

## BEING A WOMAN IN THE UNION MOVEMENT IN TERMS OF THE ISSUE OF EQUALITY: AN EVALUATION ON THE PERSPECTIVES OF HAK-İŞ'S FEMALE MANAGERS

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### Abstract

Women's relationship with trade unions in Turkey has always been limited. The trade union movement has developed in a male dominated space; the mentality that 'trade unionism is a man thing' has always been prevalent in the masculine culture of unions. This is related to the sexist attitude, as a representation of the patriarchal society. Sexism is mostly apparent in decision-making mechanisms. Accordingly, the representation rate of women in the central administrations of labor confederations and affiliated unions in Turkey is 7.4%. However, there is a revival of interest at Hak-İş regarding women workers and women unionists, Hak-İş started to realize the significance of women workers. So with the goal of empowerment within the trade unionist movement, the assignment of women to management positions is regarded as the easiest way to include them. Today, 5 women in total are represented in the headquarters of Hak-İş affiliated unions. But is this step sufficient to enable gender equality in trade unions? What do these women think about trade unions' structure and how do they experience this process? The perspective of women unionists are considered crucial for the revival of women's participation in the trade union movement. Therefore, in the study, the discourse of female unionists affiliated with Hak-İş regarding their own union positions and the significance of this for the union movement was examined. As a result of the study, it was found that the interviewees tend to internalize patriarchal union values and mostly act in accordance with these values.

**Keywords:** Trade Union, Women Unionists, Discourse Analysis, Gender, Hak-İş.

### BİR EŞİTLİK MESELESİ OLARAK SENDİKAL HAREKETTE KADIN OLMAK: HAK-İŞ'Lİ KADINLARIN BAKIŞ AÇISINA İLİŞKİN BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

### Özet

Türkiye'de sendikalarla kadınların ilişkisi daima sınırlı olmuştur. Sendikal hareket erkek egemen bir biçimde gelişmiş; sendikaların eril kültürü içinde "sendikacılık erkek işidir" zihniyeti hüküm sürmüştür. Bu durum ataerkil toplumun bir yansıması olan cinsiyetçi bakış açısıyla ilgilidir. Bugün cinsiyetçilik sendikal hareketin her veçhesinde hüküm sürmekte fakat en belirgin biçimde karar alma mekanizmalarında kendini göstermektedir. Buna bağlı olarak Türkiye'de işçi konfederasyonları ve bağlı sendikaların merkez yönetimlerinde kadınların temsil edilme oranının %7.4 olduğu görülmektedir. Bununla birlikte Hak-İş'te kadın işçiler ve kadın sendikacılar konusunda son yıllarda bir canlanma söz konusudur. Sendikal alanda güçlenme isteği Hak-İş'in kadın işçileri fark etmesini sağlamış, Hak-İş onlara ulaşabilmenin en kolay yolunu da yönetim mekanizmalarına kadın yöneticileri atamakta bulmuştur. Bugün itibarıyla Hak-İş'e bağlı sendikaların genel merkezlerinde toplam 5 kadın

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temsil edilmektedir. Peki, bu adım sendikalarda cinsiyet eşitliğini sağlamak için yeterli midir? Kadınlar sendikaların yapısıyla ilgili ne düşünmekte ve bu süreci nasıl deneyimlemektedir?

Kadın sendikacıların bakış açısının sendikal harekette kadın varlığına ivme katması açısından önemli olduğu düşünülmektedir. Bu nedenle çalışmada, Hak-İş'li sendikacı kadınların kendi sendikal konumları ve bunun sendikal hareket açısından anlamı üzerine söylemleri incelenmiştir. Çalışma sonucunda, görüşmecilerin ataerkil sendikal değerleri içselleştirme eğiliminde olduğu ve çoğunlukla bu değerlere uygun hareket ettiği tespit edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sendika, Sendikacı Kadınlar, Söylem Analizi, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Hak-İş.

## Introduction

In Turkey, as well as around the world, trade unions are not viewed as eligible organizations to pursue the class interests and demands of both male and female workers. Restrictions of rights and legal loopholes in women-dominated sectors, family and household responsibilities, and cultural factors, all make trade union membership difficult for women in Turkey. Another determining factor here is the masculine culture of trade unions along with gender discrimination. As a continuous system, gender not only separates women and men by embodying and reproducing differences between them, but also divides on the basis of gender and organizations as hierarchical power dynamics<sup>1</sup> which are deeply embedded in social institutions. This unequal structure of trade unions is revealed in many aspects, from trade unions' parlance and practices, to spatial features.

The discriminatory practices that women are exposed to are most prevalent at the administration level of trade unions, where power relations are most apparent. The representation rate of women today in Turkish labor confederations and the headquarters of their affiliated trade unions is 7.4%. This shows that the masculine mentality in trade unions does not allow for female managers. Rather than taking part in the headquarters, women can be union stewards or delegates, and sometimes members of branch administrations. Yet there are serious obstacles and challenges, based on gender discrimination, to become a member of the central administration. It is possible to suggest in this context that trade unionism in Turkey is regarded as a 'man's thing'. To change the masculine mentality and organizational structure of trade unions is a precondition for the participation of women in union administrations. In the last few years, however, in Hak-İş we see a revival of interest in women workers. Women committees are established both in the confederation and affiliated unions, while ensuring the representation of women administrators in some of these unions. In addition, now there is a focus on a variety of training activities and projects for women. The effort of Hak-İş to include women in the trade union movement is important for sure. But this is not stemming from the desire for an equal union life, and thus, equal working life: Hak-İş wants women participation in the union movement as part of the Islamic ideology it supports and the traditional roles ascribed to women in social life. This situation implies, consequently, that the positions and practices of women are to be determined by men, which in turn means a reinforcement of gender discrimination. But the most important factor that prevents women from becoming members of and working actively in trade unions is this very discrimination based on gender.

With the emergent discourse on unionist women's importance and necessity on the one hand, and the ongoing dominance of the masculine mentality in the trade unions on the other, what do women of Hak-İş think, and how do they experience unionism? Do they consider trade unions egalitarian?

Focusing on women from central administrations of the affiliated trade unions of Hak-İş Confederation, this study aims at revealing the opinions of these women about trade unions and their experiences of being female unionists, based upon their trade union practices. The study is conducted through the consideration of all limitations, problems, and obstacles (already defined in the literature<sup>2</sup>)

<sup>1</sup> Kevin Stainback, Sibyl Kleiner and Sheryl Skaggs, "Women in Power: Undoing or Redoing the Gendered Organizations?", *Gender&Society*, 30 (1), (2016), pp. 112.

