

The Turkish withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention

A case study on effects for domestic secular women's organizations

by

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Abstract

The case study examines the Turkish withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating VAW and Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention. Hereby, the study focuses on domestic secular women's organization and suggests, that one of two possible outcomes are impacted by the withdrawal: Either the work of secular women's organization combating gender-based violence is hindered by the withdrawal or it will spark strong grassroots responses from the civic society. To examine those possibilities, a problem formulation was formulated: *What effects did the Turkish withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention have on domestic secular women's organization combating GBV in Turkey?*

To locate the research adequately within the scientific field, both a background chapter and a literature review summarizes general knowledge about gender-based violence in Turkey, legal aspects and briefly both historically as well as contemporary EU-Turkey relations. The theoretical framework of this research focuses on feminist studies, especially transnational feminist theory, and theories on violence and social movements. The qualitative case study draws on conducted interview data and supplemental data like statements, news articles and reports that are related to the Turkish withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. The data is analysed with thematic analysis and in the light of the findings, four research questions are discussed which conclusively lead to the answer of the problem formulation.

This research is a master thesis, that tries to fill a research gap regarding the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and the perspective for women's organization and movements, that are confronted with a backlash towards gender equality. The main findings show that women in Turkey are living under a constant threat of violence and facing multiple forms of it, which are all rooted in the patriarchal structures of the state. The Istanbul Convention was an important legal framework and a guidance for both women and women's organizations in the country. The withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention caused severe tensions between the civic society and the government, which is also conditioned by the government's stronger commitment to pro-family and anti-gender ideologies. The withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention is examined as a culmination of anti-gender policies over the past decade. The process leading to the withdrawal and the withdrawal itself is considered a backlash. However, secular women's organization are still motivated and determined to pressure their agendas by using windows of opportunities to voice them and generate solidarity for their cause. Therefore, it is concluded that the effects on women's organization are severe, but not hindering their work but rather initiate a process of strengthening their agenda. Due to limitations in time and space, this master thesis could not elaborate several aspects of the study. Amongst others, the networking strategies of women's organization after the withdrawal seem to grow, which however cannot further be examined. Also, other forms of discrimination based on sexuality and gender identity are not considered as subjects to this research. Additionally, an analysis of the process of resistance against the backlash in Turkey requires it to be monitored over several years, which is not possible within the scope of this study. Therefore, this research hopefully inspires other research, to undertake those examinations.

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1. Introduction

On a Tuesday, the 21st of July 2020, the Turkish police found a dead body in the Aegean district of Muğla. It was the body of a 27-year-old Kurdish woman named Pinar Gültekin, who went missing five days earlier. Her partly burned remains were found in an oil drum, doused with concrete, and buried in the woods. Police investigations confirmed that Pinar Gültekin was punched, strangled, and burned alive by her ex-boyfriend. The 32-year-old bar owner, husband, and father, who had an affair with the student, confessed that he murdered her out of jealousy after she ended the relationship (McKernan, 2020; Savaş, 2021).

The murder of Pinar Gültekin caused a nationwide mourning for the young woman and fuelled feminist protests all over Turkey. Women's activist orchestrated protests and marches. On social media Turkish women posted black and white pictures of themselves, tagged with the hashtag #challengeaccepted, to raise attention to the domestic situation, since murdered women often end up as monochrome pictures in Turkish newspapers (Savaş, 2021).

The outrage following this case was not only so big because of the brutal details, the self-righteousness of the offender after his arrest or the fact that Pinar Gültekin was a young woman. It was so big because Pinar Gültekin was not the only one (McKernan, 2020). Every year hundreds of Turkish women are murdered by men. In 2020, 417 women lost their lives, according to the project Anıt Savaş, which report and counts murdered women in Turkey on their website (Anıt Savaş, 2023; McKernan, 2020). During the ruling of the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – Justice and Development Party), the numbers of women's death in Turkey kept raising over the years. While Anıt Savaş counted 147 women in 2012, not even ten years later the numbers are in the range of about 400 murdered women per year (Anıt Savaş, 2023).

However, Turkey is not the only European state in which women are murdered by men. In fact, women all over Europe and beyond facing the risk (Koç, 2022). The murder of women is a result of gender-based violence (GBV), which again is rooted in gender inequality, and is so severe, that feminist activists and scholars coined the term *femicide* to raise attention to the gender specific killing of women because they are women, and to dispose the structural level in those killings (Koç, 2022). The highest amount of femicides happens as a result of domestic violence and the perpetrator is in most cases the intimate partner or ex-partner of the victim (Heise et al., 2002; Koç, 2022).

Femicides, GBV and Violence Against Women (VAW) also occur in the member states of the European Union (EU). According to EIGE (2022), Eurostat counted 775 cases of femicides in

the EU in 2020. All mentioned numbers are likely to be higher due to inadequate counting mechanisms and a lack of reporting in several states (EIGE, 2023).

The available data, statistics and academical research however indicate that GBV and the murder of women is still a severe problem in European countries. Due to its structural level, GBV is considered as needed to be battled on the domestic but also on an international level (EIGE, 2023; Heise et al., 2002; Koç, 2022)

As one of the most important international steps to combat GBV, the Council of Europe opened a human rights treaty for signature in 2011: the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, or better known as Istanbul Convention (IC) (see Chapter 2), which acknowledges gender inequality as the main cause for GBV and calls for both preventive and protective measures as well as legal implications to adequately punish the perpetrators (Farooq, 2021). As the scholars Mammadova and Joamets (2021) phrase it: “The IC has no tolerance policy for VAW and provides for all signatory states, a wide range of extensive responsibilities for dealing with all forms of such violence, within the legal framework of international human rights in order to make the world a safer and better place to live” (p. 86).

The first state to sign and ratify this specifically on GBV focused international human rights treaty was Turkey (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021) – as well as the first one to withdrew from it again. In 2021 the same government, who committed the state to the IC, namely the Turkish AKP government under the lead of president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, annulled the state’s treaty commitment (Amnesty International, 2021; Mammadova & Joamets, 2021). The official reasoning for the withdrawal was the accusation that the IC promotes gender as socially constructed, which leads to a normalization of homosexuality and destroys the traditional family (Bodur Ün & Arkan, 2022; Burnett, 2022; Farooq, 2021; Pinar, 2021)

The withdrawal from the IC was criticized nationwide by women’s organization and human rights activists, causing an outrage in society and sparked protests and demonstrations across the country, pointing out the alarming numbers of femicides, and the lacking implementation of adequate measures to protect women from violence (Amnesty International, 2021; Farooq, 2021; Pinar, 2021).

The continuous effort of the women’s organization, demanding to take back the withdrawal was responded by president Recep Tayyip Erdogan with a reference to the domestic laws, claiming that all necessary legislation is already included in them, and the IC is therefore not needed anymore. He proposed that the Turkish government could create an Ankara

Convention, that would be “fairer, better, and stronger” than the IC (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022, p. 955; Farooq, 2021).

Internationally, the withdrawal from the IC is observed with concern, since it marks another step towards an anti-feminist *backlash* (see Chapter 4.3.4), which is likely to be linked to the De-Europeanization process, that many scholars point out (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022; Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022). Additionally, other states might take the Turkish case as an example to take similar steps. This concern was fuelled when Poland shortly after the Turkish withdrawal announced considerations to do the same (Burnett, 2022).

The withdrawal from the IC therefore ends an important international responsibility of Turkey to combat GBV, and respectively VAW, which might cause for women to be more vulnerable and marks a culmination in the anti-feminist agenda of the government, which could lead to either one of two outcomes: Either it results in a successful and sustained hindering of the work of secular women’s organisations in Turkey fighting for gender equality or it sparks grassroots responses from the civic society, that advocate gender equality even stronger than before. The examination of those two possibilities is the subject of this master thesis, which leads to the following problem formulation: *What effects did the Turkish withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention have on domestic secular women’s organization combating GBV in Turkey?*

To answer the problem formulation, four research questions are formulated to guide the analysis and discussion of the selected relevant data:

- (1) Whether and how is the Istanbul Convention needed in Turkey?
- (2) What conditioned the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention?
- (3) What responses did it spark?
- (4) Can the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention be explained as a backlash and if so, what effects does this backlash has on the general approval for gender-equality in Turkey?

To offer a better understanding of the Turkish setting, the first chapter (Chapter 2) discusses GBV and legal implications to combat it regarding the Turkish case. Afterwards a short explanation about the Turkish history regarding the Istanbul Convention and a definition of it is provided, followed by a Literature Review (Chapter 3) that focuses on the history of the bilateral relations and recent developments between Turkey and the EU, as well as feminist history in Turkey.

As for the theoretical framework (Chapter 4) of this master thesis, feminist theory is discussed, especially transnational feminist theory, intersectionality, and patriarchy. Afterwards, the term violence is theorized by presenting selected general theories on violence followed by selected feminist theories on violence. Due to the focus on civic society in Turkey, social movement theories are presented, including transnational feminist movements, selected theories on networking strategies – which are also theorized specially for the Turkish case – and the concept of backlash.

The research design, choice of theory, method of analysis, selection of data and limitations are presented afterwards in the methodology part of this master thesis (Chapter 5), followed by the analysis (Chapter 6), in which the data findings are elaborated. The research questions than are examined in the discussion section of this master thesis (Chapter 7), which is followed by a conclusion (Chapter 8), answering the problem formulation, and summarizing the results of this study.

2. The Turkish case: Mapping context and background

2.1. Gender-based violence in Turkey

Gender-based violence (GBV) describes different forms and levels of violence towards women and queer people, like sexual, verbal, institutionalized or physical violence, because of their gender and/or sexuality (Koç, 2022). Considered as a part of GBV, Violence Against Women (VAW) is a global phenomenon, which occurs on all the mentioned levels and draws legitimation from a patriarchal structure within society and institutions (for a definition see Chapter 4.1.3), that constitutes women subordinate to men (Muftuler-Bac & Muftuler, 2021). VAW can culminate in the killing of women by men, referred to as *femicides*, which feminist scholars and activists consider a structural problem: “Women globally and historically have been much more likely than men to be murdered by their intimate partners” (Koç 2022: 2). Scholars and activists use the term *femicide* to underline the structural level of the killing of women (Heise et al., 2002; Koç, 2022; Muftuler-Bac & Muftuler, 2021).

VAW is a severe problem in Turkey (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021), which is likely to have its’ cause in the patriarchal culture of the state, that legitimates VAW, when women refuse to act accordingly to societal norms (Koç 2022; Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 2021). Additionally, some scholars identify the concept of honour as an instance to control women: “In honour-driven societies, the lower patriarchal power over women, the harder it is to exercise control

over them, and consequently, the higher the chance of the practice of violence in order to reaffirm domination” (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021, p. 81).

The general severity of the problem in Turkey can be measured accordingly to the numbers of killed women in Turkey per year (Koç 2022; Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 2021), but some scholars also point out that it is rather the degree of normalization of violence, that indicates the seriousness of the situation for women (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021).

Even though the exact numbers for Turkey are questionable due to inadequate monitoring, the high and raising rates of killed women in Turkey over the recent years can be considered as an indication for an increase of VAW, since forms of it like domestic violence usually pre-occurs to the murders and are based in the same roots of a gender-based power relations and male domination as VAW in general (Koç, 2022).

The killing of women is occurring in different shades in Turkey (Muftuler-Bac & Muftuler, 2021). Some of them are classified by the legal authorities as crimes of passion, premeditated murders or “honour killings” (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 2021). The latter refers to the killing of a women, that is related to an concept of family honour (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021), that women have violated with their behaviour: “Honour crimes are one of the history’s most terrible forms of GBV across the globe. Honour killings can be concisely described as punishing a woman, mostly by killing her or forcing her into suicide, in the expectation of recovering the ‘family honour’ when the family council decides that she has behaved in a way that completely contradicts their moral principles” (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021, p. 79-80)

The mentioned classifications are legally prosecuted in Turkey. However, the civic society also raises awareness to some cases, that are not classified as murders: “However, some deaths also get reported as suicides or accidents, which women’s activists vocalize scepticism about sometimes. As independent investigations showed, some of those cases were classified as suicides even though the victim digested rat poison or other household cleaners” (Muftuler-Bac & Muftuler, 2021, p.).

The Turkish numbers on femicides kept rising over the ruling period of the AKP government, lead by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as prime minister, which came into office in 2002: “Official data on femicides indicated a rise by 1400% from 2002 to 2009, and these do not include ‘accidents’ or ‘suicides’” (Muftuler-Bac & Muftuler, 2021, p. 162).

Despite the alarming numbers, the relevant Turkish ministries (Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Family and Social Policies) stopped to enclosure the official numbers on women’s killing in 2009. Afterwards, independent organizations like the NGO “We Will Stop Femicide

Platform” or the website Anıt Sayaç, started to report femicides instead (Muftuler-Bac & Muftuler, 2021).

Those numbers show that women get killed even more often today than ten years ago (Anıt Sayaç, 2023). From time to time, officials from the Turkish government however claim a significantly lower number than the independent organizations (Muftuler-Bac & Muftuler, 2021).

2.1.1. The Istanbul Convention

Turkey signed and ratified multiple international convention to prevent femicides. In 1985, the state joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 2021). Several additional steps were taken to consolidate the Turkish commitment to CEDAW in the 2000s, one of the last happening 2004, two years after the AKP government under the ruling of president Recep Tayyip Erdogan came into office: “In 2004, the Turkish government adopted an Amendment on Article 90 of the Constitution, ensuring CEDAW has superiority over national law” (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 2021: 162).

Nevertheless, it was still a femicide case happening in Turkey, that paved the way for the IC. Nahide Opuz and her mother applied for governmental protection in 1998 due to Nahide’s abusive husband. Even though two violent incidents already proved the seriousness of the women’s need of protection - a first one in which Nahide’s husband hit both women with a car, leaving them with severe injuries and a second in which he stabbed Nahide seven times – the Turkish state failed in doing so. Both times the perpetrator was released after a few days of prison or just punished with a fine. Nahide’s violent ex-husband at that point, who both her and her mother sought protection from, eventually killed Nahide’s mother, his mother-in-law, in 2002. Even though this time, he was sentenced with a life imprisonment, a pending appeal succeeded and released him from prison (Council of Europe, 2023).

After trying several times to be protected by the Turkish state, the surviving Nahide Opuz lastly appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) for protective measures, which led to the first ECHR ruling in a femicide case: “On 9 June 2009, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Turkey had violated its obligations to protect women from domestic violence” (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 2021: 163; Council of Europe, 2023). This was the first time, an ECHR ruling confirmed GBV as a form of discrimination under the European Convention of Human Rights which shortly after missioned the Council of Europe

to combat GBV with an international treaty (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022; Council of Europe, 2023).

The ECHR ruling exposed the situation for women in Turkey and combined with the general raising of femicides, increasing by 1400 % between 2002 and 2009, Turkey needed to prove its willingness to combat the problem (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022).

When the Council of Europe therefore opened the Convention on Preventing and Combating VAW and Domestic Violence for signature, Turkey's ruling elites decided to join the preparation process to prove its image and credibility, additionally inviting several feminist organizations to guide the government in the preparation process (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022). The Council of Europe Treaty Series No. 210 is the most far-reaching international convention in this manner, that serves a holistic approach to GBV as rooting in gender inequality. It promotes not only guidelines to adequately punish perpetrators but also suggests several preventive and protective measures to address the issue of VAW. It additionally implements monitoring measurements to secure the domestic application in the states committed to the treaty. It serves the purpose of eliminating all kinds of GBV and discrimination based on sex, gender identity, sexuality, disability, race, age, language, religion, and marital status (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022; Mammadova & Joamets, 2021; Muftuler-Bac & Muftuler, 2021).

Turkey, being the first Council of Europe member state penalized by the ECHR for insufficient protection of women, was also the first state to sign and ratify the Convention. Because Turkey also took a leading position during the development of the Convention, it is also known as Istanbul Convention (IC) (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 2021).

