, rumours, half-truths, or lies—to influence public opinion (Sebastian, 2018)

“When we look at the discourses on the state level, they do not take violence as a problem regarding the inequalities between men and women”, she explains. In practice, this means that combating violence against women is limited to “protecting women” which is a reactive tactic, Pervin argues. By not acknowledging and combating inequality, which is the main source of the violence, the government fails to be proactive, she elaborates. “It is not only about protection but about prevention as well”, she concludes. Tuba interprets the government’s efforts to change the discourse in order to “create and construct their own discourse and legal terms of what women’s right should be”.

The Turkish state use media to spread propaganda, several informants inform. For instance, the government have banned several Kurdish media stations, and they control most of mass media. This is the sort of authoritarian practice that Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956, 10) emphasize on – the usage of media for social dominance. Social dominance relates to social control and “refers to situations in which an individual or a group control or dictates others' behaviour, primarily in competitive situations” (Ligneul & Dreher, 2017, 211). Politics in Turkey seems like a highly competitive situation, and AKP use propaganda through media to denigrate their opponents.

Another way of manipulating information is censorship (Guriev & Treisman, 2019, 123). In similarity with having freedom to assembly by constitution, people in Turkey have freedom of speech (Terdjman & Cosmos, 2013, 3). The constitution state “Everyone has the right to express and spread his/her thoughts and opinions, individually or collectively, with verbal, written, visual or other means” (Terdjman & Cosmos, 2013, 3). However, Tuba points out that “freedom of speech has become censored”. Irem supports this statement by saying, “women get killed, arrested and censored for standing up for what they believe in”. One way I noticed censorship was when looking for articles on the lawsuit of We Will Stop Femicides Platform Turkey. I hardly found any, and the articles that was sent to me was not accessible while I was in Turkey.

Online mobilization

The internet is an important tool as online mobilization is another tactic to advance the women's right claim of ending violence against women. Several informants highlight how feminists are raising awareness of women's rights and violence against women in Turkey through online solutions such as social media. Pervin also informs that Mor Cati has started a podcast which at the time of our interview has published eight episodes. These episodes have focused on women's legal protection, how violence against women affects children and how violence is named. According to Wang and Liu (2020, 678), feminists operating in authoritarian contexts often use online solutions to "carve out a public space to confront the frontstage and backstage of the state's performance in order to pursue collective action". Wang and Liu (2020, 678) refer to online mobilization as "artivism" used to expose "the state's illegal or repressive backstage actions or promoting alternative values and norms different from the official ideology". Artivism has according to Wang and Liu (2020, 678) been important to Chinese feminist activists who "have been able to gain momentum and public support". But, not without costs as "it was precisely the success of their artivism that contributed to the government crackdowns on both feminists and lawyers in 2015" (Wang & Liu, 2020, 678) – a similar action now taken by the Turkish authorities as for example attempting to close feminist organizations. A positive outcome of going online, however, is that the information reaches more people and younger people who by becoming more aware can more easily identify as feminists and be part of the socio-legal change, Zeynep explains. That more people call themselves feminists in Turkey and that more women dare to claim their rights is an outlook shared by almost all informants – "all the sacrifices has given result", Zerah says. Damla agrees. She says that the general public's support for the movement becomes greater and greater – "even people not identifying as feminists has come to support the feminist movement as the inequality and oppression from the government becomes more and more apparent".

Political centralism

An established authoritarian feature that Furio (2017, 17) describes as "non-acceptance of conflict and plurality as normal elements of politics", and that I would

like to call political centralism, is practiced in Turkey. This is especially prevalent in the government's attempt to exclude Kurdish politicians and parties (see, for example, Bayir, 2016). It is also something that both my Kurdish- and non-Kurdish informants describe. Hence, AKP's authoritarian practices of political centralism, I argue, relates to the legitimizing myths of ethnic prejudices and nationalism. For example, Damla says that AKP continuously attempt to ban Kurdish parties and prevent Kurdish political influence. She also says that she doesn't think the Kurdish parties want to be a solely ruling party, they just want political space to claim their rights. Zerah says that during her political carrier, she and her co-workers enforced a lot of positive changes for women in their region in south-east Turkey. They opened more women shelters, more day cares and created more job opportunities for women. However, the Turkish politicians arrested her and her co-workers in 2015, forcing them to leave their positions in the party. When asked if any political party have a feminist agenda, almost every informant answer the Kurdish party HDP. As of 2014, all political positions within the largest Kurdish parties should be divided equally between men and women, Zerah explains. Both she and Didem describes how every Kurdish political organization has two leaders – one man and one woman. An idea that other informants, as for example Alya, find positive. Alya say that this structure truly display equality. Pervin is also positive to HDP, saying that it's a grassroots movement that has developed into a political party which has kept them aligned with the feminist movement.

