

**Deciphering the Intimacy Politics of the AKP Government Through  
Its Restrictions on Sexuality Education in Turkey:  
Resistance of NGOs and Emergence of New Repertoire of Actions**

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## Abstract

The thesis is based on (1) 12 semi-structured interviews with NGO representatives two academicians in the relevant field, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) representative from Turkey, (2) participatory observations in a relevant conference and different SRHR education programs, and (3) collection of documents such as NGOs reports and guide books. It aims to scrutinize (1) the impact of the intimacy politics of the AKP government towards the applicability, structure, and content of the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education programs of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Turkey, (2) and the repertoire of actions of these NGOs, which have been inventing strategies and tactics to negotiate with and resist the AKP government. The discussion will be mostly based on the transformation of the AKP government starting from late 2000s marked by the important events such as abandonment of the pluralistic/liberal discourses previously utilized by the AKP and the rise of anti-abortion discourses as a basis for the policies regulating and disciplining sexual and reproductive health and gender equality issues. The AKP government had conducted an immense “women-oriented” (as opposed to current “family-oriented) policy-making process on SRHR issues in the early 2000s. However after the late 2000s, with the increasing authoritarian regime of the neo-conservative intimacy politics of the AKP government, NGOs implementing SRHR education programs have been negatively affected as being the target of the anti-gender and pronatalist agenda of the AKP government. This thesis will be the analysis of this tension between the AKP government and the NGOs in Turkey, which is particularly important because of the fact that it reveals the roots of the regulation of sexuality and the gendered bodies in Turkey.

**Keywords:** intimacy politics, neo-conservatism, anti-gender, anti-abortion, pronatalism, non-governmental organizations, NGOization, sexual and reproductive health and rights, sexuality education, civil society, repertoire of contentions

## Signed Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 19,313 words  
Entire manuscript: 24,901 words

Signed: Balacan Fatima Ayar

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## Abbreviations

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

CEDAW: The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CSEP: Sexual Health Education Program (Cinsel Sağlık Eğitim Programı)

ÇŞMD: Association for Struggle against Sexual Violence (Cinsel Şiddetle Mücadele Derneği)

ERDEP: Changes in the Adolescent Period Project (Ergenlik Dönemi Değişim Projesi)

EU: European Union

İKGV: Human Resource Development Foundation (İnsan Kaynağını Geliştirme Vakfı)

KADEM: Women and Democracy Association (Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği)

KİHEP: Human Rights Education Rights for Women Program (Kadının İnsan Hakları Eğitim Programı)

KİH-YÇ: Women for Women's Human Rights- New Ways (Kadının İnsan Hakları – Yeni Çözümler Derneği)

Kırmızı Şemsiye: Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association (Kırmızı Şemsiye Cinsel Sağlık ve İnsan Hakları Derneği)

KSEP: Women's Health Education Program (Kadın Sağlığı Eğitim Programı)

Mavi Kalem: Mavi Kalem Social Assistance and Solidarity Association (Mavi Kalem Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği)

SGYD: Youth Approaches to Health Association (Sağlıkta Genç Yaklaşımlar Derneği)

SRHR: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

TAPV: Turkish Family Health and Planning Foundation (Türkiye Aile Planlaması Vakfı)

TPDR: Turkish Psychological Counselling and Guidance Association (Turk Psikolojik Danışma ve Rehberlik Derneği)

UN: United Nations

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

UNHRC: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In my 7<sup>th</sup> grade in secondary school (2003) in Istanbul, I and my girl classmates attended 40-minutes long session provided as a part of the Changes in the Adolescent Period Project (ERDEP). During the session, we got information about hygiene, puberty changes, and menstrual period. Before the session, girls and boys were separated in different classes. We, girls, went to another classroom with trained nurses from the ERDEP project and boys stayed in our classroom to watch an informative video about the changes in their bodies during the adolescent period. At the end, educators gave us ORKİD which is one of the most popular menstrual pad brands in Turkey. Although I don't exactly remember the details of information provided and the booklet distributed in the class, I remember laughing faces and teasing behavior of boys. The reason of laugh and tease was the pads given to girls after the education as a promotion of ORKID brand. As most of the girls were hiding their pads when going back to our classroom, one of my girl classmates opened the pad and covered her hand with it and ran through the corridor of the school by showing it to everyone. I clearly remember her running with the pad on her hand after the ERDEP education day at school. Not the ERDEP education, but my friend's action encouraged me not to feel ashamed of the pads we were carrying in our hands since pads was the symbol of menstruation which has to remain unspoken as one of the taboos in our society (Buckley and Gottlieb, 1998). The feeling of being ashamed is coming from the cultural and traditional roots of making menstruation as something needs to be hidden and as a result, young girls having menstrual cycles became alienated to their own bodies and to their biological processes. Knowledge coming from family, which may prevail scientific knowledge against the knowledge based on cultural and traditional values and/as a result of lack of scientific knowledge on sexuality issues of parents, negatively influences the perceptions of adolescents girls towards their bodies (Dolgun, Öztürk, and Yılmaz, 2011; Erbil, Orak, and Bektaş, 2010).

Few years ago, when me and my friend were talking about our menstruation cycles, we discussed our own ways to reach right information about them and realized our lack of knowledge and misinformation about our periods during our adolescents years as a kind of shared experience. This reminded us ERDEP as the only education program and then, I started to ask questions to my other friends if they remember the education program, which all of a sudden turned into an academic curiosity. Their memories are not so different than my own. Most of them said “oh I remembered, they gave us pads, right?”. Right. They gave us pads and that was the extent to which most of us, at least within my social circle, remembered the lecture. This leads me to question the transformative effect of the content of the project and the ERDEP project itself, which represents the state’s attitude towards SRHR education programs in general. Later, my interest turned into a larger scale project (this thesis) about the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education programs in Turkey by keeping this question in my mind.

To give a brief explanation of the ERDEP project, it is a significant nationwide project aiming to access to 12-14 years old students in Turkey, which no longer continues (1993-2015). Until 2015, the ERDEP project reached approximately 16 million girls.<sup>1</sup> The significance of the ERDEP project, a collaboration of Ministry of National Education and Proctor and Gamble (P&G), results from the fact that it is the only sexual and reproductive health and rights-related (SRHR) education program that had been conducted at the secondary education level. The 40-minutes long education as an extracurricular activity, took place in the schools to inform Turkish students about “physical, psychological, social changes during adolescence, reproductive systems, menstrual period, balanced nutrition, and personal care” (Aksoy, 2015, p.116-7). The ERDEP project made an open call to nurses to be a part of the project and then,

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<sup>1</sup> Creating a New Market and Product Life Cycle. (2016, March 11). Retrieved from <https://www.markalarfisildiyyor.com/7-1-creating-a-new-market-and-product-life-cycle>



nurses attended trainings to train students in schools. In this project, girls and boys were separated into two groups. Boys were supposed to watch a VCD about abovementioned issues and girls were in a more interactive classroom setting with the trained nurses. After the education, “training kits and gift packages, including the brand products of sponsor companies are distributed to the students in the schools that are in the scope of the project” (Aksoy, 2015, p.117). Although it is represented as a corporate social responsibility project of P&G, the ERDEP project is driven by a highly marketing-oriented motivation, which aims to ensure “profit, reputation, brand recognition, loyal customers” (Aksoy, 2015, p.119). In my experience, the ultimate goal of reaching the potential customer via this social responsibility project was successfully fulfilled because I and my friends remember nothing about the content of the ERDEP session, but only the pads we were given after the education.

The ERDEP project<sup>2</sup> had been transformed a couple of times under the AKP rule before it was discontinued. These transformations, I believe, have tremendous effects on the neo-conservative politics<sup>3</sup> of intimacy that the AKP rule has been steadily constructing in Turkey especially on the regulation of gender norms and gendered bodies of the citizens. As part of the ERDEP project, mothers were started to be invited to schools and trained alongside their daughters<sup>4</sup>. By doing so, the ERDEP project by itself, (re)affirmed the fact that mother is the

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<sup>2</sup> The person who was in charge of managing the ERDEP project in Ministry of National Education was unseated a few years ago and the consultative committee had lost their contact with him. The loss of such a contact with the government caused not being able to access information about the future of the ERDEP project from official channels. One of my informants, Professor Çok, was an academic consultant in the ERDEP project. The consultants were responsible of the content development of the ERDEP project making the education content proper for both girls and boys in the schools. The consultative committee designed ERDEP as a 40-minutes long training module in coordination with P&G. Professor Özcebe was in the latter part of the ERDEP, where the content was re-developed for boys and re-arranged to involve parents as well. However, they lost their contact, Tanju Yılmaz, who was responsible of the ERDEP project in Ministry of National Education as a result of the changes in the organization chart of Ministry of National Education and then, they haven't heard anything about ERDEP.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout thesis, I will use the term ‘neo-conservative politics’ referring the specific behavior of the AKP government, which is a mixture of populist tendencies, neoliberal and conservative ideologies driven by the aim of regulating sexualities and gendered bodies of the population in Turkey (Coşar and Özkan-Kerestecioglu, 2017; Acar and Altunok, 2013; Korkman, 2016)

<sup>4</sup> Öğrenci ve Velilere Ergenlik Dönemi Semineri Verildi. (02.04.2015). Retrieved from <http://www.musovasi.com/haber/ogrencivevelilereergenlikdonemisemineriverildi-16197.html>

responsible parent for the care of children. The separation of boys and girls into two groups continued. exclusion of fathers from the education and the separation of boys and girls in the ERDEP project shows how the gender binary and gender roles are “reproduced, regulated, and restrained” (Pillow, 2003, p.151). The changes – that were only reaffirming the traditional gender roles ad binary gender separation – continued until it was discontinued and this more conservative version of the ERDEP project was taken as a model for the long-running SRHR education for years.

The results of the largest and the last inclusive survey 2007 Turkey Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Survey Report prepared by Population Fund (Nüfusbilim Derneği) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), shows that “in terms of reproductive and sexual issues, the youth can be considered as stuck in between making their own decisions and adopting societal values” (Özcebe et al., 2007, p.30). As a result, they suggest that “reproductive and sexual health information should be systematically covered in the formal education curriculum” (Özcebe et al., 2007, p.32). However, 11 years after the survey was conducted, sex education has never been a part of national curriculum in schools even in a form which would reinforce traditional gender roles. Rather, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been taking up the role of state to provide various SRHR education programs to different target population including youth, women, and mostly underrepresented populations such as LGBTI+, sex workers, and refugees. The duration and the content vary depending on collaborations, funding availability, ability to access to the target population, and more importantly, the political atmosphere of Turkey, the impact of which I will delve into throughout the thesis. There have been efforts to integrate SRHR education models in the formal education such as Supporting Sexual and Reproductive Health Training for Adolescents (1997-2004) by The Human Resources Development Foundation (İKGV) with collaboration of UNFPA. However, such projects couldn’t protect its longevity or usually have faced with

the risk of going through extreme structural changes that also affected the content because of an ideological shift of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government to a more conservative and authoritarian regime during its almost two decades of power (Keysan, 2016). As another example, there is an ongoing successful program named Human Rights Education Rights for Women Program (KİHEP) (developed in 1995) by Women for Women's Human Rights- New Ways Association (KİH-YÇ), which is an independent women's NGO based in Istanbul. This program aims to reach women by prioritizing the awareness of women for their rights in Turkey. Today, KİHEP is still implemented but it has been facing difficulties in terms of implementation and reaching target population. During the last 20 years, there have been strong alliances and collaborations between feminist and women's organizations and NGOs having SRHR education programs in terms of solidarity and/or providing financial and material support. The increasing presence and improvement of the NGOs and their SRHR education programs in Turkey starting from mid-1990s, especially with the influence of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICDP) in 1994 in Cairo and the Fourth Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing in framing reproductive health and rights (Joachim, 2003). The timing of the ERDEP education also overlaps with the conferences and during my interview with Professor Cok as an academic consultant in the ERDEP project points out the significance and the impact of the UN conferences for Turkey:

Sexual health became a part of agenda of health care providers after the ICPD in Cairo. Three important achievements we had from the conference: abortion, the definition of sexual health, and adolescence education. [...] Then, these issues were consolidated in Beijing as well. [...] We started to use the terms of sexual and reproductive rights in our agendas in Turkey.

Although there is an increasing number of implementation of the SRHR education program starting from these years, especially after the late 2000s, direct or indirect interventions of the AKP government to the NGOs and their SRHR programs started to become more observable.

By considering the difficulties that the NGOs have been facing, my argument here is that despite the whole constraints of the current intimacy politics of the AKP government on NGOs work and their agenda, NGOs have been developing a new repertoire to continue their agendas. The analysis of the tension between the AKP government and the NGOs in Turkey is particularly important because of revealing the roots of the regulation of sexuality and gendered bodies in Turkey. This feminist ethnographic thesis aims to scrutinize (1) the influence of the intimacy politics of the AKP government on the applicability, structure, and content of the SRHR-related education programs of NGOs in Turkey, (2) and what kind of repertoire of actions NGOs developed to negotiate with and resist to the AKP government.

### **1.1.Methodology**

I utilized qualitative research methods including 12 semi-structured interviews with NGO representatives, namely the National Program Coordinator of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Turkey, and two professors who were involved in the document collection, and participatory observations in two different education programs stages of “Changes in the Adolescent Period Project” (ERDEP). I have also attended a conference (Empowering Adolescence at School, TAPV, 2018) which enabled me to meet people from the SRHR network in Turkey. The main sources of the thesis rely on the in interviews conducted with NGO representatives. Other interviews and observations are used as complementary sources, which were really helpful to understand the relations in the NGOs network in Turkey and the current discussions among SRHR education models in academia and in different NGOs.

#### *Interviews and Document Collection*

For the thesis, I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews. I focused on the NGOs, which have been the active actors for SRHR educations in the NGO sector after 2000s. These NGOs define themselves variously (See Appendix) but their common characteristic is that all

of them pay attention to gender equality and are guided in accordance with the requirements of it in Turkey.

As my sampling methodology, I firstly contacted my own network to reach informants and they referred me other contacts. It made my entrance to the field easier at first. Secondly, I continued with making a list of NGOs based on their work on SRHR in order to prevent the potential risks of snowball method, which is based on accessing “informants through contact information that is provided by other informants” (Noy, 2008, p. 330). The potential risk might have been listening the same narratives during the interviews which may lead constructing thesis on single-sided narrative which may fail to see the diversity of various narratives, encounters, and experiences of NGOs. After making the list of NGOs, I reached them via e-mail and/or their personal/work phones. As a result of my attempts, I arranged 12 interviews in total. 10 of my interviews were conducted both in Ankara and Istanbul during November and December 2018. The last 2 interviews were conducted via Skype during February and April 2019, in Budapest. Since I was living in Ankara at this period, I visited Istanbul twice for my interviews. I wanted to visit my informants in their NGO offices because I also wanted to see the working atmosphere of these NGOs and it was easier for me reach formal documents that are prepared by those NGOs. I also collected documents from these NGOs to support my interviews. Some of the materials are introducing the NGOs and their program while others are the documents distributed during the SRHR education programs.