However, ten years later Turkey was also the first state to annul its ratification and withdraw from the treaty on the 19th of March 2021, which was answered with heavy criticism and outrage in civic society, supported by several women's organization (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021).

2.1.2. Legal situation in Turkey regarding VAW

In Turkey a legal framework to prevent and punish VAW is active in the law. The following discusses the most important aspects of the Turkish law regarding VAW by pointing out strength and weaknesses.

Law No. 6284

A first very important legal impact on the situation for women is Article No. 6284 of the Turkish Penal Code named “Law on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women”. The Law was adopted in 2012 (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021). It is based on the IC and was adopted for the purpose of demonstrate Turkey's commitment and compatibility to the international treaty (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021). During the process of development, 242 women's organizations collaborated with the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, providing knowledge about the issue and advice how to combat it: “Thanks to their participation, one of the main strengths of Law No. 6284 became both – ‘protection of the family’ and ‘prevention of VAW’ at the same time” (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021, p. 91).

The scholars Ulviyya Mammadova and Kristi Joamets highlight some attributes of the Law No. 6284 (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021). The first strength, the scholars point out, is that the law regulates the protection of women in Turkey, disregard their marriage status, which “[...] eliminating discrimination against women considering their marital status” (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021, p.91). Secondly, the law extends the scope of protection for women because it does not only consider women as victims worthy of protection who already had experienced violence but also including those who are under the threat of violence (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021).

Additionally, the law No. 6284 also advocates Article 90 of the Turkish Constitutional Law, which states that international treaties trump domestic laws if they conflict each other, which underlines the importance of the IC for Turkey: “Police officials, judges and other governmental authorities have the lack of awareness and knowledge of international agreements, and the IC was obliging them to pay more attention to the IC, as it is the legally binding document on combatting VAW (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021, p.93).

Furthermore, the Law No. 6284 seeks to combat VAW by basing it on a human rights approach and adhering to the definition of GBV that the IC suggests as well. Therefore, the IC serves as a guiding instance for the Law No. 6284, which however can also be interpreted as a weakness of the Law No. 6286. Indeed, the main problem remains the lack of implementation, as the law is linked to an international treaty instead and is not considered a domestic law in its own right: “The problem is not the formation of the new laws, but its implementation of Turkish legislation in the cases of VAW and the lack of political desire to guarantee gender equality” (Mammadova & Joamets, 2021, p. 93)

The “unjust provocation” defence

According to the New Turkish Penal Code, adopted in 2004, Turkish legal authorities define femicides as murders committed by current or previous intimate partners (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021). Those type of murders as well as honour-based femicides are supposed to be punished with an aggravated life sentence (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021).

In Turkey, local Criminal Courts are the first instance when the perpetrator is accused of a crime that is punishable with “aggravated life imprisonment, life imprisonment or sentences involving more than 10 years of imprisonment” like homicide or assault (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021, p. 164) The ruling of this court must be ratified by a supreme court for criminal cases – the Court of Cassation. If the Court of Cassation does not accept the ruling of the Criminal Court, the case goes back to the Criminal Court for a new trial (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021).

An explanation for the severity of VAW in Turkey, as described in Chapter 2.1., is not only the patriarchal culture (see Chapter 4.1.3.) that shapes societal norms, but also its effect on the court ruling in femicide cases: “However, while significant reforms on femicide are adopted on paper, their implementation is another story” (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021, p. 164). Mitigated sentences for the male perpetrators in femicide cases can be seen as a direct result of institutional violence directed at women: “Men who commit femicide enjoy impunity as a direct consequence of institutional violence, which occurs at many levels” (Koç, 2022, p. 2). The institutional failure to protect women before and after murder by punishing perpetrators appropriately, legitimates VAW, and allows both VAW and femicides, as its most extreme form, to happen continuously: “This argument emphasizes the role of the justice system and other institutions of state allowing VAW to continue” (Koç, 2022, p, 2).

Many different cases illustrate how this kind of violence happens in Turkish courtrooms when femicides are for trial and the perpetrators successfully using “unjust provocation” to mitigate their sentences (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021).

The provocation clause is covered by Artikel 29 of the New Turkish Penal Code: “Specifically, Article 29 of the Penal Code states: ‘If a violent crime is committed in response to a prior, unjust act which has led to anger, intense grief, then the perpetrator would be punished with a prison sentence of 18 to 24 years, rather than aggravated life imprisonment, or 12 to 18 years instead of life long imprisonment’” (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021, p. 164).

According to this, the Court is allowed to reduce the penalty, if the defence can prove a form of provocation by the victim leading to the mentioned feeling. Feelings however are not objective. Therefore, the provocation clause remains blurry in its implementation and is often

used to distract from the crime by focusing rather on how the victim should have behaved to prevent the violence, than punishing the violent act (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021).

This indicates how much the provocation defence is intertwined with societal norms and the Courts view of a women's proper behaviour (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021).

As the scholars Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler (2021) researched, many other Court rulings in cases of femicides in Turkey show the same pattern and the patriarchal interpretation of the provocation clause: "As will be shown in specific cases the legal rulings refer to being kissed on the cheek, not answering the door on time, out of wedlock pregnancy, or refusal to drink juice offered by her husband as acts of disobedience, and material proof for 'improper' female behaviour, flaunting traditional gender roles" (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021, p. 165).

One of the most horrendous cases, mentioned by the scholars, is the case of Güldünya Tören, a so-called honour killing. Honour killings are murders where the woman gets killed by family members, often a male relative younger than 18, because she dishonoured the family through improper behaviour (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021). In Güldünya's case, this 'improper' behaviour was getting raped and involuntarily impregnated with an illegitimate baby, which led to an organized killing by family members as punishment. The Court accepted the provocation defence in this case: "In their reasoned ruling, the judges argued that Güldünya's rape damaged the family's honour as a whole. Her crime, the initial rape, caused extreme distress among her male relatives" ((Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021, p. 166).

This case illustrates the patriarchal values in Turkish society and its reflection in Court's ruling, which institutionally legitimatizing the control over women and especially their bodies and sexuality through a patriarchal construction of honour, which results in protecting male perpetrators through victim-blaming (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021).

However, in 2004, significant changes in the Penal Code were adopted that are supposed to prevent mitigated sentences in honour killings. The highly patriarchal custom, which is covered by tradition, religion, and the family as a patriarchal construct, was specifically excluded from the provocation defence and classified as a first-degree murder. Additionally, underaged perpetrators committing an honour crime cannot longer expect reduced sentences due to being under the age of 18 (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021).

Nevertheless, the provocation clause is still used in many femicide cases to reduce sentences for perpetrators. The outcome of provocation defence, if it is accepted by the Court or not, is additionally linked to the victim's identity. If the victim is perceived as an honourable woman, acting accordingly to social norms for women's behaviour, it is less likely for the perpetrator to successfully defend himself with the provocation clause. As the scholars

Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler (2021) summarize: “In other words, provocation is evaluated based on the victim’s social status, her ‘honour’, her ‘chastity’, and sentences carried out to punish the perpetrators are not decided on the merits of the case, but according to the status of the women” (p.168).

Conclusively, it can be stated that the legal implementation of protecting women by appropriately punishing perpetrators and creating an institutional deterrent towards femicides faces the challenge of social values affecting the Courts ruling, which makes the law complicit in the perpetuation of VAW and femicides in Turkey. It can additionally be argued, that even though the legal scriptures to protect women exist on paper, especially Article 29 leaves too much room for interpretation when it comes to implementing the laws and therefore facilitates lenient sentences (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler, 2021).

3. Literature Review

On the 1 July 2021, Turkey withdrew from the IC (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022; Güneş & Ezikoğlu, 2023). To this date the published research regarding it is rather limited due to it being a contemporary event. Although the lacking knowledge production marks a research gap at this point, some published studies still examine the latest changes in Turkey’s foreign politics, focusing on the historically charged relationship between Turkey and the EU, while others offer interesting insights into the dynamics at play that led to the withdrawal. In the following, some selected publications are discussed to outline an impression of the State of the Art regarding EU-Turkey relation and its impact on the withdrawal from the IC. Due to the limitations in space, only four relevant studies could inform this Literature Review, but it is suggested, that a following study could focus on a more in-depth analysis of the available literature.

Promoting gender: EU accession process

The article “Europeanization and De-Europeanization of Turkey’s Gender Equality Policy: The Case of the Istanbul Convention” by the scholars Marella Bodur Ün and Harun Arıkan (2022) examines the impact of the IC on the policymaking of gender equality in Turkey. The authors focus on the literature of Europeanization and De-Europeanization to discuss the recent shift in Turkey’s political climate (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022).

As for a definition, the scholars refer to the term of Europeanization as describing the impact of European norms, values, and policies on different domestic policy areas in both member

and candidate states (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022). According to Bodur Ün and Arıkan (2022), Turkey has been in a process of Europeanization since its establishment in 1923.

The scholar Dursun-Özkanca specifies this in her article “An examination of the underlying dynamics of Turkey-EU relations through the lenses of international relations theory” (2022), stating that Turkey attempted to join the precursor of the EU for the first time already in 1959. It submitted its application for associate membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) and applied for full membership in 1987. However, it took until 1999 for Turkey to become an official EU candidate. (Dursun-Özkanca, 2022).

This process consequently kickstarted an accession process during which Turkey committed to nearly all European and UN Conventions on human rights, including those combating GBV and advocate gender equality since Turkey faced criticism from the EU regarding the status of women in the country: “These messages were taken seriously by AKP, which, after winning its first electoral victory in 2002, remained committed to the EU accession goal by undertaking political and economic reforms to meet the accession criteria” (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022, p. 949).

This is also described in the Article “Legal and Political Challenges of Gender Equality and Crimes Against Women in Turkey: The Question of Istanbul Convention” by the scholars Güneş & Ezikoğlu (2023). They state that the EU accession process at the time of the election in 2002 was one important part of the AKPs Party Program for the main reason of opposing the anti-Western ideology of the previous ruling Islamist party *Milli Görüş* (National Outlook Movement). In the AKP Election Guide it was promised that Turkey would fulfil the requirements for the EU accession as soon as possible (Güneş & Ezikoğlu, 2023). After winning the election, the AKP under presidential minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan first seemed to keep the promise by passing nine progressive packages in line with the EU accession demands (Güneş & Ezikoğlu, 2023), and eventually started the EU accession negotiations in 2005 (Dursun-Özkanca, 2022; Güneş & Ezikoğlu, 2023).

In line with this process, Turkey additionally signed and ratified several International Conventions regarding GBV, while the latest and most prominent one is the IC in 2012 during the legislative period of the AKP, which all have a serious impact on the domestic situation: “All these agreements have a direct effect on the Turkish legal system, as the Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution states that international agreements on human rights shall prevail the domestic law on the same matter in case of conflict” (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022, p. 949).

However, as Bodur Ün & Arıkan (2022) additionally state, the EU accession process was not the only reason for the progressive changes towards gender equality in Turkey. It was also

influenced by several Turkish women's organization, using the EU accession process as a guidance institution, and putting pressure on the domestic government by reminding it of the accession process and the EU regulations. According to this, the EU provided a strong point of argumentation for women's organization and opened new promising networking opportunities (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022).

Contemporary EU-Turkey relations

Since today, almost twenty years later, Turkey failed to become an EU member state due to insufficient implementations of human rights and rule of law: "Out of the 35 accession negotiation chapters, only 16 have been opened, and only one, Chapter 25 on Science and Research, has been provisionally closed" (Dursun-Özkanca, 2022, p. 746).

This led to a stalemate in the negotiations, which has a lasting effect on the Turkey-EU relationship (Dursun-Özkanca, 2022,).

Dursun-Özkanca (2022) states that over the recent years, the ruling Turkish government got less interested in joining the EU due to a lack of trust. Since 2016, the tone got more tensed with Turkish authorities openly questioning the EU and the EU perceiving Turkish foreign politics as boundary-breaking (Dursun-Özkanca, 2022).

Dursun-Özkanca (2002) examines several reasons for the shift in Turkish foreign policy towards de-Europeanization, which the scholar observes in the time frame from 2016 onwards. Turkey views itself, as Dursun-Özkanca (2002) claims, as an autonomous actor and equal partner to the West but not treated like one from the EU, which results in Turkey accusing the EU to be anti-Turkey biased, acting with Western arrogance and double standards. This then accumulates in Turkey flexing muscles in the region against EU interests to underline its important strategic position, which lead to the Turkish foreign politics often colliding with the interest of several EU member states and additionally hinder the EU relation, when Turkey uses its position as leverage against the EU: "The differences of interest between Turkey and the EU on Syria, Libya, Cyprus, and energy issues in the EastMed have contributed to the lack of trust, leading to increasingly boundary-breaking foreign policy behavior", accompanied by an ongoing and public mutual recrimination for the difficult bilateral relation (Dursun-Özkanca, 2022, p. 751).

However, Dursun-Özkanca (2022) identifies a second domain, that additionally challenges the relationship besides the international politics factors and can be reasoned as the shift towards de-Europeanization. The domestic variables in Turkey like rising nationalism, electoral considerations, weakened checks and balances system and the anti-western populism is causing EU-tensions, since the evaluation of the domestic situation is an important cause for

the challenged relation. Additionally, Dursun-Özkanca (2022) claims, that Turkey's shift in foreign policy might be calculated to distract from domestic problems like inflation and unemployment.

Observed is this as well by the scholars Bodur Ün & Arıkan (2022), stating that a De-Europeanization process started in almost the same time span as the gender equality promotion and recently sharpened. De-Europeanization is the contrary term to Europeanization, as it is stated by the scholars, and which is examined by a third and still emerging generation of Europeanization studies, that focus rather on the rejection of European policies and values and theorizing the tendency of more and more member and candidate states of becoming an alien to the EU: “[...] we define de-Europeanization both as the weakening or loss of the EU/Europe as a context and as a reference point in domestic political debates and as a ‘withdrawal from’ EU policies and reversal from European norms, values, and policy demands” (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022).

Several indicators are observed by the scholars in the past decade: “Following its electoral victory in 2011, AKP consolidated its political dominance, curtailing the power of the military and the judiciary, adopted populist authoritarian discourses, further deepening the secularist-Islamist divide, and reinforced more religious conservative values as reflected in its anti-gender, pro-family discourses and policies (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022, p. 950).

Conclusively they point out, that Turkey moved away from the European values, norms, and policy demands over the past decade in many policy areas (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022).

According to Bodur Ün and Arıkan (2022), the implementation of a legislative framework to enhance the situation of women in the country was accompanied by several attempts to reverse the relevant reforms. As a turning point in 2010, the presidential minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan publicly rejected gender equality and stated that men and women are inherently different, which nurtured pro-natalist policies, limiting women to reproduction activities and controlling female sexuality and behaviour: “PM Erdoğan urged women to bear at least three children and the then deputy PM advised women ‘not to laugh in public’ and ‘to protect their chasteness’” (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022, p. 951).

Also Güneş & Ezikoğlu (2023) identify the starting point of the shifting gender equality policies in Turkey like Bodur Ün & Arıkan (2022) in 2011, linking it as well to a speech of the president promoting traditional family values. Gender equality is viewed by the AKP as threatening the family and perceives VAW as a private matter rather than a public or even structural problem, that has its roots in gender inequality in patriarchal societies (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022).

The withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention

On the 13 July 2017, the EU signed the IC to “create a coherent EU framework for combating VAW. Thus, combatting GBV covered by the IC constitutes an important part of the EU’s common values” (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022, p. 952).

As already mentioned, Turkey shifted from leaning towards Europe to a more critical view on Western institutions and values. As Bodur Ün and Arıkan (2022) state, although Turkey was the first state to sign and ratify the Convention, it still failed in implementing it sufficiently, which is also linked to the exclusion from secular women’s organization after the (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022, p. 953).

The withdrawal from the IC is according to Bodur Ün and Arıkan (2022) a culmination of a controversial discourse about it, that was predominantly verbalized by conservative religious groups in the parliament demanding to withdraw from it. The main argument was based on a pro-family and anti-gender ideology: “The main argument presented by the opponents reflected a (deliberate) misinterpretation of the Convention’s articles with the claim that it promotes ‘third gender’ and ‘same sex marriage’, which would ultimately undermine traditional family values” (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022, p. 953).

