

Women and Local Democracy in Turkey

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Abstract. This study focuses on the role of women's civil society organizations in developing women's participation in political activities at a local level in Turkey. Based upon an empirical study conducted on ten women's organizations in Istanbul, it tries to answer the following questions: "to what extent are women's organizations influencing the political agenda at the local level and how active are they in the area of social responsibility?" The article finds that due to the existence of barriers between civil society and local governments, and the unwillingness of local governments to have close relations with civil society organizations, women's civil society organizations are not active enough to dominate the agenda of local politics. However, they seem to show a considerable success in involving themselves in the area of social responsibility.

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1. Local Democracy and Political Participation¹

As is well known modern democracies are based upon representative mechanisms and political parties are the driving powers of these systems. Alternative groups, programs and projects come to power through political parties (Sartori, 1976). Political parties, as nationwide organizations, not

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only bring alternative programs to power but also constitute a fundamental medium for political participation. However, it is clear that elections held once every four or five years do not seem to be enough for thorough democratic participation. It is important to note that participation has clearly been realized as a result of the active capacity of citizens who wish to influence the decision-making process on the one hand and the effectiveness of the political and administrative systems on the other (Dahl, 1994). As M. Margaret Conway (1991: 2-3) argues, the level of participation in a society is not dependent on the performance of social groups or citizens alone, but on the nature of political and administrative systems as well. The plural structure of the political system and the participatory mechanisms of the administrative system have allowed the groundwork for participation to be laid.

Thanks to the development of civil society organizations and the allocation of power to local governments, political participation has gained great impetus in well-developed democracies. It should be noted that if one part of modern democracy is related to “values” such as freedom and equality, another part is closely related to “participation”. As far as such concepts as local democracy and participatory democracy are concerned political participation becomes a substantial value of modern democracy. This is perhaps the reason why Carole Pateman (1970: 14) aptly comments that “democracy means participation and participation means democracy”. Active participation transforms dependent individuals into free citizens, as stated in Benjamin Barber’s (1984) *Strong Democracy*, and brings the political system under the control of social groups in particular, and society in general. Active participation clearly leads the way to the effective working of the system through the services it develops for society (Easton, 1988).

It is well known that a number of different methods have been developed in the world serving both active and dynamic participation over the course of the last few decades. Some of the most prominent tools that can be mentioned in this regard are referendums, people’s meetings, direct participation, consultative committees, urban councils, planning forums, citizens committees, round-table meetings and public surveys. It should be noted that social and political participation are not solely matters of legal regulations, as has been put forward by Almond and Verba (1963), but are also a matter of political culture. In other words, the desire of citizens to participate and influence administrative bodies seems to be as important as legal regulations. In this respect, it is important to refer to a study done by Milbarth and Goel (1977: 10-24) at the level of interest of citizens in

politics. They classify citizens into three groups according to their interest in politics: active participants, passive supporters, and apathetics. One can say that the function of legal regulation is to create a suitable ground for participation, but it is the performance of the political culture of society that stimulates participation or any other activity related to it.

It can be said that the three mediums that serve participation in democratic societies are political parties, social movements and local governments (Powell, 1982). It is worth noting here that local governments have taken a central place in political participation over the course of the last few decades. In particular local democracy and governance came to be discussed more intensively following fundamental local reforms made in the local governments in France in the 1990s (Yıldırım, 1993: 64-67). Since local governments are the closest organizations to citizens they form a ground for citizens to participate in their activities directly. Perhaps this is one of the important reasons behind the subsidiarity principle accepted by the European Union in the production of public services (Görmez, 1997: 68). One needs to remember that local government reforms have been made worldwide, particularly in European countries such as Germany, France and England beginning in the early 1990s. The reforms made in these countries have led to a shift from the classic understanding of government to what is now known as governance, in other words, the inclusion of social groups in decision-making processes at the local level (Peters, 2000: 29-57).

Given the dissemination of the principle of governance in the democratic world, cities have received great importance on the basis of the fact that they constitute the ground for local governance. One should remember that the locations of what is known as “local politics” are cities (Keleş, 1999: 99-121). The educational, cultural and artistic dynamics provided by urban life support the development of a suitable environment for the increase in the level of interest in participation. The participation that can be seen in urban life is mostly carried out by the civil society groups since they have been organized in these areas. It is clear that the principle of governance requires the existence of suitable platforms such as urban councils on the one hand, and the existence of civil society groups desiring to deal with political issues on the other (Çukurçayır, 2008: 23-33).

The question under discussion here is the importance and role of local democracy and local participation for women. In other words, local politics seems to be a more appropriate way for women to be involved in politics. Two mechanisms can be underlined in this respect: women’s effectiveness in the determination of local agendas and their representation in local assemblies. As far as local democracy is concerned the

representation of women in local assemblies seems to be a better indicator of their performance than their representation in national parliaments due to the fact that women's access to local assemblies seems, as a general rule, more difficult than their access to national parliaments. Particularly in countries like Turkey, where democracy faces the problem of consolidation, the competition among political parties and candidates in local elections is stronger than in national elections.

As far as we know, the dynamics in local elections are fundamentally different from those in general elections. As argued by Arend Lijphard the discourses, ideologies and programs of political parties are the prominent factors that play a role in general elections (Lijphard, 1984: 127-149). However, the charisma of the candidates for municipal presidency, the performance of the local branches of political parties, the informal relations between parties and voters at the local level, the commitments made to the voters and the performance of political parties in other local governments are all major factors that play a role in local elections. The competition among political parties or candidates seems to be more challenging and fiery in local elections than in general elections. Therefore a high representation of women in local democracy indicates the success of their performance. Furthermore, it indicates the social dynamism of women and their interest in politics at the grassroots level.