I reached 9 representatives from 7 different NGOs, which have an agenda of providing SRHR education programs. Two of them are working in two different foundations, which are the Turkish Family Health and Planning Foundation (Türkiye Aile Planlaması Vakfı, TAPV) and the Human Resource Development Foundation (İnsan Kaynağını Geliştirme Vakfı, İKGV). They were founded in 1985 and 1988 respectively. Six of them are working in four different associations: Youth Approaches to Health Association (Sağlıkta Genç Yaklaşımlar

Derneği, SGYD), Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association (Kırmızı Şemsiye Cinsel Sağlık ve İnsan Hakları Derneği, Kırmızı Şemsiye), Mavi Kalem Association (Mavi Kalem Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği, Mavi Kalem), Women for Women's Human Rights – New Ways (Kadının İnsan Hakları -Yeni Çözümler Derneği, KİH-YÇ), and Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence (Cinsel Şiddetle Müdacele Derneği, CŞMD). As KİH-YÇ and Mavi Kalem were established in 1990's, the other three association were newly established NGOs in 2010s.

During the interviews, I began them with collecting general information on my informants such as their personal information, the operation of NGOs they are working at, and what kind of programs are provided as SRHR educations. Then, I asked several questions about the educations and trainings that are provided. Later, I moved to ask questions about the relations of NGOs with state including Ministries and local governments, donors, and other NGOs. Depending on my informant's experience in the NGO sector, I also added another question about the past to be able to make a comparative analysis.

I also conducted 3 more interviews. I interviewed Gökhan Yıldırım, the National Program Coordinator of UNFPA of Turkey in Ankara. He had very limited time and, therefore I had a short interview (approx. 30-minute long) with him about the current situation of SRHR educations in Turkey and the relations with UNFPA, NGOs, and the AKP government. The other two interviews are conducted with Professor Figen Çok from the Institute of Educational Sciences at Başkent University and Professor Hilal Özcebe from the Department of Public Health at Hacettepe University. Both were involved in the "Changes in the Adolescent Period Project" (ERDEP). Professor Çok was involved in the ERDEP project in late 1990s as one of the academic consultants in the ERDEP project, Professor Özcebe became a part of ERDEP in mid-2000's. They were responsible of the content development of the ERDEP project to make the ERDEP content proper for both girls and boys in the schools. Since I visited Professor Hilal

Özcebe at her office, I was able to take a look at the documents published for the ERDEP project.

I took their consent orally before starting our interview and asked for permission for recording. Each of them gave their consent and allowed me to record the interview. Since some of the informants want to be anonymous, real names of the informants will not be provided in the thesis except the interviews with Gökhan Yıldırımkaaya, Professor Figen Çok, and Professor Hilal Özcebe. Since the real names are not used in the thesis, I also do not provide any identifying information about NGO workers.

The duration of the interviews was approximately one hour. All interviews are transcribed and translated to English by me.

#### *Participatory Observations*

In one of my visits to Istanbul, I participated in a conference named “Empowering Adolescence at School”, which is organized by TAPV in November 24, 2018. Since the number of NGOs being interested in SRHR issues is limited in Turkey and the conferences are gathering the NGOs representatives from other cities, they are very important meeting points. Many NGOs representatives in the field were in the conference and it gave me a chance to have small conversations with the NGOs representatives informally.

I also attended to different educational programs. One of them was provided to social workers by TAPV in November 2018. It was a trainer’s training program about reproductive health information and consultancy. The second education is sexuality education and it is provided by Zeynep, who is a sexuality educator/consultant, to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in one of the highly prestigious private schools in Istanbul. During the education sessions, I sat in the class in silence and took my observations as notes. The observations gave me a general

idea about the issues raised during the educations and trainings, how the issues are discussed, and how the information is transferred to the participant to the educations.

#### *1.1.1. Position of Researcher*

My position as a feminist researcher in this thesis is both insider and outsider, which are ever shifting and thus, not static positions (Merton,1972). This kind of “fleeting moments of positioning and identifications, which never are stable or fixed ‘truths’, is crucial in trying to understand change and how agency manifests” in this thesis (van Stapele, 2014, p.19). I was an outsider to the field I was about to enter since I didn’t have NGOs experience and didn’t know how its modus operandi which differs from one NGO to another. However, during the interviews, sometimes some of my informants and I found us saying ‘we’ by adding me into the picture. ‘We’ is coming from our shared experience and concerns as a woman and a feminist in Turkey. I am also insider because of my own experience as a feminist woman living in Turkey and facing common problems regardless of its impact such as the anti-gender discourse and the attacks of the AKP government to Istanbul Convention, which is one of the most comprehensive convention on protecting women’s rights legally. The commonality is coming from the confrontation with some of the same problems as feminists<sup>5</sup>, LGBTI+ and women. This also established a kind of “mutual trust” among us (Merton, 1972, p.11). Lastly, the shifting positions of me as a researcher helped me to analyze the complex and changing patterns of the intimacy politics of the AKP government on both individual and institutional levels.

#### *1.1.2. Limitations of the Study*

There are several limitations of the thesis because of the word count and the scope of the research. First, this thesis does not comprehensively go into the details of the global impact on

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<sup>5</sup> Not all my informants consider themselves as feminist. Tendency of some is to separate their feminist/activist position from their professional worker persona.



local SRHR issues despite its significance. Rather, it focuses on the internal dynamics by reminding the fact that they are not isolated from the dynamics of transnational feminism and globally rising anti-gender discourse. Secondly, the thesis does not fully represent the whole network of NGOs working on SRHR-related issues in Turkey. However, comparatively, the 7 NGOs I used in my ethnographic study are the experts and well-known ones in the field. Thirdly, some of the NGOs have limited agenda on SRHR topics such as Mavi Kalem having a huge separate agenda on girls' education in disadvantaged regions. As another example, İKGV has changed its agenda from more SRHR-related programs such as to creating support mechanisms for asylum seekers, refugees, and victims of human trafficking. Lastly, not all of the education and training programs of the NGOs were mentioned in this thesis. Some of the NGOs such as KİH-YÇ has been prioritizing women's human rights since early 1990's and it is impossible to focus on each projects and programs. The selected education programs used in the thesis is to identify and explain the specific patterns of the NGOs' ways of negotiation and resistances and common problems they have been facing.

## **1.2.Organization of Chapters**

This thesis consists of six chapters. The second chapter gives a context of the last two decades of Turkey under the neo-conservative regime of the AKP government. The third chapter discusses the theories covered in the thesis and it overviews the feminist and queer theories in terms of making gender and sexuality as categories of analysis. Later, it touches upon Foucauldian biopolitics and governmentality and combines with relevant Civil Society and Social Movement theories.

The fourth and the fifth chapters are the analysis chapters. The fourth chapter examines how and why the partnership of the AKP government with NGOs were dissolved by providing examples from the interviews I conducted for the research. The fifth chapter demonstrates the tactics and strategies developed as a response to the intimacy politics of the AKP government

and how NGOs invent new repertoire of actions to survive in the increasingly authoritarian regime in Turkey. The last chapter summarizes the arguments of the thesis.

## 2. CONTEXTUALIZATION

The implementation conditions of SRHR education programs of the NGOs in Turkey is a great manifestation of the intimacy politics of the AKP government. Before analyzing these education, I will briefly introduce the changing position and patterns of the AKP's governance during its 17 years of rule in order to give a background of the last 2 decades of Turkey under the AKP's politics of intimate. The discussion will be mostly based on the transformation of the AKP government starting from 2007 marked by the important events such as abandonment of the pluralistic/liberal discourses previously utilized by the AKP and the rise of anti-abortion discourses as a basis for the policies regulating and disciplining sexual and reproductive health and gender equality issues. Turkey has been creating new methods by expanding previously existing patriarchal structures. The paradoxical situation which makes Turkey different from the other countries is that Turkey can be one of the first signatory states for the Istanbul Convention while reinforcing the neo-conservative agenda on state policies (Çağatay, 2015). Apparently, the erosion of the gains for SRHR during the last decade cannot be explained by only focusing on the AKP politics. The transition to a more conservative course is not unique to Turkey although there are special peculiarities to the state policies, which I will continuously refer in the following chapters. There is an increasing anti-gender discourse with the rising right-wing authoritarian discourse globally (Smith, 2018). It creates setbacks to prevent “any and all gains that seek recognition and justice [...], particularly in the realm of sexuality and reproduction” (Garita, 2015, p.290). In time, the promising boom of projects about SRHR educations in the early 2000s had faced several difficulties including intervention and prevention to pursue NGOs goals for SRHR education programs.

AKP came to power in 2002 by seemingly favoring the virtues of conservative democracy and the party was re-elected in 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2018 with an increasing

tendency of authoritarianism in each period (Dağı, 2006; Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün, 2017). In order to strengthening its power, the neo-conservative intimate politics has always been an effective tool for the Party. The changing tune of the AKP government starting from 2007 built upon its increasingly conservative discourse centering women and their sexual and reproductive health and their position in the family. Motivations and methods based on the consolidation of power of the AKP government have differed, but the policies are “highly informed by religious nationalism, the hetero-patriarchal and the neoliberal rationality of the government” (Özgüler & Yarar, 2017, p.137). During the first period of the AKP government (2002-2007)<sup>6</sup>, gender-related policies were supported as a consequence of the EU accession period and the democracy promises of the government (Keysan, 2016, p.159-60). As part of the requirements of the prospective EU membership and the electoral pledge of the party in 2002, restructuring the role of state and giving more place to NGOs are promised (Dağı, 2006; Saatçioğlu 2010). It means that this period also includes the proliferation of the projects targeting the needs of underrepresented populations of the society consisting of women and LGBTIs from their health to education.

Although the AKP’s discourse was more based on ‘liberal pluralist line’ (Coşar, 2010, p.2), which created a wind of “liberalization programme” (Doyle, 2018, p.449) in the first years of Justice and Development Party (AKP) until 2007, in time, the conservative and Islamic connotations of the AKP became much more obvious in the “political discourse and practice” (Coşar, Özkan-Kerestecioğlu, 2017, p.159). Saatçioğlu (2010, p.5) unpacks the change in discourse and practice, especially in the policymaking:

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<sup>6</sup> While examining the transformation of the AKP government in order to understand its motives and ideological standpoint, scholars analyze AKP era by utilizing the periodization of the 17-year of the AKP history (Keysan, 2016; Coşar, Özkan-Kerestecioğlu, 2017). In my analysis, I will rely on this periodization. However, as you will see, it is important to note that the earliest turning point of the government in terms of discourse and practice is after that second elections (in 2007) with disengagement with the EU agenda ideologically and practically and it started to be more intensified starting in 2011.

Although party elites formally advocate commitment to pluralism, rule of law and human rights, there have been deviations from these in practice, as evident in many of the government's domestic policies as well as the problematic implementation record of passed EU legislation.

As a result of the combination of increasing conservative discourse and becoming distanced from the EU agenda in domestic policies has reshaped the discourse of the AKP government on gender, which “has shifted from a more egalitarian atmosphere to a religio-conservative<sup>7</sup> one with strong reference to tradition and religion” (Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün, 2017, p.615).

Between 2002 and 2007, woman<sup>8</sup> and gender issues became an important sign of democratization as being a part of formal politics. Besides there were/are also the gains and contribution to democratization processes of feminist and women's movement, that cannot and should not be simply subsumed into the discourse that the AKP's early period 'caused' the increasing space for the civil society . However, the inclusive patterns of the AKP government started to reduce dramatically and that created an ambiguous situation. With the recent anti-abortion and anti-gender populist discourse of the AKP government, the government has pushed the expected “social values and approvals”<sup>9</sup> of the imagined unity of Turkish society forefront and strengthened its exclusionary discourse.

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<sup>7</sup> In the article of Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün, the term” religio-conservative gender climate” is used to explain “the intersection of religious, nationalist, and neo-liberal concerns” (Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün, 2017, p.616).

<sup>8</sup> Woman has always been the target of politics in Turkey. Starting from 1920s, women is an object which is used for the face of modernization for years under the Kemalist regime. The creation of the image of the ideal Turkish women dates back to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and according to the image, women had to be “citizen woman, urban and urbane, socially progressive, but also uncomplaining and dutiful at home” (White, 2003, 146). While the depiction of women is based on emancipation of them such as giving them equal rights with a secular civil code in 1926 as opposed to the Islamic law, which allows “religious and polygamous marriages” (White, 2003, p.151), motherhood as a “patriotic duty” was promoted and it is prioritized (White, 2003, p.154). From those days to these days, (the image of) woman as a mother has strongly remained as being a major object of politics in Turkey.

<sup>9</sup> President of the Council of Higher Education of Turkey: The Notion of Gender Does not Fit Our Social Values. (2019, February 21). Retrieved from <https://lgbtnewsturkey.com/2019/02/21/president-of-the-council-of-higher-education-of-turkey-the-notion-of-gender-does-not-fit-our-social-values/?fbclid=IwAR349zpnj0RwtUYW9sEWXgjImWP3huwL7JJoBWeQPKtogkbaujHtfGP3nuo>

The ‘new form of patriarchy’ of the AKP government praising the family, familial relations, and motherhood (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011), started to be more interventionist, especially when it came to the issues of reproductive health issues, while openly excluding sexual health issues. The neo-conservative policies of AKP reveals itself in pronatalist and anti-abortion policies (MacFarlane et al., 2016) and in the reflections of how women’s health is reduced to their reproductive health by neglecting the sexual health and sexual lives of women (Kaynak, 2016). AKP puts family in the center for “functioning of the neo-conservative mentality and [...] producing and sustaining the desired moral order” (Acar and Altunok, 2013, p.20). Any kind of threat or opposition which may contradict to familial and religious values is trying to be excluded from the government’s agenda. The most striking example about this attempt to exclude any voices against the intimacy politics of the AKP government is the latest attacks towards the Istanbul Convention and 6284 Law<sup>10</sup> to protect family and prevent violence against woman, which was accepted in Turkey on 8 March 2012 as an obligation of the Istanbul Convention. In August 2018, Family Platform (Aile Platformu) decided to march in Taksim to demand annulation of Istanbul Convention with the slogan ‘end gender equality’<sup>11</sup> in Turkey. The march did not take place, but several men from this platform came to Galatasaray Square, brought a banner saying ‘Say Stop to Global War Destroying Family’<sup>12</sup>, and then left the street without a press statement. After this, pro-government newspapers Yeni Şafak and Yeni Akit published articles about the same issue, which are named as “Istanbul Convention is a poisonous fruit” (*İstanbul Sözleşmesi zehirli meyvedir!*)<sup>13</sup> and “The Trial of Turkey with

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.lawsturkey.com/law/law-to-protect-family-and-prevent-violence-against-woman-6284>

<sup>11</sup> Denouncement by 153 Womens Organizations Against End Equality. (2018, August 01). Retrieved from <https://bianet.org/english/women/199637-denouncement-by-153-women-s-organizations-against-end-equality-rally>

<sup>12</sup> By saying *Global War*, they referred to the threat of adaptation of ‘Western’ values into their family structure with the EU Projects, Istanbul Convention, and other legislations concerning woman.

