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Walking on Eggshells: Impacts of the Changing Political Conjecture on Women's and Gender Studies Centres in Turkey

Abstract

Following the second wave feminist movement, Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) started to institutionalise at universities in Turkey in the late 1980s. The first 'Women's Studies Centre' was established at Istanbul University in 1989. By 2017, there were around a hundred Women's and Gender Studies Centres (WGSCs) in Turkey, scattered throughout the whole country, both in public and private universities. This article is based on thirteen expert interviews and institutional material collection from theoretically selected seven cases of WGSCs. In the study, we show the significance of several nationally and internationally influential actors, processes, and institutions that altogether prepped the political setting for the institutionalisation and transformation processes of the WGSCs in Turkey in the time span from late 1980s to 2017. We conclude that the field was influenced by international networks and processes up until the 2010s and in the post-2010 period, the main source of political influence having an impact on the institutional landscape of WGSCs becomes domestic political factors. We interpret this as 1) the discovery of 'gender' as a political and scientific category in international outlets and its adaptation to the national level; and 2) a growing interest in making the discovery of 'gender' visible in the field of higher education.

This paper is based on findings of the empirical project 'Women's and Gender Studies in Turkey: Institutionalisation and Transformation' (Jan. 2017-Dec. 2019).

Keywords: Women's and Gender Studies Centres, Women's and Gender Studies, Turkey, Gender, Women.

1. Introduction

Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) as an interdisciplinary academic field emerged at the universities in the US and in the UK during the late 1960s to the early 1970s thanks to the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), which was characterised by the struggle for political, economic, and social equality of men and women. In the rest of the world – mostly non-western countries – the entry of WGS to academia took place relatively later and mostly due to “*concerns on sociological and economic development with the support of global governance and multi-party financial institutions for the international standards of gen-*

der equality".¹ In Turkey, 'women's studies' as an independent academic discipline was established by activist women scholars in the late 1980s following the wave of the second women's movement.² The first institution was established at the Istanbul University with the name 'Women's Studies Research Centre' in 1989. According to the initial count of the project team in 2017, there were at least a hundred *Women's and Gender Studies Research Centres* (WGSCs³ hereafter) scattered all around the country, both in central and provincial cities, and public and private universities.

This article presents findings of the empirical research project on 'Women's and Gender Studies in Turkey: Institutionalisation and Transformation' (2017-2019) funded by Blickwechsel Contemporary Turkey Studies Programme of the Mercator Foundation and conducted at the University of Bremen.⁴ The project was a timely endeavour as it referred to a critical juncture that WGS as an academic discipline was facing at the universities. Qualitative interviews with experts and the institutional material collected from the centres in the framework of the project show that the pioneers of WGSCs in today's Turkey have found themselves in a rapidly changing political and academic environment, which had an impact on the organisation and the content of WGS, administered, studied, and researched in these units. We name the aggregate (global & national) and shaping political environment and influence as 'the political conjuncture' in the context of this article.

We first introduce our methodology (chapter 2) and the WGSCs as a research field with the existing literature addressing the institutionalisation processes of WGSCs (chapter 3). In the main section (chapter 4), we display the impacts of the changing political conjuncture through the introduction and discussion of significant national and international developments for the institutionalisation of WGSCs deduced from

1 Kandiyoti 2011, 43.

2 There is also an Ottoman women's movement during the late imperial period (1869-1923) which is manifested through Ottoman women's periodicals, women's associations and political movements during the Constitutional Period (1908-18) prior to the foundation of the Turkish Republic (Çakır 2007). This is prior to the Kemalist (modernist) women's movement in the 1930s which was mainly characterised by the liberation and modernisation of Turkish women (White 2003). Tekeli criticises the Kemalist women's movement for not being inspired by feminism and merely sees it as a form of 'state feminism' (1982).

3 In fact, the names of these institutions vary, encompassing termini such as women's research, women's studies, women's problems, women's and gender studies, women and family studies. Both the literature and the field data reveal that majority of the first period centres were established under the name 'women's research', or 'women's studies centres', established at Ankara and Istanbul Universities (Alptekin 2011, Balcı 2016, Çakır 1996, Eroğlu 2004). The abbreviation of 'WGSC' is used throughout the article to refer to all research centres established at universities which deal with a variety of women, gender, and family subjects.

4 Women's and Gender Studies at Universities in Turkey: Institutionalization and Transformation, Blickwechsel: Contemporary Turkey Studies, A Programme by Stiftung Mercator, 2017-2019. URL: https://www.blickwechsel-tuerkei.de/en/projects/current/Women_Studies/index.php (accessed 23.09.2021).

the expert interviews and institutional material, which were collected during the field research in Turkey during 2017-2018. In the final section, we present our analysis over the findings and a conclusion.

2. Methodology

This paper is based on a total of 13 qualitative expert interviews⁵ and the institutional materials collected in seven WGSCs located in different cities –small and large cities in different regions of Turkey, established at different points in time – older and newer institutions, and with different funding schemes – at public and private universities. The majority of the existing research on WGSCs scans website information,⁶ or conducts short-answer surveys as methodology,⁷ which miss an in depth and critical reflection on the institutionalisation processes of the centres. Our aim was to collect profound internal, institutional knowledge that could not be gained by sources other than the main actors and representatives of the institutional processes, whom we deem and identify as ‘experts’. For this reason, we chose to conduct expert interviews –referring to their institutional affiliation, current administrative positions in the selected centres, as well as their expertise in the area of WGS and followed a guided interview manual to investigate the institutionalisation processes and dynamics. A large data set consisting of interview transcripts and institutional materials such as centres’ web sites, posted activities and their reports, programs, abstracts and statements produced out of these events, are analysed with qualitative content analysis. The analysis is further complemented by the secondary sources related to the institutional history of WGS in Turkey and the documents belonging to major political developments both in Turkey and worldwide such as ministry reports, policy documents, and international agreements.

3. From Women and Gender Studies to Women and Gender Studies Centres

There has been a growing scholarship on women and gender subjects in Turkey addressed in the individual works of scholars before the institutionalisation of WGS began at universities in the 1990s. The browsing of these studies shows us that the initial and the main category of focus in the scholarship was ‘women’. A primary reference book of this period belonged to Nermin Abadan Unat, which was entitled ‘*Women in Turkish Society*’ (first edition in 1979) and was a compilation of several studies focusing

5 Statement on the interviewees’ anonymity: A number of experts we interviewed asked for a high anonymization of their names and the institutions, and therefore their identification and credentials will not be exposed in the analysis of the paper. Instead, the institutions will be marked with acronyms based on the location and the funding scheme of the university. For the full list of expert interviews, please see the ‘list of expert interviews’ under ‘unpublished primary sources’ in the bibliography.