Thanks to the allocation of power to local governments, the existence of decentralized administrative structures and local governments that are stronger than central administrative bodies women in well-developed democracies, particularly in the EU countries, are more active in local governments than in national parliaments (Committee of Regions, 1999). This is perhaps because of the determination of politics at the local level and of mechanisms such as quotas in some countries that give way to the representation of women in both national and local assemblies. However, in Turkey, the picture of women's representation in that respect does not seem to be as positive. As table 1 in the appendix indicates, in the last five local elections which were held after the 1980 military intervention, the average ratio of women that were elected to provincial and municipal assemblies has been around one percent. Over the course of the last two decades the total number of women elected as mayors seems to be even less (Sayın, 2007: 14). One can say that, not only women, but also male-dominated political parties and the patriarchal culture are responsible for the picture seen in the table mentioned above.

2. Turkish Administrative Structure and Local Governance

The classical Ottoman administrative system was based on a rigid centralized administrative structure (Heper, 2009). The modernization attempts that started in the nineteenth century envisaged a change in the social and political structure from the top down and were eventually realized. A fundamental part of the radical reforms held in the nineteenth century concerned the administrative formation of the time. The Province Act of 1864 was an important step in this respect as it initiated a new understanding of local governments in the Ottoman Empire and it divided Ottoman lands into provinces (*vilayet*), districts (*kaza*) and villages (*köy*). Just a few years after this a new regulation, named the General Administration of Provincial Order, initiated to some extent the modern understanding of local governments in the Ottoman lands. The most prominent product of this regulation was the establishment of the provincial assemblies in the provinces (Eryılmaz, 2000: 179). A further revision of this regulation was done in 1913 and structured the Special Provincial Administration as the chief administrative body at the provincial level (Sunay, 2008).

The Municipality Law enacted in 1930 by the Republic, which was established in 1923, was based on a regulation from 1913 and further strengthened the centralized administrative structure. The Municipality Law envisaged the establishment of two assemblies at the provincial level, the Provincial Special Assembly and the Municipal Assembly. The Provincial Special Assembly, headed by the appointed governor, was responsible for all of the provincial lands including dependent districts and villages, and the Municipal Assembly was responsible for the center of the province only. According to this law the provincial administration was composed of governors appointed by the center and municipalities headed by elected mayors. But the elected mayors were dependent on the appointed governors in several ways.

In practice, this structure of local governments caused fundamental problems right up until the 2000s. The essential problems were that local governments had limited authority vis-à-vis the central authority and that they were not open enough to the participation of citizens at the local level because of their rigid and closed working structure. This gave way to inefficient and ineffective local public services (Saran, 2004: 111-121). The local governments had no authority in the employment of officials and in utilizing any planning which concerned the areas they ruled. What they were supposed to do was defined by the center and all non-defined activities were left to the central administration. This means that the central administration

had infinite authority, leaving local governments with very limited power at the local level. Local governments were also missing the principles of accountability, participation and transparency, owing to the absence of structures which would force them to do so. This eventually limited the interest and participation of local residents in local governments for a long time (Çaha and others, 2004).

The Helsinki Summit of 1999, which granted Turkey candidate status for membership to the EU under the condition that it followed the given roadmap until 2004, initiated a new page in respect to the administrative structure in Turkey. The reforms made under this roadmap prepared new ground for participation at both national and local levels (Arikboğat, 2007). Some of the laws enacted include the Association Law, the Law to get Information from Public Offices, the Law for Petition Rights and the Foundation Law. These regulations paved the way for the participation of civil society in the decision-making process on the one hand, and made the state work in a more transparent way on the other. It appears that the Association Law, in particular, was a new junction for supporting the development of civil society. It abolished previously existing formalities which resulted in removing the demotivation felt by social groups in establishing associations. However, the new law has given a chance for every sort of association to be established as long as they are not conducting violent activities. It has also banned the previously existing restrictions for associations to cooperate with international organizations (Act No 5253, 2004).

The government has also made fundamental reforms in the local governments. Three laws enacted in this regard in 2004 were the Special Provincial Administration Law, the Metropolitan Municipality Law, and the Municipality Law. It can be said that the regulations coming through these acts have prepared the ground for governance at the local level, in order to bring about greater “local democracy” (Kaya, 2006; *Kamuda Sosyal Politika*, 2007). The special provincial administrations were previously symbolic administrative units which assembled only once a year under the direction of the appointed governor, however new regulation makes them more independent from the governor and gives them a chance to make any decision about the provincial problems through General Provincial Assemblies. All decisions on issues concerning the provinces are now made by the provincial assemblies. These assemblies have authority to elect their speakers and determine their own agendas through meetings which are held monthly. The Special Provincial Law has changed the unequal balance between central and local governments. It limits the authority of central

government at the local level in two ways: firstly it restricts its activities to strictly defined areas and secondly it connects all local branches to the provincial administration. Thus the provincial administrations are the chief decision making bodies in the provinces. This created a new balance between the central and local administrations on behalf of local governments. One can clearly see that the new forms of the provincial administrations are in conformity with the subsidiarity principle which is recognized as a standard for local governments in the Maastricht principles.