<sup>13</sup> *İstanbul Sözleşmesi zehirli meyvedir!*. (*Istanbul Convention is a poisonous fruit!*). (2019, August 08). Retrieved from <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesi-zehirli-meyvedir-28725.html>

Gender” (*Türkiye'nin Cinsiyet'le İmtihanı*)<sup>14</sup>. As the first news article portrays Istanbul Convention as a real threat against moral codes, traditional, religion, and honor of the Turkish society, the latter news article argues how the gender equality projects of "the West" are a threat to familial values and structures of Turkey. Like the Family Platform did, Yeni Şafak also tries to highlight the so-called "danger" of gender equality projects by defining them as a top-down dictation of the Westerners via the EU adjustment laws. Lately, the increasing pattern of vilifying 6284, which is portrayed as a law breaking up a family<sup>15</sup> and causing disaster in familial relations<sup>16</sup>, is promoted with the social media again.

These examples can be considered as an instance of how non-state organizations and media are usurped by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) for the sake of reinforcing its neo-conservative ideological standpoint, especially for women's issues including reproductive health, woman's role in the society, and violence against women. With the intensifying conservative tendencies of AKP, the emphasis on family, familial relations, and motherhood became more evident as a new form of patriarchal structure (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011). This shift created contradictions with the gender equality policies initiated with the start of the EU accession period in the late 2000s. This glorification of traditional family through demonizing legal achievements coming after 2000s contradicts with the projects during the EU accession period of Turkey.

Another example is the anti-abortion discourse of the AKP government and how it is promoted discursively to the public. Former prime minister and today's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan repetitively made anti-abortion statements “associating abortion with Uludere,

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<sup>14</sup> Kaplan, Y. (2019, January 25). Türkiye'nin Cinsiyetle İmtihanı. (*The Trial of Turkey with Gender*). Retrieved from <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusufkaplan/turkiyenin-cinsiyetle-imtihani-2049038>

<sup>15</sup> 6284 Yuva Yıkıyor. (6284 Breaks up a Family). (2017, November 09). Retrieved from <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/6284-yuva-yikiyor-393091.html>

<sup>16</sup> İstanbul Sözleşmesi zehirli meyvedir!. (*Istanbul Convention is a poisonous fruit!*). (2019, August 08). Retrieved from <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesi-zehirli-meyvedir-28725.html>

where 34 Kurdish villagers were killed by the Turkish Armed Forces and implying that abortion is nothing but murder” (Cindoğlu, 2013, p.22) in 2012. Top it all of the discussion, despite the fact that the abortion is still legal up to 10 weeks, according to a research continuing to be relevant (2015), most of the public hospitals refuses to perform abortion even within the legal timeframe<sup>17</sup>. In that sense, the refusal of the public hospitals to practice abortion exemplifies how the state can mediate and control the practices without the need of official and legal procedure and documentation. Since the reactions of the feminist and women’s movement and the legal obligations prevent the strict ban on abortion, “the desire to restrict abortion access” of the AKP government found another solutions to prevent abortion in other forms including imposing ways of rejecting abortion care in the public hospitals (MacFarlane et al., 2017, p. 158).

In 2015, a project for gender equality in universities for students was developed but it has been waived as a result of the fact that “it appears that different meanings other than desired have been attributed to the notion of Gender Equality”.<sup>18</sup> This project was also a part of the requirements of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>19</sup> and the Istanbul Convention. However, the AKP’s reliance on the international conventions has gradually reduced in time while bringing the conservative discourse forefront. Eventually, the discourse based on inclusiveness and equality has started

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<sup>17</sup> Kürtaj Kanunlarda Serbest Kamu Hastanelerinde Yasak. (*Abortion is Valid in Law Forbidden in Public Hospitals*). (2015, February 04). Retrieved from <https://bianet.org/bianet/kadin/162034-kurtaj-kanunlarda-serbest-kamu-hastanelerinde-yasak>

<sup>18</sup> President of the Council of Higher Education of Turkey: The Notion of Gender Does not Fit Our Social Values. (2019, February 21). Retrieved from <https://lgbtnewsturkey.com/2019/02/21/president-of-the-council-of-higher-education-of-turkey-the-notion-of-gender-does-not-fit-our-social-values/?fbclid=IwAR349zpnj0RwtUYW9sEWXgjImWP3huwL7JJoBWeQPKtogkbauiHtfGP3nuo>

<sup>19</sup> This is not the only example of erasing ‘gender equality’ from official documents. For instance, in the Legislation on Violence Against Women in 2012, the references to Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) were also erased although “AKP program [...] committed the party to the implementation of all CEDAW requirements” during the first period of the party (Negron-Gonzales, 2016, p.201). Additionally, the government erased some definitions such as ‘gender’ and ‘domestic violence’ in the legislation afterwards.



to be disappeared as well and ‘the traditional way of life’ has been promoted as a way of negating ‘the dangers of gender equality’. Yekta Saraç the President of the Council of Higher Education of Turkey suggested that rather than projects of gender equality, the courses and programs about gender justice including the family issues and traditional values should be promoted.<sup>20</sup> The term gender justice was previously suggested and is still being used by the pro-government NGOs for women named Women and Democracy Association (KADEM). KADEM and Sümeyye Erdoğan Bayraktar<sup>21</sup>, the Vice-president of KADEM, usually tend to attack the gender equality projects in Turkey. In a conversation with Sümeyye Erdoğan Bayraktar about the ‘importance of an empowered family, she says that “We see that women’s rights discourse is dominated by the Western mind, western ideology. But there are lots of different necessities, sensitivities, different religions. So, all that local uniqueness should be taken into account”<sup>22</sup>. Erdoğan Bayraktar brings this criticism of orientalist perspective, she rebuilds the significance of the family and traditional roots but through reaffirming the AKP government discourse, which is based on the glorification of woman as mothers. So, they are using this (reproduced and distorted) duality of Western woman image and the ideal conservative mother in order to show the problems of gender equality programs as a threat of imposing Western ideology. According to KADEM, gender equality is imposed by the Western countries and it undermines and ignores ‘cultural differences. As opposed to gender equality, they offer gender justice based on religious references. They prioritize the concept of justice and argue that women’s and men’s need and positions at work should be categorized according to their nature, which is both based on the exclusion of woman in the public space or the limited

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<sup>20</sup> President of the Council of Higher Education of Turkey: The Notion of Gender Does not Fit Our Social Values. (2019, February 21). Retrieved from <https://lgbtinewsturkey.com/2019/02/21/president-of-the-council-of-higher-education-of-turkey-the-notion-of-gender-does-not-fit-our-social-values/?fbclid=IwAR349zpnj0RwtUYW9sEWXgjImWP3huwL7JJoBWeQPKtogkbaujHtfGP3nuo>

<sup>21</sup> She is also the daughter of the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

<sup>22</sup> TRT World. (2018, September 26). Let’s Talk: Interview with Sümeyye Erdoğan Bayraktar. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TmyciEnoFQ>

access of woman to public space. Not but not least, they further argue that even a woman wants to attend work force, they should not forget their prior role as being a mother (See Chapter 5). It means that man and woman are different from each other that's why only the just society can maintain the order; not the equal society based on the gender equality discourse.<sup>23</sup> In the view of such information of the discourse of the AKP government and its support mechanism with pro-government woman organizations like KADEM, NGOs providing SRHR educations has been trying to struggle along under these conditions without falling into the AKP's neo-conservative discourse on gender and sexuality.

In terms of the impact of the AKP government on the SRHR education programs in Turkey, Dr. Gökhan Yıldırım kaya<sup>24</sup>, the national coordinator of three different programs in the UNFPA dealing with sexual and reproductive health, adolescent health, and population and development having more than 25 years of experience in the field, discussed the applicability of SRHR policies in Turkey retrospectively:

The foundational change is this: back in the day, everything was more liberal, more rights-focused and more inclusive. The perspective was that of rights. Now, it is partially conservative, more normative, more oriented towards values. In the past it was more human/individual-centric; now, society and societal values or gains came to the forefront. [...] Individual rights-based approached turned into community-based benefits. Consequently, if the rights of the individual are not more important the society, they can be ignored and violated.

Gökhan Yıldırım kaya's comment on the transition relies mainly on the liberal policy-making processes during the first period of the AKP government (2002-2007) (Keysan, 2016; Dağı, 2006). Starting in 2012, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been declaring the desire of the government for "raising a religious youth" which also act as a disguise for an obvious underlying censorship mechanism. For instance, the gains and promises of SRHR related issues

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<sup>23</sup>Sümeyye Erdoğan Bayraktar Kadem'in Tekirdağ Şubesini Açtı (*Sümeyye Erdoğan opened Tekirdağ Branch of KADEM*) Tekirdağ (2017, April 05). Retrieved from <https://www.haberler.com/tekirdag-sumeyye-erdogan-bayraktar-kadem-in-9462903-haberi/>

<sup>24</sup> I conducted an interview with Dr. Gökhan Yıldırım kaya as part of my research and this quoted statement is from the interview.

and gender equality after being a signatory country for the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW have been trying to erase NGOs while promoting ‘gender justice’ rather than gender equality with its media influence, gendered policies of the government and pro-government agenda. This event can be considered as an instance of how NGOs and media are usurped by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) for the sake of reinforcing its conservative ideological standpoint, especially for women’s issues including reproductive health, woman’s role in the society, and violence against women, as we have observed with the pro-government KADEM’s direct role in producing and reproducing “gender justice”. There are also conservative responses to the attempts/success of gendering the social policy agenda with the feminist and women’s movement in Turkey. With the intensifying conservative tendencies of the AKP and the support and confirmation of pro-government NGOs, gender equality projects started to be criticized as being a top-down dictation of the Westerners via the EU adjustment laws. This shift created contradictions within the gender equality policies initiated with the start of the EU accession period in the late 2000s.

This chapter aimed to display the last two decades of Turkey which has been under the neo-conservative regime of the AKP government. As it is framed, the AKP government re-established its power by getting strength from the government policy reinforcing a neo-conservative intimacy politics on population especially after late 2000s. In the next chapter, I will focus on the theoretical lenses I will utilize throughout the thesis.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis is based on the promise of an alternative reading of the politics of intimacy of the AKP government by looking at the implementation of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education programs of NGOs. First, I will look at the changing governmentality of the AKP government towards NGOs providing SRHR education programs. Secondly, I will utilize/adapt the term ‘repertoire of contentions’ from the social movement literature to understand how the AKP government policies and discourse are challenged by the NGOs to pursue their agendas. Therefore, the theoretical lineage of this thesis starts with the discussion on the importance of making gender and sexuality as a category of analysis and then continues with the problematization of the politics of intimacy regarding Foucauldian governmentality. Lastly, I will explore civil society theories by focusing on the relations with State and NGOization processes especially with the questions of contention, negotiation, and resistance mechanisms of NGOs from a critical perspective.

The analysis of the implementation of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education requires a critical theoretical perspective on gender and sexuality. Joan W. Scott (2010) displays the use of gender to “historicize the ways sex and sexual difference have been conceived” (p.13). Making gender as a category of analysis can help us to understand the problems of feminine and masculine roles, which are attributed to woman and man and to investigate “the specific forms taken by the social organization of sexual difference” (Scott, 2010, p.9). During the conversation between feminist scholars and activists Deirdre English, Amber Hollibaugh, and Gayle Rubin (1982), they criticized the lack of discussion of sexuality in feminist theory in late 1970s and early 1980s. There is a necessity and the mandatory move of thinking beyond the heterosexual relationship structure and opening up a space for talking about women’s orgasm and lust, which also goes beyond the image of “the man on top,

heterosexual, reproductive” sex (English, Hollibaugh, and Rubin, 1982, p.40). After feminist theories, with the Foucault’s emphasis on the centrality of sexuality (1978) to understand the relations of power, Queer theoreticians pointed out the importance of making sexuality a primary category for social analysis for queer theory (Warner, 1993). Queer theory puts heteronormativity as “a founding condition of unequal and exploitative relations throughout even straight society” by adding another dimension to the theoretical discussion (Berlant and Warner, 1988, p.564). Later, discussion on gender and sexuality continued as they are “intimately linked but not reducible to one another” (Harcourt, 2007, p.7). This perspective of considering sexuality and gender which are not subsidiary categories to each other but rather complementary, allows to study the implementation of SRHR education programs in Turkey from a more holistic theoretical perspective.

Therefore, rather than studying gender and sexuality, I will utilize the concept of *intimacy* in my thesis. Intimacy here exceeds the limits of private life and turns into a part of “the normative practices, fantasies, institutions, and ideologies that organize people's worlds” (Berlant, 1988, p. 283). This thesis also attempts to make a thinking exercise to understand how intimacy works for the AKP government, especially in relation of NGOs providing SRHR education programs. To make it clear, I aim to delve into how the AKP government and “public institutions use issues of intimate life to normalize particular forms of knowledge and practice and to create compliant subjects” (Berlant, 1988, p.288). Following this, I will utilize a broader term politics of intimacy (Durnova, 2018; Bernstein and Schaffner, 2005). ‘Politics of intimate’ is more inclusive and concerning “the web of policies, decisions, discourses and laws and norms which regulate intimate and family relationships, sexualities and reproductive capabilities of individuals” (Acar and Altunok, 2013, p.15). Intimacy politics which are applied in the areas of “reproduction, sexuality, and family and partnership” became more observable

as part of the neo-conservative discourse and practices of the AKP government (Acar and Altunok, 2013, p.15).

The issues which are raised as part of the agenda under the intimacy politics of the AKP government basically aims to regulate sexuality and sexual activity in accordance with the productive self which became fundamental for the reproduction of the society. Sexual activity is reduced to its ‘reproductive function’ as it is presented as the acceptable and legitimate form if it is performed by straight married couples in their bedroom (Foucault, 1978). The biopolitics of the AKP government is built upon the idea of governing “the population and its productive capacities through regulation gendered bodies and their sexual and reproductive behaviors (Korkman, 2016, p.8). Bringing intimate issues to the forefront by framing the limits of sexuality with a neo-conservative mindset of the AKP government create “precise control and comprehensive regulation” on gendered bodies (Foucault, 1978, p.137). The way it is done is through the neoliberal governmentality which operates by putting “new reproductive mode of governance into play in [...] pro-family policy” (Özgüler and Yarar, 2017, p.141).

Anything outside of the normalcy, which is defined, shaped and reinforced by the AKP government in this case, is considered as a threat and deviant in need of elimination (Foucault, 1975). I argue that the governing mechanisms of the AKP government spills over into the NGOs projects specifically having SRHR-related agendas. The reasons might vary due to the topics such as partner relations outside of marriage covered throughout the education programs, the recognition of LGBTI+ persons, and/or promotion and advocacy of gender equality. This thesis aims to show how the intensified action against the SRHR education programs of the NGOs by the AKP government has faced with resistance.