Bodur Ün & Arıkan (2022) conclusively view the withdrawal from the IC as a culmination of both the increasing influencing of anti-gender and pro-family policies in Turkey, that is lobbied by several conservative religious groups, while delegitimizing gender equality as an solely Western value that does not fit the Turkish society: “The Istanbul Convention was delegitimized by emphasizing the essential incompatibility of cultural and religious values between Turkey and the EU and by construing the values of the former as superior in relation to the values of the latter” (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022, p. 956). As a response, the latest European Parliament resolution as well as the President of European Commission stated, that the step to withdraw from the IC widens the gap between Turkey and the EU (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022).

Feminist history in Turkey and networking strategies

Against the background of the theories discussed in Chapter 4.3.2. Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu (2022) researched changes for secular women’s organization in Turkey during the ruling of the AKP government, which they refer to as the “de-democratization phase under the New Turkey” (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022, p.). The paper is evaluated as relevant to this study and serves as the reason to include the velvet triangle and the two target-approaches as a

theory. In the following, the paper is therefore discussed in more detail, to offer a feminist movement theory regarding networking and lobbying especially for the Turkish case.

In the paper “De-Democratization under the New Turkey? Challenges for women’s organizations”, the scholars Hande Eslen-Ziya and Nazlı Kazanoğlu argue, due to the history of feminist activism in Turkey, that secular women’s organization activism rely on good networking and collaboration skills and the active organizations are highly invested in lobbying (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022).

Feminist activism in Turkey started in 1960s, when women created and participated in social movements. However, they did not yet question gender roles or the status of the women in society, but rather worked towards education of women and girls (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022). Women’s group in the 1980s than formed, which were first connected to the state institutions, but more and more secular women’s organization evolved and aligned behind feminist topics, questioning the role and status of women in Turkish society. Those organizations also started lobbying and, according to Eslen-Ziya and Kazanoğlu (2022), created strong velvet triangles with their network. When the EU-accession process started, those secular women’s organization at first benefitted from it. Not only did they get international support on their topics and therefore leverage towards the domestic government, but some also received financial and educational aid by the EU institutions (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022). Since those activists groups relied on networking already before, they also started to form collaboration across Europe with member states and EU institutions “on the ground of funding opportunities” (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022, p. 107). The lobbying strategy of secular women’s organization at that point, as Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu (2022) argue, corresponds to the single target approach, due to having smooth networking opportunities with the Turkish government and being actively included in the decision-making process of gender-equality-policies (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022).

However, the success of this strategy was put to an end during and after 2011 elections, when according to Eslen-Ziya and Kazanoğlu (2022) the de-democratization process started. As a result of this process governmental funded organizations started to replace the secular women’s organisations:

In this period, KADEM (Women and Democracy Association) – a women’s organization ran by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s daughter Sumeyye Erdogan, was established among many others. KADEM is a civil society organization with the aim to preserve traditional gender roles [...]. These

government-funded and founded non-governmental organizations, been indeed an old project of conservative parties, dating back to the mid-1980s (p. 107).

As such an organization, KADEM and other similar organizations aligned better with the traditional perspective of the governmental party, gained significant influence, and eventually replaced secular women's organization, which limited their access to governmental actors and broke the built velvet triangles (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022).

Secular women's organization therefore had to change their strategies and were doing so in targeting not the initial targets, but influential others - for example, domestic companies, international actors, or even individual and more progressive parliamentarians within the right-leaning political parties, that were mapped as having an impact on domestic politics. This strategy adheres to the double-target approach (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022).

Even though, the double-target approach secured the influence of the secular women's organizations in Turkey, it also caused disadvantages in visibility: "Relying on this shift from the single target to double target approach, it is plausible to argue that secular women's organizations became marginalized in the eyes of the politicians" (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022, p.118).

Conclusively, Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu (2022) argue that secular women's organization remained in using the double target approach, which might make them less visible for governmental actors but nevertheless influential. Who they are collaborating with however depends on trust, which can be theorized as a new additive to the double-target approach. One EU-level institution, the European Women Lobby (EWL), used to be a strong and appreciated partner of secular Turkish women's organization, but eventually lost its reliability due to continuously disappointing policy-influence on the domestic government in Turkey in the eyes of the women's organizations. As a response, secular women's organisation in Turkey turned their back on the EWL and instead collaborated with other international women's organizations. Therefore, Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu (2022) conclude: „Moreover, this paper contends that although *Europeanization* might open a salient window of opportunity for civil society movements, the socio-political conditions of the day intrinsic to national states well influence the trajectory of the movement" (p. 118).

4. Theory

4.1. Feminist Theory

Feminist Studies, terminological including women's studies, gender studies or a mixture of both, describes a wide-ranging body of research with a respectively new history of fifty years (Lykke, 2010). While it is possible to speak of it as "specific academic field", it needs to be acknowledged "that the field is non-traditional and different" (Lykke, 2010, p. 14).

Feminist Studies emerged out of political activism and social feminist movements, that inspired scholars to take it from the street to the academic context, starting a body of research which criticizes much knowledge production as biased and gender blind, serving a gender-conservative discourse. However, this intellectual rebel and struggle against conservative research shaped the field on an organizational level: "In some countries and in some universities, Feminist Studies is still marginalized and only allowed to unfold through informal networks of researchers and students. In many other places [...] Feminist Studies is recognized and institutionalized, with its own professors, research and teaching programs, separate institutions and so on" (Lykke, 2010, p. 14).

However, there is no unique feminist theory, that can briefly be discussed. The academic field includes a wide range of different approaches, developments and lines of thoughts, several different theories emerged accordingly and were shaped by historical and political developments (Lykke, 2010).

Since this research can only acknowledge but not discuss the variety of feminist theories in the academical field of knowledge production, transnational feminist theory was mapped as most relevant for this research. Because this research focuses on domestic secular women's organisation in Turkey, which are battling GBV and align themselves with feminist theory, transnational feminist theory becomes a relevant tool to analyse the collaborative actions of those organizations as well amongst each other as also to international actors such as the EU and other stakeholders. Additionally, transnational feminist theory can theorize the question if the withdrawal from the IC is able to achieve solidarity amongst Turkish women. In the following, the history and development of the theory is discussed alongside core concepts and themes, that are characteristic to it. Afterwards specific, for this research relevant, terms of feminist theory are defined and explained, namely patriarchal society/culture, which is relevant to theorize and understand the Turkish case, and intersectionality. This research project uses the analytic framework of intersectionality as to understand different power systems that might be in place for women in Turkey facing GBV and to not fall into the trap

of generalizing Turkish women but rather acknowledges that even in the same country, women might face different struggles. It is also used to examine whether the IC sufficiently covers the potential different risk of violence for multiple marginalized women. Additionally, intersectionality will provide an analytic tool to foster an understanding of differences in the lived realities of the researcher and women in Turkey, due to their different location.

4.1.1. Transnational feminist theory

The western liberal feminist movement, which mostly consisted out of privileged white women, emphasized a global sisterhood to solidarize women all around the world. Inspiring the early research on feminism, scholars like Robin Morgan adapted that approach into the academical knowledge production (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021). As argumentation a general experience of patriarchal oppression, that all women share, were assumed (hooks, 2015; Zerbe Enns et al., 2021). The main goal of the movement was equality with men and freedom of sexist oppression (hooks 2015).

The sisterhood approach however was criticised as utopian, romanticizing and from a single western perspective on oppression that cannot be generalized (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021). Scholars like bell hooks and Audre Lorde actively disagreed with this concept of solidarization amongst women. Their works inspired and informed transnational feminist theory. According to hooks (2015), women cannot solidarize under the umbrella of equalization for different reasons. First, because not even men are equal amongst each other, and marginalized women observe marginalized men struggling against racism or classism despite being male. Second, marginalized women, with cross-over experience of discrimination based on race or class do not feel the same patriarchal oppression as white privileged women do since sexism interacts with racism and classism. Third, marginalized women experience exploitation based on racism and classism from white feminist, which additionally hinders a solidarization with feminism. As alternative attempt to western feminism, hooks (2015) argues for an intersectional feminism, that acknowledges crossovers between marginalization affecting each other (hooks, 2015)The interplay of sexism, racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination need to be considered in feminist theory and research. Therefore, bell hooks paved the way for the emerge of intersectional approaches to feminism, including transnational feminist theory (hooks, 2015)

Audre Lorde too points out the necessity of an intersectional lens, when she writes: “As a forty-nine-year-old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an interracial couple, I usually find myself a part of some group defined as other,

deviant, inferior, or just plain wrong” (Lorde, 2004, p. 854). Lorde, who is a feminist writer based in the United States of America, argues, that the othering is institutionalized in a profit economy and the member of those economy (by living in it) do not learn how to be equal despite differences or relate through diversity instead of commonalities. While capitalistic societies pretend that differences are the separating factor, Lorde (2004) replies that is “[...] rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior [*sic*] and expectation” (p. 855).

Emerging from and drawing on those contributions, transnational feminist theory describes a body of feminist research that highlights the importance of “[...] diverse experiences of women who live within, between, and at the margins or boundaries of nation-states around the globe” (Zerbe Enns et.al, 2021, p.11)

The core concepts and approaches, transnational feminist theory draws on, are intersectionality and -disciplinarity, social activism and collaboration, as well as justice (Zerbe Enns et al. 2021). In practice, this means including and applying several core themes that are not exclusive to transnational feminist theory but still characteristic (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021)

As a first theme, reflexivity and personality is practiced in transnational feminism. (Self-)Reflexivity about location enhances a deeper understanding of cultural differences, power dynamics, biases, and stereotypes, and can prevent reproduction of discrimination in the knowledge production by applying a critical lens. This interweaves with personality, since it “[...] refers to one’s position in the world; one’s multiple and intersecting social identities; and one’s sources of privilege, power, and marginalization” (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021, p.11). Personality statements, as also included in this research, are used in transnational feminist theory to actively practice reflexivity in intellectual discourses, and reveal how the researchers location and position might inform the understanding of the research or biases (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021). This first theme can also be seen as having a similar understanding of academical knowledge production as the principle of situated knowledge, developed by the feminist scholar Donna Haraway (Lykke, 2010). Haraway criticizes the idea of an objective research, that can be conducted by a neutral researcher. Instead, Haraway argues for science as a “story-telling practice”, meaning that “[...] the researcher cannot give an objective depiction of the world ‘out there,’ but produces a story, of which he or she is a part” (Lykke, 2010, p.5).

A second core theme is the intersectional lens. In more detail explained further down, intersectionality refers to the interplay of different forms of discrimination, that are not just

added on top of but rather affecting and shaping each other. Transnational feminist theory acknowledges those intersections and applies intersectional lenses to understand diverse experiences (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021).

Third, interests rather than generalized experience are seen as theme to connect women across the world in transnational feminist networks. As Chandra Mohanty suggested “[...] a transnational solidarity approach that does not presume the existence of identical priorities or common identity but focuses on concrete interconnected and interrelated issues that can lend themselves to productive activism and alliance-building across borders” (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021). Based on interests and specific power inequalities, that women internationally have an interest to tackle like VAW, transnational feminism is structured under a continuously defining praxis of how to build networks (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021).

In close relation to that, the fourth core theme refers to crossing borders, which inherit different concepts like “shifting borders and boundaries, straddling borders, transcending borders, and using borderland thinking as source of information and strength” (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021, p. 17). Those concepts are used to understand different living realities, forms of oppression and power dynamics and to build empowerment and resistance (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021).

Appreciating diverse kinds of agency and resistance is the sixth theme, that identifies transnational feminist theory. As indicated above, western feminists often perceived their own struggle as normative and universal, empowered themselves while victimized marginalized women in non-western countries as less fortunate and in need of help (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021). Transnational feminist thinking however seeks to disrupt the normativity of a generalized feminism and therefore acknowledges the wide range of different forms of agency and resistance, women across the globe invest themselves in (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021).

Seventh, transnational feminist theory interacts with decolonization theory and praxis: “A central feature of transnational feminism is its challenge of dominant forms of knowledge and the creation of decolonized alternatives” (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021, p. 19). Colonialism (especially European colonialism) and its history is perceived as still shaping today’s power relations and organization in an international context. Its affects states and politics as well as societies and individuals. Transnational feminism seeks to be reflective about those power inequalities and actively break them. This also affects knowledge production. Western created knowledge receives greater attention and normative power than other knowledge production, while often depict western perspectives as universal. It is therefore criticised as reproducing

hierarchies, silencing marginalized voices and supporting inequalities and domination (Mohanty, 1984, 2003; Zerbe Enns et al., 2021).

Transnational feminist theory when applied to praxis, also support “effective and egalitarian alliances”. Creating and sustaining those alliances and collaborative partnerships becomes the eighth core theme for transnational feminist theory and praxis. Informed by the upper core themes, transnational feminist activism shape partnerships that are aware of differences as well as similarities and acknowledge diverse perspectives and priorities. However, even though transnational feminist activists seek to build such alliances, the mentioned historically build global power structures continuously challenge the partnership, so traces of it in individual or group actions need to be actively dismantled and abolished (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021).

As a ninth and last core theme, transnational feminist theory draws on critical theory and other critical bodies of research, centralizes this genealogy of knowledge production, and elaborate it further (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021).

4.1.2. Intersectionality

The intersectionality approach refers to a research praxis, that acknowledges diverse forms of discrimination based on, amongst others, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, disabilities, location, and religion. The term was first used by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and was especially discussed in black feminist theory (Cooper, 2016).

Coined in multiple essays in the late 80s and early 90s by Crenshaw, intersectionality mainly referred to the intersection of race and gender. In a later essay, she also added class as a relevant domination to one’s experiences. With those essays, Crenshaw “catalysed a tectonic shift in the nature of feminist theorizing”, due to offering an analytic framework that did not generalize but differentiate, including different systems of power as interacting with each other (Cooper, 2016, p. 3).

Intersectionality draws on a genealogy of critical scholars, highlighting both the racism and the sexism as a structural power dynamic in society. Black intellectuals and activists voiced the interaction of patriarchy with racism as early as 1892, when activist Anna Julia Cooper wrote about how women of colour face both the struggle to achieve equal rights as women with men and as people of colour with white persons: “Black women endured the ignobility of both systems, often while confronting crushing poverty too” (Cooper, 2016, p. 4).

Over the next century, many intellectuals added up on this observation, developing concepts and theories to analyse the interactions between sexism and racism. However, it was not

before 1988 that Deborah King criticised that the two newest discussed concepts, the *double jeopardy* by Frances Beale and the *triple jeopardy* by Beverly Lindsay, which also took class into account, were rather adding up the power systems than seeing them as interactive with each other. Conclusively, King coined the term *multiple jeopardy* and with that paved the way to Crenshaws Intersectionality term, as Brittney Cooper (2016) concludes: “Taken together, this body of proto-intersectionality theorizing advanced the idea that systems of oppression – namely racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism – worked together to create a set of social conditions under which black women and other women of color lived and labored, always in a kind of invisible but ever-present social jeopardy” (p. 5)

Relevant to mention however is, that intersectionality was not intended by Crenshaw to circle around creation of identity or identity politics but rather highlights power structures in the interference of multiple forms of discrimination, that are acting out in diverse combinations. Additionally, intersectionality tries to balance out the fine line between problematic essentialism – because it is historically used to legitimate mentioned power structures – and valuing diversity (Cooper, 2016).

Though Crenshaw did not envision it, the framework of intersectionality was still interpreted as a contribution to theories of identity despite Crenshaw explicit rejection of it (Cooper, 2016).

To avoid a misunderstanding of the concept, it therefore needs to be highlighted that Crenshaw repeatedly pressured, that intersectionality is an only structural analytic framework, that might be adaptable to theorize structural identity but never to constitute personal kinds of identity. Projects that tried to use it as an analytic tool for a “totalizing account of identity” proofed it insufficient for those ventures (Cooper, 2016, p. 8).