<sup>2</sup> Barış Seçer, "Kadınların Sendikalara Yönelik Tutumları ile Cinsiyet Ayrımcılığı Algılarının Sendika Üyesi Olma İsteğine Etkisi", *Çalışma ve Toplum*, (2009), 4: 27-59; Yaşar Seymen, *Kadın ve Sendika*, SD Yayınları, Ankara1992.; Gülay Toksöz, ve Seyhan Erdoğdu, *Sendikacı Kadın Kimliği*, İmge Yayınları, Ankara 1998.; Gülay Toksöz, "Kadın Çalışanlar ve Sendikal

that unionist women encounter. Thus, rather than exploring the problems, this study focuses on women's individual opinions in the context of their awareness of gender.

First, the policies of Hak-İş regarding women are explained briefly, then an analysis based on the fieldwork is presented.

## 1. Hak-İş and Women

Hak-İş was established in 1976 when the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi - MSP*)<sup>3</sup> was the coalition partner of the Nationalist Front Government (*Milliyetçi Cephe*). Adopting an Islamic perspective of trade unionism, Hak-İş does not include concepts like democracy, secularism, and republicanism in its founding principles, unlike the other confederations. Instead, the confederation references some doctrines which have an important place in Islamic political thought. These doctrines are still among the main points of reference for the confederation.

With the current decline of trade unions and process of de-unionization, Hak-İş has benefited from sharing a common ground with the political ideology of the government and succeeded in being the second largest confederation of Turkey<sup>4</sup>. The conciliatory trade unionism approach and the influence of employers played a decisive role in this. Legal amendments of the government, particularly the thresholds and sectoral regulations, have paved the way for Hak-İş to flourish in trade unionism<sup>5</sup>. Hak-İş started focusing on women workers with the need for new members in order to preserve or enhance power. Starting in the 2000s, neoliberalism, Turkey's membership to the EU, and a discursive change integrated into globalization have also played a role in this new focus on women workers<sup>6</sup>. The step towards encouraging women members of Hak-İş as a result of these factors was the Women's Committee, established under the confederation in 2009 but started its activities in 2014. After this year, the representation of women administrators –either through election or assignment– was also provided in some of the affiliated trade unions of the confederation.

To reach large groups of women, Hak-İş organizes big events on commemorative days such as March 8. During the March 8 event of 2019, which was the eighth occurrence of this event, the confederation president stressed the necessity of involving non-union women in the struggle and its importance for the confederation; though without any mention of gender equality as a goal<sup>7</sup>. In this context, it is possible to say that Hak-İş also pays attention to the line between conservatism and change, not only in its general union activities but also to the woman question. The perspective of Hak-İş on the woman question draws heavily on Islamic values and patriarchal ideology. The confederation, who has adopted a perspective within the framework of Islamic ideology since its establishment, accordingly shaped its policies and discourse towards women. For example, the theme of the March 8 event of 2019 was 'Difference in Nature, Equality in Rights'. On many platforms, Hak-İş has been emphasizing women's innate characteristics, their maternity and the sacred values

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Katılım", A.Ü. Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi, 49 (3), (1994), s. 439-454.; Gülay Toksöz, "Sayımız Çok Az Sendikalarda Kadınlar", Balkan Neşecan ve Sungur Savran (Der.), Neoliberalizmin Tahribatı 2000'li Yıllarda Türkiye, Metis Yayınları, İstanbul 2014, s. 234-253.; Seda Topgül, "Sendika İçi Kadın Örgütlenmeleri Türk-İş ve Hak-İş İçin Bir Değerlendirme", International Journal of Human Sciences, 13(1), (2016), s. 2349-2367.; Betül Urhan, "Görünmezlerin Görünür Olma Mücadeleleri: Çalışan Kadın Örgütlenmeleri", Çalışma ve Toplum, 2, (2009), s. 83-110.; Betül Urhan, "Sendika İçi Kadın Örgütlenmeleri: Karanlık Tablodan Yansımalar", Süalp, M. Nedim ve Aslı Güneş (Der.), Sınıf İlişkileri: Sureti Soldurulmuş Bir Resim mi?, Bağlam Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2011.; Betül Urhan, Sendikasız Kadınlar Kadınsız Sendikalar, Kadav Yayınları, İstanbul 2014.; Betül Urhan, "Sendika İçi Demokrasi ve Sendika İçi Kadın Örgütlenmesi", Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları Dergisi, 69, (2017), s. 29-58.; Mesut Yeğen, "Sendikalar ve Kadın Sorunu: Kurumsal Gelenekler ve Cari Zihniyetler", Sosyoloji Araştırmaları Dergisi, 1-2, (2000), s. 1-39.; Gözde Yirmibeşoğlu, "Turkish Women in Trade Union Leadership", Ekonomik Yaklaşım, 19 (69), (2008), s. 67-88.

<sup>3</sup> A political party with Islamic ideology, which was active between 1972 and 1980.

<sup>4</sup> Türk-İş, which is the largest labour confederation in Turkey, has 973.300 members, Hak-İş has 684.144 members and DİSK has 171.428 members (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, Communiqués on the Number of Workers and the Number of Members of Trade Unions, January 2019 Statistics).

<sup>5</sup> Zeynep Çelik, "Sendikal Mücadelede Yeni Bir Sayfa: Sendikalar ve Toplu İş Sözleşme Yasası", (2002), <https://sendika63.org/2012/10/sendikal-mucadelede-yeni-bir-sayfa-sendikalar-ve-toplu-is-sozlesme-yasasi-zeynep-celik-73476/>, Erişim tarihi: 27.01.2023.

<sup>6</sup> Betül Urhan, Sendikasız Kadınlar Kadınsız Sendikalar. Kadav Yayınları, İstanbul 2014, s.38.

<sup>7</sup> Hak-İş, (2019).

attributed to the family and mother in Islamic doctrine; furthermore, it defines women workers in relation to their traditional roles as mother and spouse. Hence, Hak-İş is aiming to create working conditions for women's employment that would not destroy the family structure, therefore providing training for their women members, intended to reconcile their work and family life.

The patriarchal culture and masculine language dominating the trade unions in Turkey are also apparent in Hak-İş. It seems difficult for women to take part in leadership positions in a hierarchical structure of competition and power. Describing trade union activism as a 'manly business' – which is even being internalized by women – alienates women from trade unions<sup>8</sup>, which in effect causes men to be at the forefront of events that concern women. These events of Hak-İş easily reveal the masculine structure. At these events, mostly male administrators give speeches in a hierarchical manner, emphasizing women's importance in social life and the family, rather than their equal participation in the trade union movement, and relevant policies and implementations. Such gendered discourses reinforce the masculine structure of trade unions and gender-based discrimination.