While remembering the Foucault’s famous quote “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1990, p.95), I will argue that the governing mechanisms of the AKP

government towards NGOs does not necessarily mean “absolute domination” over them and in this situation, NGOs position against the AKP government “addresses a zone between [...] two poles of ‘strategic relations’ and ‘states of domination’” (Walters, 2012, p. 11). As power “appears in so many different locations and in so many different forms” (Schulzke, 2016, p. 59), so does resistance. Therefore, there is always a space to negotiate, to strive for resistance. However, the ways of resistance are also varied and contradictory. Since my thesis aims to look at the negotiation, adaptation, and resistance mechanisms of the NGOs having SRHR agenda in Turkey, I will move to the theoretical discussion of the interaction of state and civil society in connection with the repertoire of actions for NGOs.

### **3.1. Discussion on Civil Society and Repertoire of Contentions of NGOs**

Unlike the liberal and democratic approach that regard civil society as an important societal element in consolidating democracy with the encouragement of citizen participation and citizen auditing of the state, Antonio Gramsci describes civil society as “an element of state power rather than alternative to it [state]” (Doyle, 2018, 447). According to Gramsci, “in actual reality, civil society and State are the one and the same” and it creates contrast with the idea of transformative effect of civil society (Gramsci, 1992, p.160). Basically, Gramscian civil society, which “receives class instincts, class interests, and class struggle and tries to normalize them through family, religious associations, cultural groups, and networks of social capital” (Patnaik, 2012, p. 579-80) serves the needs of State. Today, as I will argue, NGOs still retains a similar function of normalizing relations of the interest groups based on class and to strengthen the position of State.

In order to bring a feminist perspective into the theories of civil society, Carol Pateman, argues that modern Western civil society is based on upholding the interest of fraternal patriarchy concerning the men’s benefits. Pateman, in her influential book *The Sexual Contract* (1988), defines civil society as “the unity of the social order is maintained, in large part, through

the structure of patriarchal relations” (p.12) by adding the gender dimension into the picture. Continuously, civil society was formulated as an “intermediate realm between the family and the state” (Kaldor, 2003, p.584) in which private sphere (family) characterized as being “not politically relevant” (Pateman, 1988, p.3). In that sense, the actors of the civil society are men in this separation while women are portrayed as “the guardians of private realm of need, desire, and affectivity” and belongs to family, the private sphere (Çaha, 2013, p.7). When feminist scholars takes gender as a category of analysis by referring “to the social institutionalization of sexual difference”, they also problematize the question of the distinction between public and private sphere, which are extremely gendered (Okin,1998, p.116). Okin analyses how public/private distinction refers to both “state and society (as in public and private ownership), and [...] non-domestic and domestic life” by putting ‘intimacy’ to private sphere, where woman are *supposed to be* in (Okin, 1998, p.117). I argue that this kind of categorization trying to separate family, civil society and State also represents how the political relations and separation among them depends on intimate relations. One of the earlier feminist reactions of taking intimacy out of the shadow and brining into the analysis as it is something needs to be politicized and visible by criticizing the public/private dichotomy is “the personal is political”<sup>25</sup> (Okin, 1998).

In order to make connection between the Gramscian conceptualization of civil society and how the civil society is considered as a “masculine realm” characterized as a respondent and ally to State for its benefits from critical feminist perspective, I will refer to Jessica Leigh Doyle’s article (2018) explaining the intervention of State to civil society, specifically to newly established women’s NGOs (Hagemann, 2008, p.30). Doyle contemplates the AKP “government’s attempt to co-opt civil society by creating and instrumentalizing new women’s

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<sup>25</sup> This is firstly used by the feminist Carol Hanisch in the publication called "The Personal is Political" in 1970. It aims to challenge the gendered structures of the society where women and their experience are invisibilized and ignored. The aim is to politicize women’s experience in the society (1970).



organizations” (Doyle, 2018, p.456). The increasing number of Islamic women’s pro-government NGOs and their similar (sometimes identical) discourse with the AKP government exemplifies the state’s control over the civil society. Although the visibility of women in the NGOs network has increased with the success of the feminist movement especially after 1990’s in Turkey, through a Gramscian and critical feminists readings, I argue that the intimate politics of the AKP government has manifested itself in the NGOs network and their projects’ implementations as well. The regulatory mechanisms of the AKP government can be observed in the increasing number of shadow organizations serving for the interest of government or in the direct or indirect interventions to the NGOs which promote women’s and LGBTI+ rights, gender equality and work against the anti-abortion discourse of the government (Doyle, 2018; Özgüler and Yarar, 2017).

These theories will both guide and trace the questions of the thesis which are about (1) why and in what ways pro-family discourse of the AKP government and the Islamic women’s NGOs discourse overlaps and (2) in what ways the AKP government intervenes to NGOs working on SRHR education programs. However, I argue that this is one side of the picture that depicts the relations between civil society and state. Now, I will look at the other discussions which find a way out of the Gramscian pessimism, which is based on the State’s diffusion to all spheres of life and Pateman’s essentialist view of civil society, which creates an image of victimized woman collapsed in private sphere .

As opposed to the idea of NGOs being under the constant constrains of the state, I will go back to the Foucauldian perspective of how “power and resistance confront each other, and use multiple, mobile, and changing tactics, in a field of relations of force” (Fontana and Bertani, 1975, p. 281). To putting the plurality of experiences of NGOs regarding their relation to State, Mary Kaldor discusses activist version of the NGOs, which refers to a kind of transformative power and/or attempt of NGOs to challenge the problems of the society. Kaldor further argues,

it is “not a Utopian blueprint or a model” which do miracles but rather, the activist version reminds that NGOs can negotiate or resist in any situation (Kaldor, 2003, p.14). This refers to the idea of the fact that NGOs are neither fully dominated or nor totally independent actors. By regarding NGO as “a process, not an end-point” – an approach that can allow individuals involved to resist and negotiate by creating their own strategic repertoire of actions within the existing rule of the AKP government in Turkey (Kaldor, 2003, p.14), I will utilize Charles Tilly’s concept of repertoire of contention, which is shaped and invented as a kind of tactic relies on the previous experiences with the interaction of authorities (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007). These tactics “are developed through the interaction of challengers and authorities” depending on the (Maney, KutzFlamenbaum, Rohlinger & Goodwin, 2012, p.46). As Sidney G. Tarrow argues, it “involves not only what people do when they are engaged in conflict with other but what they know how to do and what others expect them to do” (Tarrow, 2011, p.39). In this thesis, I am not necessarily referring the conventional repertoire of actions of NGOs such as lobbying and advocacy but rather, in what ways their negotiation skills or resistance mechanisms change and how their reactions developed over time within the changing moves and strategies of the intimacy politics of the AKP government.

### **3.2. NGOization**

The compliance and resistance mechanisms of the NGOs are not isolated from the international NGOs, and donor relations and it means the only actor to deal with is not necessarily limited to State. Although the focus of the thesis is based on the relations of NGOs with the government, the NGOs sector is much more complicated and located in different ties with various actors such as grassroot movements, local and international NGOs, donors, national governments, and private corporations. Today, in order to survive as an NGO, NGOization, which “refers to the process by which social movements professionalize, institutionalize, and bureaucratize in vertically structured, [...] to some degree, marketable

expert knowledge or services” might be required since a professional and institutionalized appearance of NGOs in front of the potential donors might increase the change of getting funded (Lang, 2013, p.63-4). In addition, rather than solving social and economic problems of women and poor, the feminist agenda’s goals is instrumentalized for the benefits of state and national/transnational companies. Therefore, NGOized NGOs are considered as “handmaidens of neoliberal planetary patriarchy” (Alvarez, 1999, p. 200). Therefore, in the feminist literature on NGOs, the continuous critique towards NGOization which refers to the shift of feminist activism “from participation in political movements to advocacy and action in feminist and women’s NGOs”, is required to reveal the multi-dimensional factors of the struggle of the NGOs (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p.11).

NGOization as a global trend, also affected the experience of NGOs in Turkey. According to Coşar and Gençoğlu Onbaşı (2008), because of two factors, feminist and women’s movement NGOs’ hands against the state (especially women’s organizations) after late 1990s is strengthened. The first one is “the need of [the government] to engage with WROs’ demands so as to assure their attentiveness to liberal and democratic priorities” mentioned in the EU integration process and the latter one is that this process led women’s organization to have “opportunity to voice their demands more forcefully through EU-financed projects” (Coşar and Gençoğlu Onbaşı, 2008, p.331). Gaining its momentum with the EU accession process, feminist activism in Turkey has been having it’s share from the impact of the global tendency from activism to advocacy especially when it is combined with the influence of neoliberal policies. This period also caused acceleration of the business-like operational settings of the women’s movement in Turkey, which is later criticized for taking the “risk of being assimilated into the existing patriarchal structure in the absence of a common feminist platform” (Coşar and Gençoğlu Onbaşı, 2008, p.340). The potential risk of losing the activist tone of voice of the NGOs and increasingly professional working conditions have been

criticized by feminist scholars (Coşar and Onbaşı, 2008; Negron-Gonzales, 2016; Üstündağ, 2006; Kuzmanovic, 2010). The critiques<sup>26</sup> were mostly directed to the short-term nature of the projects and putting women's problems in certain categories which does not necessarily represent local women's need in a wholesome manner (Sirman, 2006; Kuzmanovic, 2010; Kümbetoğlu, 2002). However, the change from a more institutionalized form was also necessary because "social policies and social state practices were either too weak or non-existent" in late 1980s Turkey (Coşar and Keretecioğlu, 2017, p.158) and there is a need for (international) financial sources to pursue NGOs' agendas. Feminist movement needed professionalized agendas to develop trust for international donor to receive funding and to implement projects in order to pay due attention to the women's issues that the state have been systematically ignoring (Bernal and Grewal, 2014; Lang, 2013).

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<sup>26</sup> The critiques are mostly based on the threat to the feminist activism coming from the process NGOization. This is called "project feminism" referring to the short-term and project-based 'temporary' solutions of the NGOs (Bora and Günal, 2002).

## 4. DISSOLUTION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE AKP GOVERNMENT AND NGOs

### 4.1. Introduction

The foundation [Turkish Family Health and Planning Foundation], which has been trying to prevent the reproduction of Turkish nation since the day it was established, confuses little minds with the educational activity initiated under the name of “Sexual Health Education Program.”<sup>27</sup>

Yeni Akit – an overtly partisan daily newspaper of the neo-conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) government – published a news piece about the Turkish Family Health and Planning Foundation<sup>28</sup> (TAPV) and its Sexual Health Education Program for youth. TAPV’s education program was vilified by Yeni Akit in 2013 by arguing that the program was a threat to youth because of its “sexually explicit context.” As it is seen in the quotation above, Yeni Akit accused TAPV of confusing little minds with the information about their bodies, sexualities, and safe-sex practices depending on their age. By doing so, Yeni Akit implies that TAPV recognizes sexuality among adolescents which supposedly does not. The Sexual Health Program of TAPV uses an integrated approach by describing sexuality as “an individual’s physical and psychological life experiences oriented to sexual satisfaction and reproduction”<sup>29</sup> and provides the education program in mixed-gender classes. According to Yeni Akit’s archconservative perspective, TAPV promotes premarital sex by “not saying that sexual relationship can only be happened between married couples”<sup>30</sup> and by refusing to implement the education sessions in boys or girls only classrooms. Giving information about sexual development of children and adolescents during the programs were depicted as a threat because trainers do not mention the fact that sexual act should only be performed by men and women

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<sup>27</sup> TAP Vakfının Okullarda İşi ne?. (*What is TAPV doing at schools?*). (2013, November 12). Retrieved from <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/tap-vakfinin-okullarda-isi-ne-7174.html>

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix for more information about the NGOs mentioned throughout the chapter.

<sup>29</sup> Sexual Health Programme. Retrieved from <http://www.tapv.org.tr/en/tci/24/SEXUAL-HEALTH-PROGRAM>

<sup>30</sup> TAP Vakfının Okullarda İşi Ne?. (*What is TAPV doing at schools?*). (2013, November 12). <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/tap-vakfinin-okullarda-isi-ne-7174.html>

in marriage. Consequently, TAPV became a target for not confining sexual acts within the realm of heterosexual marriage thus heteronormativity, which excludes any other intimate relationality and is the only acceptable form of sexual act in a supposedly Muslim society.

Newspapers like Yeni Akit, as a representative of the voice of the current government, promotes and supports the AKP government's sexual and gender politics, which have "a central role not only in regulating everyday life from a neoliberal and conservative perspective, but also in reshaping the secular-religious divide" (Mutluer, 2019, p.101). The newspaper I detailed can be regarded as the signals for the upcoming policies. Sometimes, such newspapers publish articles just to reinforce to decisions of the government about discourses and policies as I also previously outlined in Chapter 2. A news titled as "*Sexuality Education in Schools is Murder*"<sup>31</sup> from Yeni Akit as another particular example directly attacking to the concept of sexuality education, in 2010, can also be considered as another earlier sign of the regulations or the potential attacks towards education programs from the government channels. The timing of the publish of the news of Yeni Akit about TAPV (2013) was corresponded to the process of dissolution of relations between the AKP government and some certain NGOs, which provides sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education programs.