6 Balcı 2016, Çilingiroğlu 2001, Eroğlu 2004, Özvarış and Akın 2003.

7 Savaş, Ertan, Yol 2003.

on the status of women in family, at work, in politics, and in society. In a similar fashion, the 1980s witnessed the publication of a series of scholarly work, which started to refer more and more to the structural sources of women's problems.⁸ In this decade, some of the women's topics that were touched upon by the scholars were: violence against women,⁹ women's labour,¹⁰ and women's political participation.¹¹ These topics were also tackled in detail in the influential book edited by Şirin Tekeli called *Women in 1980s Turkey from a Woman's Perspective*.¹² In line with the developing scholarship, we see the accumulation of a greater demand for a substantial and institutional base to carry out women's studies in academic environments. Already in the late 1970s, the first 'women' courses were added into the curricula at a public university in Ankara¹³ and the first 'Women's Studies Research Centre' was established at Istanbul University in 1989 by women scholars who were active in the women's movements at the time.¹⁴ This example was then followed by Ankara University in 1993, Adana Çukurova University in 1994, and the Aegean University in Izmir in 1996.

Institutionalisation of WGS was further supported by state institutions, in particular by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE-YÖK). With the enactment of Higher Education Law No. 2547 in 1981,¹⁵ the Turkish higher education system possessed a centralised structure, allowing for central planning and control of the institutional governance by the foundation of the CoHE.¹⁶ The CoHE is the decisive authority which approves the initiation of the centres within universities and holds a central position in the institutionalisation and the transformation processes of the WGSCs. As sign of acknowledgement, the CoHE published two official recommendations to the rectorates of all universities, the first in 1995 and the second in 2016, which recommended the wider expansion of the centres and further integration of women and gender courses into the higher education curricula.¹⁷

WGS in Turkey are performed through a variety of institutional forms and practices, including but not limited to the centres, departments, journals, scholarly publications, students' clubs, forums, and sexual and harassment units (CTS)¹⁸. The academic field

8 Cited literature here on women in the post-1970s can be distinguished from the scholarly work under the influence of the Kemalist paradigm for they question the sub-ordination of women under men. The shifting paradigms detected in our research and in WGSCs are discussed in a separate article by the authors, which is currently under preparation.

9 Yüksel 1990.

10 Ecevit 1986 and Berik 1987.

11 Arat 1989 and Koray 1991.

12 Tekeli (eds.) 1990.

13 Interview: Ankara-2 Public 2018.

14 Binder, Çubukçu, Dağ et.al. 2019.

15 YÖK 1981.

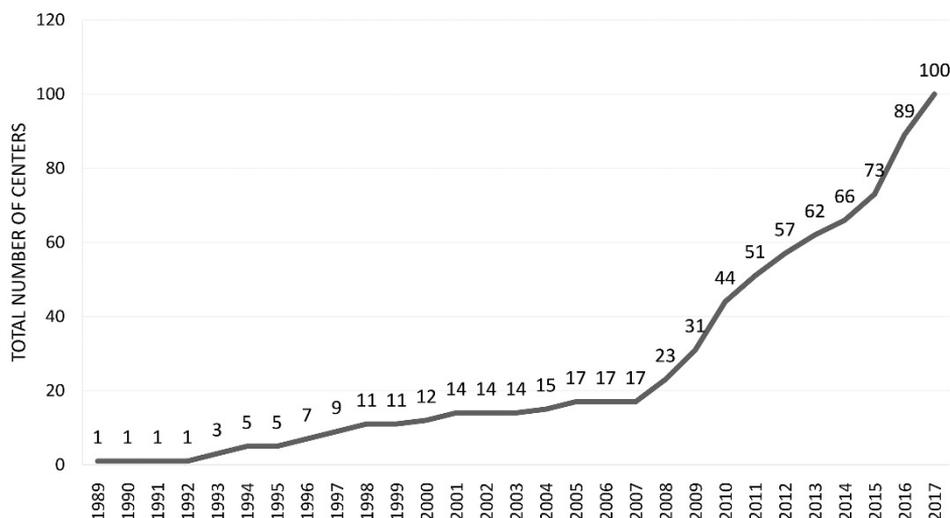
16 Mızıkacı 2006, 27.

17 It is important to note here that WGSCs, like all other research and application centres, are directly connected to the rectorates as an organisational rule.

18 CTS-Sexual Harassment Units are founded to raise awareness of and to battle with the sexual attack and harassment at the universities by women academics. The first CTS was

of WGS defines the ‘centres’ as the most opted and wide-spread institutional form for the field’s practices. Compared to some hundred centres,¹⁹ there are nine master programs and three doctoral programs in the area of WGS.²⁰ The graph below shows that the number of WGSCs in Turkey has mounted up dramatically and steadily since 2008, increasing the number of WGSCs by more than 400%.

Figure 1: The total number of centres into the years between 1989-2017²¹



There is a void for an in-depth investigation of WGS in which the research and the application centres constitute the main focus. Research conducted by the centres as the focal point of WGS in Turkey is necessary for a number of reasons. First, as argued above, they are the most adopted, common, and wide-spread institutional form to conduct WGS in Turkey. Second, centres are hybrid institutional forms of higher education which allow for hosting a diversity of activities like research, education, and public events. It is in that sense a more engaging platform for both within and outside university actors such as state institutions, local administration units, civil-society organisations, local residents, student clubs, the rectorates, and other departments. Thus, centres function as the mirrors of the interaction of multiple actors and political discourses on women and gender reflecting the socio-political climate of the era.

founded at Ankara University in 2012 and today turned into a wider and collaborative network of academics on the topic (Göker and Polatdemir 2019, 9).

19 According to the initial count of the centres by the project team in 2017, hundred WGSCs centres detected were established in both public and private universities. The total number of centres is constantly changing, however.

20 Savaş, Ertan and Yol 2018, 1540.

21 The last scan for the existing Women’s and Gender Studies Centres was conducted prior to the field research at the end of 2017.