A potentially important renewal coming through these reforms, in regard to the topic under discussion, is that civil society organizations, universities, chambers, and representatives of business associations have been given a chance to participate in the meetings of the provincial assemblies. It must be noted that these organizations have no right to vote in the assemblies but they can express their opinions and discuss any suggestion brought by the local authorities in the meetings of the assemblies.

One can clearly say that the foundation for local governance has been formed, in Turkey, through “urban councils” which were established by the Municipality Law of 2004. Urban councils are made up of the chief administrative units of the cities, either in provinces or in districts, and civil society organizations. Those who have the right to take a seat in urban councils, through representatives, are institutions such as the highest administrative bodies of the city, municipalities, local branches of political parties, universities, chambers, labor unions, business associations, different elements of civil society and deputies elected from the relevant cities (Regulation, 2006). The urban councils are given the role of developing an urban vision which aims to provide sustainable development in the city, to develop sensitivity to the environment and to promote social assistance and solidarity in urban life. The relevant law strictly defines that the urban councils are the decisive units determining the fate of cities and working under the principles of accountability, participation, transparency and subsidiarity (Act No 5272, 2004).

The decisions made by the urban councils are supposed to be placed on the agenda of the first meeting of the municipal assemblies. It is clear that civil society organizations are participating in local decisions in this way. One can say that the participation of citizens in local decisions through urban councils seems to be a fundamental reform in Turkish politics. This will help the development of local democracy in Turkey (Şentürk, 2007: 34-36). We can expect that this reform will lead to the development of volunteering and participation in the local governments. In other words, urban inhabitants will be more aware of as well as more eager to solve local problems. The control

of citizens over government agendas will be possible also by means of the ombudsman system which the government has been intending to establish since 2006. The Institution of Public Control, which the government also plans to set up as part of this system, will check if the work of the administrative system coincides with the principles of human rights, the rule of law and fairness (Özden, 2007).

3. Women and Political Participation in Turkey

Feeling indebted to the Republic regime, which gave equal legal and political status to Turkish women in 1920s, well-educated and professional women acted loyally towards this regime and its secular system until the 1980s. The Kemalist understanding of modernization, during the Republican regime, has been based upon the notion of a uniform public sphere (Köker, 1990). In creating such a public sphere the Kemalist elite gave well-educated and professional women a special mission. Therefore, any particular interest in implying disassociation from Kemalist identity, in the name of women, was not welcomed until the 1980s. But the liberalization of Turkey and an increase in the level of educational and communication networks after the 1980s have made it possible for different social groups to represent themselves in public life with claims on special rights and identities (Göle, 1994). One of the most active of these groups is feminists who have placed their stamp on the cultural values and legal norms of Turkish society in the aftermath of the 1980s. They made the Turkish public hear their voice in the public domain, declaring their disassociation from Kemalism or any other ideology such as socialism. They then took to the streets making use of original and creative activities after the mid-1980s. The struggle started by feminist groups on behalf of women has made the women in other social groups, such as Kemalists, Islamists, Kurdists or leftists, pay attention to women's issues experienced by women in Turkey through their own ideologies (Çaha, 2007). Each of these groups has focused on women's problems from their own points of view.

Feminist groups have focused on the issues of the right to abortion, divorce on demand, the elimination of violence against women, permission to stay longer at home for working women during pregnancy, the elimination of discrimination against women, increasing the level of women's participation in politics and the punishment of harassment of women either at home or in the public domain. Islamic women have struggled to get the right of attending schools and working in public offices with their own style of dress (Özdalga, 2006). Likewise, the Kurdish feminist groups emerging

after the mid-1990s have voiced a discourse of double identity, referring to the mixture of their gender and ethnic identities. They disassociate themselves from both Turkish feminist groups and the Kurdish ethnic movement (Kutluata, 2003; Açıık, 2002). Kemalist women's groups have, on the other hand, spent their energy passionately disseminating what they call "contemporary values" among Turkish women (Arat, 2000). Although each of these groups stress women's issues from their own viewpoint it is worth noting that they all agree on some common values concerning women's problems. Issues such as the schooling of female students, equal legal norms, elimination of violence against women and the honor crimes seen in the rural areas of Turkey and the low representation of women in the parliament are some of the areas where all the women's groups have reached a consensus.

Today, it is estimated that more than one thousand women's organizations struggle for the rights of women at national and local levels around the country. Şirin Tekeli, a prominent leader of the Turkish feminist movement, claims that women's organizations direct more than half a million women in Turkey in the struggle for the rights of women (Tekeli, 2004). It is evident that in addition to feminist women's organizations, a large number of women's groups, organized under the roof of political parties, chambers, business associations, universities and local governments, are vigorously working for the improvement of women's rights and are struggling against the problems women face at the local level in Turkey.

Since the 1980s, women's groups have succeeded in improving the rights and status of women in different areas. The Turkish government signed the CEDAW, the declaration of women's rights, in 1985 under the pressure of women's groups. The Turkish parliament has likewise revised the constitution as well as the civil and penal codes within the framework of an egalitarian outlook. In particular the new civil code, enacted in November 2001, seems to be a fundamental reference for the equality of women. It is also an important fact that the enactment of the civil code was accomplished under the pressure of women's groups, carried out either through lobby-based activities or street campaigns. Another regulation in that respect is the Law for the Protection of the Family. Enacted in 1998, this law redefines the family on the basis of equality and takes serious measures against violence against women at home (Gürcan and Özdoğan, 2006: 55-56). It seems that feminist groups have succeeded in drawing the attention of governments to the issue of violence against women at home. This is clearly seen in the Municipality Law of 2004 which necessitates the construction of women's shelters by municipalities with space for more than 50 thousand women who are victims of domestic violence.