4.1.3. Patriarchy

Broadly speaking, the term patriarchy describes the domination of men over women. Even though patriarchy is often linked to sexism, it is not sufficient to describe it as such. A more detailed definition of patriarchy is given by Sherry B. Ortner, when referring to patriarchy as a power structure: “It is a social formation of male-gendered power with a particular structure that can be found with striking regularity in many different arenas of social life, from small-scale contexts like the family, kin groups, and gangs, up through larger institutional contexts like the police, the military, organized religion, sports, the state, and more” (Ortner, 2022, p. 308).

Carol P. Christ acknowledges this definition of patriarchy “[...] as a system of male dominance” (Christ, 2016, p. 215), however she claims that a more complex definition is needed to understand the structure of it better. Christ (2016) therefore suggests a definition of patriarchy as an “integral system at the juncture of the control of women, private property, and war” (Christ, 2016, p. 215).

Those three structures play into each other, are not separable anymore and it remains unclear, which was first. However, Christ identifies the control of female sexuality as the core and fundament of patriarchy. If women earn too much control over their own body, reproductive rights and sexuality, patriarchy is on threat of deconstruction. According to Christ, this explains the strong opposition towards abortion rights, education on female sexuality and other in modern societies (Christ, 2016).

Following Christ's argumentation, patriarchy is originated in the interplay of war and accumulation of property. In the narrative of war, the male conqueror is allowed to take whatever he wants as a reward and signal for the successful domination - land, property and even people, especially women: “The ‘spoils’ of war also includes the right to ‘take’ the women of the defeated enemy and to confirm ownership of them (and humiliate their fathers or husbands) by raping them” (Christ, 2016, p. 220). The system of domination that was established with war, was therefore coherent with the idea of ‘earning’ the right to reign over land and people and confirming ownerships was in the means of war associated with violence or at least the threat of violence (Christ, 2016). This first condition of patriarchy was therefore the starting point for the idea of property, which then constituted the second condition of patriarchy. With conquering land and people through war, warriors started to accumulate property and wealth – which made it suddenly relevant for men to ensure fatherhood of male heirs: “There would be no need for a man to be certain of the paternity of his children if the institution of individual private property did not exist and if the value of individuals was not defined by the property they own and pass on to their heirs, usually sons” (Christ, 2016, p. 219). Christ therefore argues that this connection to violence and property initiated the control over women because inheritance became relevant which also meant that men needed to be sure of their fatherhood, what they could only achieve by controlling women's sexuality: “The customs that surround patriarchal marriage have the intention of making certain that a man's children are his biologically” (Christ, 2016, p. 219).

As this argumentation of Carol Christ indicates, patriarchy is not a stand-alone power structure but rather intersects with other forms of domination like colonialism, which was

legitimated by racism, and the logic of property, that constitutes the domination of the rich over the poor (Christ, 2016).

Additionally, Christ asks for the legitimation of a violent system like patriarchy and answers the question with religion: “Patriarchy employs religious symbols to create the illusion that violence and male domination are ‘in the nature of things’” (Christ, 2016, 222). She states that this is not solely to be found in western religiousness. The need to apply religion as a reasoning for violence and war is first forced but eventually works on its own if the dominated people are starting to believe in the religion: “If those who are dominated believe that their domination is ordained by God or by karma or that they will be rewarded in another world, they are less likely to protest or rebel or even to recognize that their oppression is wrong” (Christ, 2016, p. 222).

4.2. The term of violence

What violence is and how it is manifested, has occupied much research, and inspired a long and extensive theoretical academic output (Wästerfors, 2023). Therefore, this chapter cannot explore the body of research circling around the term of violence to its fullest and the following needs to be considered as a selected mapping of the for this study most interesting aspects with no claim to completeness. The discussion about and the definition of violence however is needed for a more in-depth understanding of the situation for women in patriarchal societies and to enable the interpretation of the data findings.

As a first step, Johan Galtung, who examined different forms of violence and coined the terms *structural violence* and *cultural violence*, will be discussed, followed secondly by Pierre Bourdieu and his term of *symbolic violence*. Lastly, Hannah Arendt’s distinction between violence and power is briefly discussed.

This selected but rather general discussion of the violence term is then extended by a specific definition of feminist research regarding a gender-sensitive concept of violence, especially highlighting *normative violence* and *institutional violence* as imbedded in patriarchy.

4.2.1. General theories on violence

When speaking of violence, the dominant conceptualization in research theorizes it as an act of “[...] intentional, direct, immediate, and visible infliction of physical harm, the assault or encroachment on the physical integrity of another human being or his or her property” (Winter, 2012, p. 196). Thus, the term violence usually refers to an observable phenomena, with a detectable perpetrator and/or victim (Winter, 2012).

However, much contemporary knowledge production questions this definition of violence and rather refers to it as a more complex phenomenon: “Violence is a masculine-coded instrument within a large number of different relations: political and economic, intimate and institutional, direct and mediated, and lawful and unlawful” (Wästerfors, 2023, p. 5).

Johan Galtung: Structural and cultural violence

One of the first to question the reduction of violence to visibility, was Johan Galtung. In Galtung words, violence is defined “[...] as avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to *life*, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible” (Galtung, 1990, p.).

With his essay “Violence, Peace and Peace Research” from 1969, Galtung inspired an extensive body of academical knowledge production by suggesting a distinction between *direct violence* and *structural violence*. While Galtung (1969) acknowledges the visible, detectable violence with referring to it as *direct violence*, he distinguishes it however from *structural violence*, which he analyses as imbedded in systems of social communities, that “[...] manifests itself as inequality of power, resources, and life opportunities” (Winter, 2012, p. 195). *Structural violence* is therefore a systemic violence, an institution, that causes and perpetrates different kinds of inequality and discrimination, making the term of violence also applicable to hunger, social exclusion, poverty and subordination (Galtung, 1969; Sauer, 2011; Winter, 2012) According to Galtung, exploitation as the main characteristic of *structural violence*. While *direct violence* is, as the term indicates, directed and rather immediate, consequences of *structural violence* are observable in the long run without a directed act, like in an early death due to malnutrition and diseases: “All of this happens within complex structures and at the end of long, highly ramified causal chains and cycles” (Galtung, 1990, p. 294).

In his article “Cultural Violence” from 1990, Johan Galtung extends his previous research to coin another form of violence: *cultural violence*. *Cultural violence* refers to the overall implementation and legalisation of others forms of violence in a society: “Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong” (Galtung, 1990, p. 291). According to Galtung (1990) it is different from the other two forms of violence in its relation to time. While *direct violence* is an *event* like an earthquake, *structural violence* refers to a *process* like the movement of tectonic plates and *cultural violence* in this picture serves as the permanent condition of the fault line, an *invariant*.

Those three forms build the *triangle of violence*, because they intersect and condition each other: “Generally, a causal flow from cultural via structural to direct violence can be identified” ((Galtung, 1990, p. 295). As realms of *cultural violence*, Galtung (1990) identifies six main domains: Religion, ideology, language, art, empirical and formal science. All those domains, in their respectively thematic frames, legitimize the *structural violence* – or even *direct violence* – by creating or at least defending inequalities (Galtung, 1990). Religion was for example used to legitimize structural violence like colonialism and racism, sexism, or poverty while it also allows direct violence like witch-burning and inquisition by claiming it all as gods will (Galtung, 1990). Ideology on the other hand replaced religion in the modern states. The mechanisms however are the same: Ideology can legitimize violent in many ways. It can either be defended by an idea of a “natural” order or – most commonly – statism and nationalism: “Killing in war is now done in the name of the ‘nation’, comprising all citizens with some shared ethnicity. The new idea of democracy can be accommodated with transition formulas such as *vox populi, vox dei*. Execution is also done in the name of ‘the people of the state X’; but like war has to be ordered by the State” (Galtung, 1990, p. 299).

Galtung (1990) also stresses language as a domain of *cultural violence*. For example, by exclusion: In some languages, the male form is used as the neutral one while in others the same word is even used for both the men and the human. Thus, women are made invisible (Galtung, 1990).

While those first domains are rather obvious in their legitimization of violence, art has a more mirroring function. It can still be *cultural violence* though, since it legitimizes and manifests violent narratives in the moment of reproduction (Galtung, 1990).

Both empirical and formal science can produce *cultural violence*. As an example, for the first, Galtung refers to the neoclassical economic doctrine: “The consequences of this doctrine in the form of today’s vertical division of labor in the world are visible for most people to see. Structural violence everywhere: among countries and within countries” (Galtung, 1990, p. 300). Regarding the latter one, Galtung (1990) refers to mathematics, emphasizing that it influences us in black-white thinking.

Pierre Bourdieu: Symbolic violence

Pierre Bourdieu’s term of *symbolic violence* is close to one domain of *cultural violence*. It is manifested through knowledge and communication, hence language, but also recognition and disregard in social relations, hence norms. Symbolic violence is effective because it is often not even visible for the victims let alone bystanders. Bourdieu already links symbolic violence

to male dominance in society and states and argues, that the symbolic violence is the continuous reproduction and naturalization of the gendered order: “Thus, in the spirit of Bourdieu, the term violence may be used to describe mechanisms that operate in the continuous reproduction of the social structure of an entire society. In this case, it might be translated to coercion, domination, oppression, and subjugation” (Wästerfors, 2023, p. 5).

Hannah Arendt: Power and Violence

As the last scholars to be discussed, Hannah Arendt makes an important distinction between power and violence. Even though she acknowledges that power and violence often occur together, they are not identical: “As long as orders are obeyed, as long as the police and the military are ready to use their weapons on behalf of the state, a regime can persist. [...]. When power structures lose their legitimacy and crumble, revolutions become possible” (Wästerfors, 2023, p. 68).

According to this argumentation, the relevant distinction between violence and power, as Arendt theorizes it, is the need for support. Violence is not dependent on an agreement between many, it can occur as an individual act that is not approved by anyone else. It might create domination – which can be confused with power - in the sense of obedience of those who are threatened with or experience violence, but Arendt argues that this appearance of power usually does not last. Power rests namely in contrast to violence on the support of the many. As an example, Arendt refers to the tyranny: “Tyranny is certainly the form of government that is most inclined to resort to violence, but it is also the weakest form of government, precisely because violence constitutes a relatively shaky foundation” (Wästerfors, 2023, p. 62).

This distinction therefore argues for violence as an instrument that seeks to implement power, but can be due to its nature never able to truly generate it. Arendt states that any power, that is established by the means of violence, will always crumble sooner or later, is therefore coerced and never lasting, which is exactly why it is not a true power but always under the threat of collapsing (Wästerfors, 2023)

4.2.2. Feminist theories on violence

Feminist theories on violence are usually referring to the different types of violence, Johan Galtung identified (Aytaç et al., 2018).

Birgit Sauer: normative and institutional violence

The feminist political researcher Birgit Sauer agrees with the criticism, that violence cannot get reduced to only physical and visible violence, but it rather must include different levels: "All aspects of human being are under the threat of injury. Damage to any of these dimensions is therefore to be described as violence" (Sauer, 2002, p. 85, translation by author).

Sauer therefore argues, in agreement to Galtung, for a broadly defined term of violence rather than narrow it down to visible, individual, and intentional actions (Sauer, 2002).

The feminist term of violence therefore includes not only physical, but also psychological violence that is occurring in forms of verbal threats or stalking as well as any subtle restriction of actions or decision-making: The vulnerability of women regarding violence is referring to "[...] the body, the psyche and the mind, that means, to everything that creates a person's identity" (Sauer, 2011, p. 52, translation by author). In accordance with Galtung and Bourdieu, the feminist violence term accepts *structural*, *cultural*, and *symbolic violence* as forms of violence (Sauer, 2011).

Nevertheless, Birgit Sauer also adds the term of *normative violence* (Sauer, 2002). *Normative violence* can be seen as related to cultural violence, but it still needs to be distinguished from it since it rather refers to social praxis and hegemonial discourses, that are produced and reproduced through adhering behaviour. Its purpose is to secure the domination of a certain power system like for example patriarchy (Sauer, 2002). As an example, for *normative violence*, Sauer (2002) refers to the binarity of the sexes. The normative violence is that every person gets categorized into male and female by simply looking at them while disregarding any other and personal identifications. If a person does not adhere to the hegemonial discourse, their life reality is not only discriminated but made invisible which violates identity (Sauer, 2002).

Building up on the already mentioned concept, Sauer (2002) suggests another additive form of violence, which is close but still to be distinguished from *structural violence*: *Institutional violence*. Violence, as also Galtung already argued, cannot be seen solely within individual actions but rather must dismantle violence as a political order. According to Sauer, the state institutionalizes not only direct violence by monopolizing it but also cultural and normative violence by exclusion and discrimination (Sauer, 2002).

Arendt claimed that violence can never constitute power (Wästerfors, 2023). However, after this discussion of the different terms of violence, it can be argued that invisible violence like structural, cultural, normative, or institutionalized violence, is used as an effective instrument to maintain power structures because the vast majority is not recognizing it and therefore does

not feel threatened by it. The violence becomes a permanent state, a fault line, as Galtung (1990) already mentioned, and it is possible to cause an earthquake (Galtung, 1990; Sauer 2002, 2011; Wästerfors, 2023).

4.3. Social movement theory

Since this study focuses on domestic secular women's organisation in Turkey, social movement theory is a relevant field of research, that needs to be discussed and theorized to create a better understanding of the data findings. Since social movement theory envelopes several theories and approaches and this research is limited in time and space, only a few relevant theories and approaches are discussed in this section. Transnational feminist movement as well as the *velvet triangle theory* and the *target-approaches* appear to be relevant for this research because it offers a conceptualisation regarding the environment in which secular women's organization operate in Turkey (see Chapter 3).

However, feminist movements are also theorized in relation to contemporary opposing movement, which seem relevant to understand due to this research's focus on the withdrawal from the IC, and therefore the concept of backlash is discussed in the last chapter of this section.

4.3.1. Transnational feminist movement

Transnational feminist movement can be theorized as challenging the status quo on gender equality and human rights issues around the globe. The scholar Valentine Moghadam (2015) writes: “[...] transnational feminist activism is one of the distinguishing features of globalization-from-below, which has challenged the masculinized hegemony of business and political elites” (p. 53). Consisting out of different activist organization, the transnational feminist movement emerged working together to build a “fluid coalescence of networks, coalitions, campaigns, analysis, advocacy and actions that politicize women's rights and gender equality issues beyond the nation-state” (Baksh & Harcourt, 2015, p.4).

As social movements, that are scientifically backed up by the transnational feminist theory, transnational feminist movements operate on different levels and focusing especially on border-crossing as well as intersectional networking: “These movements are made up of actors working across local and global contexts who are generally committed to shared values and solidarity across differences, developing a common discourse through dialogue and action, and changing the structural inequalities and the deepening impact of globalization on gender, class, race, and ethnic relations” (Baksh & Harcourt, 2015, p. 4).

Moghadam (2015) refers to this organized form of the movement, that is using networking strategies to target different political and social actors, while also interconnecting inherently within the different feminist movements on a global scale, as *transnational feminist network (TFN)*.

Since transnational feminist movements naturally intersect with other human rights issues, Moghadam (2015) identified four different contemporary TFNs, that are active with a different additive focus:

1. TFNs targeting neoliberal economic policy agendas, who are in solidarity with workers issues, against exploitation and engage in environmental protection policies, bridging those agendas with the feminist approach of arguing that women are more effected by problems caused by neoliberalism (Moghadam, 2015, p. 59, 61).
2. TFNs mobilizing against fundamentalism emerged as a response to the Islamist movement demands to apply restrictive Islamic norms and laws onto women. The feminist agenda in this TFN is to combat women's oppression that is legitimized by fundamentalist ideology and (Moghadam, 2015, p. 59, 61).
3. TFNs targeting war, conflict, and empire is the oldest identified TFN, that is still active in contemporary policy-making processes. Highlighting especially the specific vulnerability of women in warzones, focusing on sexual abuse and demand to include women in peace negotiations (Moghadam, 2015, p. 59, 62).
4. TFNs with the focus on international solidarity and feminist humanitarianism are the last identified TFN and need a specific mentioning, even though it could be argued that all TFNs are engaging in intersectional solidarity and humanitarian agendas (Moghadam, V., 2015, p. 59, 62). Despite that, the fourth TFN still differs from others since they are actively engaging in operational work regarding humanitarianism. Therefore, it is specifically and noticeable active in "moral support and material assistance for those in conflict zones or repressive states" (Moghadam, 2015, p. 62).