Currently there are five women administrators in 15 affiliate trade unions of Hak-İş. In addition, Hak-İş and its affiliate trade unions have a total of 16 women's committee presidents. But the women's committees of Hak-İş and its affiliated trade unions do not have separate budgets and committee presidents are not represented in the top positions of the unions. Thus, it is impossible to conclude that women's committees have a direct influence on the activities and the decisions of the trade unions.

## 2. Method

The study draws on feminist methodology, as it focuses on the opinions and experiences of unionist women through the women's point of view. Researches based on feminist methodology assume that subjective experiences of women and men differ<sup>9</sup>. Conventional social science analysis has only drawn from the experiences of men, posing questions of social experiences that only consider the problems of men. In other words, conventional social research is only aimed at men. But research drawing on feminist methodology is focused on women and views problems in terms of women's experiences<sup>10</sup>. By choosing a feminist methodology, this research is based on experiences emanating from the process of political struggle, instead of any usual experience of women. The purpose of similar studies on ideology is to correct the invisibility and irregularity in women's experiences, by putting an end to the inequalities in women's social status<sup>11</sup>. Thus, this study is based on unionist women's views on the masculine structure of trade unions and gender problems as well as their experiences as women unionists.

There are in total five women head office administrators at the Hak-İş affiliated trade unions. In order to provide data for the study, recorded interviews were conducted with the five women. Feminist methodology sees every woman as valuable in her own uniqueness and accepts her experience as relevant data. For this reason, even the data obtained from a single interviewee is seen as meaningful and worthwhile. While determining the sample of the study, this understanding was taken into consideration. Though the number of female managers in Hak-İş is only five, it is still an effective sample group because this is the totality of available data. This situation can also be considered as a limitation of the study. The semi-structured interview technique was used in the dialogues that took place between March and August 2019; pre-prepared questions were asked and answers were elaborated on with follow-up questions when necessary. Due to ethical practices, real names of the interviewees are not disclosed. However, there is no ethics committee approval for the study, since the

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<sup>8</sup> Seda Topgöl "Sendika İçi Kadın Örgütlenmeleri Türk-İş ve Hak-İş İçin Bir Değerlendirme", *International Journal of Human Sciences*, 13(1), (2016), s. 2362.

<sup>9</sup> W. Lawrence Neuman, *Toplumsal Araştırma Yöntemleri 1*, Yayın Odası, İstanbul 2010, s. 152.

<sup>10</sup> Sandra Harding, "Feminist Yöntem Diye Bir Şey Var mı?", Çakır, Serpil ve Necla Akgökçe (Der.), *Farklı Feminizmler Açısından Kadın Araştırmalarında Yöntem*, Sel Yayıncılık, İstanbul 1990, s. 39-41.

<sup>11</sup> John W Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Sage Publications, California 2007, pp. 26.

data for the study was collected before 2020 and Ethics Committee approval was not requested during this period. However, publication ethics were applied within the study.

As the study focuses on the views and experiences of women working in leadership positions of male-dominated trade unions, the participants were interviewed in line with these two research categories. Themes were determined according to the answers and the related discourse was examined. As a method of analysis, the discourse that plays a role in producing and reproducing gender patterns is related to the processes of establishing various power dynamics in language<sup>12</sup>. Hence, discourse analysis is chosen as a method because of its relevance to ideological analysis.

### 3. Women's Perspectives on Trade Unions and Trade Unionism

The study focuses on the discourse about certain issues while examining interviewees' perspectives on trade unions and trade unionism, including, but not limited to, how they define trade unions, whether they find them egalitarian, the necessity for women executives in trade unions, and their opinions about trade unions in terms of their spatial structure. First, we must note that their perspectives on trade unions and trade unionism is not woman-oriented at all. If not asked specifically, none of the interviewees have either mentioned the masculine structure of trade unions, or referred to the unions in terms of the differences and challenges of being a woman, or expressed the obstacles based on organizational restrictions. The opinions of interviewees on whether or not gender equality is present in trade unions are decisive for this study. It seems that interviewees' lack of awareness of gender inequality leads them to generate contradictory discourse on the equality issue.

#### 3.1. Gender equality in trade unions

Two views came up after asking whether interviewees find trade unions egalitarian or not. The first is that an expectation of equality is irrelevant. According to this view, which draws on Islamic ideology (already a significant reference for Hak-İş), equality is not possible and therefore the goal in trade unions must be justice rather than equality — as Islam is not a religion of equality, but one of justice, and God created the world based on justice rather than equality. Many Islamist authors hold the mentality that the idea of equality is unfair to women because of the natural differences between men and women, and that such an equality is disadvantageous for women. According to this view, women's rights are already afforded by Islam and real equality is therefore to improve skills on the basis of the created nature<sup>13</sup>. One of the interviewees, Elif, made a statement that corresponds with this view:

*“No need to push so hard for equality”*

“For example, we exaggerate about ‘we will be equal.’ But we are not. If I feel happier as things are, and my nature adheres to it, I feel free. Don't try to restrict. There is no need to push so hard for equality.”

The articulation of such views legitimizes gender discrimination and creates a justification for inequality. The main point here is not whether women and men are biologically identical or different, but whether these differences lead to gender-based discrimination for women. The interviewee confuses two concepts - sex and gender - with each other. From the gender equality viewpoint, the goal is to become socially equal, not biologically. Hence, deliberately or not, the interviewee uses discriminatory discourse. Nevertheless, it is conceived that Islamic ideology and the political environment in Turkey play a role in these views. Sharing common political ideologies with Hak-İş, who increases its organizational power in an era of rising Political Islam<sup>14</sup>, The Justice and Development Party also references Islam and – as a party bearing the word ‘justice’ in its name – constantly emphasizes that men and women cannot be equal. Indeed, the party's leader Erdoğan

<sup>12</sup> Ayşe İnal, Haberi Okumak, Temuçin Yayınları, İstanbul 1996, s. 107.

<sup>13</sup> İpek Merçil, “İslam ve Feminizm” Direk, Zeynep (Der.), Cinsiyetli Olmak Sosyal Bilimlere Feminist Bakışlar, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul 2012, s. 108-109.

<sup>14</sup> Ayşe Buğra, “Labour, capital and religion: harmony and conflict among the constituency of political Islam in Turkey.” Middle Eastern Studies, 38 (2), (2002), s.187.

claimed in his speech at the Women and Justice Summit that 'Equality between women and men is against nature'<sup>15</sup>; and in another speech he stated: 'You can't put the strong and weak in the same race. Let a man and a woman run a 100m race together. Is that justice? Women run with women, and men with men. That's the way it should be. That's what pertains to creation, to nature.'<sup>16</sup>.