In the introduction, I portrayed the difficulties of NGOs working with SRHR, especially after the first period of the AKP government in Turkey. This abovementioned example of Yeni Akit news indicates the transition of the AKP government from a more liberal and NGO-friendly line to a more conservative and authoritarian line. On the side of the AKP government's relations with NGOs working with SRHR after late 2000s, unlike the first period (2007-2007), when NGOs' projects and programs were implemented easily, they started to have difficulties such as reducing number of collaborations with Ministries and finding social workers to train

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<sup>31</sup> Okullarda cinsel eğitim cinayettir. (*Sexuality Education in Schools is Murder*). (2010, September 10). Retrieved from (<https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/okullarda-cinsel-egitim-cinayettir-558842.html>)

as well as having limited access to the scarce global funding options provided for the SRHR. SRHR-related policy-making and decision-making processes have been negatively affected by the increasing Islamic display of the AKP government<sup>32</sup> and in party's "political discourse and practice" (Coşar, Özkan-Kerestecioglu, 2017, p.159). Not only the conservative tendencies have an influence on SRHR issues but also the neoliberal and populist policies of the AKP government has an impact on the problems encountered by NGOs. The intensification of the family-centered policies of the AKP government is linked to the policy model which cannot be simply identified as an economic phenomenon and needs to be considered within the realm of conservatism and also, populism (Coşar, Özkan-Kerestecioglu, 2017; Kaya, 2015). The neo-conservative policies cause disruption to the implementation of the NGOs' SRHR programs, which have been targeted as a threat because of their emphasis on the topics contradicts Islamic morality representation of the AKP government.<sup>33</sup>

In this chapter, I will explain how the intimacy politics of the AKP government has been influencing the operation of NGOs' education programs and the collaborations of NGOs with Ministries especially after 2007 and I will provide examples of different NGOs experiences during the dissolution process. I will start with the Family Education Program (AEP), which was prepared by the General Directorate of Family and Social Researches (ASAGEM) under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies<sup>34</sup> and started to be applied in 2011. Secondly, I will carefully trace how Human Rights Education Rights for Women Program (KİHEP) replaced AEP in time. By doing so, I aim to show how the neo-conservativeness of the AKP government has been establishing itself through regulating and controlling NGOs and their education programs and changing the NGOs' education program

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<sup>32</sup> (See also Yavuz, 2019 and Mutluer, 2019)

<sup>33</sup> Belge, B. (2010, February 26). No Gender Equality in Education Yet. Retrieved from <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/gender/120292-no-gender-equality-in-education-yet>; Council of Higher Education Cancels Gender Equality Project. (2019, February 19). Retrieved from <https://m.bianet.org/english/women/205678-council-of-higher-education-cancels-gender-equality-project>

<sup>34</sup> On 10 July 2018, the name of the ministry was changed to Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services.

content. Then, I will provide concrete examples of how NGOs education programs became dysfunctional and precluded by legal and de facto actions of the AKP government. This section will be drawing on interviews with NGO representatives of Women for Women's Human Rights – New Ways Association (KİH-YÇ), Turkish Family Health and Planning Foundation (TAPV), and Human Resource Development Foundation (İKGV). These three NGOs are well-established autonomous organizations in their own field. KİH-YÇ as a women's organization which was established in 1993, prioritizes women's rights and gender equality. TAPV was founded by paying attention on rapid population growth of Turkey related issues such as family planning, reproductive health, and economic development in 1985. İKGV had also similar concerns about the rapid population growth of Turkey and maintain its agenda accordingly since 1988. Lastly, in order to provide another example of structural changes in the public sector as a consequence of neo-conservative and pronatalist policies of the AKP government, I will show how the transformation in the primary healthcare services in Turkey starting from 2005 also have indirect impacts which prevent NGO's from providing education programs (MacFarlane et al., 2016; Ayar, 2017).

That is to say, my argument here is that the relations of the AKP government with the NGOs were being reshaped in order to regulate certain types of behaviors and knowledge about SRHR issues. The AKP government tries to restrict and regulate the access to SRHR education programs by keeping distance from NGOs providing right-based education models on SRHR issues, direct or indirect interventions on the content of the education programs of the NGOs, and predicating and promoting abstinence-only sex education models which are based on marriage in Turkish context. These transformations are the results of the increasingly authoritarian and religiously driven regime of the AKP government, which has been trying to re-establish its power via intervening NGOs education programs. The significance of examining the direct and indirect interventions which aim to/result with dissolution of



partnerships with NGOs is to analyze the intimacy politics of the AKP government from the side of the of the government and civil society relations.

#### **4.2. Based on Familial Roles of Women: Family Education Program (AEP)**

The idea of AEP started to be discussed in 2009 with the “Family Education Needs Analysis Project” designed by ASAGEM. According to the outcomes of the project, a 23-module education program was developed under 5 different categories: intra-family communication, health, economics, law, and media. In 2011, AEP was introduced to trainers in Directorate General of Family and Community Services (ATHGM), a subdivision of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies<sup>35</sup>. The project aims to reach citizens who are about to be married and/or already married. Unlike KSEP and KİHEP<sup>36</sup>, which promote more holistic perspectives in terms of SRHR issues without attributing importance to marital and familial roles and without reinforcing the idea of heterosexual marriage, AEP prioritizes family and familial relations and shapes the content accordingly. For instance, in a book called *Marriage and Family Life* (2012) provided to the participants to the AEP programs, there is a chapter named ‘Distribution of Roles in Family’. The chapter raises a question about the traditional and egalitarian marriage and says both types are applicable if husband and wife are capable of pursuing both types in marriage:

In egalitarian marriages, both man and woman can work, both of them can share equal role on housework and childcare. Yet in traditional marriages, who is responsible for childcare, who cooks, who earns money and even who is in charge of making decisions about familial issues are obvious. What matters here is not which type of relationship is better but what the spouse’s expectations are. (Canel, 2012, p.97)

The book treats equally both forms of marriages and for each case, it adds that “if partners are satisfied in their role in their marriage as husbands and wives, it means there is no problem on

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<sup>35</sup> On 10 July 2018, the name of the ministry was changed to Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services.

<sup>36</sup> They were briefly introduced in the Introduction part. However, for more information about KİHEP and KSEP, please read Appendix 1 first before reading the rest of this section. There is a detailed list about the NGOs and their programs, which are mentioned here and throughout the thesis.

this issue” (Canel, 2012, p.97) without a critical perspective on the traditional form of marriage in Turkish context (see Chapter 2). The reason I am paying attention on the AEP program and its comparison to KİHEP is that the program and the guide books provided during the education correspond and promote to the intimacy politics of the AKP government based on the pro-family discourses, which defines woman “within the familial sphere through traditional roles” (Ünal and Cindoğlu, 2013, p.24). Elif from the KİH-YÇ Association explains how their approach is different from AEP:

There are stories in AEP about violence: “Ayşe came home from work. House is a mess. Children are crying. Her husband is very angry and asking where she was by this time. Then, he slaps her in the face”. AEP (trainers) says that “Mehmet (her husband) slapped in her face, which is very wrong. However, if Ayşe insists on working, Ayşe should have arranged kindergarten hours more properly, cooked a day in advance.

The construction of women in this program mostly depends on women’s position in the family, which is determined by the traditional values of the society, which shows a tendency to justify violence against women if a woman does not correspond to her traditional role in marriage. KİHEP spares two weeks of the 16-week long program to the violence against woman and women’s legal rights with the discourse of a *zero-tolerance* to any kind of violence. Elif criticizes the approach of AEP, which justifies violence against women if a woman (as a mother and a wife) does not meet the expectations of traditional familial roles. During the opening of the new building of a pro-government NGO for women, Women and Democracy Association<sup>37</sup> (KADEM) in 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that “A woman who abstains from maternity by saying ‘I am working’ means that she is actually denying her femininity. [...] A woman who refuses maternity and gives up housekeeping faces the threat of losing her freedom. She is lacking and is a half [a person] no matter how successful she is in the business

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<sup>37</sup> I intentionally added KADEM here to re-signify the close relationship of the AKP government with the pro-government women’s NGOs. Giving a speech during the opening of KADEM has a symbolic meaning, which refers to the direct (and mutual) support of the AKP government and KADEM to each other.

world.”<sup>38</sup> Erdoğan’s speech could be taken as a friendly warning for KADEM because KADEM also works for women’s participation on workforce. Correspondingly, KADEM already creates their agenda depending on sticking to the emphasis of ‘motherhood’ of women. Even they work for the increasing the participation of women into work force, they also promote motherhood as a moral value of society and religion. Sticking by the AKP’s image of ideal women, they also promote the involvement of women into business world and support them but with one condition: keeping the role of mother as a priority. When Sümeyye Erdoğan Bayraktar, the Vice-president of KADEM, came back to Turkey after her education abroad, she talks about two main differences she observed between “the West” and Turkey:

One is the traditional narrative and the second is the Western dominated narrative. In the Western one, if you look at all the women’s rights studies, discourse, you will see that the only way for a women to be autonomous, to be strong is to work, have a good careers and the family responsibilities will impede, will block her development. Secondly, on the other way, the traditional narratives, and not all the traditional narratives by the way, partly told that taking on the family responsibilities is very important thing and if you go outside of the home, if you are active in the social life or in the work life that will block you from protecting your family and the responsibility is only on the women. And I see that neither of those reflected my understanding for the life, for the world. In KADEM, we believe that there is a middle path and I know it is difficult to do this, but we need to find a way to change this.<sup>39</sup>

In this long quote, she offers a middle path, but it is based on relying on and reinforcing the mother’s role by justifying the role as part of the imagined societal reality of Turkey. The discourse of KADEM also corresponds with the image of ‘the new good woman’, which is arisen with the current global neoliberal tendencies (Cornwall, Gideon, and Wilson, 2008). The expectations from woman such as “meeting children’s needs and their tendency to expend less resources (in terms of both leisure time and luxury consumption) on themselves” (Cornwall,

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<sup>38</sup> Erdoğan Sparks Outrage Again After Declaring Childless Women to be Deficient. (2016, June 6). Retrieved from <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-sparks-outrage-again-after-declaring-childless-women-to-be-deficient-100142>

<sup>39</sup> TRT World. (2018, September 26). Let’s Talk: Interview with Sümeyye Erdoğan Bayraktar. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TmyciEnoFQ>

Gideon, and Wilson, 2008, p.5) continues discursively and in practice with the new regulations on policies. The job definitions and working hours for women are re-defined depending on a “gendered division of labor” (Molyneux, 2002, p.183), which provides women spare time for their so-called familial duties and responsibilities. By doing so, even the policies seem like they prompt increased attendance of workforce, it is another way of reproducing patriarchal system in the neoliberal era. The new woman as a neoliberal subjectivity is created through the neo-conservative drives of the AKP government sticking to the traditional gendered roles and neoliberal era’s demands for workforce. As the neoliberal policies on women by reinforcing the “deeply conservative notions of womanhood and of women’s role within the family”, it is also harmonized with the conservative discourse of the AKP government in Turkey and supported with the education programs like AEP and NGOs such as KADEM as the voice of the AKP government<sup>40</sup> (Cornwall, Gideon, and Wilson, 2008, p.2). Unlike the AEP program and KADEM’s discourse on woman, The other programs like KİHEP and KSEP give woman an autonomous space and remind them of their rights to work from the gender equality perspective, which contradicts the “gender justice” understanding of the government.

Treating women as mothers and wives consequently serves strengthening women’s traditional position at home by reinvention of these roles. Although it is promoted as creating a just environment for women, the approach used in AEP helps to reinforce the AKP’s ideal women<sup>41</sup> by bringing so-called “feminine qualities of care, nurture, and moral purity” to

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<sup>40</sup> AKP government uses civil society sector to reproduce their “anti-feminist and pro-family discourses” with the help of the pro-government and/or government-supported NGOs (Özgüler and Yazar, 2017, p.141).

<sup>41</sup> As an example of the reinforcing the idea of secluding women from the public space, the former Minister of Health Mehmet Müezzinoğlu (2013-2016) visited the first-born baby in 2015. During his speech, he said that “mothers should not put any other careers in the center except motherhood career”. Yılın ilk cinsiyetçi açıklaması: Sağlık Bakanı’na göre kadının kariyeri annelik olmalı. (2015, January 1). Retrieved from <http://www.diken.com.tr/yilin-ilk-cinsiyetci-aciklamasi-dustu-bakan-muezzinoglu-gore-kadinin-kariyeri-annelik-olmeli/>

forefront (McPhail, 2003 p.49). Elif from KİH-YÇ explains the transfer process of KİHEP trainers to AEP:

Around 2011, AEP was prepared now and started to be implemented to trainers and all KİHEP trainers were transferred to AEP. [...] There was a pressure on social workers who are also KİHEP trainers not to open KİHEP classes. They put higher quotes for KİHEP classes to prevent opening classes.

Although the protocol was still in effect, the implementation of KİHEP was relatively reduced in number. The social workers who have attended to KİHEP trainer's training program were being transferred to AEP program. They were encouraged to provide AEP to woman in their classes if they open any in their neighborhood.

Another constraint for NGOs' education programs is the abolishment of the Community Centers<sup>42</sup>, where TAPV and KİH-YÇ were able to provide education programs from 1998 until 2013 even with the gradually reducing numbers of the education programs. With the promotion of AEP, the restrictions creating barriers for social workers who want to implement KİHEP were becoming more apparent in the early 2010s. Although there is no legal enforcement and no continuing protocol with KİH-YÇ, the imposed sanctions of the authorities in the Centers prevent the implementation of KİHEP. In the next part, I will examine in what ways social workers faced difficulties in providing KİHEP and KSEP in public institutions with a specific focus on the abolishment of Community Centers and the period that followed.

#### **4.3. The Current Situation of Women's Health Education Program (KSEP) and Human Rights Education Rights for Women Program (KİHEP): After the Abolishment of Community Centers**

The AKP government's stance towards NGOs' demands and potential collaborations gradually evolved from an expressed willingness for cooperation to lack of interest, and at times, hostility, and this shift indirectly showed itself during the transformation of the public

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<sup>42</sup> Detailed information about Community Centers will be provided in the immediate section of this chapter.

institutions and chances in the organization chart (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011, p.564). By doing so, the AKP government partially closed the ways to reach potential target population of the KİHEP and the KSEP programs, which are defending and promoting women's rights from a gender equality perspective by emphasizing, prioritizing, and reminding the significance of women's rights in both of the education programs.

Community Centers were established under the Turkish Social Service and Children Protection Institution (SHÇEK), which are “designated to handle child protection issues in addition to all other social support” by having approximately 3,200<sup>43</sup> social workers (Ağırtan et al., 2009, p.248). One of the reasons for the establishment of the Community Centers is to improve the conditions of neighborhoods that have various rural-to-urban migrant populations. There has been an increasing need for supportive mechanisms and platforms, through which citizens can access social services and sources (Han, 2006). Rural-to-urban migration starting from 1950s created *gecekondu* settlements (squatter settlements), where women suffering “from a double disadvantage: as women in a patriarchal Muslim society and as rural migrants in the city” (Erman, 2001, p.121). Community Centers continued to operate until the abolishment of SHÇEK in 2013. After the abolishment of SHÇEK, Community Centers were also closed and most of the buildings which were previously used as Community Centers, continued to be used for the Social Service Centers<sup>44</sup>.

According to Elif and Demet, Community Centers were suitable spaces to implement KİHEP and KSEP because women who “are kept inside the home or the neighborhood” (Erman, 2001, p.121) as a result of the patriarchal system were able to attend to Community Centers closer to their own neighborhoods and benefit from KİHEP and KSEP. Even if they

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<sup>43</sup> The old data is taken from article titled “Establishment of Interdisciplinary Child Protection Teams in Turkey 2002–2006: Identifying the Strongest Link Can Make A Difference!” (Ağırtan et al., 2009).

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2013/02/20130209.pdf>

were allowed to work, job market for them has been based on gendered division of labor including sewing, knitting, and cleaning without having a job security (Erman, 2001). TAPV and KİH-YÇ had protocols with this state agency and they were able to provide their education programs in the Community Centers, which have suitable conditions as an institution in terms of their feasibility having special rooms and services. Community Centers were providing kindergarten service to mothers in the neighborhood and this service provided an opportunity them to leave their children when they were attending to the education programs. The feasibility of the facilities could attract attention of women and motivate them to attend programs, which helped social workers a lot in implementing the education programs.