There are a few studies reflecting on the foundational period of WGSCs as an institutional development. Çakır defines the purpose of this initiative as “*to produce knowledge on women, for women, and with the women’s own perspectives*”.²² Sancar associates the institutionalisation of WGS at universities with “*the entry of feminism into academia*”²³ and emphasizes that it was enabled by “*the successful coalition of the modernist women with a secularist agenda and the feminist women who were in the pursuit of intellectuality within the women’s movement, an intellectuality critical of male domination*”.²⁴ Kandiyoti approaches the development with a more conjectural perspective which stresses the relevance of different national and international actors and argues that the growing academic establishment of WGS in Turkey was:

[...] the confluence of three mutually reinforcing sets of influences: women’s movements; the epistemological/analytic challenges of feminism to academia; and the global institutionalisation of standards and mechanisms for gender equality through the workings of the UN and other international financial donors.²⁵

Starting from the 2000s, several studies explored the presence of the WGSCs and provided the first descriptions of the institutions based on their precepts and web-site info.²⁶ Kerestecioğlu and Özman’s work (2017) based on the document collection and semi-structured interviews with the representatives of the selected centres presents the first example of a deeper analysis in the field and offers a critical lens towards neoliberalism’s intervention at universities.²⁷ Savaş, Ertan and Yol conducted a survey study (2018) in which a portion of the centres’ directors, research areas, activities, conditions, and their problems were described. The study reports that several directors at the time were not experts of WGS; that majority centres are found to be inactive; and most centres are suffering both from insufficient financial resources and insufficient number of working hours spared by their members due to faculty-based commitments.²⁸ Despite the structural issues, Göker and Polatdemir (2019) list the centres in their assessment report as “*one of the supportive and most influential mechanisms of gender equality policies at universities*”, which becomes “*a manifestation of dedication to the concept by the universities’ managements*”.²⁹

22 Çakır 1996, 307.

23 Sancar 2003, 167, 174.

24 Ibid., 175.

25 Kandiyoti 2010, 166-167.

26 Çilingiroğlu 2001, Özvanş and Akin 2003, Eroğlu 2004, Alptekin 2011, Balcı 2016.

27 Kerestecioğlu and Özman 2017. Authors use ‘neoliberalism’ as an umbrella term referring “*the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism characterised by mainly flexible labour relations*” (2017, 203). They argue that neoliberal politics weakens and transforms feminist knowledge production in line with its own political merits and strategic priorities such as its appropriation for regulating the market and industrial relations and thus reducing feminism’s self-transformative effects (2017, 205).

28 Savaş, Ertan and Yol 2018, 1542-1543.

29 Göker and Polatdemir 2019, 24.

4. The Impacts of the Changing Political Conjuncture on WGSCs

The expert interviews tagged several nationally and internationally influential actors, processes, and institutions that altogether formed and shaped the political setting for the institutionalisation processes of the WGSCs. In that, state institutions are regarded as the most featured transmitters of the political discourses, generated in national or international political arenas, into the universities and the centres. We do not understand state institutions as the independent generators of political impact. There are greater and external sources of political influences channelled into national and political arenas, which induce state institutions to position themselves in respect to WGSCs at universities according to the statements of the experts. We frame and refer to the summation of the political influences (both internal and external) as ‘the political conjuncture’ in the analysis of the data. On one hand, it is possible to analyse the triggering points of the political conjuncture as international vs. national. On the other hand, a chronological analysis of conjectural developments helps us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how both national and international processes are interlinked and have a connection to the (changing) status of WGSCs.

4.1. CEDAW

The earliest referenced event by the experts is ‘the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women-CEDAW’. CEDAW, widely described as the universal bill of rights for women, was adopted in 1979 and opened to signature in 1980 by the UN General Assembly.³⁰ Turkey became signatory to CEDAW in 1985, but placed reservations on some of its clauses due to the prevalence of patriarchal elements in the National Civil Code at the time.³¹ When CEDAW came out in 1979, there were no instances of a WGSC in Turkey yet. Its precedence relationship to the institutionalisation process of WGSCs is however built by many scholars during the expert interviews. Scholars assert that CEDAW, together with the Beijing Conference (to be presented in 4.3), prepped the accommodating political frame for the foundation processes of WGSCs by providing scholars with the first contact to international discussions on gender equality in Turkey. Many experts note that they adopted CEDAW’s working definition of gender equality in their teaching material used in the courses as well as in the activities of the centres.³²

4.2. The Foundation of KSSGM in 1990

The foundation of ‘the General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women’ (*Kadının Statüsü ve Sorunları Genel Müdürlüğü-KSSGM, now KSGM*) was founded in

30 For more information on CEDAW see: CEDAW, UN Women Watch.

31 Berik 1990 and Berktaş 2003, 57-59.

32 Interviews: Belkis 2017; Ankara Public-1 2018; Erbatır 2017.

1990 as the national mechanism to monitor and develop policies on the status of women.³³ Acuner classifies KSSGM's main tasks in two folds: (1) regulatory assisting legislation in line with principles and demands of the women's movement and women's rights³⁴ and (2) distributary and organizational allocation and redistribution of financial sources from international donors to local and national projects to support the foundation of women organisations, women's services, activities, and women based research.³⁵ Several activist, feminist women were critical of the foundation of KSGM in the 1990s for it meant acceptance and collaboration with a state authority and a weakening force to the existence and strength of the women's movements.³⁶

Supportive of the literature,³⁷ interviewed experts establish a relationship between international political conjuncture and the foundation of the KSSGM. Several academics, whose research interests were based on women subjects, were directly involved with the development of this governmental institution and held bureaucratic positions there. Istanbul Public-1 interprets this as "*an openly visible impact*" observed in the 1990s and states that "*the development of the WGS at universities and the governmental institutions went hand in hand*".³⁸ Today, the KSGM is not the flagship institution of women's rights as it used to be in the 1990s and exists merely as a sub-department to the Ministry of Employment, Family and Social Policies since 2011. Thus, it functions as a reporting office on women's situation in distinctive areas, such as employment, education, and social policies.³⁹ The KSGM's annual conferences with representatives of the WGSCs together with the CoHE in the post-2015 period was reported not to have a strong institutional effect in the activities of the WGSCs and limited to the presentation of general activities by the centres.⁴⁰

4.3. UN Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995

The Beijing Conference of 1995 was the last in the series of global conventions organised by the United Nations on the subject of women and points out "*the significance of the conference for it signalled the coming of age of the gender agenda in development which inspired the academic turn to*".⁴¹

On the macro level, the Beijing Conference served as a fitting platform to discuss women's issues and status in a global space and transferred the generated knowledge and the tools to ensure gender equality back to the local and national contexts, but

33 KSSGM Publications Series 1993, 52. cited in Acuner 1999, 94.

34 Acuner 1999, 264.

35 Ibid., 261.

36 Ibid., 152-179.

37 Çubukçu 2004.