It is evident that a fundamental change has taken place on the issue of gender both in academia, in politics and at the grassroots level. It is clear that a woman's outlook has been spread in these areas. A number of TV series and movies, focusing on woman's issues and sensitive to women's problems, are shown on different TV channels, in cinemas and in theatres. Women's problems as a sociological issue have occupied not only the agenda of feminist groups, but also the agenda of political parties, labor unions, the media, universities, business associations and the film industry (Çaha, 2007).

Turkish women have composed of an important part of political parties after the 1990s. One of the political parties motivating women was the, now defunct, Welfare Party which activated millions of women (Eraslan, 2002). This party won the majority in the municipalities of such cities as Ankara and Istanbul with the help of women who went from door to door to circulate the party's ideology. The Welfare Party owed much to the women's branch of the party in the 1995 general elections that gave way to its being the leading party sharing a coalition government. Needless to say, despite the active roles of women within political parties, they have not occupied enough places in the representative and administrative systems of political parties. Unfortunately, only a small number of women are seen in party administration in the Turkish parliament as well as in the provincial and municipal assemblies.

Table 2 in the appendix indicates the place of women during 1935-2007 in the Turkish parliament. As seen in the table, the highest rate of women before 2007 was 4.5 percent in the 1935 general elections. Under the pressures of women's groups, the number of women in parliament reached 50 members, corresponding to 9.1 percent of total chairs in the parliament in the 2007 general elections. It is possible to claim that the pressure from women's groups, the EU negotiation process, women's increasing interest in politics and the egalitarian values developed at the grassroots level have all played a role in the development of this picture (Ka-der).

The place occupied by women in Istanbul's local governments is a fundamental question of this study since it analyzes the role of women's civil society organizations in the representation of women in local assemblies in this city. The picture of women's representation in the metropolitan and district assemblies of Istanbul in the last local election gives us an idea about women's interest in politics here. As seen in Table 3 in the appendix, women's representation in Istanbul seems to be fundamentally higher than the average in Turkey. In particular their ratio in the metropolitan and district municipal assemblies, seems to be nearly three

times more than their average ratio in Turkey. Despite this, unfortunately, there is no women mayor in any district municipality of Istanbul. What role women's organizations play in that respect is an essential question of this study.

4. The Methodology of the Study

This study concentrates on the role of ten women's organizations in increasing women's political participation and in their activities in the area of social responsibility in Istanbul. Three points which were considered in the selection of the organizations studied were their ideological preferences, their organizational levels and their popularity. In respect to the first point, feminism, Kemalism and conservatism have been considered as three ideological preferences. Even though none of these associations can be absolutely identified with only one ideology, we can say that each moves predominantly within the framework of one of these ideological preferences. In regard to the second point the women's associations which this study investigates are the ones that operate at national, provincial or district levels. As to the last criteria, we have chosen 10 women's organizations according to their popularity based on the place they occupy in the Turkish media. One can say that some of these organizations, particularly three feminist organizations, are not only the most popular feminist organizations in Istanbul, but also in Turkey as a whole. The same observation covers conservative organizations as well.

As far as we know, about sixty women's organizations were active in Istanbul when the fieldwork for this study was conducted between July 2007 and April 2008. Ten women's organizations, seen in Table 4 given in the appendix, were selected for study according to the criteria mentioned above. It is noteworthy to remark that each association has a priority in its activity. While some of them give priority to women's rights and discrimination against women, some others give priority to the vocational education for women or to the notion of assistance and solidarity among women.

The data in this study depends on two sources: interviews with two leaders from each organization and content analysis of their publications and websites. Thus 20 female leaders in civil society organizations were interviewed in the course of this study. The attitudes of women's organizations towards political and social participation were analyzed on the basis of their role in increasing the participation of women in local governments and their work in the area of social responsibility. It should be

noted that municipalities, provincial governorships and district administrations are the central actors of local governments in Turkey. Considering this, the study analyzed the relationship of women's organizations with groups such as special provincial administration, the Istanbul metropolitan municipality, the Istanbul governorship, 32 district municipalities and administrations found in Istanbul, branches of political parties, urban councils, local agenda 21, provincial and district units of police association and provincial and district units of national education. In respect to social responsibility, the role of women's organizations in motivating women in the six areas of social responsibility; education of women, health care services for women, protection of the environment, work for the eradication of poverty, the struggle against domestic violence against women, and women's participation in cultural and artistic activities was analyzed.

It is useful to briefly describe Istanbul's administrative structure. Istanbul, which includes about 13 million residents according to the 2009 census, has a provincial assembly whose members are elected from competitive political parties. The metropolitan municipality along with its assembly comes after this. While the provincial assembly is responsible for all administrative issues concerning Istanbul, the metropolitan municipality is chiefly responsible for the municipal issues. The governor of Istanbul is a member of the provincial assembly. However, the metropolitan mayor of the city heads the metropolitan assembly. There are 32 districts in Istanbul and each has its own mayor, municipality, district assembly and district administration.