*"I Think there is equality"*

The second view on equality consists of partiality. On the one hand, the interviewees consider the trade unions as patriarchal and unequal and, on the other hand, exclude their own trade unions and confederation from that. The reasons for why they view their own trade unions as egalitarian are reflected through varied discourse. It would be appropriate to deal with the concept of 'value' first. All of the interviewees have pointed out that their confederation and trade union presidents significantly value them and consider women when they make decisions, and therefore there is an equal environment in their trade union. Hak-İş president's positive words in favor of women and the activities towards women in specific periods (such as March 8) are thought to have an effect on these views. Women members of Hak-İş consider the events in which they are hosted in large hotels and receive gifts as an indication of value and equality<sup>17</sup>. But generally it is men who give speeches at these events, highlighting women's roles in the household and family based upon their allegedly emotional and compassionate disposition, as well as their necessity for trade unions<sup>18</sup>. Women who are not aware of, or who are unwilling to see the inequality, are beyond questioning the masculine culture of trade unions and the events organized by men that are dominated by speeches made by men. Another of the interviewees, Derya, for instance, could not give any other example for the egalitarian approach, except for March 8 events and dinner meetings. A separate interviewee, Gülay, expressed her satisfaction as the following: "I have a chairman who supports the work of the women's committee. (...) So does our Hak-İş Confederation president Mr. Mahmut. You probably know that he supports women's work very well, and always stands by them."

But so far there have been no pro-women projects carried out by the trade union, only March 8 events organized under the confederation and training for women on 'the reconciliation of work and family life'<sup>19</sup>. The fact that this training is only provided for women is itself a sign of inequality, since family life is shared in common by both women and men. But Hak-İş considers equality together with natural differences and wants to preserve the traditional roles ascribed to women. This point of view reinforces the conviction that women's primary job is to work for their family and homes. Family-friendly jobs and part-time work are utilised by various countries as a key mechanism for ensuring gender equality. Yet some criticism has been leveled on the basis that such jobs might consolidate the 'male breadwinner' family model and adversely affect women's salary and work opportunities, rather than ensuring gender equality<sup>20</sup>. In the same vein, given that such training in Turkey is only provided for women, this will reinforce the housewife roles of women and the male breadwinner model. In Turkey, part-time jobs for women generally mean informal and precarious working conditions. Hence, providing training about the reconciliation of work and family life to only women, bears the risk that women turn to part-time work.

*"Our women prefer to remain in the background"*

Another point of discussion among the interviewees was the view that their own trade unions are egalitarian due to the fact that they hold women responsible. Özge, who thinks that her own trade

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<sup>15</sup> BBC News, (2014).

<sup>16</sup> BBC News, (2018).

<sup>17</sup> Dilek Keleş, "Türkiye'de Sendika Kadın İlişkisi: Sendikacı Kadınların Bakış Açıklarına İlişkin Bir Değerlendirme", Çalışma ve Toplum, 4 (59), (2018), s. 2066.

<sup>18</sup> Akit (2019).

<sup>19</sup> Hak-İş, (2015).

<sup>20</sup> Gill Kirton, and Anne-marie Greene "Gender, Equality and Industrial Relations in the 'New Europe': An Introduction", European Journal of Industrial Relations, 11 (2), (2005), s. 141-149.; Maria Stratigaki, "The Cooptation of Gender Concepts in EU Policies: The Case of Reconciliation of Work and Family", Social Politics, 11 (1), (2004), s. 30-56.; Sylvia Walby, "Gender Mainstreaming: Productive Tensions in Theory and Practise", Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society, 12 (3), (2005), s. 321-343.

union has an egalitarian structure, assumed a patriarchal attitude when she was reminded of the low number of women in leadership positions:

"I make offers to women, speaking words of encouragement (...) however they don't want to participate. In this sense, our women prefer to remain in the background a little. Honestly, I don't blame men too much here."

Elmas has a similar point of view: "Our ladies do not feel very active in general. (...) In this sense, in a place where the ladies do not come to the fore, you can not necessarily give an assignment to the lady. I mean, neither the shop steward nor the provincial head."

These views are frequently expressed by women who have achieved certain positions in trade unions<sup>21</sup>. The interviewees refuse to acknowledge the burden of household and family responsibilities on women and the limitations of trade unions, thus these issues are neglected and women are left alone with all these responsibilities. Therefore, household and family responsibilities mean a 'double shift' for women and pose one of the biggest challenges to women's active participation in trade unions<sup>22</sup>. And beyond this, every person has his/her own subjective conditions. While being a woman or a man does not mean the same in every time and place, the power imposed on individual behavior preferences is always variable<sup>23</sup>. Women are forced to be dependent on multiple power structures at various stages of their lives. Thus, women's experiences vary depending on power structures, and particular instances should not be generalized for all women in the trade union movement. Various subjective conditions for different women is a fact that is often neglected by many women.

*"We couldn't be here if they didn't want to"*

The interviewees who think there is an egalitarian environment in Hak-İş asserted their own position as a justification that men want to see women in leadership positions. For example, Özge stated that "Men generally say that they don't want to see women in trade unions. But, of course, this is not true for our confederation's president and executives. After all, if they had that mentality, we wouldn't have been administrators here now. We are administrators now solely because they care about and appreciate women." While Gülay pointed out that "the Hak-İş Confederation pays particular attention to this", Elif stated that "Hak-İş is an organization strongly insisting on women."

Despite the claim that women are valued at Hak-İş, it is also male-dominated like all the other trade unions, and the current positions of the interviewees does not prove that their affiliated trade union wants to see women in leadership positions. While the support that women get from their fellow male trade union and confederation workers cannot be generalized to the whole trade union movement, the same applies to Hak-İş and its relevant trade unions. These small instances are of course significant in increasing women's presence in the trade union movement, though they are not enough. Above all, women are forced to make an extraordinary effort, work harder than men, and establish themselves in order to reach a certain status in trade unions. Although some of the interviewees have had issues with the viewpoints of male members of trade unions, none of them defined trade unions as inequitable organizations. Only their own position leads them to speak positively.

### ***3.2. Women unionists in masculine spaces***

In the scope of the study, the interviewees were asked what they think about the necessity of women administrators in trade unions and the masculinity in trade unions. All interviewees think trade unions need women administrators. However, the goal of an equal trade union life was not mentioned at all as a talking point, but rather they pointed out that a woman administrator is required to understand, support, and help them with their needs. Discourse, again, was based on religious ideology and gender biased views:

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<sup>21</sup> Dilek Keleş, a.g.e. s. 2071.; Seda Topgül, a.g.e. s. 2358.