38 Interview: Istanbul Public-1 2018.

39 For information see: KSGM Website.

40 Interviews: Irzık 2018; Ankara Public-2 2018; Özkazanç 2017.

41 Kandiyoti 2011, 170.

also back to the universities and WGSCs in case of Turkey.⁴² The delegation of Turkey consisted of bureaucrats, NGOs, and academics including some of the interviewed experts, who stayed in contact post-Beijing to collaborate for the advancement of centre's activities.⁴³ On the micro level, participant experts also highlight the conference's self-transformative aspect which motivated them to pursue their academic career further in the field of WGS and transformed them into being "*activists*"⁴⁴ and "*feminists*".⁴⁵ The first half of 1990s was also characterised by the UN's pro-active stance with the transfer of funds to the KSGM to be used on women empowerment related programs. The fund was partly used in the foundation of the 'Gender and Women's Studies' department at a public university in Ankara in 1993 and for the further development of Ankara and Istanbul universities' centres.⁴⁶ Prior to the Beijing Conference in 1995, there were already five WGSCs established mostly in big cities and public universities: Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, and Adana, which shows that Beijing was supportive to expand the establishment of these units, but not the starting point. Soon after the conference KSGM issued an official letter to the CoHE to be circulated among the university rectorates, which recommended:

to expand the foundation of Women's Problems Research and Application Centres and integrate women subjects into the curriculum of higher education institutions for the purpose of training skilled persons (positions) who are sensitive towards women's status and problems for the Turkish society.⁴⁷

Within five years the number of centres doubled, several of them being in smaller cities.

When CEDAW and Beijing are held together collectively marking the period from 1980s to the 1990s as 'women friendly' in the field of policy making, it reinstated the institutional landscape on women in Turkey. The first spread of WGSCs at the universities was part of this process. The period of 1990s is assessed by the scholars as "*more liberal times in which there was an environment in side with women and that studies could be conducted to implement Beijing decisions*",⁴⁸ during which "*the causal link between the institutionalisation of WGS and the political conjuncture was an openly observable process*".⁴⁹

4.4. Start of Accession Negotiations with the European Union, late 1990s to early 2000s

Turkey had been persistently trying to become a member of the European Union (EU) throughout the second part of the 20th century. In the early years of the 2000s during which Turkey was running access negotiations with the EU (EU process hereafter), the

42 Interviews: Erbatır 2017 and Ankara-1 2018.

43 Interview: Erbatır 2017.

44 Interview: Ankara Public-1 2018.

45 Interview: Erbatır 2017.

46 Interview: Ankara Public-1 2018.

47 Directive by the CoHE 1995.

48 Interview: Erbatır 2017.

49 Interview: Istanbul Public-1 2018.

prospect of candidacy contributed to several national reform packages including democratisation of law and regulations, improvement of human rights and freedom of speech as well as advocating gender equality. Motivated by the EU process, the government pushed forward the introduction of the new Civil Code (2001), the adoption of gender equality provisions in the constitutional amendments (2001-2010), and the establishment of a commission on gender equality (2009).⁵⁰ The influence of the EU process was a visible factor, but the reformation processes would not have occurred if there were no solid and persistent demands of various women's organisations in Turkey.⁵¹

The expert interviews confirm that the start of the EU process gave an important boost to the activities of WGSCs due to the Union's pursuit of a substantial agenda on 'gender equality'.⁵² With this, we also see a shift in concepts used in the WGSCs from 'women' to 'gender'. Early period centres report how universities, in particular the centres, became instrumental in nesting the term 'gender equality', not just in higher education institutions, but also in the state's institutions and their policies through their training programs for the bureaucrats and policy makers.⁵³ Özkazanç states that *"the term 'gender equality' was not dealt within the framework of the centre's activities prior to the EU process. What scholars used as the guiding concept in classes and activities instead was 'feminism'"*. Özkazanç here distinguishes the concept of 'feminism' from the term 'gender equality'. According to her *"feminism works with different concepts and political aims such as women's liberation and women's freedom, which go beyond the understanding of equality that is pursued by the institutional and legal systems introduced by the EU process"*.⁵⁴ Gender equality, in this context, emerges as a policy-oriented area introduced by an international organisation through its financial schemes, whereas feminism(s) though it, too, produces policy related outcomes *"bring along a much more conceptual and political emphasis, [...] thus distinct itself from 'gender equality' in this context"*.⁵⁵ In this sense, the sponsor and the initiator of 'gender equality' is governmental and international bodies, whereas feminism is owned and maintained through women's movements. This points to the first paradigm shift in the field triggered by a conjectural dynamic and in this case by an international actor.

50 Çubukçu 2012.

51 Arat 2008.

52 The centralisation of the term 'gender equality' in the area of EU's policy making is generally known as 'gender mainstreaming'. The EU defines gender mainstreaming as *"an effective strategy aimed at achieving gender equality which requires the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated into all policies at all levels and all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking"* (European Commission, Gender Mainstreaming).

53 Interviews: Istanbul Public-1 2018; Özkazanç 2017 and Erbatur 2017.

54 Interview: Özkazanç 2017.

55 Ibid.

4.5. *The Istanbul Convention, 2011*

'Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence' is an international treaty which largely regulated national legal mechanisms to tackle with gender based violence. It was formulated and opened for signature under the umbrella of the Council of Europe on 11 May 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey. Turkey was the first country that ratified the convention, which was followed by 46 other countries. The Convention was put into force in Turkey in 2012.⁵⁶

The Istanbul Convention appears to be the last event in the series of internationally triggered impacts reported by the experts. As of the 2010s, scholars start to refer to domestic sources of political influences on centres. In this sense, the Istanbul Convention forms the last resort of a trend, started with CEDAW and continued with the EU Process, which established the routine for WGSCs' scholars to resort to international settings and rules for a road map on working with the concept of gender equality. Unlike the period of CEDAW, during which secularist women's studies were dominating the field, the clauses of the Istanbul Convention were questioned in early 2019 by the conservative-religious groups on the grounds that the text was in their interpretation not in line with '*family values*'. A campaign led by a cluster of religious media harshly criticised the text for placing a dynamite to the '*unity of family*' due to its non-heteronormative references on the term gender and promotion of LGBTQI+ individuals⁵⁷, and Turkey fully withdrew from the convention by a presidential decree on 1 July 2021. The end of the field work in 2018 did not allow us to capture the dividing lines on which the centres position themselves with regards to the Convention.