Demet from TAPV explains the negative effects of the shift from Community Centers to Social Service Centers:

Community Centers were established in the disadvantageous regions with difficulties in accessing information. After Community Centers were transformed into Social Service Centers, authorities closed the training classes as well. [...] As a result, social workers lost the possibility of providing educations in the institutions.

In addition, Social Service Centers – a part of the Ministry of Health and Social Policies<sup>45</sup> – were established but it resulted in a certain amount loss of contact as a result of reorganization of the employees and directors. Trainers of KİHEP and KSEP lost their contacts and their ability to implement programs in newly opened Social Service Centers. Hence, the abolishment of the Community Centers directly results with complication of reaching target population of the education programs of KİH-YÇ and TAPV. In addition, AEP already started to be applied in most of these Social Service Centers rather than KİHEP and KSEP which were being applied before the abolishment of Community Centers. The contradictions of the content of KİHEP and KSEP education programs with the AKP government's sexual and reproductive health agenda had consequences. The reasons of the cancellation and/or the prevention of education

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<sup>45</sup> On 10 July 2018, the name of the ministry was changed to Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services.

programs are about the content, which is more inclusive and locating women and their needs at the center.

Although opportunities of the Social Service Centers is limited when it is compared to Community Centers, it is still possible to implement education programs. However, the social workers who were previously working in the Community Centers and implementing KİHEP and KSEP are appointed to different locations with the new authorities in the Social Service Centers, which works under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies.<sup>46</sup> Elif's (from KİH-YÇ) experiences and observations provide ample examples:

For instance, there was so much displacement and distribution of social workers [to other institutions]. They already don't want to see that KİHEP is implemented in these institutions. Now, Community Centers do not exist, where are the women [social worker] going to? [For instance] They are going to ŞÖNİMs but in ŞÖNİMs, there is no such education program. Even when they have the chance to organize programs, they have to go to other places. There is no effort to let the residents come in, let their kids play or the mothers to get training...

She situated the problem of how the social workers are sent to other public institutions such as Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (ŞÖNİM), where their ability to provide KİHEP has become limited. She continues to explain the facts that changes are not limited to the lack of physical capacity but also about the pressures of the new managers from the authorities or the fear from the new managers:

They sent women (social workers) to provincial directorates. For that matter, they are intentionally appointed to children's' shelter or dorms, where social workers cannot organize groups for our education programs and community work. These women [social workers] have become unable to organize education program<sup>47</sup> even in weekends. Some of our trainers told us 'I wanted to organize education program, we came to an agreement with the (X) association but then my directorate learnt it and (s)he didn't allow me to do it.' Eventually, the numbers of the application of KİHEP decreased considerably.

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<sup>46</sup> On 10 July 2018, the name of the ministry was changed to Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services.

<sup>47</sup> These social workers attended Training of Trainer's programs provided by KİH-YÇ and therefore, they can implement KİHEP. However, they, as a result of the factors I explain here, are not able to provide the education program even if they want to work during weekends as it is mentioned in the quote.



Depending on where the social workers are sent to or which managers they are working with now, social workers can come across difficulties due to their exclusion from the group works and/or being refused the group work requests. The permission requests can be rejected as a consequence of multiple reasons such as having a pro-government directorate as the above case shows or the implementation of the program can be prevented as a result of the fear of the AKP's intimate political ideology regardless directors' ideological position. Demet from TAPV gives an example of how the government pressure or the fear of such pressure can affect the directorates ability to take initiative. She situates the problem of the new Social Service Centers in the aftermath of the abolishment of Community Centers:

Directors also changed. Each time, you have to talk again with the new actors about the aim of the program (KİHEP). Their ability to take initiative of directorates changes or let's say, there are changes in the act of taking initiative.

As a continuation of the problems of logistic and technical problems, the pressure of/from directorates and new assignments in relation to the Social Service Centers experiences of social workers, Demet from TAPV explained another obstacle they face while providing Training of Trainers program for KSEP:

Normally, we [NGOs] request for paid leave for social workers for the duration of their trainings. Because being a part of this program will support them regarding their position at work. They can easily do it in municipalities. However, the ones in Social Service Centers are using their annual leave [to attend the education programs]. Actually, it is a great sacrifice for the social workers.

As it is observed, it negatively influences not only women's access to education programs but also the social workers' access to these programs and their ability to reach their target groups for KİHEP and KSEP. After the establishment of Social Service Centers, NGOs providing programs related to women's issues, women's rights, and reproductive and sexual health from a more rights-based approach, have been facing such preventive mechanisms including barriers to implement both education programs for women and trainers' training programs. It caused

reducing number of implemented education programs, limited capability to reach disadvantaged women, and gradually reduced visibility in the public sector.

In the last section of this chapter, I will focus on how these obstacles show themselves in the healthcare service areas in the public sector with a focus of the implementation of İKGV's education program.

#### **4.4. Health Education in Public Healthcare Services: Experiences of Family Physicians**

Up until this point, I mentioned the promotion of education models in compliance with neo-conservative policies of the AKP government which has a strong emphasis on pro-family discourse. I also revealed different ways in which the AKP government has practically intervened with women's access to the rights-based education models such as KİHEP and KSEP. Now, in order to elaborate how the intimate politics of the AKP government operates, I will refer to an example of Barış from İKGV about the barriers that the family physicians face in accessing education program 'Legal and Ethical Problems of Reproductive Health Service Provision: Reproductive Rights in Turkey'<sup>48</sup> which aims to improve the conditions of the rights-based reproductive health service provision. By doing so, I aim to show how "the contemporary politics of intimacy in Turkey seeks to regulate the realms of sexuality and reproduction in line with the intersecting rationales of neoliberalism and neo-conservatism" (Korkman, 2016, p.128).

In my previous MA thesis (2017), I focused on the Family Medicine Implementation (*Aile Hekimliği Uygulaması*) in Turkey, which is a result of an huge transformation of Health Centers to Family Health Centers in the primary healthcare services. It was established under the Health Transformation Program (HTP) of the AKP government in 2003. HTP deeply reflected the broader patterns of neoliberal restructuring in the healthcare services including

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<sup>48</sup> See Appendix for further details of the education program provided by İKGV.

privatization of healthcare. During conducting interviews and doing participant observations, I observed that as a result of the increased workload, newly added responsibilities to meet the specific performance targets, and managerial duties, most of the family physicians are only capable of providing “preventive and curative healthcare services” and it causes shortage of time for health education for their population (Ayar, 2017, p.67). On the other hand, as a result of managerial duties, they cannot easily take a leave of absence from Family Health Centers (FHC) even if they want to attend NGO programs relevant to their work. In this case, they have to find another family physician to voluntarily replace them during their absence. This problem was mentioned yet again during the interview with the Barış from İKGV, this time, within another context:

Until 2007, we had a good training period. But in time, health departments started to say ‘we cannot find healthcare personnel’ to you. Because when it comes to family medicine, they treated family medicine as if it is private healthcare. They have agreements and if they go somewhere else during the working hours, they have to find another person. For instance, we invite 20-25 people and it means that we have to find 20-25 people to replace. Who can we find?

Ministry of Health was much more willing to provide participants for our education programs in the past. It is also about the transition to FMI. Family physicians cannot leave their work. They have to find another doctor when they (want to) attend education programs. It became difficult.

Barış exemplifies the indirect intervention of the AKP government as a result of the increasing difficulties to arrange another family physician to attend the education program of İKGV. Consequently, the number of educations for family physicians also reduced as it happened to KİHEP and KSEP. With the transformation in the primary healthcare service, not only family physicians but also the registered population of the family physicians are affected. Primary healthcare services are a strategic places for the regulation of the population since the logic of the biopolitics of the AKP government also works by taking population “as political problem, [...], as a biological problem and as power’s problem” (Foucault, 2003, p.245). The education “Legal and Ethical Problems of Reproductive Health Service Provision: Reproductive Rights in Turkey” is not necessarily mandatory; however, they are supportive and complementary

education programs specifically designed on particular issues, in this case, it was for the improving healthcare standards on rights-based reproductive health:

But during the last education program [Legal and Ethical Problems of Reproductive Health Service Provision: Reproductive Rights in Turkey], we were talking about the examples such as a fifteen-year-old girl pregnant girl with the questions of ‘what should be the behaviour of the healthcare personnel?’, ‘is s/he supposed to go to police or provide healthcare?’, ‘what is the ethical and legal side of it?’. They usually prefer to not to encounter this kind of situations or even if they encounter them, they intend to not to do anything but refer them.

The situation and attitudes overlap with the anti-abortion and pro-family discourse of the AKP government (Özgüler and Yazar, 2017). As I provided the example of the de facto ban on abortion in public hospitals (see Chapter 2), where the boundaries are not set legally, this is another example of intervention to access on SRHR issues, which is systematically utilized by the AKP government in different spheres especially as in healthcare sector and education. The content of the education includes information about how to provide reproductive health service from right-based approach aiming that both the family physicians and the physicians’ registered population are well-informed about their rights. In 2012, Ayhan Sefer Üstün, the former Chairman of Parliament's Human Rights Commission said “even there is a rape, women should not have abortion”<sup>49</sup>. Regardless of the situation and decision of women, the AKP government reinforces the abortion ban. The anti-abortion and pronatalist attitude of the AKP government shows itself not only in re-enacting laws on abortion but also in preventing other channels such as this education program provided for family physicians. By preventing the education of İKGV from family physicians, the AKP government indirectly intervenes in women’s abilities to know their rights through the potential guidance of family physicians. Like abortion, this case of the restriction on education programs provided by İKGV shows the biopolitics of the AKP government on women’s body and the attempt to take “the control of

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<sup>49</sup> Ayhan Sefer Üstün’e İstifa Çağrısı. (*Resignation Call to Ayhan Sefer Üstün*). (2012, June 1). Retrieved from <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/138793-ayhan-sefer-ustun-e-istifa-cagrisi>

life and the biological processes of [wo]<sup>50</sup>man-as-species” through regulation (Foucault, 2003, p.246-47). As a result, the situation of not being able to reach target population for these education program, İKGV cancelled their program on relevant issues one by one and then, they later changed their target and started to concentrate on supporting refugees.<sup>51</sup>

#### 4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued in what ways and under which conditions the collaborations with Ministry of Health and Ministry of Family and Social Policies<sup>52</sup> started to be reduced dramatically. Especially after the beginning of 2010s, as a result of the radical political change on the policies of women’s health and gender issues and the intensified neo-conservative discourse of the AKP government, working with them become almost impossible as my informants argue. Unlike the NGOs whose agenda is more or less identical to the government’s neo-conservative ideology such as the pro-government NGOs as I exemplified when the occasion arises throughout the thesis (See Chapter 2 and 4.2), these NGOs have been facing increasing interruption of their SRHR programs (Lang, 2013). The strategic repertoire of regulating population of the AKP government through the prevention of specific education models from the target population which might differ from woman, adolescents, and beneficiaries such as family physicians as it is provided as an example in this chapter. Besides, EU accession process, and the international conventional obligations to Istanbul Convention and CEDAW causes to prevent the radical shifts and changes of the AKP government on SRHR issues. Therewithal, the AKP government found indirect solutions to disrupt the paths and connections of the NGOs through the semi-visible government intervention.

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<sup>50</sup> Added by the author of the thesis.

<sup>51</sup> The reducing number of educations on reproductive health and rights is not the only reason for changing their target but apparently, both services (of healthcare services) and access to target population (of İKGV) were interrupted and it highly influenced this shift.

<sup>52</sup> On 10 July 2018, the name of the ministry was changed to Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services.

As a result of the direct, indirect and intentional interventions to the education programs of various NGOs, each of them seeks different solutions. TAPV and KİH-YÇ started to change the structure of the program and started to focus on other collaboration opportunities with different actors such as municipalities intensively. İKGV has shifted its focus to refugees. Depending on the “patterns and forms of repression they are likely to face”, the invention of tactics of NGOs varies accordingly (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003, p.221). In that regard, in the following chapter, I will discuss what kind of repertoire of actions NGOs develop as a solution and how this abovementioned situation is experienced by different non-state actors.

## 5. REPERTOIRE OF ACTIONS

### 5.1. Introduction

After 2011, the AKP government's negative and restrictive attitude towards the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues become visible with the increasing number of anti-abortion discourses in relation to the glorification of heterosexual family under the biopolitics of the AKP government as discussed in the Introduction and the Contextualization chapter. The gradually weakening partnerships between the Ministries and the NGOs promoting gender equality as a result of the AKP government's increasingly authoritarian regime crystalized that negative and restrictive attitude as discussed in the previous chapter. The gender equality policies previously established and being implemented by the women's and LGBTI+ movements and organizations have been attacked and they have partially reversed by the intimacy politics of the AKP government. The AKP government has been using other tactics such legal intimidation and sometimes overt pressure as I have already outlined in the previous chapter. In brief, NGOs faced with various difficulties as a result of (1) fear of and pressure from the AKP government, (2) losing contacts and closing down the physical spaces as a result of the abolishment of Community Centers, and (3) replacement of SHRH-related education programs within the education programs, which are more appropriate to intimacy politics of the AKP government.

In this chapter, I will continue the discussion concerning the constraints the NGOs face and additionally, I will highlight in what ways NGOs have constructed their repertoire of actions against the increasing direct/indirect interventions of the AKP government. My argument here is that the AKP government's shift from the inclusivist/liberal discourse to religiously driven, family-centred, neo-conservative discourse, which also corresponds to a more "rapid political change", created a need for new coping mechanisms from the side of

NGOs resulting with new inventions added to the repertoire of contentions of NGOs (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007, p.21).

The AKP government has been trying to consolidate its control over civil society including NGOs by the help of newly emerging shadow organizations, which can be considered as an attempt of government-territorialisation of AKP government in the civil society from a Gramscian perspective seeing the civil society as serving the benefits of the State (Doyle, 2018; Gramsci, 1971). The invitation of the NGOs having opposing views and agendas against the current government, to the tables is much more limited from the government institutions' side as a result of this aim of the territorialization (Doyle, 2018, Lang, 2013). That's why it is not always easy to be invited to the official meetings for policy discussions as an NGOs representative working on non-approved topics and populations from the government perspective such as sexual health and rights and or LGBTI+ people. However, they are different ways of challenging the territorialization despite the limitations:

Our perspective is based on being 'collaborative rather than confrontational' with institutions regardless the current politics of Turkey. We argue [during the official meetings] what kind of requirement this field necessitates and how sexual health is related to public health. Public health matters because when you start talking about sexual health as part of public health, the person you are talking to notices the connection and its significance. Sometimes, sex work needs to be explained from a public health perspective. Then we can collaborate. At this point, we act pragmatically. (Aytun from Kırmızı Şemsiye)

As the quote suggests, there is an attempt to communicate with the AKP government and to be involved in the policy making processes by using the conventional NGO's repertoire of action: advocacy. Rather than raising their voice from a confrontational position like Aytun mentions, Kırmızı Şemsiye strategically structures their discourse based on prioritizing the public health rather than bringing individuals [sex workers] to forefront in the policy making meetings. This is their way of negotiation with the current government.