The women's organizations were singled out for the present study on the basis of their activities not only at the level of provincial administration or metropolitan municipality, but also at the level of relevant districts as well. We have assessed how active they are at the national level as well as at the level of the province and districts of Istanbul. An attempt was made to answer the following questions through this study: what kind of relationship do women's organizations have with local governments; what problems do they face in that respect; to what extent do they encourage their members to deal with politics through political parties; and how active are they in the areas of social responsibility considered in this study?

5. Women's Civil Society Organizations and Participation in Local Government Affairs

As far as relationships between women's organizations and municipalities are concerned we see that women's organizations have no long-term projects in cooperation with municipalities. Particularly where their relations with the metropolitan municipality are concerned this becomes more evident. When the speakers of women's organizations were asked about their relations with the metropolitan municipality, their answers were often "not any more". Sometimes some of these organizations are supported by the metropolitan municipality but they have accomplished almost no long-term projects in cooperation with it (Sargut, 2008; Yılmaz, 2007).

The formal and bureaucratic structure of the metropolitan municipality seems to be a fundamental problem in respect to its relationship with women's organizations. Because of this, women's organizations are not able to reach the relevant authorities and tell them about their projects. This gives way to informal relations between women's organizations and the metropolitan municipality. Those organizations that have informal relations with any person working in a municipality's top position are able to inform him/her about their projects and thus get their support. One should remark that women's organizations are also responsible for the lack of relationships that they have with the metropolitan municipality. Some women's organizations, particularly those who move within the feminist paradigm like Amargi, are principally against any cooperation with public authorities (Esmeray, 2007). Still others, especially those who identify themselves as secular/Kemalist like Umraniye Women's Center (ÜKM) and Gaziosmanpaşa Women's Culture and Solidarity Foundation (GKKDV) are reluctant to cooperate with the metropolitan municipality because they think that it is dominated by a different party and will not support any organization such as theirs (Tırpacı, 2007; Afacan, 2007). The speakers of women's organizations also believe that the metropolitan municipality is not so eager to work in cooperation with them (Kerimoğlu, 2008). The metropolitan municipality gives a widespread service to women in Istanbul by means of its two sub-organizations, namely the Istanbul Women's Coordination Center (*Kadın Koordinasyon Merkezi*) and Art and Vocational Education Courses (*İSMEK*). Since the metropolitan municipality provides services to women directly by means of its own organizations perhaps it has not felt any need to work with other women's organizations in that regard.

When researching the expectations of women's organizations vis-à-vis the metropolitan municipality, it seems that their main demand is for a location for their activities which is a major problem in Istanbul. Moreover,

they demand the establishment of a specialist unit under the metropolitan municipality which is responsible for coordinating with civil society organizations to develop the possibility of having billboards to promote their projects and the opening of shelters by municipalities for women who face violence at home (Lermioğlu, 2008). The interviews with the leaders of women's organizations clearly indicate that there is a major problem in communication with the metropolitan municipality and its sub-units. Both sides seem to be responsible for this. Although the metropolitan municipality has a large budget for activities of civil society organizations it seems that it has not promoted it properly. On the other hand, women's organizations are seen not to be enthusiastic to follow announcements given by the metropolitan municipality pertaining to civil society projects.

It is clear, according to our investigation, that women's organizations have joint works and cooperation with district municipalities more than with the metropolitan municipality because of the bureaucratic reasons pointed out above. The physical closeness to the district municipalities gives women's organizations a chance to communicate with them and submit their projects. It has been observed through this study that the nationwide women's organizations have close connections with the municipalities of small provinces. This indicates, once again, that the bureaucratic structure and the formal relations of the municipalities with civil society groups seem to determine the fortune of relationships between civil society organizations and municipalities in Turkey. In particular, such non-political activities of women's organizations like vocational education, health care services, and assistance and solidarity among women are, for the most part, supported by the district municipalities (Akalm, 2007; Çitil, 2008).

Municipalities seem hesitant to give any support to the activities of women's organizations that have political implications. Perhaps this is the reason why neither metropolitan nor district municipalities are eager to open or give support to the opening of shelters for women. The reason for this is that they perceive demands for women's shelters as a political claim which is standing against the unity of the family. It is important to note that feminist groups are highly receptive to the opening of shelters for women since they believe that violence against women is well-known and common in Turkish families. They demand that shelters be opened by municipalities but should be managed by voluntary organizations such as themselves since they believe that civil society, working voluntarily, is more effective and efficient than municipalities (Arın, 2008; Gülbahar, 2007). An important problem underlined by the leaders of women's organizations in respect to

their relations with the municipalities in general is that, they claim, municipalities are not willing to recognize them as “institutions”, however they have tried to contact the municipalities personally. This is the reason why Hülya Gülbahar (2007), the General Chief of the Association for Support and Education of Women Candidates (Ka-Der), says that “whenever the management of a municipality changes we start to be afraid of losing what we have in hand”.

It is a fact that the women’s organizations studied here are dealing with issues that are in the areas of municipalities’ responsibility. They deal with such issues as vocational education, health care services, women’s employment, violence against women, women’s human rights, cultural and artistic activities for women and shelters for women. These issues are clearly the responsibility of municipalities, therefore the execution of these kinds of activities by means of specialized civil society groups will be more efficient and effective. It is evident that since members of civil society are working voluntarily they are more eager than municipalities to perform these activities in a more effective way (Arın, 2008).