However, not only the contemporary TFNs differ in their respective specialties, but TFNs also apply different strategies – either solely or simultaneously - to achieve their goals (Moghadam, 2015).

First and like others social movements crossing borders, TFNs "create, activate, or join global networks in their struggle for gender justice by mobilizing pressure against forces that seek to undermine women's status" (Moghadam, 2015, p. 63). They utilize that by employing e-

petitions, action alerts or appeals as well as acts of civil disobedience and public protests (Moghadam, 2015, p. 63).

A second strategy is to focus on powerful international actors, such as the UN agencies and departments or international intergovernmental organizations. TFNs seek to influence policies and create visibility by “preparing background papers, briefing papers, and reports, and by submitting these documents” to the mentioned actors (Moghadam, 2015, p. 64).

Recruiting and networking across borders and nation states is described as a third strategy by Moghadam (2015). Facilitating training programs, workshops, connecting with local partners, networking with supporters and potential members, and engage in public protest, are some of the main tools for this third strategy (Moghadam, 2015, p. 64).

As a last identified strategy, TFNs are enhancing their own resources by network amongst each other “[...] in a sustained process” by information-sharing, internal activities, engaging in movement building and inter-networking. This process is accompanied and simplified by the Internet: “The Internet – the “gift” of globalization – has allowed them to transcend borders, boundaries, and barriers in their collective action against forces that seek to keep women oppressed or excluded” (Moghadam, 2015, p. 64).

4.3.2. Velvet triangle theory and target-approaches

Besides the transnational feminist movement theories, other social movements theories address the networking activities of locally organized and independent women’s group entering transnational politics to achieve their goals, such as the *velvet triangle theory* (Woodward, 2015). The Velvet triangle is a theory developed by the scholar Alison E. Woodward which offers an analytic framework to better theorize power dynamics and relationships in transnational gender equality policy making, foremost focusing on Europe. Originally linked to the EU politics, the velvet triangle developed into a heuristic concept (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022; Woodward, 2015).

The theory is suggesting a triangle of three actors: Policymakers and politicians, feminist academics and experts, and women’s movement (Woodward, 2015). The *velvet triangle theory* emphasizes the interaction of these actors, their interdependence, as well as shifting dynamics and influential lobbying. The government can rely on scientific experts and research to legitimize and inform its policy decisions. At the same time, feminist movements can put pressure on governments and create a link between scientific expertise and policy decisions (Woodward, 2015) Even though all of them interact with each other in shifting dynamics, engaging in a velvet triangle is especially beneficial for women’s movements: “Through such

velvet triangles women's groups become able to challenge and influence policies and create new structures to implement gender mainstreaming for instance" (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022, p, 110).

In the same manner of the velvet triangle, the scholar Hande Eslen-Ziya developed the *single-target approach* (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022). It theorizes lobbying and networking as a strategy for policy change. The single-target approach is a directed networking and lobbying activity towards one special target – for example the own government. Like the velvet target, the single-target approach is used when the interactions to the different actors are smooth: "Such strategy is expected to be used by the women's organizations under freer and less constrained political conditions, where they can reach the politicians directly in order to pursue them for more gender-sensitive policymaking" (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022).

However, in some cases the governmental system is not willing to network with feminist movements, as it is the case for example in rather restrictive regimes. To be able to still theorize networking activities of feminist movements in such cases, Hande Eslen-Ziya complements the single-target approach with another theory called *double-target approach* (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022). The double-target approach is applied as a follow-up strategy to the single-target approach. When women's organization are not able to successfully use the single-target approach, they instead map out secondary targets, that have a potential influence on the initial target (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022). If the initial target for example is the domestic government, women's organization as presenting feminist movements might turn to international actors, targeting them in their networking and lobbying strategies, to create a pressure on their own government through international dependencies (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022).

4.3.3. Concept of backlash

The concept of backlash is mainly discussed within feminist and antiracist social movement research (Sosa, 2022). It started to be theorized in the 1960s when the civil rights were rejected by white electorates and were picked up on by Susan Faludi in 1991 to describe the opposition against US second-wave feminism (Sosa, 2022)

As for a definition, the scholar Joseph Jay Sosa (2022) writes: "Originally referring to retaliatory practices that attempted to "turn back the clock" on liberation movements, backlash has developed into a broader concept that addresses how structural oppression evolves against and sometimes through continued struggles against oppressive systems" (p. 198).

The concept is mainly theorized by feminist anthropology, even though a broad discussion throughout different academical disciplines picks up on it as well. However, the mobilization of backlash movements often reacts to feminist struggles: “Feminist anthropology can investigate the specific mechanisms of power through which backlash operates by mobilizing long-standing attention to how gender relations are often at the centre of both the maintenance and transformation of social structures” (Sosa, 2022, p. 198).

Two metaphors constitute the term of backlash: One is the linguistic associations with “lashing out”, which describes a quick, emotional, and potentially violent reaction. The second metaphor refers to mechanical engineering, in which the term is used to describe the intentionally created space that compensate the backward pressure, when a gear is rotating forward (Sosa, 2022). Both metaphors are also useful to describe backlash as a social movement: “This double metaphor suggests backlash appears both emotionally out of control and highly calculated” (Sosa, 2022, p. 199).

Nevertheless, especially within feminist research, scholars view the nature of backlash differently. One line is perceiving it rather as an event, as “a momentary retaliation (that may evolve into a conservative movement)”, others in contrary stress it as “an ongoing process of structural oppression” (Sosa, 2022, p. 199). Thirdly, a critical approach to theorize the eventness of backlash emerged, rejecting both conceptualizations and instead claiming, that backlash refers to “a critical perspective on how social structures transform” (Sosa, 2022, p. 120).

Even though, a backlash marks a retrograde development to progressive change, it still “offers a much-needed standpoint to name the complex operations underway to constantly resecure structural oppression in the face of sustained efforts to transform it. [...] In this sense, backlash offers a “moment of revelation”, where emergent logics of oppression become apparent” (Sosa, 2022, p. 202).

The scholar Güneş Koç (2022) refers to feminist studies examining male VAW by theorizing it within the concept of backlash, suggesting that VAW and femicides are a form of backlash. Those research, starting in the 1970s, indicate that VAW with a male perpetrator increase with gender equality and empowerment, like making education more accessible to women, allowing women in the labour market, enable and advance financial independence for women, which also increases the possibility for women to decide for separation or divorce (Koç, 2022). Men react to the increasing female independence with violence to overcome a fear of loss, regain and secure dominance and power over women due to patriarchal conceptions about gender roles and identities: “The backlash theory views masculinity as performance;

men who lash out at empowered women are engaged in constructing masculine identities, asserting themselves as masculine subjects, and reacting to circumstances that make them feel vulnerable in their masculine identity” (Koç, 2022, p.3).

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Design

For this Master thesis, a case study was conducted to answer the problem formulation (see Chapter 1, p. 4). A case study focuses on a specific event, organization, person, or other specific entity to analyze, and often draws on qualitative data, even though a mix of qualitative and quantitative data is also possible (Bryman, 2004). Since Turkey is the first country to withdraw from the IC, the effects of this decision on local women’s organization can only be examined specifically for the Turkish case. Eventually, the effects of the withdrawal can be taken into considerations, in the case of other countries threatening with their withdrawal from the Convention. The case study on the Turkish situation will be a qualitatively based study and it is therefore only able to picture the consequences for women’s organization appearing in the data collection through interviews and statements.

A case study does not have the claim of generalizability (Bryman, 2004) and neither has this one. Nevertheless, the research might still offer relevant insights to help understanding possible similar developments in other state and societal responses. Poland for example recently announced their withdrawal from the IC, recurring on Turkey as a pioneer (Burnett, 2022). Despite the major difference between the states, especially regarding international relations and EU membership, a case study about Turkey might still guide further research to examine explanations for the development and possible strategies to either hinder or support the decision-making processes. Additionally, the case study design can be used to intensively examine existing theory and apply this to a chosen case, which causes relevant insights in the theories applicability.

In theory, four different case studies are distinguished: The *critical case*, the *unique case*, the *revelatory case* (Bryman, 2004). The first one is a case designed to examine a specific hypothesis, which can be either verified or falsified through the case study. The second can also be called an *extreme case* and is usually applied in medical studies. It assumes that the case at hand is somehow unique, for example because of a specific location or time, and therefore contains an intrinsic interest that is able to produce groundbreaking findings. The

third case is used, when a case is examined, that relates to a topic that is yet scientifically unexplored due to its accessibility (Bryman, 2004).

Bryman (2004) though argues that most case studies are taken place under the umbrella of an *exemplifying case* – no matter which other case category they might adhere to: “Cases are often chosen not because they are extreme or unusual in some way but because they will provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered. As such, they allow the researcher to examine key social processes” (p. 51).

The case study at hand is accordingly considered to be a mixture of a unique and an exemplifying case. Because Turkey is the first state to withdraw from the IC, which is a fairly new event at this point, the case is highly relevant. Additionally, the IC on is the first international convention of its kind to prevent VAW in the committed states, which makes the case unique. An exemplifying case is also applicable to the conducted case study because a case study design is considered as a reasonable strategy to answer the formulated problem formulation and research questions. Additionally, the case study seeks to understand societal effects and responses to a specific regressive policy.

5.2. Choice of theory

The chosen theory for this research includes first feminist theories as the main relevant theory. Since this research focuses on women and women’s organization, feminist theory and especially transnational feminist theory is used to theorize the societal and political situation of women. The term of patriarchy is viewed and explained, to examine it in regard to Turkey. Additionally, the term intersectionality as a feminist concept is introduced to point out fault lines, possibilities and debates in feminist history surrounding the question of solidarity between women.

This research also theoretically draws on the term of violence. Since the concept of violence was discussed throughout history in several different way, an active decision to pinpoint only relevant works from that body of research was made. Thus, Johan Galtung’s terms of *structural* and *cultural violence* (Galtung 1969, 1990) are discussed alongside Pierre Bourdieu’s *symbolic violence*, and the distinction of violence and power by Hannah Arendt (Wästerfors, 2023). Those works were chosen because they mainly influenced feminist theories of violence. Since this research circles around GBV, especially VAW, feminist thinking about violence is introduced, including different but intersecting forms of violence.

Relevant for the discussion of this research, the concept of *backlash* is included in the theory section as well, followed by theories about social movement. Within, the latter, first

transnational feminist movements are discussed to look on solidarity between women in praxis. Second, two concepts explaining the network approaches and changes in the strategies of women's organisation are introduced, namely the *velvet triangle* and the *double target approach*. Lastly, the concept of backlash is introduced to understand social movements and its effects on political and societal norms.

5.3. Method of analysis

The dataset of this study already indicates that it is conducted as qualitative research. However, and as many scholars point out, qualitative research cannot be analyzed without a clear method and thorough description of the method of analysis (Nowell et al., 2017).

For this research, the qualitative method of thematic analysis was chosen to examine the data, which will be elaborated further in the following. When speaking of *data corpus*, the entire data is referred to, while *dataset* mean a specific group of data (groups are mentioned in 5.4. Selection of data) and *data item* is used when one text is meant.

5.3.1. Thematic analysis

As Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke argue in their article "Using thematic analysis in psychology" from 2006, thematic analysis is broadly used within qualitative research but still not sufficiently elaborated as a method because many researchers viewed it as an assistance to other qualitative research method than being a method on its own. However, Braun and Clare argued for it as a foundational method for qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

Nowell et al. (2017) agree with that: "We argue that thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions. It is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (p. 2).

Some advantages of thematic analysis are, that it provides trustworthy and insightful findings due to its flexible approach. Thematic analysis includes a theoretical freedom that enables the researcher to adjust the method to the needs of the study: "As thematic analysis does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of other qualitative approaches, it offers a more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in their research career" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2).

Therefore, thematic analysis is very flexible and can be linked to different theoretical frameworks. Nevertheless, the linkage has to be made clear since any theoretical framework

include a specific lens to look at the data: “Any theoretical framework carries with it a number of assumptions about the nature of the data, what they represent in terms of the ‘the world’, ‘reality’, and so forth. A good thematic analysis will make this transparent” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81).

Relevant to note is, that thematic analysis, if applied accordingly to the characteristics of trustworthiness, requires a transparent decision-making process throughout the research. The steps need to be coherently understandable (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

Thematic analysis is useful when the dataset consists out of different perspectives – for example because of qualitative interviews or because the dataset is a mix out of diverse data, as it is the case in this research (Nowell et al., 2017).

However, as any method also thematic analysis has some disadvantages. The usage of it as a foundational method is of respectively new history, which means that there are not as many theoretical texts written about it as for other qualitative research methods. Additionally, thematic analysis is able to structure and analyze the content of the data but reaches its limits when language use is supposed to be examined as for example Discourse Analysis attempts (Nowell et al., 2017).

A theme in thematic analysis emerges from the data when coding it in the process of analyzing. However, while many themes might emerge, only those relevant to the research questions are considered. Important though is, that a theme in thematic analysis does not need to be of a certain prevalence in the whole data corpus as it might be a requirement for other research methods: “A theme might be given considerable space in some data items, and little or none in others, or it might appear in relatively little of the data set. So, researcher judgement is necessary to determine what a theme is” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82).

Also, as already mentioned, the ‘key’ themes are related to whether they are important in answering the research questions. So, using thematic analysis for a method can be driven by particular analytic questions rather than being constituted through quantifiable measures: “Part of the flexibility of thematic analysis is that it allows you to determine themes (and prevalence) in a number of ways. What is important is that you are consistent in how you do this within any particular analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.83). It is therefore necessary, to be transparent about the decision to decide on a theme and in which way it could be found in the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) identified four main decisions, which have to be made transparent in order to conduct a thematic analysis.

The first decision regards to the data. It is both possible to adhere to the whole data

corpus of a research and attempt to be descriptive about it all or, as a second possibility, give more focus to specific parts of the data corpus and conduct a more in-depth analysis of them. The second decision involves “two primary ways in thematic analysis” according to Braun and Clarke (2006): The first one is an *inductive* way, the second *theoretical/deductive* one. The first links the themes closely to the data and they are emerging with from it with the researchers attempt to be free of any “preexistent coding frame” or “analytic preconceptions” (p. 83).

The second way in contrary adheres to the theoretical and analytic prework of the researcher and “is thus more explicitly analyst-driven”, which also intends rather a specific detailed analyses than an overall description of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 84). Both ways therefore also have an impact on the coding: “You can either code for a quite specific research question (which maps onto the more theoretical approach) or the specific research question can evolve through the coding process (which maps onto the inductive approach)” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84).

Thirdly, a decision has to be made between *semantic* or *latent themes*. Choosing the first refers to paying attention only to what was said – the semantics - and not considering any possible underlying conceptualizations, ideologies, assumptions, or ideas. The researcher using the semantic approach descriptively analyzes, which means showing patterns in the content of the data and organizing it. Ideally after this analysis, the researcher though moves on to an interpretation afterwards, “[...] where there is an attempt to theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications, often in relation to previous literature” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). The latent approach on the contrary goes beyond the semantic level already in the first step. The researcher interprets and theorizes meanwhile analyzing (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The fourth decision, Braun and Clarke (2006) identify, circles around the epistemology of the research project and is the choice between an *essentialist/realist* or a *constructionist thematic analysis*. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, that even though the epistemology of a project is usually answered in the beginnings already, it might appear again during the analysis, and it informs the findings. An essentialist/realist approach enables the researcher to examine individual experience and motivation due the assumed direct linkage between meaning and language while a constructionist perspective draws on sociocultural contexts, that shape the individual perspective, and structural conditions that influence the experience: “[...] from a constructionist perspective, meaning and experience are socially

produced and reproduced, rather than inhering within individuals” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85).