<sup>22</sup> Betül Urhan, "Görünmezlerin Görünür Olma Mücadeleleri: Çalışan Kadın Örgütlenmeleri", Çalışma ve Toplum 2 (21), (2009), s. 89.

<sup>23</sup> Caroline Ramazanoğlu, Feminizm ve Ezilmenin Çelişkileri, Pencere Yayınları, İstanbul 1998, s.39.

*"How much can you understand us, anyway..."*

"Because there is no chance that a man can understand a woman. That's because their nature is quite different. Allah has created each woman and each man with a different nature." (Özge)

*"Things are put in order"*

"Things are put in order, and regularised. People think carefully on what they say." (Elif)

"A woman provides order in the working environment." (Özge)

"As our ancestors used to say, everything women touch turns into beauty." (Elmas)

The claims that women are intrinsically disposed to the beautiful, good, and to tidiness and order are reflections of the well-known patriarchal culture. The interviewees drawing on this culture legitimise their own existence in trade unions through sexist judgments. However, the masculine language, lewd jokes, and slang talk in union meetings annoy women and cause them to stay away from such environments<sup>24</sup> — a factor which contributes to the low participation of women in trade unions. In this context, it is possible to interpret the interviewees' discourse with an underlying meaning that trade unions, despite being male-dominated spaces, are still secure spaces for women. The conservative interviewees tend to be more attentive and self-restraining, even seeing men as sexually dangerous. Thus, these statements emphasise that they feel comfortable in mixed environments; this comfort provides a legitimizing basis for their presence in the trade unions.

Derya draws an analogy between work and household life as the following: "Environments with women are always more decent, and more orderly. (...) You also do the housekeeping. Actually, a woman has been a manager since her birth. If you are decent in your domestic life, so too are you in the work life. Therefore I think women are a big factor."

Derya's discourse differentiates women from men, but links women together and presents the household as the domain of this shared experience. The 'housewife' role of the woman, as *the* person putting the house in order, fulfilling the needs of family members, and doing the housekeeping work, is thus transferred to the trade union. Yet these are jobs imposed on women by patriarchal ideology and that women are forced to learn. Such discourse establishes women in trade unions through sexist practices and renders trade unions as spatial extensions of the household. Therefore, women are not viewed as their identities as trade union workers, members, or administrators, but as their 'housewife' identities. Indeed, whatever women do, they are first conceived as housewives, while the household and domestic work are used as cultural codes in the construct of femininity. Patriarchal ideology imagines the household as a clean and innocent place which is away from the outside world and its dirt. While men are exposed to this world through work, women and children stay at home; that is, this clean and innocent place<sup>25</sup>. The analogy between the household and trade union in the discourse of the interviewees makes the trade union innocent and secure, also legitimizing women's presence in trade unions.

Gülây has a similar approach when she said: "This has a family ambiance." Such discourse also adds a different dimension to the relations between female and male workers. As a result, women's roles in the family as wife, mother, or sister are moved to trade unions, removing their sexual identities from women. It is thought that women's concern about being viewed as sexual targets leads to their presence in trade unions and the invisibility of their female identity<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, women's participation in the public life in Turkey is only possible with their 'asexual' identity isolated from its feminine character<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Seda Topgöl, a.g.e. s. 2362.

<sup>25</sup> Aksu Bora, Kadınların Sınıflı Ücretli Ev Emeği ve Kadın Öznelliğinin İnşası, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2012, s. 59-60.

<sup>26</sup> Dilek Keleş, Türkiye'de Sendikacı Kadınların Sendikalarda Var Olma Biçimleri, Yayınlanmamış Doktora Tezi, Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, (2016), s. 167.

<sup>27</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar. Metis Yayınları, İstanbul 2011, s. 160.



#### 4. The Experience of Being a Woman Trade Unionist

The prevailing patriarchal traditions and discourse impact union policies, underlying the inequality in the unions. The struggle based on equality in unions, however, contributes to a more equal working life and, thus, a more equal social life in general. In this context, while the number of women members is important, women's representation in decision-making processes is also a precondition for a democratic trade union struggle. Indeed, democracy in trade unions is an implication of equality and, therefore, it is essential to seek a balance between members and leaders<sup>28</sup>. Obviously women do not participate equally in the trade union process as do men in Turkey; but how they participate is of crucial importance in terms of the future of trade unions. The next section examines how women experience trade union activities and what they think about the processes.

##### 4.1. Women's leadership and goals

Considering the interviewees' way of being appointed as administrators and their goals, it is almost impossible to conclude that they have deliberately made the effort to take part in the trade unions' decision-making mechanisms. We see that men take the initiative and women obey.

As a worker in a Hak-İş affiliated trade union, Derya became an administrator in another union upon her assignment by the confederation. Gülay and Elmas were offered their positions, and it was even a *fait accompli* for Elmas as she expressed below with surprise: "I really don't have any expectations of myself. (...) Our chairman said, 'Mrs. Elmas, I added you to the administration.' (...) I couldn't believe this for one, one and a half months."

Similarly, Gülay expressed her surprise for the offer she received: "I didn't have many expectations. One day before the general assembly, they asked me if I could participate in the administration. And I was shocked."

The participation in the leadership positions, which is an exceptional situation for the interviewees, can be defined as a story of inclusion and exclusion, to quote Ledwith<sup>29</sup>. The story of women's long standing subordination to men in trade unions like this has been much debated. This story is one of masculine unionism against inclusive gender politics, and more recently, politics of diversity. It is a story of one step forward and two steps back, or sometimes, of two steps forward and one back. (...) The steps forward can be characterized as structural changes in trade unions which both recognize gender deficits and attempt to put in place explicit remedial measures to arrive at some form of gender equality<sup>30</sup>. The difference here is that the interviewees are not part of this story. Depending on the development of a male-dominated trade union movement in Turkey, women's lack of knowledge and self-confidence seems like a reinforcing factor in their positions of subordination to men — an aspect also accounting for the low number of women in the trade union movement. The underlying reason why women leave the initiative to men is thought to be the lack of self-confidence, coupled with such a lack of knowledge and experience. Not surprisingly, both Gülay and Elmas pointed out that they hardly had a grip on the matter. The affiliate trade unions of the interviewees enabled direct representation of women, instead of providing consciousness-raising activities to promote and pave the way for them. Therefore, there was no movement or demands from the grassroots level. That being said, for women, the feeling of incompetence or lack of self-confidence still remains. Various strategies have been proposed in order to balance the numbers of women and men and increase the rate of women in leadership positions. First of all, it is argued that it is necessary to encourage participation in the trade unions and ensure that the newly active women members feel that they have a voice in their union. In addition, developing basic skills and setting their own agenda must be provided for women<sup>31</sup>. Such applications may increase women's nomination to be represented in

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<sup>28</sup> Sue Ledwith and Fiona Colgan, "Tackling Gender, Diversity and Trade Union Democracy", Colgan, Fiona and Sue Ledwith (Ed.), *Gender, Diversity and Trade Unions*, Routledge, London 2002, pp. 4.