When the relationship between women’s organizations and Istanbul’s governorship is analyzed, the picture evident here is no different from their relations with the metropolitan municipality. Bureaucratic formalities and informal relations play a role in women’s organizations reaching the governor’s office in Istanbul as well. However, the nationwide organizations receive the support of governors in the small provinces. Specifically, the Foundation for the Support of Women’s Work (KEDV) started its projects in other provinces with the contribution of governors (Akçar and Yenice, 2008). Governors support these kinds of organizations in relation to their activities in areas like vocational education, solidarity among women, employment of women, the schooling of female students and social assistance to the poor. As mentioned above the bureaucratic structure of governorships makes the personality of a governor a key factor in this regard. If the governor is personally open-minded and sensitive to civil society he promotes cooperation between the governor’s office and civil society. Otherwise, such relations cannot work successfully (Akalin, 2007).

According to the findings of this study, the public offices that women’s organizations have close relations and cooperation with are district administrations. Almost all organizations studied here have been supported by a district administration in some way, particularly regarding the education and health care services they give to women. The district chiefs give support to women’s organizations directly, as well as through sub-units within their administrations such as national education centers or people’s education

centers. The most prominent reason why women's organizations have closer relations with district administrations compared to municipalities is perhaps their non-political identity. Since they are politically neutral, or in other words not affiliated with any political party, they are open and stand at the same distance to all elements of civil society. One can also say that since the district administrations govern in small units it becomes possible for civil society organizations to reach them and follow their activities.

As indicated above local reforms in Turkey since 2004 have paved the way for political participation. The urban councils have played an important role in this respect. The participation of women's organizations in the urban councils and in the local agenda 21s and their impact on the agenda of these institutions is a primary concern of this study. But, it has been evident in this study that almost no women's organizations have actively participated in these platforms using their institutional identity, however, some members of these organizations have been invited to the urban councils meetings in a personal capacity. The meetings of the urban councils and local agenda 21s are organized by the governor's office and the municipal authorities. The speakers of women's organizations are critical towards the governor's offices and the administration of municipalities because they have not considered them in an institutional capacity. They notably express that their participation in these platforms in a personal rather than institutional capacity reduces their power and influence (Yılmaz, 2007).

This study also tried to examine the importance of tools such as lobbying, face to face contact with leaders, campaigns, petitions, street activities and protests, for women's organizations in order to influence local authorities. Lobbies and face to face contact are two of the most prominent tools that women's organizations use frequently. In addition campaigns are another important tool that women's organizations use to influence local decision-makers. The local and national campaigns launched by Ka-Der in order to promote the candidacy of women during local and general elections are renowned in this respect. The nationwide campaign that Ka-Der launched for obtaining the right of quota for women in the 2007 general election is a prime example here. With the help of the Turkish media, Ka-Der circulated pictures of some famous female stars with moustaches on billboards and through the media network communicating that they did not want all elected politicians to be men only. Similarly, the Mor Çatı Foundation frequently campaigns and lobbies for the establishment of shelters for women.

The speakers of women's organizations convey that in order to be successful in influencing local policies, local leaders should be open enough

to any contact and relationship with them. Canan Arın (2008), the spokesperson of Mor Çatı, expresses this in the following way: “In order to influence the municipalities, we do lobby activities and hold meetings with their leaders to understand how we can influence each other. But the elected mayors move with a mentality as if they have created the mountains. Unfortunately they forget that they are there to serve society”. Hülya Gülbahar (2007) likewise notes that despite their passionate efforts to cooperate with municipalities they cannot succeed because of the mentalities of the municipalities which make them unwilling to cooperate with civil society.

As far as the relationship between women’s organizations and political parties is concerned almost all women’s organizations studied here are disinclined to have visible connection with any political party. Some organizations have members in the municipal councils and even in parliament but they refrain from giving them support because they want to be neutral and keep a distance from all political parties. Even Ka-Der, which is basically working to promote women’s interest in politics, is very careful not to be identified with any particular political party. It is a fact that political identity has a deep-rooted influence in Turkish politics as well as in Turkish society. Certainly social and political differentiation has historically been fostered by political identity more than class position in Turkey. Unfortunately this gives rise to the growth of walls between political parties, particularly those who are positioned on the right or left, in respect to their political discourse, programs and ideologies. These are perhaps the central reasons why civil society groups are so reluctant to be identified with a certain political party.

6. Women’s Organizations and Social Responsibility

Another part of this study looked into the effectiveness of women’s organizations in the six areas of social responsibility: education, women’s health care services, the struggle against poverty, the protection of environment, tackling the problem of violence against women and cultural and artistic activities for women. Almost all women’s organizations are dealing with educational activities. They give women vocational education and training, as well as education on self-development and self-realization, general culture, child care, women’s health care, and reproduction techniques. It is worth noting that all organizations have the same understanding of vocational education and training for women, however, each defines its educational activities in reference to its own ideology where

the political self-development and self-realization of women are concerned. While feminist organizations give priority to awareness raising activities related to women's identity in that respect, the conservative organizations as in the case of HAZAR, give priority to the rise of religious consciousness for women (Kerimoğlu, 2008). When secular/Kemalist organizations are considered with regard to their work on the political self-improvement and self-realization of women it seems that for the most part they stress the education of women in light of Kemalist principles.