Legal mobilization

Another tactic to advance the women's right claim of ending violence against women is through legal mobilization. "Law is something you need to mobilize. You need to push it", Damla says. She elaborates, "you need to really own your rights and ask for it and claim for it and pursue it, especially in a social context like Turkey". Alya agrees saying, "you have to force the law, for example law 6284 for it to be implemented". In different ways, they express a desire "translated into a demand as an assertion of one's rights," which is Zeman's (1983, 700) definition of legal mobilization.

An important feminist landmark is the ruling in the case of *Opuz vs Turkey*, outlined in chapter 2.2.

This is the first time the court find a state responsible for not preventing violence against women... Turkey is the first country who have been sentenced because it failed to protect women from violence, Damla explains.

She says that the ruling opened a conversation on the states responsibility to protect women from violence which paved the way for the Istanbul convention. Damla describes how the feminists in Turkey reached out to “international scholars and colleagues and said now we have to have an international framework which is going to outline the responsibilities of the states”. Hence, the ratification of the Istanbul convention was a result of international feminist legal mobilization. The negative effects of the withdrawal from the convention have already shown. Didem, Ecrin and Tuba say that more women have “disappeared” after the decision to withdraw and Nerin says that the femicide rate is higher than ever. Zerah says that since the withdrawal, violence against women is escalating and that the attitude towards victims is more hostile. Zeynep believe that it is necessary for Turkey to re-enter the Istanbul convention to improve the legal framework of violence against women. She emphasizes that Turkey needs to adhere to international standards, both in order to improve and in order to wash away the “demonized” and conservative image of the country in an international context. Pervin says that the withdrawal meant that feminists lost their “reference point”. She explains that when the needs of women weren’t met by the national legal framework, feminists could invoke the Istanbul convention. ” We were kind of pushing the mechanisms and referring to Istanbul convention and forcing them that you should do this because it is in the convention”, she elaborates.

Another way that feminists try to mobilize law is by supporting women that has been subjected to violence in their legal processes. For example, feminist organizations often attend court hearings in cases of violence against women. Damla calls this “feminist trial monitoring activities” to ensure “that the judicial process is working properly”. Damla continues,

they're pushing the courts, both the decisions and procedure. They are trying to improve the judicial procedure for the victim and their families... that's also a very significant dimension of feminist legal mobilization in Turkey.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

To summarize and conclude this thesis, I will provide answers to the research questions.

- *What legitimizing myths and authoritarian practices can be found in contemporary Turkey?*

Drawing from the stories from my informants, I have identified five legitimizing myths in the Turkish political- and socio-legal domains: sexism, ethnic prejudice, nationalism, political-economic conservatism and family values. These legitimizing myths are stabilizing oppression and gender based power imbalance. This is shown in a social context by, for example, daughters being raised differently than sons, and through the idea of women belonging in the private sphere, first and foremost being wives and mothers. It is also shown in a legal context through, for example, verdicts, and the biased behaviour from legal institutions such as the courts and the police.

As established in the introduction and throughout this thesis, Erdoğan's rule has become increasingly authoritarian. The authoritarian practices that I have identified in this study are state/police violence, manipulation of information and political centralism, which all can be viewed as institutional discrimination. State/police violence is a part of the intensifying crackdowns on feminist mobilization against violence, and are particularly visible during demonstrations. Manipulation of information is shown in different ways, for example, through propaganda and censorship. Political centralism is in practice shown, for example, through the arrests of political opposers such as the Kurdish politicians. Furthermore, there are evidence to suggest that AKP are trying to create state feminism to control the feminist agenda which also could be viewed as an authoritarian practice.

- *How do these identified myths and practices affect the issue of violence against women according to secular Turkish-, Kurdish-, and Islamic feminists?*