<sup>29</sup> 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Sue Ledwith, "Gender Politics in Trade Unions. The Representation of Women Between Exclusion and Inclusion.", *European Review of Labour and Research*, 18 (2), (2012), pp. 186.

<sup>31</sup> Michell Kaminski and Elaine K. Yakura, "Women's Union Leadership: Closing The Gender Gap", *Working USA: The Journal of Labor and Society*, 11, (2008), s. 466-471.

decision-making positions and their motivation. Therefore, instead of directly choosing particular women for leadership positions, inclusive work to train women unionists is considered to have more lasting results. Additionally, internalization of patriarchal values by women leads them to take for granted the processes and initiatives of the male trade unionists. The interviewees have made no effort to be part of decision-making bodies. In this sense, their opinions about being at the administrative level are noteworthy. The interviewees, who are put on the list by male administrators, almost show gratitude towards their chairman:

“Our chairman deemed me worthy of this duty. (...) And I am proud of this. Never have I demanded - I mean neither financially nor morally - a position or anything else.” (Elmas)

“My selection as a candidate started when they deemed me worthy of that and put me on the list. (...) I think this is the value they place on me.” (Özge)

The possibility of trade unions based on equality can be achieved by providing women and men equal freedom to elect and be elected for decision-making positions. But it is a fact that the interviewees naturalize the masculine structure and comply with the patriarchal culture of trade unions. In fact, this is also a reflection of women's obedience to the patriarchal culture in general. Indeed, the sexism pervading every aspect of public life — from national assemblies to trade unions, from workplaces to professional chambers — is relevant to women's private lives. The factor impeding women's participation in public life is the way in which their private lives are lived. Their obedience and views of recognition inherent in how women live their private lives are consequences of the modern patriarchal political conceptions<sup>32</sup>. The obedience of the interviewees to the executive men at trade unions is a result of the obedience to their husbands or fathers at home.

*“They did all they could not to elect us...”*

Two of the interviewees — Özge and Elif — who are founding members as well as executives of their trade union, have participated in an election, but could only be elected in the third round. Both think that it was because they are women.

“They didn't want me because I am a woman. They did all they could not to elect us.” (Elif)

“The election was tough. It was tough in the sense that (...) our nomination as women annoyed the men because the ratio of women workers was 1%, and we were elected in the third round.” (Özge)

It is possible to say that an ideological association prevails and interviewees tend to favor their own trade unions in any case. Taking into account the general status of women in organizations, it is evident that they are not in positions requiring power and authority, while men, on the contrary, hold managerial positions. Instead of taking place in the hierarchical level, women become workers and find themselves in less powerful and less prestigious organizations<sup>33</sup>. The troublesome process of the election period for the interviewees can be viewed in this respect - men do not want to share their power, while women submit to this assertion.

When their goals in trade unions were asked, the interviewees expressed no clear opinion. Although four of the interviewees said they can continue as executives in trade unions, they noted they will not put any effort into maintaining these positions.

*“I didn't have ambitious goals...”*

“If God will aid me in such a position when I do my job well, I think he will dispatch either someone or something to allow me maintain this position. Therefore, I never had such ambitious goals.”

“If our chairman doesn't want me on that list, I'll never object. (...) Neither will I put effort into this, but if our chairman sees fit and puts me on the list, then why not? Of course I'll continue.” (Elmas)

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<sup>32</sup> Eser Köker, “Saklı Konuşmalar”, Özbek, Meral (Der.), Kamusal Alan, Hil Yayınları, İstanbul (2004), s. 543.

<sup>33</sup> Rosabeth Moss Kanter, “Women and the Structure of Organizations: Explorations in Theory and Behaviour”, Marcia, Millman and Rosabeth Moss Kanter (Ed.), Another Voice Doubleday, New York 1975, s. 35.

While male unionists blame women for being passive in trade union activities<sup>34</sup>, women leave these decisions to men. On the other hand, men make women feel insecure by telling them that trade unionism is a 'man's business' or that trade unions do not have any responsibility to empower women. To transform this contradictory situation into an egalitarian trade union environment, the male unionists will need to put in an active effort. Whatever their sex, only when everyone participates in trade union activities will unions gain a more egalitarian base. This entails a transformation of the patriarchal mentality in both men and women. Otherwise, trade unions will continue to be organizations governed through a 'male democracy'<sup>35</sup>.

#### ***4.2. Women in trade union relations***

The way interviewees experienced the unionist process and their interactions with male unionists during this process, is an important factor in contributing to the transformation of the male-dominant structure of trade unions. In this regard, interviewees were asked about the meaning of being a woman executive in unions; what they feel about it; what challenges (if any) it poses; how they feel in the spaces of trade unions; and their exchanges with men in the unions. In this context, a crucial point is whether the interviewees consider themselves necessary as women in the managerial positions of trade unions. None of the interviewees have interpreted their own presence in light of the male-dominated structure of unions and the difference of women's experiences. Their lack of awareness about gender segregation makes them less likely to question the unequal structure of trade unions.

*"You should put aside gender differences"*

"You should put aside gender differences and act according to your managerial skills. I don't want to have a say as a woman. (...) For I think that being a woman only adds aesthetic value through gentle touches." (Özge)

"I think we should think as humans..." (Derya)

"No discrimination between man and woman, every human is necessary. That is, you should come to a place if you know something. In my opinion, this doesn't necessarily entail being a woman." (Elif)

What the interviewees say is something pertaining to an equal social life; but male dominance is prevalent in every aspect of life. Thus, the problem is that men should discard gender discrimination, not women. Interviewees talk as if there is a blind insistence that women must be executives, even without mentioning the problem of the male-dominated structure of trade unions — which is a reflection of a patriarchal perspective. The presence of women being represented in managerial bodies is, however, an important factor to transform the patriarchal structure of trade unions. Indeed, while women in lower positions of organizations reinforces the gender order, their presence in leadership positions can have disruptive effects on this order<sup>36</sup>. A study conducted in Britain suggests that the presence of women unionists 'serves to dispel the myth that trade unionism is for and about men, creating a "role model" effect' for other women. The study also shows that women challenge men, claiming their own presence in trade unions<sup>37</sup>. None of the Hak-İş member interviewees have examined their own presence in trade unions in this or any similar aspect.