4.6. *The Issuing of the Approach Document (2016) and the Establishment of the Unit on Academic Women's Studies (UoAWS, 2015)*

The historical role of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE-YÖK) in the institutionalisation of WGSCs was nuanced by two rounds of official recommendations which called for wider expansion of WGSCs at universities. The CoHE issued its second directive in 2016, this time naming it the 'Approach Document' (*Tutum Belgesi*). The text was formulated as a result of the joint effort of several WGSCs' scholars, who gathered in the workshops organised by the CoHE in Ankara in 2015. Following the first centres' meeting that year, a subsection to the CoHE called the 'Unit on Academic Women's Studies -the UoAWS' was established by the WGS scholars. The purpose of the Unit was defined as to monitor the implications and the progress of the recom-

56 The Istanbul Convention is the first instrument in Europe to set legally binding standards specifically to prevent gender-based violence, protect victims of violence and punish perpetrators (Council of Europe Report, 2012). Legal experts, GREVIO, and feminists in Turkey harshly criticised the governments' lack of initiatives on the full implementation of the convention's rules in the domestic jurisdiction in the previous years (Kuyucu 2017).

57 News outlets such as Yeni Çağ, Yeni Şafak and Akit are amongst those who criticise the convention and argue for its abandonment (Cerav 2019).

mendations in the Approach Document as well as to maintain the networking among different WGSCs.⁵⁸ The issuing of the Approach Document was the first action of the Unit and it openly asked for a wider spread of WGSCs and further integration of gender courses into the higher education curricula.

The call for the first centres' workshop by the CoHE in 2015 was announced shortly after the incident known as 'the Özgecan Case'. Özgecan Aslan was a female university student who was raped and murdered on a public vehicle in Mersin, Turkey in 2015. The incident caused public outrage and became the primary agenda of the Turkish public as well as that of higher education institutions, for it triggered the necessity to take pro-active initiatives on sexual harassment and attack against women. The issuing of the Approach Document is often associated with the Özgecan incident in the literature.⁵⁹ The document bore its fruits almost instantly and the number of WGSCs jumped up to a 100 from 77 by the end of 2017.

Most experts during our fieldwork assessed the Approach Document positively. Many of the pro-arguments centre around the belief that "it leads to the wider spread of gender equality courses at universities"⁶⁰ and that "it creates overall support for scholarly work on gender issues again at universities".⁶¹ Erbatır also stresses the symbolic importance of the CoHE's involvement as "it has become an intimidating factor for the perpetrators of sexual attack at universities".⁶²

The issuing of the Approach Document by the CoHE was indeed a result of a deep wave created by the efforts of many WGSCs' scholars. In fact, the production of a policy document was already independently attempted by a smaller group of WGSCs' representatives in 2014, when an exclusive centres' meeting without the presence of any authority was organised at the Aegean University in Izmir. When the two texts are compared, we see many similarities with that of the Approach Document:

Table 1: Comparative display (created by the authors) of the Approach Document (2016) to the centres-initiated First National Women's Research Centres Congress Declaration (2014)

Final Declaration of the First National Women's Research Centres Congress, 25.04.2014 ⁶³ :	The Approach Document by the Council of Higher Education, 08.03.2016 ⁶⁴ :
The establishment of Women's Research Centres at all universities shall be promoted.	(CoHE promises) to promote the opening of the Women's Problems Research and Application Centres at the universities that do not have such units.

58 For more information on the Unit see: UoAWS Website.

59 Göker and Polatdemir 2019, 7 and O'Neil in O'Neil, Bencivenga and Göker (eds.) 2018, 212.

60 Interviews: Sancar 2017 and Erbatır 2017.

61 Interview: Akgül Yılmaz 2018.

62 Interview: Erbatır 2018.

63 Final Declaration of the First National Women's Research Centres Congress, 2014.

64 Approach Document (Tutum Belgesi), Council of Higher Education, Ankara, 2016.

Universities shall open elective gender courses in the curriculum of all the departments.	(CoHE promises) Gender Equality courses with this or another name and in line with the decisions of the authorised committees shall take place in the programmes as elective or obligatory courses and there shall be informative activities provided for this initiative.
Joint activities shall be developed to achieve gender equality at the universities.	(CoHE promises) to work for the monitoring of gender equality
Universities shall produce a joint directive following an oversight and investigation of all other related directives on the prevention of sexual harassment and discrimination. This shall be shared with all public and foundation universities and prompt necessary changes in the disciplinary regulations.	In order to maintain a safe life in campuses, (CoHE promises) to inform on sexual harassment and attack, to make reporting stations accessible, and to carry out its responsibilities on other structural facilities (such as transportation and lightening).

In this table, we see that while some of the statements on both documents are almost identical, some others have similar orientation, but propose different solutions. For example, the Congress' declaration clearly asks for a production of university-initiated directives on the prevention of sexual-based discrimination and harassment, whereas the Approach Document suggests more basic adjustments such as improving the lighting in university areas. Already a couple years before the centres' own declaration in 2012, WGS scholars at the University of Ankara had initiated a network of academics to collectively fight against 'sexual harassment and attack' (CTS)⁶⁵ following a collaborative workshop organised at the university. What started with a network of 10 universities has now grown into a collaborative group of at least 33 universities in 2016.⁶⁶ With this case, it becomes evident that the state (in this case through CoHE) claims a strong presence for the field of WGSCs in the post-2015 period.

4.7. The President's 'Men and Women are not Equal' Discourse and Its Navigating Role

In this section we present an underlying change in dynamics to the line of chronological events, which had a political impact on WGSCs. The emerging role and the discourse generated by the President Erdoğan (and taken up by the AKP policies) display a shift in gender narratives and discourses, which started to be prevalent from 2010 onwards.⁶⁷ From the perspective of WGCSs' experts, we see that this period is associ-

65 More information on the network see: CTS Network 2016, Inter-universities Report.

66 XIII. CTS Çalıştay Raporu [13th Workshop Report of Sexual Harassment Attack- SHA] 2018.

67 Mutluer 2019, 103.

ated with Turkey's gender regime being influenced and directed by domestic political factors versus the international ones in comparison to the 1990s.