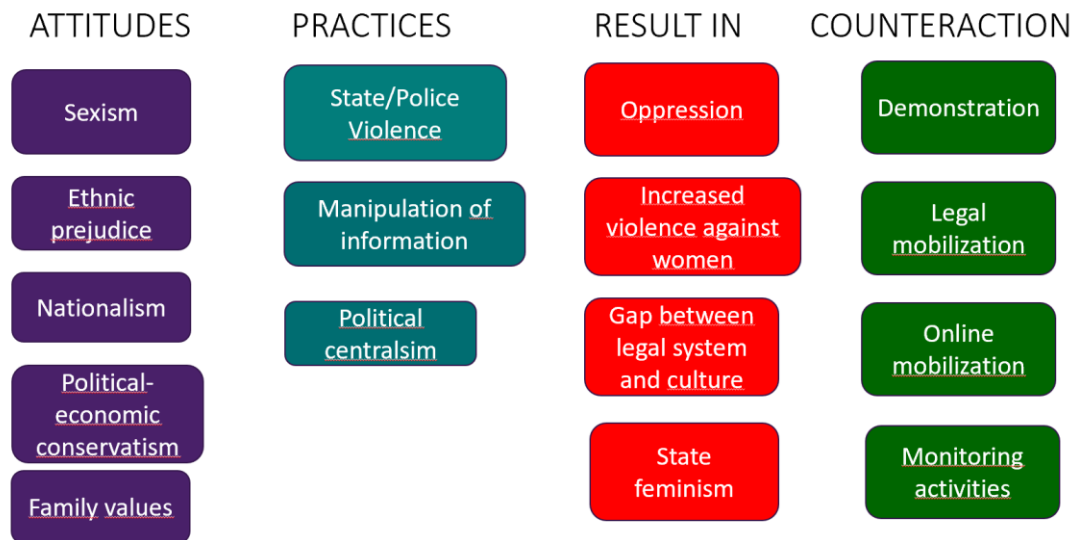
Some of the consequences of the identified legitimizing myths and authoritarian practices on the issue of violence against women are the relaxation amongst private and public offenders to subject women to violence, that more women are subjected to different forms of violence and that there is a general mistrust amongst women towards Turkey's legal institutions. This is shown in, for example, the increasing numbers of femicides (according to my informants and monthly NGO reports), and the tendency of women not reporting violence to the police. Some legitimizing myths and authoritarian practices, such as ethnic prejudice and political centralism, make Kurdish feminists a particularly vulnerable group, and they seem to be subjected to a higher level of especially state/police violence. Also, as argued in section 5.3, legitimizing myths contributes to an identified gap between the Turkish legal system and legal culture which entails, for instance, implementation issues of especially law 6284.

- How do secular Turkish-, Kurdish-, and Islamic feminists counteract the identified legitimizing myths and authoritarian practices to advance their claim of ending violence against women?

To counteract the identified legitimizing myths and authoritarian practices, secular Turkish-, Kurdish-, and Islamic feminists are developing and using different strategies to advance their claim of ending violence against women. The strategies that I have identified in this study are demonstrations, online mobilization and legal mobilization. The feminist movement, with its different strands, are marching the streets and shouting slogans. They also use online solutions such as social media and podcasts to spread information and awareness. Furthermore, they mobilize law by, for example, using their constitutional right and law 2911/Law on Meetings and Demonstrations, to create public opinion. They also mobilize law by trying to enforce law 6284 in cases of violence against women by, for example, monitoring court hearings. Even though the conditions are harsh, the feminists are quite successful in creating public opinion. More people are supporting them, and hopefully, in the long term, they will reverse the current trend of increasing violence, and successfully eradicate violence against women in Turkey.

Illustration of findings:

To provide an easy overview of my findings, I have created an overall illustration:



Chapter 7. Suggestion for further research

During our interview, Damla repeatedly lamented the general lack of research and empirical data on feminism and violence against women in Turkey. She also highlighted the importance of conducting research through a socio-legal lens. This chapter will suggest three topics relevant for further research.

After my opposition of this thesis on the 18th of May 2022, Ehrhart (2022), published an article through Open Democracy where she identifies similar findings. For example, Ehrhart (2022) concludes that “government-controlled women's organisations in Turkey are undermining genuine feminist organisations in the country” and “the Turkish leadership under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan strategically uses women’s organisations that it funds and controls – so-called ‘women-GONGOs’ – in order to mimic and undermine feminist groups”. This is line with my argumentation, that Erdoğan are creating state feminism through pro-AKP women activists, in order to control and dictate the feminist arena in Turkey. Hence, further research on the means used to create state feminism, and the

independent feminist movement's resistance towards it would be an interesting approach.

Furthermore, I have found that Kurdish feminist are a particularly vulnerable group due their ethnicity and interest for gender equality. This double vulnerability would be interesting to further research through a targeted study on the Kurdish feminist movement. To be completely transparent, that was one of my initial thoughts for this study but due to issues of reaching enough Kurdish informants, and the identified gap of cross-feminist-studies on violence against women, I decided on the outlined approach. My hope is that, through the advancement of my academical carrier, and more intersectional work to show for, I will have it easier to access the field and conduct research stemming from a Kurdish, feminist perspective.