It is common knowledge that women's problems find little place in trade unions' agendas and that these fade away in the general agenda. Male unionists adopt a masculine perspective even while supporting women's rights, reinforcing segregationist practices. For that reason, women unionists' contribution to creating a specific agenda for women and equal trade union struggle may be enormous.

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<sup>34</sup> Betül Urhan, a.g.e. s.116.

<sup>35</sup> Derya Demirdizen ve Kuvvet Lordoğlu, "Türkiye'de Sendika İçi Demokrasi Ya Da Bir İmkânsızın Arayışı Mı?", V. Sosyal Haklar Uluslararası Sempozyumu Bildiri Kitabı, Petrol-İş Sendikası Yayınları, İstanbul 2013, s. 240.

<sup>36</sup> Kevin Stainback, Sibyl Kleiner and Sheryl Skaggs, a.g.e. pp. 113.

<sup>37</sup> Gill Kirton, "Sustaining and Developing Women's Trade Union Activism: A Gendered Project", Gender, Work and Organization, 6 (4), (1999), pp. 217-219.

Some theories suggest that 'women in positions of organizational power may erode gender-linked inequality among subordinates'<sup>38</sup>.

The interviewees were asked about their feelings and opinions of being at a leadership position. It is thought that women's feelings and opinions, and whether their job satisfies them are important in terms of maintaining women's struggle. Gülay approaches to her own presence pragmatically, expressing her happiness with these words: "I can see my women member's needs more clearly." It can be said that the rest of the interviewees are gender-blind in general.

*"I feel flattered."*

"There is no difference with male executives. But let me tell you one thing, it is nice. I mean, 3 women among 20 men are really nice. (...) They are kind to you, they are gentle to you. (...) For one thing, this makes women feel flattered. Secondly, you feel you are deemed worthy. For instance, when we organize a dinner party somewhere: "Where should we do it, Mrs. Tuba?" You know, your opinions are actually valued. I think this is an advantage of being one person." (Derya)

The interviewee makes her presence meaningful through men and seems to have adopted the social judgment that it is women's side that needs to be treated politely. The idea that various organizational activities should be managed by women or that their opinions should be taken into account can be viewed completely as a reflection of the patriarchal culture. The mentality here implies that women are more apt to organize social events due to their domestic responsibilities of organizing housekeeping work. Yet it is not surprising that the interviewee who adopted sexist judgments sees the low participation of women in trade unions as an advantage for herself. The lack of collective consciousness is seen as a cause for such thoughts.

*"It makes one feel strong outside. But weak inside..."*

It is important how the managerial behavior or culture in organizations are affected by the sex ratios of executives. In a place dominated by male executives, a masculine culture would prevail<sup>39</sup>. The masculine culture of trade unions, as organizations with male domination, is a compelling factor for women members and executives. Furthermore, the functioning of trade unions based on a structure of competition, power and hierarchy either estranges women from unions or entails them to struggle even harder in order to overcome this structure. Elif feels weak in the masculine culture of the trade union:

"It makes one feel strong outside. But weak inside. When looking from outside, a woman is a board of manager member of the trade union. So this has a good, nice force. But inside, you remain single as a woman. In fact, if there is no women-men discrimination, or more precisely, no gender discrimination, then you wouldn't feel yourself alone. But (...) if someone continuously puts an emphasis on things because you are a woman, and tries to keep you away from something, then you feel the disadvantage of being woman pretty well."

Although Elif supports justice instead equality in trade unions, she has experienced gender inequality as a unionist; but her ideological tendency prevents her from specifying the situation clearly. As 'a way of making sense of transactions' or behaviors, gender 'exists not in persons but in transactions'<sup>40</sup>, and gender processes affects behaviors, thoughts and feelings as well as interactions between individuals — and in turn, it has an impact on shaping the structure of social institutions. In this context, gender inequality can be thought of 'as an ordinal hierarchy between men and women in material sources, power, and status'<sup>41</sup>. This attribution of trade unions, as the essential actors in the working life, to men in terms of space and activities can be viewed as a reflection of this ordinal hierarchy — in other words, as an indication of men's power. Deliberately or not, women comply with this masculine structure, whose rules are set by men, in order to find a place in the career ladder.

<sup>38</sup> Kevin Stainback, Sibyl Kleiner and Sheryl Skaggs, a.g.e. pp. 113.

<sup>39</sup> Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Women and the Structure of Organizations: Explorations in Theory and Behaviour", Marcia, Millman and Rosabeth Moss Kanter (Ed.), Another Voice Doubleday, New York 1975, s. 38.

<sup>40</sup> Jennifer Coates, Language and Gender: A Reader, Blackwell, Cornwall 1998, s. 12.; Mary Crawford, Talking Difference, Sage Publications, London 1997, s. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Cecilia L. Ridgeway, Framed By Gender. Oxford University Press, New York 2011, s.3.

Women's spatial and personal relations with trade unions and male unionists, in this context, seem to fit into the patriarchal setting. In general, all the interviewees mentioned they have not encountered any challenges to their presence as women executives in trade unions. Even two of them referred with a sexist approach to the advantages of being a woman: "Spatially I feel very content. We have three manager rooms here. For example, they said, they give priority to me. 'Which room will you choose?' they asked." (Elmas)

To let someone choose anything is a matter of courtesy in public life, and the ways of behavior that needs attention (by either men or women) should not be perceived or presented as privileges to women. Indeed, neither is a simple polite behavior an indication of equality nor do women expect trade unions to let them choose their room.

Derya explains the secret of feeling comfortable in the trade union as a female executive: "If many men are there, wear pants then. If many men are there, keep your skirt below your knees."

Women's clothes are never just about themselves and always indicate something. On the other hand, what menswear signifies is not clear all the time<sup>42</sup>. Patriarchal ideology is always a determining factor on women's clothes and a woman is assessed according to what she wears, being ascribed political or moral meanings. A woman's cloth functions as a means of social control upon her, and her decency and outfit are associated. In this respect, while outfit can be defined in terms of being seductive or not, male sexuality is legitimized in accordance and all moral responsibility is left to women. From this viewpoint, Derya's comfort in the trade union is due to her compliance with the masculine order. Though choosing what to wear according to men is a sign of a sexist and unequal situation.