Another area in which almost all women's organizations have a great deal of activities is that of women's health care services. Most women's organizations have activities in this area. These activities in women's health care can be divided into two areas: direct and indirect services. Direct services refer to the direct health care services given to women or children. Indirect services refer to preventative activities. In respect to the direct services, the most active organization to mention is the Women's Education and Culture Foundation (HEKVA), which targets poor groups. Piyale Özdoğan Çitil (2008), the speaker for HEKVA, expresses this in the following way: "Since poor groups have so many health problems, our activities are naturally inclined towards them". Their direct services mostly concern health scanning and medical treatments in slum areas. Mor Çatı, as another active organization in this area, gives health care services for the most part to women who face domestic violence or harassment. Some of the organizations studied here limit their activities to education on women's health care problems. The Mother and Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) is one of the significant organizations in this respect giving education to women on pregnancy, reproduction techniques, children's health, protection from accidents and nutrition.

Women's organizations have been found to have very little interest in the area of the environment. Even though some organizations have carried out some work concerning the environment, most of them have no long-term projects or serious studies concerning the environment. Activities of women's organizations on the environment are limited to the cultivation of trees. The Turkish Women's Culture Association (TÜRKKAD) seems to be the only women's organization that has a considerable project on the environment. This organization started a project on water in cooperation with UNESCO in 2008 (TÜRKKAD, 2008).

Another area in which women's organizations are less active, compared to education and women's health care services, is the struggle against poverty. Some of the organizations studied explained that they have not carried out any direct activity in this area because of their limited

economic power, while others state that the eradication of poverty is not among their activities. The organizations with conservative characteristics seem to be more sensitive to this issue such as HEKVA and TÜRKKAD. Supporting the women of poor families in accessing vocational education and training and encouraging their children to attend school are among the fundamental activities of HEKVA. Similarly, TÜRKKAD organizes campaigns for giving economic support to poor families in deprived areas (Sargut, 2008).

An area where all the women's organizations have several activities is the struggle against domestic violence. Mor Çatı foundation is mainly involved in this issue. Mor Çatı was established as a result of the struggle of feminist groups' against violence. The campaign named "Solidarity Campaign against the Beating of Women" was launched by feminist groups in 1987 and gave way to the emergence of this association. After the Solidarity Campaign, feminists felt the need to establish an organization which devoted its energy to tackling domestic violence against women. Mor Çatı thus came into existence and has attempted to establish women's shelters for women who have suffered violence at home. The name Mor Çatı evokes the image of a "women's shelter" for many of the Turkish population. This public image is apparent by its mention in a Turkish TV series where a character says that he "will take shelter in Mor Çatı" when feeling under pressure from his wife at home. This shows that where the term "shelter" is concerned, Mor Çatı comes to mind as the major reference point within Turkey's public sphere.

Almost all feminist organizations are highly sensitive to this issue but instead of having any direct activity they give indirect services to women in this area. They have stressed this issue through media networks, publications, academic research, movies and protective educational activities to both men and women. Non-feminist organizations seem to be disinclined to participate in any direct work in this area because of the risks that it potentially presents in such a patriarchal society. For instance, Esmâ Gündüz, the speaker of GKKDV, said that when they planned to open a center serving women in the Gaziosmanpaşa district they originally decided to fight against domestic violence but when they considered that the place in which they would work was a deprived area with dominant patriarchal values, they forfeited this idea (2007).

As far as cultural and artistic activities towards women are concerned, almost all women's organizations seem to be active in this area. Most women's organizations have culture and art commissions and they organize activities through these commissions. Such activities include

publishing, making movies, organizing theater shows and preparing TV and radio programs. It seems that some women's organizations use these cultural and artistic activities as instruments to disseminate their opinions. One such organization is Filmmor, which prepares short films on women's problems and disseminates them to raise awareness on women's issues in cooperation with feminist women's organizations. Similarly, TURKKAD pays special attention to these kinds of activities. It regularly organizes activities, including the following: showing movies and documentaries, publishing, exhibitions, and concerts (Sargut, 2008). Similar to educational activities, women's organizations take part in such activities in accordance with their political and ideological preferences.

Conclusion: The Contribution of Women's Organizations to Local Democracy in Turkey

It can be said that the local government reforms in Turkey in the course of the last few years have opened an ample space for the participation of civil society groups in the decision-making process at the local level. As has been shown in the case of women's organizations in this study however, civil society organizations are not active enough to dominate the decision-making process. This is due to the fact that local governments are still not eager to consider civil society organizations with their institutional identities and they are not yet ready to open their doors to these groups. This might be connected to the Turkish political culture as developed in particular during the Republic regime, which has fostered a high notion of respect for the state and official institutions, while developing a suspicion about civil society organizations.

One of the main projects of the ruling elites who established a regime under the Republic in Turkey in 1923 was to build a homogeneous nation. They perceived social as well as political and even cultural diversity negatively and even as a challenge to the nation-building project. Any social group that served a different value system or a project different from those of the state elite was strongly rejected and forbidden. Strongly influenced by the collective politics of the time developed in Eastern and Western Europe, Turkey had initiated a single party system in 1924 and until 1946 forced all alternative parties and civil society organizations underground. Thus, a rigidly constructed centralized system was established leading to the accumulation of political power in the hands of the ruling elites.