A specific incident which marked this era as the 'turn of direction' is the discourse generated by Erdoğan against men-women equality.⁶⁸ Giving the key note speech in the first International Conference on Women and Justice organised by the GONGO, Association of Women and Democracy (KADEM)⁶⁹ on 24 November 2014, Erdoğan infamously stated that: "*Women and men are not equal. This is not in their nature. I do not believe in this*".⁷⁰ Erdoğan's statement sparked public debates among intellectuals, scholars, state's personalities, and civil-society organisations on the status of women in Turkish society and within both scholarly and activist gender discourses. Some academics used Erdoğan's statement to re-interpret and transform the analytical concepts governing WGS and introduced the concept of 'gender justice' to compete with 'gender equality'. One of the advocates of the term 'gender justice', who also presided a WGSC in a private university in Istanbul (at the same time an influential figure at KADEM) defines the concept on biological terms:

(Justice) is a perspective that is one step further than equality. It originates from the physical roles of woman and man; from the biological roles they are in... It is the woman who goes through pregnancy, not the man! Now imagine a woman heavily pregnant, sitting on an office chair for eight hours long... This might seem like equality; to sit under the same terms with a male colleague, but this is not justice; this is not the only thing. This is putting women at a disadvantage which is brought by 'equality' and based on her biological characteristics.⁷¹

The contestation of these two terms is often associated with the rise of political conservatism both in the literature⁷² and in the interviews. Sancar defines the discussion on 'justice vs. equality' as "*an open political positioning*"⁷³ and interprets this introduction as an additional "*fault line embedded in ideological categories*"⁷⁴ along with the discussions on women vs. family, women's sexual independence, and women's care responsibilities. On the point of rising conservatism, Belkis states that she observes "*people in general being more resistant to transformation under conservative political climate*"⁷⁵, while Uy-

68 Erdoğan's discourse on the impossibility of men and women equality is assessed as a shift in the gender regime of Turkey by several scholars as well as the interviewed experts (Kandiyoti 2016 and Durakbaşa 2019; Interviews: Erbatır 2017 and Sancar 2017).

69 Association of Women and Democracy was founded in 2013 with the co-chair of Erdoğan's daughter, Sümeyye Erdoğan. Several academics label the organisation as GONGO for having close ties with the AKP government (Dursun 2018 and Diner 2018).

70 BBC News Turkish 24 November 2014.

71 Interview: Istanbul Private-1 2018.

72 Kandiyoti 2016; Diner 2018; and Dursun 2018.

73 Interview: Sancar 2017.

74 Ibid.

75 Interview: Belkis 2017.

gur draws attention “to the lack of clarity and confusion in WGS units created by the unprecedented turn of direction and enforced changes in basic concepts”.⁷⁶

In the light of the emerging polarisation, the CoHE eventually took on a stand and made a move to reinstate the fundamental structure of WGSCs. In early 2019, after the term ‘gender equality’ was opposed in the framework of the Istanbul Convention, the CoHE removed the Approach Document from its web-site. The director of the CoHE announced at a press interview that they would soon finalise their efforts to remove the concept of ‘gender equality’ from policy documents “due to its undesired connotations” and instead “would work towards the promotion of ‘women’s studies based on justice’ in order to put forward the distinguished values of the Turkish society like the concept of family”.⁷⁷

In this period, we clearly see an emerging polarisation in the field of WGSCs, not just over the statements of the President, but also in terms of fundamental working concepts developed by WGSCs’ scholars who stand on different ideological lines.⁷⁸ Fed by this fraction, the field witnesses much more drastic measures and outcomes during the post-2015 period, which shook the fundamentals, structures, and the working conditions of the WGSCs with the additional processes of Peace Petition and the Emergency State (OHAL).

4.8. Processes of Peace Petition, Emergency State (OHAL), and the Governmental Decrees (KHKs) in the post-2015 Period

In January 2016, more than eleven hundred academics signed a petition called ‘We will not be party to this crime’ (*‘Bu Suça Ortak Olmayacağız’*), criticising the state’s revitalised military operations in the Kurdish populated areas of the country after the breakdown of peace negotiations in 2015. The petition was subjected to harsh criticism by President Erdoğan, calling the signatory academics traitors and putting them at target for legal actions and punishment by the state. Initial criticisms and disciplinary proceedings initiated by the CoHE against academic-signatories evolved into a major purge process “with many of the petitioner-scholars being subsequently suspended, dismissed, forced to retire, or otherwise denied work when the Emergency Rule (OHAL) was established half a year later in 2016”.⁷⁹ OHAL was introduced following the coup attempt on 15 July 2016 to initially locate and prosecute the plotters of the coup and lasted for two years ending on 18 July 2018 following a series of extensions of the rule. Not only were politicians and military

76 Interview: Uygun 2017.

77 Gazete Duvar 2019.

78 After we left the field work in 2018 there was yet another development in the field of WGSCs which manifested itself in the foundation of series of ‘Women and Family Centres’. Although the sample of the project did include one case of Women and Family Studies Centre founded at a private University in Istanbul, it did not capture this new wave of ‘Women and Family Centres’ established rapidly at the universities between the years 2017-2020. Exploration of the inner dynamics of this development is investigated by Deniz Dağ (2020) as an individual and separate project.

79 Free To Think Report 2016, 10.

officials prosecuted, representatives and members of several civil-society organisations, think-tanks, journalists, and academics were also the target of investigations, under the claim of finding the perpetrators of the coup.^{80 81}

Having a research centre at a university is not the sole indicator to the existence of research and education in the field of WGS. The interviewees reflect upon wider but still WGS relevant impacts, which enable us to link the outcomes of the political processes with the losses and changes occurring in WGSCs. When taking a closer look, one realises that many of the expelled women academics are either feminists; or had close relations with WGS departments at universities.⁸² As a result, several WGS centres and departments were faced with leadership and policy changes following the dismissals.⁸³ The key actors which were instrumental in transmitting the effects of these two political processes into the WGS centres and scholars were the universities' managements. Some instances of university managements' intervention on the practices of WGSCs included objections against posters for activities, canceling campus-based starting point of the 'pride parade' and initiating parallel platforms on women with the participation of women scholars who were close to the university's administration.⁸⁴ Özkazanç points out that "*the friction between the department and the university's management accelerated as the campus was becoming home to queer groups and activities in recent years*".⁸⁵

The effects of the Peace Petition and *OHAL* processes were not limited to the centres. The Women's Studies MA and PhD programme at Ankara University alone suffered from the loss of three professors who used to carry a major load in teaching. Doctoral supervision of PhD candidates was disrupted; teaching in post-graduate degrees was stalled. By the rectorates' decision, Women's Studies MA programme at Ankara University was limited to accepting five students in year 2018 instead of the usual annual intake of 15. The university also disabled the possibility for external instructors to teach the curriculum. Sancar from the same university defines the situation as a

80 Başer, Akgönül, and Öztürk 2017.

81 In the course of *OHAL* fifteen universities were shut down; 1427 administrative personnel and 6081 academics were dismissed from their jobs without explanation or due process of law. According to the data of Academics for Peace initiative, so far 517 academics who signed the petition were removed, or banned from public service either through decree laws, or dismissal, or forced to resignation or retirement. In 2018, 14 academics who defended freedom of speech and academic liberties in their defences during trial were sentenced to 15 months in prison with suspension of the pronouncement of the judgement. After some academics carried their sentence to a higher court for objection, the Constitutional Court out ruled the decisions as 'violation of right', which forced national courts to publish acquittal orders starting from 2019 (Pişkin 2020).