There [in their latest strategic plan], there is something like this; back in the day, we could do Women's Human Rights Education Program (KİHEP) very comfortably. One



of the main goals of the Association is to convey information from the local to the national, and vice versa. KİHEP was enough for this but since we do not have such numbers [of participants] anymore, we are thinking of doing something in shorter periods; we are discussing of disseminating KİHEP through limiting the content. We developed seminars in accordance to this. [...] We plan on transforming the modules of KİHEP to conversation bits through which information can be conveyed. During this period covering the 2018-2022 strategic plan, we want to inform the trainers. Since the trainers also look for women and ways to start groups. If they cannot do this, then they might as well go to a place for an hour, talk about economic violence from a feminist perspective, and leave. [...] We create simpler contents so that we can become more widespread. (Elif from KİH-YÇ)

As Kırmızı Şemsiye engages more with the advocacy side of the repertoire of actions to reach target population of the NGO, KİH-YÇ works on modification of KİHEP as a consequence of the reducing number of the implementation of KİHEP. One way of continuing KİHEP is to divide the modules of KİHEP into different education sessions since the ability of access to women from Community Centers were blocked and the protocols haven't been renewed with the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services. Although it is this is not the ideal version of the KİHEP as a transformative and well accepted education program, dividing KİHEP into different modules can be considered as a temporary "tactical innovation" (and even *tactical compromise*) which helps to pursue the agenda by sticking to the idea of KİHEP as much as possible during the neo-conservative era of the AKP government (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003, p.229). I argue that any attempt to pursue the SRHR education programs of NGOs should be considered as part of the new inventions in the repertoire of actions in NGOs sector. By keeping this in mind, I will analyze (1) the strategies and tactics developed after the direct/indirect refusal of the AKP government to collaborate with NGOs and both newly emerged and strengthened collaborations such as with psychological counsellors and district municipalities and , (2) the institutionalization of NGOs because they had to get international funding and budget opportunities for SRHR education programs, and (3) reorganization of the SRHR education program content and the re-structuring of the SRHR education programs by the NGOs' workers.

## 5.2. Alternative Collaborations

### 5.2.1. Working with Psychological Counsellors/Guidance Teachers to Access to Public Schools

As SRHR-related education programs can be implemented much easier in private schools because of less government/State control, the access to public schools and students was dramatically reduced as a result of the bureaucratic constraints. Both Zeynep as a former NGO worker<sup>53</sup> and Işık from Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence (CŞMD) mention the easiness of accessing children and adolescents via private schools. Işık emphasizes that what matters here is to make SRHR educations accessible to the students in public schools. However, although there is no legal limitation to provide SRHR-related education programs in public schools, in practice, reaching youth via state institutions and state bureaucracy has become more difficult (See Introduction and Chapter 2). This is mainly due to the increasing pressure and the inherent fear of the AKP government. Focusing on my main source of data from my interviews, I will exemplify in what ways NGOs have been creating their own repertoire to adapt, resist, and negotiate with the regime and their bureaucratic obstacles which create paths to continue to implement their agendas.

In the previous chapter, I gave an example of the particular witch-hunt that the AKP government and pro-government media have conducted in 2013 against the Turkish Family Health and Planning Foundation (TAPV) and its Sexual Health Education Program (CSEP), which aims to raise the awareness and knowledge about sexuality in the society in Turkey. It partially served as a warning, for the other institutions which implemented SRHR-related education programs by targeting an NGO, which is a well-established NGOs having experts on SRHR issues through the news of the partisan media. Consequently, it had a broader impact on

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<sup>53</sup> She wanted to keep the information about her previous work confidential. Therefore, I don't use the name of the NGO, where she worked before.

the other NGOs' (former and current) relations with public schools and (former and current) access to the students and parents in these institutions.

Zeynep mentioned an NGO's solution to adapt the situation and find their own way to keep the SRHR education program in public schools accessible as much as possible:

We started thinking of ways for entering those schools through psychological counsellors as it is hard to enter public schools with this program. Even though cooperating with the Ministry of National Education is hard, these Counselling Researcher Centers can dissociate from the Ministry a little bit. They themselves can demand work to be done.

The Guidance and Research Centers<sup>54</sup> are government institutions working under the Ministry of Education in Turkey and they are supposed to operate in every district in the cities of Turkey. Centers work coordinately with school's counselling services and make plans to organize education programs to improve psychological counsellors/ guidance teachers' professional knowledge. Also, they are able to cooperate with different actors such as local governments, bar associations, universities, different kinds of associations and foundations and so on. The organization consists of psychological counsellors/ guidance teachers and they are able to provide education programs depending on the needs of students (with disabilities), parents, and educators in schools (Karasu, 2014). The education programs including in-service trainings, panels, conferences, seminars, parenting education and educations provided with other institutions<sup>55</sup> are organized depending on needs and demands of the schools and/or parents. Zeynep talked about the significance of the intermediary role of the psychological counsellors/ guidance teachers to implement NGOs education programs in the public schools with the help of the initiations of the psychological counsellors/guidance teachers:

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2017/11/20171110-2.htm>

<sup>55</sup> The other institutions also refer to the NGOs being in the scope of this research. The process requires government correspondence and then an approval from the provincial directorates of national education. ([https://orgm.meb.gov.tr/meb\\_iys\\_dosyalar/2018\\_01/17234231\\_ram\\_kilavuzu\\_2018.pdf](https://orgm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2018_01/17234231_ram_kilavuzu_2018.pdf))

On the side of accessing schools, although it is hard to collaborate with Ministry of National Education, there are The Guidance and Research Centers where are the centers conducting psychological consulting services by working under the Ministry of National Education. Guidance teachers can be a little bit separated which means they can demand training/education [from us] by saying that ‘come and organize workshop for us [for students]’.

By such means, NGOs can skip direct/indirect involvement with the AKP government and can collaborate directly with the psychological counsellors/guidance teachers of the public schools. Working with them makes it easier to reach students and conduces to new connections with other centers. Furthermore, Işık from newly established NGO named CŞMD also emphasized the potential of easier access to public schools with the intermediary position of the psychological counsellors/ guidance teachers as opposed to establishing direct relations with Ministry of National Education. The first youth project of CŞMED What’s Up What’s Not?! aimed to inform educators and students about SRHR-related issues including dating violence, safe relationships, and gender-based violence by following a protective-preventive model.<sup>56</sup> The project was initiated in August 2016, just after the coup d’état attempt in Turkey and the following State of Emergency. The current neo-conservative politics of the AKP government which has become more effective and persistent during the state of emergency during that period cause caution in terms of recognizability of the CŞMD.

At the stage of implementing the first project, we thought of arranging meetings with the administrative staff of the Ministry of Education based in the city districts we would implement the project, however, right then, the State of Emergency started, it coincided with that summer. So, we could not dare. As we were associating through this project, we felt afraid of being caught by the radar [of the AKP government], which could put other relationships under distress, so we didn’t take the risk.

The risk here refers to the possible restrictive reactions of the Ministry of National Education, which may even prevent to implement the education program. Rather than developing direct

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<sup>56</sup> What’s Up What’s Not?: A Youth Project. Retrieved from <http://cinselsiddetlemucadele.org/en/whats-up-whats-not/>

relation with the Ministry, the precautious behaviors due to intimidation of the AKP government<sup>57</sup> towards NGOs is preferred by CŞMD and they used their other contacts:

In the process of starting to work at schools, it was the psychological counsellors that we knew with whom we cooperated the most; they supported us and acted as mediators. As we didn't have many contacts at the administrative level, psychological counsellors facilitated the process. [...] there were cases in which the counselor persuaded the directorate.

With the collaboration of the psychological counsellors/guidance teachers, governmental obstacles had relatively been overcome in What's Up What's Not?! and the project ultimately reached 3500 high school students. At this stage, personal relationships with the psychological counsellors/guidance teachers has also worked, they also took initiative to bring the project to their schools. There is a larger web of connection which needs to be revealed too:

Sometimes, counsellor's from Eğitim-Sen mediated the process and we reached schools with the help of them. They were much more motivated and willing counsellors to do something [for this kind of education programs at schools]. With their initiation, it [attempt to find and reach schools] turned into a better process. (Işık, CŞMD)

As Işık explained that the success of the project's access is also as a result of working together with the different actors such as local municipalities, which sometimes connect the Guidance and Research Centers' workers with CŞMD, unions such as Education and Science Workers' Union<sup>58</sup> (Eğitim-Sen) and professional associations such as Turkish Psychological Counselling and Guidance Association (Turk Psikolojik Danisma ve Rehberlik Derneği, TPDR). There is this resistance against the ongoing constraints through a kind of solidarity consists of different institutions with the intermediary roles of psychological counsellors/guidance teachers who can sometimes be familiar faces from the SRHR network in Turkey or can be counselors willing to have SRHR education programs at their schools.

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<sup>57</sup> Tahaoğlu, Ç. (2016, December 16). Kadın dernekleri kapatıldı, hangi çalışmalar yarıda kaldı? (Women's Associations were closed down, which projects were left half finished?). Retrieved from <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplumsal-cinsiyet/180798-kadin-dernekleri-kapatildi-hangi-calismalar-yarida-kaldi>

<sup>58</sup> A left-wing trade union consisting of teachers and education workers in Turkey.

In conclusion, I argue that establishing or benefiting from direct relations with people having higher hierarchical positions in these institutions have an impact on having access to public institutions such as schools and it is commonly used as one of the strategies as part of the repertoire of NGOs. NGOs found other ways of resisting to the interventions of the AKP governments to the implementation of the SRHR education programs. To minimize the bureaucratic obstacles as a result of the dominant neo-conservative ideology spreading into the state institutions, with Işık's their own words, they are accessing their target population "not through deduction but through induction"<sup>59</sup>. Another alternative way of reaching their target population is to build/strengthen bridges with local municipalities, which I will elaborate in the next section.

### 5.2.2. Continuity to Implement KİHEP

As a result of their inability to work with ministries, NGOs began the search for new possible partnerships to implement their education programs. For instance, Women for Women's Human Rights – New Ways Association (KİH-YÇ) found alternative partnerships to KİHEP, which is prepared depending on women's special legal, social, and political needs and rights, rather than ending the program. After the abolishment of the Community Centers in 2013, KİH-YÇ faced with difficulties as a result of new space requirement and loss of contacts in these state institutions (Chapter 4). Then, as a response to the difficulties, KİH-YÇ developed new strategies by enriching their repertoire to continue the KİHEP by finding new partners to maintain the continuity of the KİHEP:

When the Association came to the realization that this won't work that way, it decided to collaborate with the municipalities. An educational program that densely includes women are being provided by the municipalities. (Elif from KİH-YÇ)

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<sup>59</sup> It means rather than going to the directorates or the state institutions first, they prefer to contact with schools.

Although there are few examples of AKP municipalities working with KİH-YÇ, these municipalities are the opposition parties: Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) and People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) municipalities. Starting in 2013, the KİHEP's<sup>60</sup> Trainer's Training Program has been providing for twelve days to women working in municipalities' counselling services for women.<sup>61</sup> Although the previous implementation of KİHEP was interrupted by the institutional changes and replacement of KİHEP with the Family Education Program (AEP), KİH-YÇ found new partnerships to continue their education program. Besides newly established relations with municipalities in different cities of Turkey, Elif mentioned that number of social workers who were trained previously by KİH-YÇ to provide KİHEP, continued to implement KİHEP. KİHEP trainers continued to implement KİHEP under AEP to different target groups of women. Thus, I argue that this network including KİH-YÇ workers and KİHEP trainers developed their own methods as a resistance mechanism by taking their own risks.

### 5.3. Creating Resources

European countries such as Holland and Sweden contribute to the SRHR budgets of the NGOs. Since sexual and reproductive health issues are outside of the areas of interest of the donors and the private sector [in Turkey], we try to run our work through the funds we can create through embassies, development institutions or the social institutions of the governments that are a bit sensitive about such issues. (Gökhan Yıldırımka from UNFPA)

There are two main reasons of the flow of foreign funds to Turkey for SRHR issues. The fund transfer from these countries has shifted to Turkey as because they make gender equality awareness as one of the focal points in their agenda in the developing countries as well (Seims, 2011). The latter one is the neo-conservative intimacy politics of the AKP government, which causes number of constraints such as a lack of sufficient national budget transferred to NGOs

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<sup>60</sup> This program is provided to women in women's organizations as well. The average number of the Trainer's Training program is 20-25 woman and frequently, the larger component of the education programs are from the counselling services for women in the municipalities.

<sup>61</sup> KİHEP Kronolojisi (*The Chronology of KİHEP*). <http://www.kadinininsanhaklari.org/KİHEP-kronolojisi/>

implementing SRHR education programs from a right-based and gender equality perspective. AS a result of the lack of financial support from State institutions and also the conservative attitude towards SRHR issues, NGOs have to search for other financial resources to pursue their agenda. I will provide two examples regarding the creating resources to continue implementing NGOs' agendas: (1) the story of Mavi Kalem, which recently transformed into a more professionalized structure to get funded from international donors and (2) the fund transfer to newly emerging NGOs in the field for the proliferation of SRHR issues in the NGOs sector in Turkey.

In 2015, Mavi Kalem as an organization working with underrepresented groups of society such as women and girls from poor neighborhoods, decided to leave the voluntary-based working. According to Sezen, there is a close link between the professional work and the pursuing the work of the NGO. Therefore, they prioritized the continuity/sustainability of the NGO:

If your annual budget is small, you cannot access larger resources. When you cannot, your budget stays small, and when it is small, you cannot have access. It is like a vicious circle. (Sezen from Mavi Kalem)

After 2015, we put voluntary work aside because it is really hard to keep work sustainable. We decided to prioritize the sustainability of the Association and the develop our volunteer network. Then we turned into a more institutional way of working. Surely, it was based on hiring professionals. [...] For us, the years between 2015 and 2017 was the reorganization process of the Association such as documentation, redefinition of the Association, and making all policy documents in written forms and also the process of making decisions about the future of Mavi Kalem. [...] In time, we turned into stronger institution [...] and consequently, the grants we reached has increased. (Sezen from Mavi Kalem)

Additionally, although Sezen refers to the facts that institutionalization may prevent to see the all details or affect the level of amateur excitement, and the energy, she added that, with the professional identity, it is much easier to find international donors and work with them. Consequently, Mavi Kalem left the voluntary based working organization and shifted to a more



institutionalized working conditions to be more recognizable in the international platforms, strengthened their infrastructures between 2015 and 2017. NGOization is one strategy “to acquire legitimacy in the eyes of potential donors” to be able to implement the agenda of NGOs in Turkey (Lang, 2012, p.75). As an example, since 2017, Mavi Kalem has been implementing the Child Protection Project for the empowerment and protection of Syrian and non-Syrian refugee children in partnership of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHRC) in Zeytinburnu and Balat in Istanbul. Previously, the NGOization in early 2000s mainly was a consequence of the EU accession process and proliferation of projects into Turkey, which leads the increased number of NGOs (See p.14). I elaborate the purpose of seeking international donors and the NGOs processes of attaining international funds and grants and in today’s conditions, I argue that one of the reasons of the aim of having a professional and institutional identity to reach larger grants capability is a consequence of the lack of governmental support. Another constraint is the number of NGOs covering SRHR issues:

The main problem is that sexual health and sexuality issues are still a taboo. These issues still scare people and it causes limited number of NGOs in the field [working on SRHR issues]. They can be short-lived NGOs with few numbers of association members. Because of these risks, NGOs cooperation begins with capacity buildings since the beginning. (Gökhan Yıldırımkaaya from UNFPA)

The whole patriarchal and exclusionary discourse of the neo-conservative regime of the AKP government indirectly affect the establishment of the new NGOs or the continuity of already established NGOs like I have outlined the examples of Mavi Kalem which chose to be professionalized to get funded and İKGV, which left SRHR focused project behind and shifted its focus to humanitarian aid. It also causes human resources problem alongside with the economic constraints.