Thanks to the victory of the democratic forces over the fascist regimes in the Second World War which gave rise to democracy once again

in Europe, Turkey started to make a transition into a multi-party system in order to take part in the democratic world. But, the multi-party system, started in 1946, has witnessed a critical confrontation between political elites and bureaucratic elites composed of military and civilian bureaucrats. The bureaucratic elites have staunchly defended the centralized administrative structure, which gave supremacy to the center over local governments. This is perhaps the reason why the former president Ahmet Necdet Sezer and the Republican People's Party (CHP, the founder of the Republican regime), both defenders of a centralized administrative structure, reacted strongly to the administrative reform package prepared by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2004. The AKP government envisaged transferring most of the powers from the central administrative authorities to local governments, but as the result of strong reactions coming from president Sezer and the CHP, the AKP rulers were not able to get the package through. They were thus left with a partial reform. As was previously described, even this limited move was a fundamental deviation from the traditional administrative structure.

Moving on from this fiery struggle between center and periphery in Turkey, we will look at the issue under discussion: a focus on the role of women's civil society organizations in promoting women's interest in local politics. As previously mentioned, women's civil society organizations are not active enough to determine the agenda of local governments. Even on the issues concerning women, women's organizations have not exerted a tangible influence on the policies of local governments. One can say that both local governments and women's civil society organizations seem to be responsible for this situation.

As for local governments, the bureaucratic formalities create great barriers that hinder civil society organizations from reaching them. The relationships between women's civil society organizations with the district municipalities and district administrative units are easier than those of with the Istanbul governorship and metropolitan municipality. The relationship of women's organizations with the district units, i.e. with the closest and small administrative units, show that informality still plays an important role in the relationships between governmental agencies and civil society organizations in Turkey.

Women's civil society organizations also have a share of responsibility for the current situation. The Istanbul metropolitan municipality announces projects and areas of study for civil society groups each year but women's civil society organizations have not followed them closely. This is due of the fact that most of the women's organizations

studied here are not professionally organized. Some of them perform their tasks based on the personal efforts of a limited number of women. The absence of professionally established project units or research and development units within most women's organizations reduces their chances of establishing coordination with local governments.

As expressed by Almond and Verba (1963), democracy is not only a matter of rules and regulations but also of political culture and learning. As has been demonstrated in this study, the case of Turkey indicates that the political culture plays a significant role in the consolidation and development of democratic attitudes as well as in the behavior of administrative bodies and civil society organizations. Power sharing and cooperation with civil society have not been dependent solely on having facilitating rules and regulations, but also on the culture and attitudes of the local leaders. The internalization of democratic values plays a critical role in that respect.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Women in Local Governments in the Last Five Elections (in percentages)

Local Elections	General Provincial Assemblies	Municipal Assemblies	Elected Mayors
1984	0.3	0.6	0
1989	0.7	0.8	0.2
1994	0.9	0.9	0.5
1999	1.6	1.4	0.5
2004	2.3	1.7	0.5
Average	1.2	1.1	0.3

Source: These data have been compiled from Habitat II-National Report and Action Planning 1996; and Aysun Sayın, Kota Hand Book, Ankara: KADER, 2007. For internet resource see http://www.adrena.com.tr/kader/images/yayinlar/Kota_El_Kitabi.pdf, p. 14; access date: November 3, 2008.

Table 2: Women in the Turkish Parliament, 1935-2007

Election year	Total seats in parliament	Women Deputies	Percentage of Women (%)
1935	399	18	4.5
1939	429	16	3.7
1943	455	16	3.5
1946	465	9	1.9
1950	487	3	0.6
1954	541	4	0.7
1957	610	8	1.3
1961	450	3	0.7
1965	450	8	1.8
1969	450	5	1.1

1973	450	6	1.3
1977	450	4	0.9
1983	399	12	3.0
1987	450	6	1.3
1991	450	8	1.8
1995	550	13	2.4
1999	550	23	4.2
2002	550	24	4.4
2007	549	50	9.1

Source: http://www.tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?tb_id=42&ust_id=12, access date: September 15, 2008

Table 3: Women in the Municipal Assemblies of Istanbul in the 2004 Local Elections.

	Total	Women	Ratio (%)
Provincial General Assembly	225	8	3.6
Metropolitan Municipal Assembly	348	20	5.7
District Municipal Assemblies (32 districts)	1499	103	6.9
District Mayors	32	0	0.0

Source: The data here has been compiled by me from the website of Turkish Statistical Institution, Istanbul Governorship, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and 32 districts municipalities of Istanbul during December 7-25, 2008.

Table 4: Women Civil Society Organizations Studied in this Research

Organization	Organizational Level
Mother Child Education Foundation (<i>Anne Çocuk Eğitimi Vakfı/AÇEV</i>)	National
Amargi Women's Cooperative (<i>Amargi Kadın Kooperatifi/ Amargi</i>)	National
Gaziosmanpaşa Women's Culture and Solidarity Foundation (<i>Gaziosmanpaşa Kadınlar Kültür ve Dayanışma Vakfı/ GKKDV</i>)	District
Hazar Education, Culture and Solidarity Association (<i>Hazar Eğitim, Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği/ Hazar</i>)	Provincial
Women's Education and Culture Foundation (<i>Hanımlar Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı/ HEKVA</i>)	Provincial
Association for Support and Education of Women Candidates (<i>Kadın Adayları Destekleme ve Eğitim Derneği/ KA-DER</i>)	National
Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (<i>Kadın Emegini Değerlendirme Vakfı/ KEDV</i>)	National
Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation (<i>Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı/ Mor Çatı</i>)	Provincial
Turkish Women's Culture Association (<i>Türk Kadınları Kültür Derneği/ TÜRKKAD</i>)	National
Umraniye Women Center (<i>Ümraniye Kadın Merkezi/ ÜKM</i>)	District