82 Özkazanç 2017 and Interview: Erbatur 2017.

83 Interview: Özkazanç 2017.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid. It is important to note here that LGBTQ+ and queer groups and activities at Ankara University existed long before being subjected to persecution and thus exposed.

“*rough ride*” and marks the Peace Petition as the “*starting point of the hardship*”.⁸⁶ As a result of the purges, the group of scholars who founded and co-directed Ankara KASAUM (*Kadın Sorunları Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi*, the WGSC at Ankara University) and the post-graduate programme since the 1990s was dissolved. Relations between colleagues became strained as the process created a group of ‘insiders’ vs. ‘outsiders’.⁸⁷

The effects of this period were not felt evenly at all institutions. Irzık from SU Gender, a WGSC established at the private Sabancı University, provides us with a different case in dealing with the interventionist policies of the university managements in the post-2015 period. As reported by the interviewee, “*the centre has faced no dramatic impact of the political kind*”⁸⁸, thanks to the supportive attitudes of the rectorate towards the centre and its predefined mission”.⁸⁹ Irzık adds that “*they had to stop collaboration with state institutions due to the rapid re-cycle of the personnel in state offices under OHAL, which contributed to the centre’s strategy of isolation from state directed discourses and interventions*”.⁹⁰ Erbatur from Çukurova University centre argues that “*the real target during this period was women’s groups and organisations; and to reach this target the state exerted pressure on universities*”.⁹¹ This, she thinks, is “*due to the fact that the universities are seen as the driving force behind the civil front on women and gender issues opposing the government. That is why the government uses instruments like OHAL and KHKs in order to weaken the leading force behind the existing women’s organisations, which is the universities, and create space for its own civil-society foundations*”.⁹²

5. Findings, Analysis and Conclusion

In conclusion, an overall assessment of the expert interviews and institutional material collection gives us the following results on the wider effects and the political implications of the national and international conjectural events having an impact on WGSCs.

First and foremost, the empirical data show that several international but also national political developments and documents on the issue of women’s rights, women’s status and gender equality have produced important implications for the institutionalisation and transformation processes of WGSCs at universities in Turkey. The immense importance of the international network that Turkey is situated in and the changing domestic political climate for the establishment and further development of these academic entities could be thereby proven.

86 Interview: Sancar 2017.

87 Interview: Özkazanç 2017.

88 After the end of the field research in 2019, Ayşe Gül Altınay from SU Gender at Sabancı University was sentenced to 2 years and 1 month in prison on the charge of “*knowingly and willingly helping a terrorist organization without being a member*” for her signature on the Peace Petition (Pişkin 2019).

89 Interview: Irzık 2017.

90 Ibid.

91 Interview: Erbatur 2017.

92 Ibid.

Second, we witness from the late 1980s to the early 2000s that the international conjuncture was the dominant political factor in the institutionalisation processes of the centres. This period was shaped by the influence of significant global organisations as it is theorised in Kandiyoti's work⁹³ and marked with the flagship events, such as the CEDAW (1985), the Beijing Conference of UN (1995), the start of EU accession negotiations (late 1990s to early 2000s), and finally with the signing of Istanbul Convention (2011). The influence of these events was not limited at the institutional level, but they also formed important benchmarks in the professionalization of the WGSCs' scholars and strengthened the link between policy and academia, especially during the EU accession negotiations. The EU process is used as a 'bargaining chip' by WGSCs and the scholars to convince university managements in the pursuit of gender equality courses and training programmes.

What we see in the post-2010 period is that the influence of international conjuncture was gradually replaced by the conjuncture shaped by the developments in domestic politics of Turkey. During this time, the state institutions stopped taking international conventions and summits as the main reference point in the formation of the national women's agenda in Turkey. Halting progress in the EU negotiations together with international criticism on gradually increasing authoritarian character of Turkey's political regime induced Turkey to focus and rely on the internal dynamics more often than the outer ones. The unifying force generated by the public resentment against Özgüçan's murder brought several centres and academics to stand on a common ground. The formation of joint-action against sexual attack proves to be a momentary 'coalition'⁹⁴ among the diverse groups of WGSCs' scholars. In the spirit of a common action, the CoHE established the 'Unit on Academic Women's Studies' and issued the Approach Document. Further analysis of institutional materials reveals that the CoHE's initiatives can be seen as the expropriation of the centres' independent practice by a state authority at a time when the national agenda was calling for a substantial action to combat sexual harassment and attack against women.

A conceptual polarisation between different groups of WGSCs' scholars surfaced during a women's conference organised by KADEM considered to be a government-oriented NGO (GONGO) when men-women equality was contested by the statements of President Erdoğan in 2014.⁹⁵ Never before was such a strong position taken by a Turkish political authority with regards to the status of women, which had no international correspondence like the Beijing Conference, or CEDAW. The equality agenda was built as result of not only widely implemented instructions and initiatives of international organisations, but also by the life-long dedication and the labour-intensive efforts of activists and the founders of the first WGSCs in Turkey. One of the founding directors of the first period-centres, Erbatır, names the period starting by the shift in

93 Kandiyoti 2011, 166-167.

94 In a similar way, Polatdemir (2017) describes the topic of violence against women as the common denominator of many women's movements leading to coalitions based on the field research on women's movements in Turkey conducted during 2016.

95 Kandiyoti 2016, 100, Diner 2018, and Koyuncu and Özman 2018, 12.

discourses “as the end of the positive political conjuncture”.⁹⁶ Sancar states that “this is not merely a scientific introduction, but a ‘consciously given political instruction’ and ‘a forceful and spiteful direction’, which attempts to leave behind much of the gains of women’s rights and to repudiate the institutional existence and success of WGSCs reached by the principle of gender equality”.⁹⁷ The president’s narrative was based on biological differences of the two heteronormatively defined genders and openly challenged the concept of equality.

With the leading political figures’ clear hinting, the religious-conservative counter narrative on ‘gender equality’ paved the way to the generation of a new concept, which was ‘gender justice’. The concept of ‘gender justice’ was constituted by hijacking the term ‘gender’ and removing the ‘equality’ from the understanding of inter-sex relations. We interpret this as an attempt of religious-conservative protagonists to introduce a new school of thought to be planted into the existing institutional landscape of WGSCs, where the ‘equality’ was the prevalent paradigm. On the whole, the support for the term ‘gender equality’ provided by the international political conjuncture surely did not stop due to the president’s remarks, or the re-study of the term by religious-conservative academics. However, it simply found no more institutional ground in the field.