It is like we are trying to keep a tumbledown house up. [...] In this conservative atmosphere, if we cannot do anything, we cannot even enter the house in the following years. It is very important that we still talk about sexual and reproductive health issues,

we can still see demand on this issue, NGOs can implement little programs on SRHRS issues to their own target population. If these weren't here, all would remain inactive. (Gökhan Yıldırımkaaya from UNFPA)

Yıldırımkaaya's analogy on the current situation of NGOs working on SRHR also references the attempts to create temporary solutions which leads NGOs to invent new repertoire of actions despite the lack of economic and human resources. Within this scope, another survival strategy is to work together in solidarity with the SRHR network. For instance, UNFPA in Turkey became a guarantor for financial support for the *newly established* NGOs such as Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association (Kırmızı Şemsiye), working with sex workers in Turkey and Youth Approaches to Health Association (SGYD), which is the legal entity of Y-PEER Turkey, focusing on today's youth sexual and reproductive health and rights and to implement their projects. Unlike the common tendency to not to provide funds to newly emerged NGOs, as a result of the *urgent and constant need for action* and because of the familiarity of the network in the field and great effort of the NGOs, NGOs were able to create an area where they could work. I argue that "networking" is also becoming a part of the repertoire of action which connects local and international actors based on solidarity and trust in Turkey (Tarrow, 1999).

In the next part, I will provide examples of strategies developed by NGOs to create resistance by reframing the content and reorganize the education program to apply their programs in public schools and reach women as much as possible.

#### **5.4. Reframing and Reorganization of SRHR Education Programs**

In the second chapter, I showed how the position of woman is defined based on the heterosexual familial relations in the AKP government's policies. Despite being signatory of the international conventions, the AKP government prioritizes the protection of the family institution even when woman in marriage is subjected to violence. By doing so, domestic violence is systematically ignored and kept undefined. Under these conditions and in a country

governed by neo-conservative regime, CŞMD aims to struggle against all forms of sexual violence such as dating violence (*flört şiddeti*). They aim to introduce basic concepts to youth about sexual violence, work on preventing sexual violence, and increase recognition of the prevalence of sexual violence by challenging the gender binary thoughts and concepts. Işık from CŞMD explained in what ways they created solutions to talk about dating violence in schools:

In public schools, it does not matter whether the training is feminist or not, but the issue is around legitimizing flirting or sexuality; many headmasters told us to conduct the training but not use the words flirting or love. We go in to talk about romantic relationships, but we need to do it without saying girlfriend/boyfriend/lover. We made concessions at those points, yes. Our main aim was to enter the public schools and meet the youth; even though we say emotional relationships instead of dating, still alternative spaces of freedom unravel. One can talk about what one wants to talk about without using the usual words. Thus, it is not something we resist too much. We do not have the perspective that if we cannot say flirting or feminism, we will not be there.

Talking about flirting means recognition of flirting and it clashed with the intimacy politics of the AKP government, which denies any other forms of intimate relations except the one in marriage (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011). I argue that the behaviour of the headmaster, who stipulated preconditions for the CŞMD to implement their project is derived from the “process of political will to regulate sexuality” of the AKP government (Acar and Altunok, 2013, p.19). In response to this, the concessions they mention, refers to the repertoire of actions in which NGOs take as new resisting mechanism to the conservative politics of the AKP government. In the previous part, I explained how it is difficult to enter public schools and its solutions by using intermediary figures. Now, once the NGO is allowed to implement their projects, they also have to reframe their content and/or their wordings during the workshops depending on which headmaster the school has. Again, like it is going to be happen to the KİHEP when the program is divided into different modules to access more woman, this is another example of compromise NGO needs to make during the attacks of the AKP government towards SRHR education programs in Turkey. In order to access more target population at schools, CŞMD

creates quick and creative responses and develops tactics by changing wording of their projects and changing the way they introduce concepts to have access to public schools.

### **5.5. Conclusion: NGOs Like a Bad Penny That Usually Turns Up**

It is like if you are kicked out from the door, you enter from the chimney<sup>62</sup>. Am I kicked off? Okay! That the duty of an NGO: developing strategy. (Zeynep, sexuality educator/consultant)

Current political atmosphere of Turkey under the neo-conservative regime of the AKP government influenced the repertoire of actions of the NGOs. With the reference to Foucault's "plurality of resistances" in opposition to the power, NGOs reinvented different tactics and strategies by (1) embarking on a quest of finding new collaborations and new partnerships, (2) creating resources, and (3) redesigning their discursive framings and structures (Foucault, 1990, p.96). Depending on the necessities of time and repressive regime, like Zeynep says, they developed their own repertoire even it sometimes causes great compromises.

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<sup>62</sup> This is the direct translation of "kapıdan kovsan bacadan girmek". It corresponds to "turn up like a bad penny".

## 6. CONCLUSION

Throughout the thesis, I aimed to analyze the new inventions of the repertoire of actions of NGOs in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues in Turkey, as a response to the intimacy politics of the increasingly authoritarian AKP government, especially after the late 2000s. Drawing from my fieldwork, I first identified the constraints of NGOs such as the abolishment of Community Centers, discontinuing the protocols with NGOs to continue to provide SRHR education programs in the state institutions, not being able to reach social workers whom were already trained for the education programs, huge transformation in the healthcare services which prevent the access of family physicians to education programs. Such dissolutions of the relations/partnerships of NGOs with the governments are not unique to Turkey but rather it is like a global trend regardless the ideology of States (Lang, 2013). However, as opposed to the general global situation, Turkey has a distinctive characteristic because of having a complex political shifts and agendas. The AKP government had conducted an immense “women-oriented” (as opposed current “family-oriented) policy-making process on SRHR issues in the early 2000s. However, as amply demonstrated, in late 2010s, the government went through an ideological shift from liberal and inclusivist tendencies to a neo-conservative politics consisting of “authoritarianism, pro-Islamism, proliferation of neoliberal and conservative values”, and this shift influenced the operations and the repertoire of actions of NGOs in Turkey, has created a paradoxical situation (Cindoğlu and Unal, 2016, p.50). On the one hand, there are gains from the women oriented policy making period such as making Turkey as a signatory state of Istanbul Convention and on the other hand, there is an reinforced neo-conservative agenda on SRHR issues, which causes legal disputes with Istanbul Convention. NGOs working on SRHR issues have been very affected as being the target of the AKP government’s neo-conservative agenda.

Therefore, looking at the new repertoire of actions of NGOs allows us to read this transformation of the AKP government through intimacy politics. The repertoire is developed through the invention of new resistance and negotiation mechanisms of the NGOs in order to be able to interact with the government and to pursue their own agenda without the interaction with the government whenever possible (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007). The tension between the power and resistance reveals itself in the relations between NGOs working on SRHR issues in Turkey and the neo-conservative AKP government.

Sometimes they comply, sometimes they resist but always in motion...

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## Useful Links

<https://lgbtnewsturkey.com>

<https://bianet.org>

<https://www.haberler.com>

<https://www.yeniakit.com.tr>

<http://www.tapv.org.tr>

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com>

<http://www.diken.com.tr>

<http://anamurram.meb.k12.tr>

<http://cinselsiddetlemucadele.org>

<https://orgm.meb.gov.tr>

<http://www.kadinininsanhaklari.org>

<https://www.mavikalem.org>

<http://www.lawsturkey.com>

<http://www.musovasi.com>

<https://www.markalarfisildiyou.com>

## **Appendix List of Interviews<sup>63</sup>**

### **Turkish Family Health and Planning Foundation (TAPV)**

(<http://www.tapv.org.tr/en/default.aspx>)

TAPV was established in 1985 with the collaboration of businesspeople of Turkey and academics under the leadership of Vehbi Koç. The mission of TAPV is to contribute to gender equality by improving the standards of women's and girls' access to education. TAPV has a prestigious education program called Women's Health Education Program (KSEP), which has been implementing since 2009 with the collaboration of local authorities, institutions, women centers, and NGOs.

#### *Women's Health Education Program (KSEP)*

TAPV has a 13-week long program called Women's Health Education Program (KSEP), which aims to "improve the lives of women and their families by training them to develop fundamental preventive health behaviours and raise awareness and access to preventive health services". They provide Trainings of Trainer programs for KSEP for social workers based on invitations. During the educations, they provide information about "reproductive organs and functions, diet and hygiene, safe motherhood, family planning, preventative reproductive health, community skills, sexuality, rights issues, children and adolescents, general health concerns and protection".

### **Human Resource Development Foundation (İKGV)**

([http://www.İKGV.org/index1\\_en.html](http://www.İKGV.org/index1_en.html))

İKGV as an autonomous organization was established in 1988 with the aim of promoting "reproductive health and family planning education, information, training and services as well as the empowerment of the human resource". The Foundation has worked for the "preparation process of National AIDS plan of Turkey" and strengthening sexual and reproductive health services and rights. İKGV is one of the pioneer NGOs which works for "empowering vulnerable groups" such as sex workers. İKGV worked "to empower health service providers on reproductive health and rights" and also "implemented trainings and made publications on adolescent sexual health". However, in time, especially after the Syrian Civil War, İKGV has shifted its focus to supporting refugees and left the other programs related to sexual and reproductive health rights and services, which they have been implementing for years.

#### *Legal and Ethical Problems of Reproductive Health Service Provision: Reproductive Rights in Turkey*

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<sup>63</sup> The list includes synoptic information about the NGOs. Not all the education and training program of the NGOs are mentioned here. Therefore, I provided links for each NGOs where you can click and have more information about them.

This program is based on the idea of supporting “the improvement of rights based reproductive health service provision in Turkey with a strong emphasis on medical ethics” (Human Resource Development Foundation, 2018, p.15). This training is provided in 2011-2013. One of the targets of this project is the family physicians who work at the primary healthcare services in Turkey.

### **Women for Women’s Human Rights- New Ways (KİH-YÇ)**

(<http://wwhr.org/>)

The association as being an independent women’s non-governmental organization, was founded in 1993 with the purpose of the recognition of women’s human rights. The idea of affirming women’s rights as human rights was firstly discussed in the 1992 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna and KİH-YÇ’s name was influenced by the conference in Vienna. During the first years of the establishment of KİH-YÇ, an extensive research project about violation of women’s rights was conducted in the Eastern and South-Eastern Anatolian region and Marmara region. The research revealed that most of the women were not aware of their own rights (İlkkaracan, 1999). As the research pointed to an obvious and urgent need of women to access and know their rights, they developed Human Rights Education Programme for Women (KİHEP) to increase awareness of women for their rights. It holds NGO consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations since 2005.

#### *Human Rights Education Rights for Women Program (KİHEP)*

KİH-YÇ provides Trainings of Trainer programs for social workers, psychologists, and health professionals to implement KİHEP in different state agencies such as Community Centers. The duration of the program is four-months and the content includes “women’s human rights, violence against women and domestic violence, strategies against violence, women’s economic rights, communication skills, gender-sensitive parenting and rights of the child, women and sexuality, reproductive rights, women and politics, feminism and Women’s movement, and women’s organizing”. After the pilot implementations of KİHEP, “a 16-module Trainers’ Manual” was published and started to be implemented in different parts of Turkey starting from 1997.

### **Mavi Kalem Social Assistance and Solidarity Association (Mavi Kalem)**

(<https://www.mavikalem.org/category/eng/>)

Mavi Kalem was established after Izmit earthquake in 1999 to provide needs of victims of the earthquake. In 2002, they moved to Fener-Balat district in Istanbul and continued to their projects working with the locals of this neighborhood. In time, they turned into a women-led NGO focusing on empowerment of youth, women’s health, and educational support for girls. Specifically, they work on empowerment of girls in disadvantaged communities. They implemented and continue to implement local and nationwide projects by prioritizing gender equality. Mavi Kalem was based on voluntariness but then, they decided to professionalize the core team while institutionalizing the structure of Mavi Kalem in 2015.

## **Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association (Kırmızı Şemsiye)**

(<http://www.kirmizisemsiye.org/EN/Index>)

Kırmızı Şemsiye was established in Ankara in 2013 with the initiatives of sex workers in Turkey and since then, the NGO has been working with male, female, and transgender sex workers. They provide legal support and Training of Trainers program for awareness raising for sexual health especially for sex workers and make advocacy for the access of health services especially for HIV, sexual and reproductive health services.

## **Youth Approaches to Health Association (SGYD)**

(<http://sagliktagenc.org/en/home/>)

SGYD is the legal entity of Y-PEER Turkey since 2015 and a member of the international youth network, Y-PEER. This network includes youth and works for youth and their SRHR issues from a right-based and gender equality perspective. It encourages youth participation. SGYD develops and generalize peer education models with the aim of gender mainstreaming.

## **Association for Struggle against Sexual Violence (CŞMD)**

(<http://cinselsiddetlemucadele.org/en/>)

As a feminist and a queer organization, CŞMD was founded in 2014 and aims to work against any forms of sexual violence. The aim of the association is to work against any forms of sexual violence and to struggle against the construction of the gender binarism in the society. CŞMD is based on anti-hierarchical structure and solidarity.

CŞMD provides three different content for three different target group including young people, parents and trainers, and social workers.

### *What's Up What's Not?!*

The project started as a pilot study in 2016-2017 academic year in Istanbul. Topics such as gender, peer-bullying, safe relationships, and dating violence are covered with the trainers and young persons. Then the project continued in 2018 with the support of Sabanci Foundation and provided Training of Trainers program for psychological counselors and guidance teachers. The book prepared as part of the project was distributed all around Turkey and approximately 800 school counselors, trainers, and social workers. (Information is taken from the Annual Activity Report 2018 of CŞMD, <http://cinselsiddetlemucadele.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2018-activity-report-web.pdf>)