Besides those decision, thematic analysis involves six phases of analysis: *Familiarizing with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; producing the report* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87). Even though every analysis using thematic analysis as a method includes those steps, the order of the phases might vary depending on the already mentioned decisions. As Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, the relevant aspect of thematic analysis is its flexibility, therefore the guidelines are “[...] exactly that – they are not rules, and, following the basic precepts, will need to be applied flexibly to fit the research question and data. Moreover, analysis is not a *linear* process of simply moving from one phase to the next. Instead, it is more *recursive process*, where movement is back and forth as needed, throughout the phases” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.86).

5.3.2. Decisions for this research

Due to the Limitations of time and space in this research, the decision was made to focus on specific parts of the data corpus rather than describe it entirely. Following up on this first decision, the *theoretical way of thematic analysis* was chosen, which draws on the theoretical framework that was depicted in the theory section (Chapter 4) of this study. This second decision was made due to the specific research question regarding responses towards the withdrawal (see Chapter 1, p. 4) that already caught the researcher’s interest before the analyze of the data and also shaped the interview guideline (Appendix E). Additionally, this approach was chosen since the theory of this research already problematize the challenge of academical research to be neutral and free of the researcher’s location and position, which would argumentatively hinder the *inductive approach*. Thirdly, the researcher of this study decided to use a *semantic approach*. The reasoning for this decision involves the structure of the research of involving both analysis and discussion as stand-alone chapters. The semantic approach offers the possibility to separate neatly between them and allows the researcher to discuss the broader meanings of the findings more transparent and clearly in relation to the theoretical underpinnings.

Additionally, the constructionist thematic analysis instead of the essentialist, as described by the scholars Braun and Clarke, emerges as the lens of this research from the discussed theoretical framework. Even though the semantic approach might offer the possibility for an essentialist/realist approach, the rest of the project argues for the constructionist epistemology due to drawing especially on transnational feminist theory, which rejects the essentialist

approach of the global sisterhood. An analytic break with it bears the risk of sabotaging the whole line of argumentation.

It was decided to waive the coding with a software program but do it manually. This decision was made to ensure the control over the data and because of the time, since some data was conducted very late in the research process due to high utilization of the interviewed persons by the Turkish election.

5.3.3. Themes and codes for the research

According to the definition of a *theme* in thematic analysis, the following five themes emerged from the data corpus through coding the data manually by coloring, while having in mind the problem formulation and the research questions as formulated in the introduction. In order to underline the decision of a theoretical approach on thematic analysis and for transparency reasons, the emerged themes and subthemes were grouped with theory.

The following themes were identified: (1) *Situation of women in Turkey* with the subthemes *Violence* and *Women combating gender discrimination*; (2) *Environment for secular women's organization in Turkey* with the *Motivation for women's organization*, *State actors and allies to patriarchy vs. women's organization* and *societal environment*; (3) *Responses on the withdrawal* with the subthemes *legal responses*, *civic society responses* and *political responses*; (4) *Impacts of the IC and the withdrawal from it on Turkey* with the subthemes *Impacts of the IC on Turkey* and *Impacts of the withdrawal from the IC on Turkey*; (5) *Solidarity and Networking* with the subthemes *solidarity in feminist agendas* and *networking*.

For the purpose of a better overview and to display the used codes and the grouped theory to the themes, the researcher designed the following table:

Color	Codes	Theme	Subtheme	Theory
Yellow	Patriarchy/patriarchal Women Femicide (Domestic) Violence Gender-based violence Violence against women Equal/Equality Discrimination Perpetrator Protection Communication	Situation of women in Turkey in general	Violence Women combating gender inequality	Femicides and VAW Patriarchy Intersectionality
Blue	Resistance/Against Struggle Family/Family-oriented politics Our (organization) Empowering System/Institutions Civic society	Environment for secular women's organization in Turkey	Motivation for women's organization State actors and allies to patriarchy vs. women's organization	Backlash Transnational feminism
Green	Statement Support (the Istanbul) Convention After the withdrawal Announcement Response Reaction Position Report (Strategic) Litigation	Responses on the withdrawal	Legal responses Civic society responses Political responses	Literature Review
Red	Istanbul Convention The withdrawal Implementation/implement Action Plan Bills/Laws Backlash Effect	Impacts of the Istanbul Convention and the withdrawal from it on Turkey	Impacts of the Istanbul Convention on Turkey Impacts of the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on Turkey	Term of violence Backlash
Purple	Women's council Volunteer Relation(ship) Solidarity Social Media Platforms Public Support	Solidarity and Networking	Solidarity in feminist agendas Networking	Velvet triangle/double target Transnational feminist theory Transnational feminist movements Intersectionality

Table 1

The coded dataset *Interview* is added in the respective appendices as well to additionally adhere to the transparency requirements of thematic analysis. The codes are highlighted both by color and bold type. The dataset *supplemental data* was also coded but due to its form of online availability, the coded documents were not attached. Additionally, the supplemental data were used to deepen the findings in the main data but could not be considered for additional findings, due to time and space limitations.

5.4. Selection of data

To answer the research questions and examine the problem formulation, relevant data was conducted. The data corpus consists out of two datasets, that are explained in the following.

The first dataset is the main one, consisting out of two interviews with secular Turkish women's organization working to combat GBV (Appendix A, B) and an expert interview with the Prof. Dr. Bertil Emrah Oder (Appendix C), which all together constitute the dataset *Interviews*.

For the first two interviews, six organizations (Mor Çatı, We Will Stop Femicide Platform, UN Women in Turkey, Anıt Savaş, The Foundation for Women's Solidarity and Yaka-koop) were mapped as relevant, some of them came to the attention during the literature research others were found in an Internet search. Criteria for them were, that the organization fight against VAW and has an English section on their website. All of them were asked via E-mail for an interview. Two agreed to be interviewed, one denied an interview and three others did not respond, even though a reminder was sent out.

All conducted interviews were semi-structured with open questions (Appendix E) and consent was given in written form from all three participants (blank consent form Appendix E).

First, the organization Mor Çatı, a women's shelter, was interviewed (Appendix A). The interview was in written due to a request of the interviewee. However, the responses to the questions were accurate, detailed and lengthy. Yet no follow up questions were possible in this case. The second interview was with a person volunteering for the organisation "We Will Stop Femicide Platform" (Appendix B). Both this and the third interview with Professor Oder (Appendix C) took place via videocall, using the platform Zoom. The audio was recorded and transcribed – the one with We Will Stop Femicide Platform manually, the interview with Professor Oder by using the platform Good Tape (www.mygoodtape.com) due to time pressures. It was checked for mistakes by the researcher. Both organizational participants were asked the same seven question (Appendix A, B, E). Since of the form of the second interview, follow-up questions were asked (Appendix B, E). The questions for the expert interview in contrary circled around the legal impacts of the IC and aimed at filling blank spots in this manner (Appendix C, E).

The three interviews are supplemented by a second dataset including documents like statements and reports from relevant actors, as well as news articles (Appendix D). This also constitute the second dataset, namely *supplemental data*. The relevant time frame for the conducted data is from 2020 to 2023 and is either related to IC or the relationship between the Turkish government and women's activism. It was conducted by a Google search including the keywords "statements Turkish withdrawal", "Istanbul Convention", "Violence against Women Turkey" and "women's organizations Turkey".

5.5. Limitations

This research is limited in both time and space. Furthermore, the researcher does not understand the Turkish language, which also made the research limited in accessible data due to language barriers.

Another limitation regarding the data was the access to other potential interviewees. The researcher reached out to six secular women's organizations in Turkey (We Will Stop Femicide Platform, Mor Çatı, Anıt Savaş, UN Women in Turkey, the Foundation for Women's Solidarity, YAKA-KOOP) that are working in combating GBV in Turkey. After sending a first interview request, two organizations responded and agreed to an interview. The researcher tried again to contact the other four organizations (via E-mail and phone) but received no positive response. An attempt to phone call organizations failed due to limited financial resources. One reason for the limited responses can be the language barrier, even though the researcher offered to organize a translator. Another reason can be the timing, as one negative response indicated as well (alongside a general denial for interviews). Due to the mentioned time limitations, the interview requests had to be sent out in April 2023. April however was a crucial month in the Turkish election campaigns (elections were held in the end of May 2023) and therefore, it is possible that the organizations themselves were limited in time and resources due to higher activism and lobbying.

GBV is a global problem and not only specific to European countries. It is also not specific to women but an umbrella term to describe different forms of violence towards women and queer people (LGBTQ+ persons). As mentioned above, this research was limited in time and space and therefore needed to be narrowed down. First, this argues for the focus to Europe and Turkey when speaking about GBV, which can however also be seen as a limitation since this narrowing prevented the possibility of shedding light to other crucial places on a global scale, where GBV is an even bigger problem. Second, this narrowing together with the heritage of the author creates the limitation for this research to look at Turkey from a western European lens, which might limit the cultural understanding and creates a blind spot. Third, due to this narrowing, this research focuses on one specific form of GBV, namely VAW and girls. Therefore, it is limited in covering other aspects of GBV like violence against gay or trans people in Turkey, which could be examined in another research. Also, even though this research is perceived as a contribution to the body of research on intersectional feminism, violence towards women due to sexuality, class or race cannot explicitly be covered in this research. The intersectional dependencies however are acknowledged by the researcher and could be focused on in following research.

6. Analysis

Emerged from the conducted data and in relation to the research questions formulated in the introduction, the following five themes were identified: *Situation of women in Turkey; Environment for secular women's organization in Turkey; Responses on the withdrawal; Effects of the Istanbul Convention and the withdrawal; Solidarity and Networking.*

The analysis was structured by the main themes and additionally, as in Chapter 5.3.3 mentioned, the respective subthemes.

6.1. Situation of women in Turkey

6.1.1. Violence

According to the analyzed data, women in Turkey living in a predominantly patriarchy system, whose structures are reflected in society, politics, and jurisdiction (Appendix C; D) This is especially pointed out in a joint statement of three independent women's organizations: "The root cause of violence is the patriarchal system that does not see women as equal to men, aiming to control women, to sustain inequalities of power, and to restrict women's ability to speak for their own lives as equal individuals" (Appendix D, Statement 2). Although the equality of women and men in Turkey is legally secured on paper, since several reforms took place in the beginning of 2000s, those laws are accompanied with an institutional neglect, as Mor Çatı observes: "there is a lack of will by the state to achieve gender equality and to prevent VAW" (Appendix A, p. 2). Despite the laws, women are therefore not experiencing equality to men and instead facing violence on multiple levels (Appendix A; B; C; D).

While physical violence is acknowledged in society – due to having visible proof - other forms of violence are not as much noticed and even denied as being violence by society: "[...] first of all, we should know that the description of the Violence Against Women or gender-based violence in Turkey is different than the other countries. [...] it is too hard to talk about psychological, verbal, emotional, economic violence in Türkiye because we... we cannot describe it so clear in Türkiye because so many people think that it is a law" (Appendix B, p. 4).

The situation for women in Turkey regarding physical violence such as GBV and femicides can be additionally described as endangering women's life on a daily basis since the codes *gender-based violence, violence against women, (domestic) violence* and *femicides* were found strikingly often in the interview data and were mentioned by all the interviewees

several times (Appendix A; B; C). GBV and femicide cases are according to that a prevalent issue in Turkey (Appendix A; B; C; D) and can be seen as the predominant level of violence, as also the numbers of women indicate that are seeking shelter and help from the interviewed independent women's organization Mor Çatı or the observation from the secular women's organization WWSFP, that the numbers of cases regarding VAW and femicides are increasing (Appendix A; B; D).

Even though women are protected by law on paper (Appendix A; C), the implementation of the relevant laws such as Article 6284 is not sufficient, since women experience a constant threat of life: "So the gender-based violence, ja, everyone aware of this problem ja, but we are always under the threaten of a violence – in the streets, at home, at school or workplace etc." (Appendix B, p. 4).

The impact of that general situation on the lived reality for women in Turkey is especially notable described by the organization We Will Stop Femicide Platform (WWSF): "So, it's kind of a weird thing to say, we want to live in 2023, but if we... if we think about the femicide now, we have to say this word: We want to live, just live" (Appendix B, p. 1).

Summarizing, it can therefore be analyzed as a first finding, that women in Turkey are living under a constant threat of their physical wellbeing and are not protected sufficiently by the state. This situation is rooted in the patriarchy, which permeates all areas of private and public life in Turkey.

The need to attend the Courts in order to perform trial watches, as WWSF does (Appendix B, C), and the higher chance for women of winning a case if a trial watch is performed (Appendix C), additionally indicates a lack of institutional protection for women in Turkey, which is also confirmed multiple times in the data and constituting other levels regarding violence that are however connected to the physical level (Appendix A; B; C; D):

First, the measures to prevent VAW and femicides are not used adaptively to women's lived realities, causing women to be unprotected, re-traumatized by having to repeat reports about violent assaults multiple times, and facing bureaucratic hurdles in the process of seeking for institutional protection. Additionally, children of violent fathers are not included in confidentiality orders and are instead granted visitation rights, which leads again to windows of opportunities for violent assaults and questions if the thread of VAW is taken seriously by authorities (Appendix A; D).

Although the state authorities are aware of the issue regarding VAW and Femicides which indicate the facilitation of multiple public awareness campaigns and the availability of a

governmental app, alongside laws providing protective measures, both WWSF and Mor Çatı report, that the lived reality of affected women rather indicate a neglect in taking the issue seriously (Appendix A, B). So does the Turkish police for instance reject victims of physical violence by shifting responsibilities (Appendix B) or are falsely informing and misleading those in need of protection:

Experiences of women who have applied to Mor Çatı show, that women are falsely informed or not informed at all when they apply to law enforcement officers, that they are dissuaded from making an official complaint or forced to show evidence, that officers seek to reconcile them with the perpetrator of violence and when all such strategies fail, that their complaints are not officially recorded (Appendix A, p. 4).

As a second finding, it can be stated that women are under such threat of physical violence because they are not sufficiently protected by the institutions, even though relevant laws are in force.

Regarding the punishment of perpetrators, a second level of violence emerged from the data (Appendix A; C; D). Perpetrators are likely to be sentenced with mitigated sentences due to legal contracts called “unjust provocation” and “good manners” (Appendix C; D). Those legal contracts are “[...] extensively applied in terms of victim blaming, interpretative patterns or in terms of protecting the perpetrators in many ways,” according to Prof. Dr. Bertil Oder and strategically used by the perpetrators in the trial processes (Appendix C, p.4). As for example, Pinar Gültekin can again be mentioned, whose murderer was granted a mitigated sentence due to “unjust provocation,” after the Court of Cassation rejected the first ruling which convicted him to aggravated life-sentence (Appendix D).

Also, non-lethal domestic violence cases are not followed up sufficiently in Court, which are granting impunity to the perpetrators and putting the victims repeatedly at risk (Appendix A, D). The unwillingness of protecting women from VAW by the Turkish authorities is also shown by many legal cases, mentioned by Mor Çatı, that failed to prevent lethal VAW, even though the perpetrator was trialed before (Appendix A; D).

The third finding therefore is, that men are not adequately punished for VAW, which legitimates male violence towards women in Turkey.

Thirdly, the patriarchal structure in Turkey tend to affect progressive changes regarding gender equality due to the government seems to take one step ahead and two backwards, putting women's health at risk: "Although these were the promising developments for the women in Turkey, in the very same year then Prime Minister Erdoğan announced that he believes abortion is murder and he is against C-section" (Appendix A, p.2). Even though no changes were adapted regarding abortion, those public expression by state authorities and especially the Prime Minister, affect women's lived realities in Turkey: "[...] however in practice public hospitals refuse performing the abortion" (Appendix A, p. 3). This can be analysed as a fourth finding, stating that not only laws but also expressions of opinions by political authorities effecting the situation of women in the country.