Third, the expert interviews signal us a new institutional landscape of WGSCs on the horizon under the auspices of the Peace Petition and OHAL processes. This period is characterised by the intellectual shrinkage of Women’s and Gender Studies despite the numerical expansion of the centres. The shrinkage takes place both in terms of personnel and in terms of knowledge production and academic freedoms. The dismissals of WGS academics with significant roles at the centres and post-graduate programmes, imposed reduction of incoming students to women’s studies programmes, and interventions to the area of WGS based activities are some examples of the shrinkage. The bottom line here is that the shrinkage is not an impulse by the field, but rather a top-down process. Sancar calls this a “*contra-attack*” and that “*WGS is being stripped of its feminist perspectives and instead filled with antifeminist, conservative content of family issues or any subject with the word ‘women’ on it*”.⁹⁸ Supportive to her assessment, we see an increase in the number of ‘Women and Family’ centres established at universities starting from 2017. These examples, in its very essence, prognosticating the ‘transformation’ of the field.

Another outcome of this period is that remaining scholars are now working to maintain the current status quo of the centres. In that sense, WGSCs are in ‘retreat and preserve’ (mode), to protect the field and its institutional space from further shrinkage. The retreat action has seemingly produced its own split among the colleagues, who collaboratively built up and developed the WGSCs along the years. ‘Insiders’, who managed to keep their positions within the universities, continue their struggle in realigned institutions under strict control of university managements and in the waning of academic freedoms. SU Gender at Sabancı University presents us an exceptional

96 Interview: Erbatur 2017.

97 Interview: Sancar 2017.

98 Interview: Sancar 2017.

case, in which the original foundation of the centre could be sustained thanks to the support of and resistance by the university management against the state's intervention, which created a 'safer space' for the field's original maintenance.

The case of dismissed academics was not the only form of isolation from the institutional spaces we have detected in the field. In the preparation of the field research and the formulation of the sample, we attached importance to embracing all elements of different ethnic, religious, and gender identities and discourses. It is an additional finding that this particular institutional landscape, namely the 'application and research centres', is not a complete reflection of the social and ethnic dimensions within the field of WGS in Turkey and that centres, as institutional forms, are intersectional exclusionary.⁹⁹ Despite the sizeable Kurdish population in Turkey, there is a visible void on the mention of Kurdish women, Kurdish women's studies, Kurdish women's movements and other minority women's subjects, such as non-Muslim, or other linguistic minorities and indigenous people in the institutional documents and the interviews of the experts as well as institutional materials relating to the activities of WGSCs. The void of mentioning of Kurdish Women's Movement and Studies by the interviewed experts could also be interpreted as (1) the outcome of different hierarchies and paradigmatic dominions within Turkey's women's movements¹⁰⁰ and thus its reflection onto the academic outlets; and (2) that centres as institutional forms are not independent of the dominant political environment and the ideology surrounding them.

All findings considered, we conclude with the following observations. The tenacious attacks against WGSCs actually show us the significance of the institutionalisation of WGS. Istanbul Public-1 notes:

Women's Studies in this respect is something like a borderline. Once this area is destroyed, this will spread everywhere. On the other hand, this also shows that how effective spaces are seen, what type of potential they carry, and the political rulership is aware of this. So, this is used here as a political lever, to start from here it is seen both as a threat, namely dangerous, but also as the 'soft spot'. [...] The university management and the academic community in general may not see this (WGS) as so important, for this reason it is (considered) a soft spot. We need to be aware that

99 Exception to this are two universities in our sample: Ankara University and Sabancı University, in which we see mention and evidence of LGBTQI+ studies and support to queer activities within the university environments and their activities.

100 In a field-based research project conducted at the University of Bremen (2014-2016), Azizoglu-Bazan reports that the Kurdish Women's Movement is not considered 'feminist' by the feminist movement and that '*the feminist movement neither speaks for, nor represents Kurdish women, who are seen as 'subaltern'*' (2017, 6-7). Similarly, Polatdemir reports that "*demands on equal citizenship rights together with ethnic, social, cultural, and linguistic rights raised by the Kurdish Women's Movement are considered to be a 'racial struggle' and that their demands were listed as 'divisive topics' by various members of different women's movements during the expert interviews*" (2017, 5).

these two sources of enforcements get together and response the attack (against WGS).¹⁰¹

Dismissals have proven to the WGS academics how much they actually needed the institutional spaces in the first place. The ‘outsiders’ continue their professional agendas through varieties of ‘off-university’ options and informal academies established outside the walls of the campuses. Also, many have found refuge through international funding programs such as SAR (Scholars at Risk), CARA (Council for At-Risk Academics), and the PSI (Philipp-Schwartz Initiative, Humboldt Foundation, Germany) to continue their academic work and join into the newly established transnational solidarity networks.

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101 Interview: Istanbul Public-1 2018.

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List of Expert Interviews used in this paper:

List of Anonymised Expert Interviews Upon Request (6 experts):

- Ankara Public-1 & Ankara Public-2, 2018: Gender and Women's Studies department¹⁰² based in Ankara, public university, founded in 1993 (two experts).
- NAR-1, 2018 & NAR-2, 2019: Women's Problems Application and Research Centre based in North Anatolia Region, public university, a recently founded institution (two experts).
- Istanbul Private-1, 2018: Women and Family Application and Research Centre based in Istanbul, private university, founded in 2013 (one expert).
- Istanbul Public-1, 2018: Women's Problems Application and Research Centre at the public Istanbul University, founded in 1989.

102 This case was added to the sample although it was not a centre because it is one of the significant case of UN-led initiative and works as a centre despite its educational emphasis.

List of Expert Interviews who declared their permission for full visibility (7 experts):

- Prof. Dr. Serpil Sancar, 2017: head of Women’s Problems Application and Research Centre (Ankara KASAUM) at the public Ankara University founded in 1993.
- Prof. Dr. Alev Özkazanc, 2017: former head of Women’s Studies Departmental Field at the public Ankara University, founded in 1994.
- Prof. Dr. Gülriz Uygur, 2017: head of Sexual Harassments Attack Unit at the public Ankara University.
- Prof. Dr. Gaye Erbatur, 2017: founder of Women’s Problems Application and Research Centre at the public Adana Çukurova University founded in 1994.
- Prof. Dr. Sibel İrzık, 2017: co-coordinator of SU Gender Excellence Centre at the private Sabancı University founded in 2007 as a forum and turned into a centre in 2011.
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Özlem Belkıs, 2017: former head of Women’s Rights and Problems Application and Research Centre at the public Izmir Dokuz Eylül University founded in 2009.
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gülay Akgül Yılmaz, 2018: former president of Women’s Problems Application and Research Centre at the public Marmara University founded in 2015.

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