Lastly, as identified in this thesis, a large problem considering violence against women in Turkey is implementation issues of Law 6284/Protection of family and violence against women. The causes and results of these implementation issues needs further investigation. Hence, it would be interesting to conduct further research guided through questions as, for example, "How do Turkish courts and legal actors reproduce conservative, patriarchal ideals, as produced by AKP, in cases of violence against women?", and/or "How do Turkish courts construct the 'ideal victim' in cases of violence against women, and what socio-legal effects does this have?".

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Appendix 1.

Dear Madams

My name is Sofie Karlsson and I'm a 29-year-old master student at Lund University, Sweden. My major is sociology of law, and I will be writing my master thesis this spring about the Turkish feminist movement and violence against women. The reason why I'm contacting you is because I admire your work and would love to learn more. I'm wondering if you have any representatives who would be willing to participate in an interview sometime between w. 12-19 2022? If not possible to conduct interviews by meeting in person, then via Zoom, Skype or Teams.

The interviews will be fully anonymous and will only be used for academical purposes. All ethical considerations will be presented beforehand. It will adhere to the Swedish Science Councils recommendations.

A little more about me, I have a bachelor's degree in behaviour science and criminology. In addition, I have studied gender equality and middle eastern studies. My bachelor thesis was regarding a women's organization and their protests against VAW in Sweden. I'm happy to provide any other information you need.

I need a contact person at your organization who is interested in helping me by participating in an interview and/or put me in contact with other people who are willing to participate in interviews. Please let me know if you are interested and do not hesitate to ask if you have any questions

I'm looking forward to your response on my request.

Size şimdiden teşekkür ederek,
Sofie Karlsson

Appendix 2.

Background

Can you describe organization X a bit? (X= the organization the informant is associated with)

What is your role at organization X?

What is the greatest accomplishments of organizations X so far?

How did you become a feminist?

Or

What kind of law do you specialize/take special interest in?

What are some of your greatest accomplishments as a lawyer so far?

Are you associated with any feminist organizations and if so, how do you collaborate?

How did you become a feminist?

Or

What made you interested in gender and law?

How long have you've been a professor of gender and law?

Feminism

How would you describe feminism in Turkey today? (follow up: generational differences?)

What would you say are the main objectives of feminism in Turkey right now?

What are the greatest challenges of being feminist in Turkey today?

How is feminist mobilization (for example meetings, protests, using social media) received by Turkish law enforcement?

How does your organization mobilize for legal reform? (Maybe clarify: what means do you use?)

How would you say that the current Turkish government works with feminist issues such as violence against women? (follow up if appropriate: do you feel that feminist issues are prioritized, in what ways/why not?)

Has your organization had any campaigns and if so, can you please tell me about them?

What kind of words and symbols are used in feminists' mobilization (or by your organization)? (slogans?)

What does the colour purple mean to the feminist movement in Turkey? (follow up: only used by secular feminists or all feminist in Turkey?)

Does any political party have a clear feminist agenda? If so, which and can you tell me more about it?

How does Islamic feminism work with the issue of violence against women?

What differs Islamic feminism from secular feminism?

What does Islamic feminism and secular feminism have in common?

Does Islamic feminists and secular collaborate and if so, in which ways?

How is the relationship between Turkish and Kurdish feminists?

Violence against women

How would say women in Turkey experience violence?

How is the situation regarding violence against women in Turkey right now?

Has the withdrawal from the Istanbul convention affected the situation for women in Turkey? If so, in which way?

What are your thoughts on Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul convention?

How has the situation regarding violence against women in Turkey changed during the past 5 years?

What key factors would you say contribute to violence against women in Turkey? (ex: societal, political)

What would you say are the biggest obstacles for reducing violence against women in Turkey?

What needs to happen in order to reduce violence against women?

Legal framework

I've heard that the Council of the State has criticised the decision to withdraw from the Istanbul convention, do you have any information about this and if so, can you please tell me more about it and what this means going forward?

How would describe the Turkish legal system?

How would you describe the Turkish law enforcement?

(If applicable) What are your experiences of the Turkish legal system?

Do women have the same access as men to the legal system in Turkey? (if not: how is it unequal?)

Do Kurdish women have the access as non-Kurdish women to the legal system in Turkey? (if not: how is it unequal?)

How are female victim of violence treated in Turkish courts?

Is it possible to prosecute policemen for violence? If yes: do you have any examples of when this has happened? If no: why is that?

What are your thoughts about law no 6284? (possible follow-up: is it clear?, is it useful? Is it well implemented)

How can the law(s) concerning violence against women improve in Turkey?

Do you know any current high profiled cases involving violence against women or feminist organizations that you can tell me about?

End Question

Is there anything on the topics of feminism and violence against women that you would like to add?