This plays into the fourth level regarding violence, that Turkish women face, which is lying within the public narrative of gender equality, the Turkish government sent to society (Appendix A, D). While they claim "the "no tolerance policy" to VAW," it is nevertheless aligned with "a strong sexist Islamic approach to the status of women" (Appendix A, p. 5). The messages to women from public authorities circling around having empathy with the perpetrators:

For example, a video by the Ministry of Family and Social Services commissioned for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence suggest "mercy" is the solution to VAW. This approach fixes women as needy and weak, stabilizes men's dominance and urges to accept this inequality and fix the problem with the conscious. The recent approach of government is taking a moral approach to the problem of VAW which leads to unsecular solutions (Appendix A, p. 5).

Another layer of messages is presented more openly by the public authorities and politicians within the last decade claiming that equality for women and men can never be achieved (Appendix A).

This constitutes therefore the fifth finding, that women are not only living in a constant threat of violence but are also required by the leading decisionmakers to accept the situation and that it is an individual, private issue than a structural problem.

6.1.2. Women combating gender inequality

However, this governmental narrative is answered with an open debate problematizing GBV and VAW in Turkish society, predominantly lead by women as Prof. Dr. Bertil Oder formulates: “[...] the women have become truly visible in the public debate, not only on the street, not only as the protesters” (Appendix C, p. 7).

The society is in general aware of VAW as a problem, as statements in the Appendices B and C suggest as well as several data from Appendix D, and at least the physical VAW issue is not silenced or denied, which “creates a momentum to discuss all other issues surrounding the gender equality” (Appendix C, p.7).

Additionally, the data indicates that the governmental narrative can be answered with education and conversations about the issue surrounding GBV and people usually acknowledge the problem afterwards (Appendix B).

Not only do women raise their voices in general and make their experiences visible in the public sphere (Appendix D), but they also successfully combat gender discrimination in specific events. As depicted in the data, Turkish women prevented changes to the abortion law by large protests and due to women’s activity gender equality was at least achieved by law in Turkey (Appendix A).

Summarizing, this constitute the finding, that women are not allowing the institutions to silence them, but revolt against the situation.

6.2. Environment for secular women’s organization in Turkey

6.2.1. Motivation for women’s organization

The prevalent issue of GBV and VAW is the dominant motivation for secular women’s organization while an underlying motivation is achieving an implemented gender equality (Appendix A; B; C). However, especially Mor Çatı emphasizes, that the motivation is “[...] sharing in a common struggle, not ‘helping’ women ‘in need’” (Appendix A, p. 1).

While one layer of motivation is the support of women, especially those affected by violence, another motivation also includes monitoring practices. Both WWSFP and Mor Çatı are engaging in such practices in diverse ways. The first one by trial watches, the latter one by knowledge and experience gathering, and reporting and evaluating the doing of public agencies (Appendix A; B). The aim in performing such practices is to put pressure on the government by dismantling the system in this regard, which is also tied to the first motivation of supporting women (Appendix A). It can therefore also be analysed that this second layer of motivation is achieving visibility.

The combat against the level of violence analyzed in the previous Chapter 6.1. is perceived as so relevant to Turkish women, that the secular women's organizations are prepared to continue under all circumstances (Appendix B; D). As WWSFP states, their work was not even affected by a lawsuit trying to shut the organization down: "No, no, no we, ja, we worked all the time because the femicide continue and we read so many femicide cases or VAW cases, so we can't stop, we don't stop. Never" (Appendix B, p. 3).

Also, the withdrawal from the IC did not have the power to shift this priority: "Actually, I think, it did not affect too much to our organization. [...] I do not know, we continued struggle, ja" (Appendix B, p. 5). However, this point will be elaborated more in detail further down.

The main motivation of the interviewed secular women's organization in Turkey is therefore combating VAW and achieving gender equality, which conditions the secondary motivation of creating visibility. The cause of their work is perceived as so important, that they are not willing to give up.

6.2.2. State actors and allies to patriarchy vs. women's organization

Emerging from the data, the political environment for secular women's organization changed over the past decade (Appendix C; D). Secular women's organization engaged in political decision-making in the preparation phase of the IC (Appendix C; D). While they used to tightly collaborate with the government by providing knowledge and sharing experience in terms of GBV (Appendix B, C), secular women's organization were ousted from directly aimed political influence when the Turkish government decided to stop the collaboration (Appendix B).

The contemporary prevalent confrontation with Turkish policies and governmental actors alongside allies like men right groups can be analyzed as emerged from this decision, and is part of the environment, in which secular women's organizations in Turkey are active in nowadays (Appendix A; B; C; D). Opposing views on society and societal issues are increasingly nurturing conflicts between the representatives of conservative groups and policies and the secular women's organizations (Appendix B; D). While the independent women's organizations demand gender equality, combating VAW and femicides, and protecting female victims and their children from domestic violence, the opposing position argues by using the family as the instance most worthy of protection (Appendix A; B; C; D). This clash of perception is shown strikingly in the accusation towards the We Will Stop Femicide Platform, which serves as a reason to shut the NGO down: "than they said that our

platform is damaging to family in Türkiye. I do not know how we are doing that, but that is perfect, if we can do it, ja!” (Appendix B, p. 3). Following the argument, the proponents of shutting down the We Will Stop Femicide Platform appear to view the emancipation of women as a threat to the family and that “[...] the unity of the family is valued over women’s emancipation [...]”, as Mor Çatı phrases it (Appendix A, p. 5), which can be examined as referring to a definition of family that is a patriarchal one with a man as a sovereign.

The same indication can be made, when the Turkish police rejects female victims of violence with the reasoning of not having a family department within the station (Appendix B), even though Law 6284 requires them to support women and children facing GBV (Appendix A; C; D). It can be therefore analyzed that GBV is viewed as something different than general violence since regarding cases are rejected by police stations managing all other kinds of criminal violent acts. The term “family” in this context, shifts GBV into privacy, which tries to excuse the lack of actions by the state authorities.

As Mor Çatı states, over the last decade the valuing of family becomes a stronger argument: “Government’s anti-equality and pro-family approach motivates the bad practices of the officials and cause prioritization of family over the emancipation of women” (Appendix A, p. 5). Policies and governmental debates increasingly emphasize the importance of the family as a unit, indirectly claiming that nothing is as bad as a divorce (Appendix A). The higher valuation of the intact family results in politics treating women solely as mothers, which is a narrative women’s organization are confronted with (Appendix A).

Additionally, women’s organizations must face a battled standpoint. They are confronted with repressive measures from state actors such as the police while also dealing with minister in ruling office openly positioning themselves against feminist organizations, and legal attempts to silence whole organisations by shutting them down (Appendix C; D).

For independent women’s organization, it can be therefore analyzed as a finding that they act within a political environment of constant fighting against false information and idleness, having to deal with a flawed system regarding GBV (Appendix A; D), and acting under the threat of repressive actions aiming at silencing them. At the same time, they are additionally confronted with a governmental denial of the importance of their agenda by state actors and allies, who are facilitating a narrative that relegates the voiced issues into the private sphere by upholding patriarchal gender norms (Appendix A; B; D). The latter is also voiced by Mor Çatı: “This case is one of the early examples of widening the gap between the laws and implementation, which leaves women and women’s rights activist at a position of having to proof themselves all the time against the denial of the government” (Appendix A, p. 3).

6.2.3. Societal environment

Regarding the societal environment secular women's organization in Turkey operate in, they do not seem to face the same denial and opposition towards their agenda as they do from state actors and allies (Appendix B). As it appears in the data, the society in Turkey is aware of the issue regarding VAW and femicides (Appendix D), and claims to be against it (Appendix B, D). However, they are often not confronted with the background knowledge to understand the different layers of it, which is solved by education through women's organizations in this regard (Appendix B).

However, the main issue is the concept of gender, which meets concern and rejection in society and is able to turn the mood against feminist organizations, rather than VAW and femicides (Appendix B; D).

It can therefore be analyzed as a finding, that women's organization receive support for combating VAW, but meet societal resistance when they include other layers of gender equality such as identity or sexuality.

6.3. Responses regarding the Turkish withdrawal from the IC

6.3.1. Legal responses

The first response, facilitated by women's and human rights groups, was to legally question the withdrawal from the IC, when it was announced by the ruling government, by filing a lawsuit (Appendix A; C). The lawsuit failed to hinder the decision due to the demand of halting it was rejected by the Council of State (Appendix A). However, the Attorney General supported the demands of the feminist NGOs (Appendix A; C), claiming that the withdrawal was illegal and demanded the government to remain in the IC (Appendix A; C). However, the case is still pending. Prof. Dr. Bertil Oder refers to this lawsuit as "still an ongoing strategic litigation fostered by different types of feminist NGOs in Turkey. And the case is still pending, actually. And it is just an administrative strategic litigation process, which means that a group of NGOs, however, a large group of NGOs, provided a strategic litigation before the highest administrative court of Turkey" (Appendix C, p. 1-2).

6.3.2. Civic society responses

The withdrawal caused an outrage in civic society (Appendix D), opening up a widely encouraged discussion about GBV (Appendix A; C), in which predominantly women's organization vocalized their opinion of the unwillingness of the state to protect women from

violence (Appendix A). Women's organization in general vocalized their support to the IC (Appendix A; B; C; D), announcing combating the decision of the withdrawal: "We all, we, the feminists, our organization support the Istanbul Convention and we will... ja, fight back" (Appendix B, p. 5) and "Istanbul Convention is Ours! We're not giving it up!" (Appendix D, statement 2). The UN Women also urged Turkey to reconsider the withdrawal (Appendix D, statement 3).

As for a surprise to the secular women's organization, solidarizing responses with the IC from governmental women's organization were occurring as well (Appendix B; D). The organization KADEM, closely related to the government and in support of their policies, openly and strongly supported the Istanbul Convention (Appendix B; D). In their published statement (Appendix D), KADEM actively defends the IC alongside the Law No. 6284 and officially rejects the accusation, that the IC promotes gender in a problematic way: "To claim that this convention causes the legitimization of homosexual orientations is malicious, to say the least" (Appendix D, statement 1, translated by author). A news article regarding KADEM's positions also stated: "KADEM said that the convention does not promote homosexuality, undermine the traditional family unit, or deny biological sex" (Appendix D, News articles 1).

This outrage however was accompanied by a deep insecurity of women in Turkey about the impacts of this decision to their lived realities: "After the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, so many women in Türkiye thought we have no equal rights after the withdrawal from Istanbul Convention. They were like anxious, like you know 'what does it mean for women, okay, we will not be free and equal from now on?'" (Appendix B, p. 4).

Summarizing, it can be analyzed, that the withdrawal from the IC caused a strong reaction against it and include for a moment even unexpected actors in the common goal of remaining in the IC.

6.3.3. Political responses

The governmental authorities responded to the withdrawal as well, mostly defending the decision and aiming at overturn the opposition against the withdrawal, which accumulated in society alongside the accusation of lacking an institutional will to protect women (Appendix A; D). One attempt within this response was also directed at secular women's organization, inviting them to a Parliamentary Investigation Commission targeting the combat against VAW: "We encouraged the Commission to publicly announce their opposition to the

withdrawal decision. However, our contribution at the meeting was responded with interruption and silencing,” Mor Çatı reports (Appendix A, p. 7; Appendix D).

This attempt, amid the findings of the previous analysis chapters, can be analyzed as a political strategy to ease the open opposition standpoints from feminist organization by including them back into policy-making decision, as it was the case in the preparations of the IC a decade ago. However, due to the description of the meeting by the woman shelter Mor Çatı (Appendix A; D), it can also be stated that this attempt was not sincere but rather aiming at manipulation.

Within this range, another governmental response to the withdrawal can be analyzed in the same manner of trying to ease the opposition against the withdrawal and proof good will, since the Turkish ruling government announced an “action plan” to compensate the IC on the day of the withdrawal (Appendix A; C).

Additionally, another political response can be analyzed within this frame, since the democratic opposition used the withdrawal from the IC as an elective strategy, announcing that the IC will be adopted again under their ruling (Appendix C; D), what to this point cannot be proved by actions due to the pending election (Appendix B), and therefore can only be analyzed as a political strategy (Appendix C). However, the supplemental data also indicates, that the decision of withdrawing from the IC, also caused some party members of the AKP to go into opposition towards the withdrawal: “The AKP’s inner circle seems divided on whether Turkey should withdraw from the treaty” (Appendix D, News Articles 1).

Summarizing, the political response regarding the withdrawal was circling around easing the opposition towards it, which can be analyzed as strategically but not as a sincere attempt of fulfill oppositional demands regarding VAW. However, it can additionally be seen that not the entire government was on board with the decision.

6.4. Impacts of the IC and the withdrawal on Turkey

6.4.1. Impacts of the IC on Turkey

Prof. Dr. Bertil Oder formulate the first striking impact of the IC: “In case of the Istanbul Convention, the parliamentary debate was rather striking, because Istanbul Convention is the only convention in the constitutional and parliamentary history of Turkey, which was adapted by almost consensus. There was an extraordinarily strong support for the approval of the Istanbul Convention” (Appendix C, p. 3). This shows that the IC serves an acknowledged noble cause by the parliament and impacted a political acknowledge of the topic.

The IC is perceived as “the most important framework for the elimination of VAW” (Appendix A, p.7) and a “lifeguard of women and LGBTQI people here in Turkey” (Appendix B, p. 5), and is therefore highly approved by women’s organization working within this field (Appendix A; B; C). An important impact of the IC, which is extremely relevant for women in Turkey and was mentioned by all the interviewees, can be observed legally in the legislation number 6284 (Law to Protect Family and Prevent VAW). It is often linked to the code *Istanbul Convention*, but also to the code *Implementation/implement* (Appendix A; B; C) The Law is based on the IC and in accordance with its requirements (Appendix A; B; C). Due to that, women achieved gender equality in regard to VAW and femicides legally on paper (Appendix C; D). However, it is lacking implementation, what was voiced by all interviewees and the link to the second code additionally suggests (Appendix A; B; C).

Furthermore, Prof. Dr. Bertil Oder points out another relevant impact. She argues: “However, the Istanbul Convention has been also some sort of a stimulation for civic society” (Appendix C, p. 1). This perception is argued by her additionally, when she states: “However, I personally think that, or better to say, observe that in all jurisdictions, the most significant impact of the Istanbul Convention was creating a public and open public debate” (Appendix C, p. 7).

On the one hand because of the already mentioned collaboration between state actors and feminist organizations during the preparation of the IC, which stimulated the engagement of the civic society in Turkey, and on the other hand the approval and support of the IC by the civic society after the ratification (Appendix C; D).

Another impact on Turkey from the IC was the widespread support of the Convention across ideologically different women’s organization. As WWSFP states with surprise and which was already analyzed in the Chapter 6.3.2., even the governmental funded women’s organization KADEM supported the IC and are ever since attacked by men from AKP, who are demanding to shut down KADEM (Appendix B; D).

As a finding, it can therefore be stated, that the IC impacted the visibility of women, draw attention to VAW and gender inequality in the Turkish society, and fueled open discussion and debates while it in general met with a high approval in society.

6.4.2. Impacts of the withdrawal from the IC on Turkey

As emerging from the data, the impact that the withdrawal has, is first and foremost a widening gap between the governmental and its allies, and the agenda of women’s

organization, that is causing severe tensions between them and is followed by an increasingly hostile discourse towards feminist topics in Turkey, which secular women's organization have to respond to (Appendix A; B; C; D). The withdrawal is perceived as just the tip of the iceberg: "The withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention is the result of ongoing attacks to women's vested rights and demand for equality" (Appendix A, p. 7).

Prof. Dr. Bertil Oder aligns with this perception and speaks of the development that led to the withdrawal as a gender backlash and links the withdrawal to a general autocratization process in Turkey (Appendix C). Aligning with that, also the joint statement of three independent women's organizations identify a backlash in the Turkish policies regarding gender equality: "In the committee report, we identified many paragraphs that come to mean a backlash against the rights of women and girls", which caused them to be worried about future policies (Appendix D, Statement 2). This process affects especially secular women's organizations: "However, as soon as the withdrawal was provided, the government released different types of autocratic decision to control the feminist NGOs" (Appendix C, p. 8). Additionally, women's organization experience more than ever due to the withdrawal, that their knowledge and suggestion on the topic of GBV are not guiding public policies (Appendix D).

Linked to that is another impact: The withdrawal from the IC is stated as illegal, even though the Constitution allows a withdrawal (Appendix C), due to its lacking discussion in the Turkish Parliament (Appendix A; C; D), being a single executive order without statutory legislation and a midnight degree that prohibited civic monitoring (Appendix C; D). This procedure stands in striking difference to the process of entering the Convention (Appendix C). This combined with the universal support of the IC in society and the consensus in parliament of entering it, as analyzed in the previous chapters (Chapter 6.3. and 6.4.1) opens a window of opportunity for secular women's organization to voice their critic more strikingly, dismantle the governmental position as against equality and unwilling to protect women, and especially to be heard by more state and societal actors than before (Appendix A; B; C; D).

As analyzed in the previous Chapter 6.3.3., legislation number 6284 is based on the IC. Also, the criminal code and the criminal procedural code are "[...] in line with the Istanbul Convention's paradigm" (Appendix C, p. 4). However, to this date, the withdrawal did not affect the relevant article. No changes were adapted. The law is legally still in effect and based on the IC as a guiding instance (Appendix B, C). However, the withdrawal did limit the ability for secular women's organizations to pressure state authorities, such as the police, to comply with the law's requirements: "[...] So, we can see that after the withdrawal from Istanbul Convention we had, it was so hard to do something with this law, because for

example Istanbul Convention says that the police station should do something but after the withdrawal it is too hard to push the police station to do this responsibilities” (Appendix B, p. 4).

Also analyzed in the previous chapter 6.3.3., the ruling AKP government under the lead of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as Prime Minister, announced an action plan in response to the withdrawal from the IC (Appendix A; C). This action plan is therefore impacted by the withdrawal from the IC, also because it draws on the general framework of the IC (Appendix A). While one action plan is described as “very well developed, very well thought on the paper” by Prof. Dr. Bertil Oder, the newest one is criticized by Mor Çatı as just claiming to adhere to the IC but differing from it tremendously: “This action plan benefits from the general framework undertaken by the Istanbul Convention, whereas it does not even once mention the name Istanbul Convention and does not use the concept “gender equality” at all [...]. The pro-family approach that is centered [*sic*] around traditional gender stereotypes (instead of gender equality) is prevalent in the action plan [...]. Nowhere in the action plan is there even a statement about sexual health services” (Appendix A, p. 8).

Additionally, the withdrawal from the IC caused the first part of another law package, the “4th Judicial Package” to be adopted, which demand “concrete evidence” in crimes. However, sexual assault and child abuse cases are not included in the categorization of the crimes in the package. This law therefore is viewed as another strike against gender equality: “This legal change paves the way for injustice on sexual crimes and will encourage perpetrators (Appendix A, p. 9).

Also, a third bill, which was passed in 2022 after the withdrawal, and adopts legal changes within VAW and Violence in Healthcare. This bill is perceived as containing positive changes but does not reach far enough into the causes of VAW (Appendix A).

Therefore, it can be stated that the withdrawal had a holistic impact on Turkey, including areas of private and public life such as the political environment, civic society activity, the legislation, and the lived realities of women in the country.

Besides the already discussed implications of the withdrawal from the IC, it needs to be analyzed that no monetary impact on secular women’s organization occurred due to the withdrawal (Appendix A; B). Both Mor Çatı and WWSFP are independent women’s organization, which are not relying on financial support from the government or other international actors such as the EU (Appendix A; B). WWSFP however observes, that the readiness for funding from the EU towards Turkish women’s organization even increased

since the withdrawal (Appendix B). This is analyzed as a positive impact on the financial situation of secular women's organization in Turkey.

6.5. Solidarity and Networking

6.5.1. Solidarity in feminist agendas

As emerging from the data, the interviewed women's organization are in solidarization with women in Turkey (Appendix A; B). They do not appear to divide their solidarity amongst the women, basing it on certain attributes, but rather speak of them in a general term, even though especially Mor Çatı expresses the awareness of different discrimination factors when they state in a different context: “[...] discrimination is carried out on the basis of age, disability status, citizenship status and type of violence” (Appendix A, p. 4). They are also acknowledging intersectional struggles, as it can be analysed on the grounds of the interview data. So does Mor Çatı against states: “Women may call Mor Çatı only once as well as multiple times and be in need of different kinds of support simultaneously” (Appendix A, p. 1).

Solidarity is mostly expressed in the form of support, which is indicated by the main occurrence of the code *support* in this last theme (Appendix A; B; C).

While the women's organization are performing this type of solidarity daily by providing the necessary support, the state authorities are not, even though the support is required by law and the state policies used to be supportive of international human rights laws, especially women's rights, until recently (Appendix A; C). However, the regressive policies and hurdles regard the combat of VAW and femicides, are noticed by society, which enhances the societal approval and solidarity with the feminist agenda of the mentioned women's organizations (Appendix A; B; C; D).

This is also indicated in the mentioning of both Mor Çatı and WWSFP working with several volunteers, which suggests, that they receive solidarity for their cause from the society (Appendix A; B; D), as well as the statement, that many people financially support WWSFP (Appendix B). Also, the public discourse about violence, that was caused by the IC, shifted the solidarization of feminist politics from the edges to the centre (Appendix C). However, this solidarity appears to be tightly linked to individual experiences of violence: “so many, we have so many volunteers and member, and also you know, we have volunteer who, whose sister or mother or daughter [was] also murdered” (Appendix B, p. 3)

To create solidarity however, the main tool for secular women's organization seems to be social media. Especially regarding VAW and femicides it is first and foremost important to

draw attention to the topic, as the data suggests (Appendix A; B; C; D). This visibility is created through social media, as also the Hashtag-Campaign indicates that emerged after Pinar Gültekin's death, which added to the creation of an international outrage over the situation in Turkey (Appendix D). In this regard also Mor Çatı voices: "There are many cases of femicide, sexual attacks and child abuse discussed on Twitter which make the argument "searching for justice on Twitter" a phenomenon. It suggests that justice in the court is impossible if you don't create a very strong public outrage. Even in the cases that are campaigned on Twitter, the justice system might fail" (Appendix A, p. 6). Also Prof. Dr. Bertil Oder expresses herself similarly: "However, in minor issues or the issues that did not attract the public opinion or the attention, particularly the social media or the press, there are so many problems of course" (Appendix C, p. 7).

Regarding the justice system, another support that can be analysed as solidarization with the feminist agenda of the women's organization, as already mentioned previously (Chapter 6.3.1.), can be seen in the support of the Attorney General regarding the illegality of the withdrawal from the IC (Appendix A; C). Prof. Dr. Bertil Oder states: "Which is stunning in case of the case, is the support of the Attorney General as regards the positioning of the feminist claimants. In other words, Attorney General of the highest court supported the claims of the feminist NGOs" (Appendix C, p. 2).

In this chapter too it must be taken up again on the already mentioned topic surrounding the governmental women's organization KADEM. The founding of KADEM was a result, which emerged from cutting out networking activities of secular women's organization with state actors. KADEM solidarizes with the government and mainly conservative women are active within the organization (Appendix B). However, the withdrawal from the IC shifted this directive for the first time (Appendix B; C; D). KADEM supported the IC against the governmental line, which was surprising to secular women's organizations and the governmental party. From the latter even claims emerged to shut down KADEM (Appendix B; D). Striking in that manner however is, that WWSFP although expressing unwillingness to support KADEM due to deviating opinions, in case of emergency they would still be in solidarity with them against the government: "I hope, we will not see a day, that we you know have to support KADEM I guess. I do not want to support them, but maybe they will need who knows" (Appendix B, p. 7).

To summarize the findings, it can be stated, that the solidarity of women regarding the combat of VAW appears to be stronger than before and the approval of the feminist fight for gender

equality is supported by many, while the relevant women's organizations are willing to form intersectional alliances as long as it serves the cause of combatting VAW.

6.5.2. Networking

As for the last subtheme in the last theme, the networking of women's organization emerged from the data. However, it is depicted as the smallest of all themes, but it nevertheless was evaluated as inheriting relevant findings for the discussion. Mainly the codes *women's council* and *volunteer* occurred in the data, which are relevant for this subtheme (Appendix A; B).

Even though the former networking activities of secular women's organization with state actors were cut in the process of continuous autocratization, women's organizations are nevertheless engaging in networking activities (Appendix B; D). Especially WWSFP points out the networking structures of their organization, having women's council in Turkey as also abroad. The foreign councils are mainly placed on the European continent (Appendix B). Also, volunteers are active in other countries than Turkey, supporting and solidarizing with the cause of WWSFP (Appendix B). Also, Mor Çatı highlights the number of volunteers and members supporting the organization (Appendix D). The UN women expresses support: "We join those urging the Government of the Republic of Turkey to continue protecting and promoting the safety and rights of all women and girls" (Appendix D, statement 3).

Additionally, and as already mentioned in a previous chapter (Chapter 6.4.2), networking with the EU seemed to be easier now after the withdrawal than before: "So they [the EU] support so many universities and feminist organization, more than yesterday. I know so many project [...]" (Appendix B, p. 6).

7. Discussion

To summarize the findings from the Analysis (Chapter 6), women are living under a constant threat of violence in Turkey, which impacts their lived reality and is not comparable to what other women in other European states, especially in which the researcher is positioned, are facing. The patriarchy in Turkey appears to be deeply imbedded in the political system, the institutions, and the society, which is the cause for gender inequality, which in turn constitutes the threat of violence. Besides the physical violence, women in Turkey also face other forms of violence, even though they are rather silenced in society: Women in Turkey are not sufficiently protected by the state's institutions, even though relevant laws are in force,

because it lacks implementation. This is shown not only in protective measures but also in the prosecution of perpetrators. Therefore, women in Turkey facing institutional violence as defined in Chapter 4.2.2. of this master thesis. It can additionally be argued that women in Turkey are also facing structural and cultural violence, as defined in Chapter 4.2.1., due to the structural level of discrimination and the effect on their lived reality by expressions of opinions from political authorities. Also, normative violence (Chapter 4.2.2) can be seen as applicable since VAW usually escalates in cases, where women are not complying with social norms and values. However, women are revolting against their societal and political status on an ongoing basis. Having this in mind, the first research question can now be answered:

Whether and how is the Istanbul Convention needed in Turkey?

Its importance for the Turkish women is visible in different aspects of public and private life and are related to the situation of women in Turkey:

First, the IC opens the general discussion about VAW and femicides in Turkey. It allows women's organization to raise the topic in general, remind the political decisionmakers of their responsibility and other institutional actors, such as the police forces, to do their job. Additionally, it created the possibility for secular women's organization to actively participate in the policies and network with the government towards gender equality. Additionally, the IC is important for Turkey since it also considers different forms of violence as VAW and links it to a general gender inequality, that must be battled. This also has a rather symbolic impact on the women in Turkey. The analysis of the data indicates that women in Turkey felt less protected once the IC was withdrawn, which can also be argued as them not having enough trust in their domestic government to combat the issue.

Second, the IC is important since it still guides domestic laws in Turkey, that are now after the withdrawal even more blurry in their implementation than before, and the withdrawal again normalizes and legitimates VAW.

This leads the discussion towards the second research question:

What conditioned the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention?

Emerging from the data and having in mind the theoretical framework of this master thesis, the withdrawal from the IC was conditioned by a general De-Europeanization process and a tendency towards establishing an autocratic system under the ruling government. Additionally, several conservative religious groups within the government, who gained significant power in the policy-making processes over the past decade, are pushing the agenda

towards a pro-family approach, that contradicts with gender equality. This is also shown in the reasoning for the withdrawal by the government.

The withdrawal can also be discussed as an act of defiance towards the EU. Since the bilateral relation faces a stalemate, as discussed in the Literature Review (Chapter 3), the withdrawal from the IC can also be interpreted as one of the clearest signals towards Western politics, that Turkey is no longer seeking for compliance with the EU values, norms, and policies. However, as discussed before the IC is a highly supported international treaty, and therefore the withdrawal sparked multiple responses. This answers the third research question:

What responses did it spark?

The withdrawal sparked multiple responses, that were mostly critical of the decision. Not only did – as expected – secular women’s organization opposed the decision, took legal steps by initiating a strategic litigation, and demanded to remain in the IC, but also women’s organization that are funded by the government and usually are in line with its policies, positioned themselves against the decision and voiced their support with the IC, which was answered by AKP party members with the demand to shut them down. This regressive response can be discussed to be in line with the autocratization process, that led to the withdrawal, and shows once more, that women in influential positions are only tolerated and allowed to pressure official political agendas in patriarchy, when they do not challenge it in the core.

The latter is also illustrated by the governmental response towards the general societal opposition against the withdrawal. Feminist organizations were invited to share their knowledge with a committee after the withdrawal. However, this was analysed as just a strategically attempt to soften the resistance, since the invited women’s organisation were neither heard nor their positions acknowledged by the committee, which additionally shows the unwillingness of the Turkish government to achieve gender equality.

This analysed unwillingness leads to the last research question:

Can the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention be explained as a backlash and if so, what effects does this backlash has on the general approval for gender-equality in Turkey?

The withdrawal from the IC can be explained as a backlash because it just marks a culmination of general anti-gender politics by the Turkish government in recent years. As discussed in the Theory section (Chapter 4.3.3.) VAW and femicides are interpreted by some scholars as a backlash towards gender equality. Over the years of slowly increasing gender

equality in Turkey, the numbers continuously risen, and the government did not sufficiently hinder it. It can therefore be discussed that the government legitimate VAW and therefore also facilitates not only a political but also a societal backlash.

The political backlash, that can be seen in the pro-family and anti-gender approach of the leading elites, also impacts the decision to withdraw from the IC. However, the findings can be interpreted in a way, that the decision to withdraw from the IC was a kickstart for women's solidarity in the country and sparked several protests, demonstrations and actions promoting gender equality. Therefore, the threat of violence can be interpreted as a relevant factor to constitute an intersectional solidarization. The findings can also be interpreted, that the motivation for secular women's organization was rather strengthen than defeated by the withdrawal from the IC.

8. Conclusion

In the Introduction (Chapter 1) two possible outcomes were presented, that could possibly follow the withdrawal from the IC. First, it was suggested that the withdrawal could lead to a successful and sustained hindering of secular women's organization or as the second option, it could spark grassroot responses from civic society, that are stronger than ever. Accordingly, the following problem formulation was asked: *What effects did the Turkish withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention have on domestic secular women's organization combating GBV in Turkey?*

Conclusively, the conducted case study show, that the withdrawal from the IC had multiple effects on domestic secular women's organization combating GVB in Turkey. It caused stronger tensions for them with the government and its allies, it made it harder for them to support women due to raising cases of VAW and the lacking legal implementations of the existing laws, that are all linked to the IC. The withdrawal took away both an important argument towards state authorities as also for a moment tied up the organizations capacities by inviting them to committees or having to issue a strategical litigation to combat the withdrawal.

However, even though the withdrawal affected secular women's organization in a negative way, they are also surprisingly strong in moral and meet increasing support by different – and sometimes unexpected – civic society actors. They can also rely on even stronger international networking opportunities and the withdrawal opened a window of opportunity for them to vocalize their agendas in public discourses even louder. Conclusively, the first

mentioned outcome of successful hindering secular women's organization is therefore falsified. The second outcome seems more likely but is perceived as a rather starting process at this point. To verify it, it would need to be examined in few years as the subject to follow-up research.

As discussed in the theory section, Hannah Arendt (Chapter 4.2.1) distinguished between violence and power. She stated that real power can never be achieved through violence. As a final conclusion it can be stated that the Turkish secular women's organization are proofing Arendt's theory in praxis.

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