Interviewees' relations with men at trade unions have also sexist contents. While the fact how culture defines biology and its relevant social perceptions specify women as cheerful, compassionate, caring and emotional, men are characterized as serious, tough and rough. These sexist perceptions make Elmas a 'source of joy' at the union, and make Özge to look 'like a flower'.

*"You are our source of joy"*

"They say "You are our source of joy" because of my cheerful, natural behaviors. (...) A lady brings some more liveliness." (Elmas)

"A lady must be like a flower, I think she is like a flower, I mean, you already make the place beautiful if you be like a flower." (Özge)

It is thought-provoking that women's initial discourses about their presence and relations with men in trade unions are expressed in this way. For it is no duty of women to bring joy or order to any place, or make it look like flowers. Nor are such characteristics inherent in women. These are all acquired attributes, labelled on women by the patriarchal culture. Elmas and Derya's relations with male take the forms of 'elder sister-brother' or 'elder brother-sister': "I told I am elder sister, but no sex difference between siblings should exist. (...) I am one of the elder persons in our organization and among our members. Most of them call me 'sister.'" (Elmas)

"In my union, we are like brothers and sisters. I mean, call my chairman "Brother Zekeriya" (...) 'Yes Sister', he replies." (Derya)

The emphasis of the interviewees on the sister role denotes a situation of suppressed sexuality leading to sexual propriety. This discourse emphasizes a woman freed of her sexuality, laying at the same time all the burden of moral responsibilities of male-female relationships to women. For 'sisterhood' isolates women from their sexual identity and desires, turning women into 'innocent' beings, while placing immorality on the opposite of the sister identity. This viewpoint can also be interpreted as the reflection of protecting oneself morally from external threats and seeking acceptance in public life. Since women's participation in public life in Turkey is only possible with an 'asexual' identity isolated from its feminine character<sup>43</sup>. Women's emphasis on these roles reproduces the sexist mentality and practices on the one hand, but can also have a subversive effect on power on the other.

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<sup>42</sup> Aksu Bora, a.g.e. s.140-141.

<sup>43</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, *Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar*. Metis Yayınları, İstanbul 2011, s. 160.

Social institutions are domains of political processes and power relations in which gender hierarchies are both created and questioned<sup>44</sup>. Trade unions, like all domains of working life, are seen as men's power domain, and therefore men's aim to make women invisible is realized through this discourse of 'sister' or 'mother'. Indeed, motherhood or sisterhood belong to the private sphere, i.e., the household. Establishing such an affinity in trade unions does also underscore a family ideology. Family is a privileged institution of patriarchal relations; and different hierarchies for men and women, and the separation of spheres of activities for different sexes are inherent in patriarchy. Accordingly, what falls under women's and men's spheres of activities are household for the former and working life for the latter. In other words, women are restrained with the household; and such women are under the control of men<sup>45</sup>. In trade unions which function as men's sphere, the affinity relations subordinate women to men, relegating women to lower rungs of the hierarchical ladder. While Elif opposes this situation, the other interviewees accept to be 'mother' or 'sister', even assuming these roles voluntarily — since the household and affinity/kinship structures are taken for granted as something normal and desirable due to the family ideology. Thus, women's presence is regarded normal in trade unions as family settings. Women legitimizes their passage from the 'proper' family to the 'improper' external world in this way. The family ideology thus serves men by relegating women to lower rungs of the hierarchical ladder on the one hand, while serving women as a legitimizing basis on the other.

Elif criticized interviewees for assuming the roles of 'mother' or 'sister'. However, she has chosen to act like a male in her relations with men, claiming this as a comfort in the trade union.

*"I leave aside my femininity."*

"Why am I comfortable, it is in fact because I act like a man? At one point I leave aside my femininity. Starting to behave like them, doing like them. (...) I mean, even my sitting position now is different, I'm not sitting like a woman. My speaking, my utterance are like men's. (...) 'Male Elif.'"

Elif, like the other interviewees, has also preferred to accommodate herself to the patriarchal structure and therefore, again there is a tendency towards propriety and seeking acceptance in public life — but this time in a different way. She also relinquishes her femininity, but instead of assuming the sister role, she prefers to act like a man. Whatever the manner, all of these choices will continue to make trade unions male-dominated and women invisible. In light of these points of views, all the interviewees pointed out that it is not difficult to work with men at trade unions; since the interviewees work in trade unions by establishing family relations and conforming to the masculine culture.

## Conclusion

In this study, the perspectives of women members of Hak-İş are discussed through the case of equality. It is possible to conclude, in this context, that awareness of gender discrimination is the key determinant. Within the scope of the study, it is seen that the interviewees lack awareness about this subject, and even confuse the concepts of sex and gender. Additionally, it is possible to say that the interviewees — although not explicitly pointed out — accept the masculine culture of trade unions and conform to it. Based on these points of views, the interviewees tend to see trade unions as egalitarian organizations and show their own presence as a proof for this. However, neither is it possible to generalize this situation to the trade union movement, nor can we consider five women executives as an indication of equality. Overlooking the fact that trade unions are unequal organizations — while it is obvious — may prevent any move forward, since problem-solving begins at the very point of recognizing it.

That being said, the effort of Hak-İş to provide representation of women in decision-making mechanisms is of course important at least in terms of bringing women into view in trade unions. But it is not enough to ensure gender equality, because the masculine culture, sexist practices and discourses that dominate trade unions pose the risk of confining women in traditional value judgments and patriarchal practices. Obviously this would impede the accumulation of women experiences in the

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<sup>44</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, a.g.e. s. 187.

<sup>45</sup> Caroline Ramazanoğlu, *Feminizm ve Ezilmenin Çelişkileri*, Pencere Yayınları, İstanbul 1998, s. 199.

trade union movement, making the specificities of these experiences invisible. And as a result, a formal equality – nothing more than a matter of image – will remain.

Trade unionist women's determination in struggle and critical perspectives to the structure of trade unions are extremely important to overcome the male-dominant unionism. That being said, the increase of women in trade unions would motivate other women to participate in unions and accelerate this process — which in turn will make it easier to set the agenda in relation to women's problems and contribute to the transformation of the masculine culture of unions. But at the end of the study, it is evident — in spite of the interviewees' claims to the contrary — that the existence and aim of an equal trade union life are out of question. The interviewed women have a patriarchal and sexist perspective as much as men. Their discourses reveal that these women have practices and thoughts in line with the masculine culture of trade unions. It is thought that this situation is reinforcing and will reinforce the male-dominated structure of trade unions.

A transformation in the masculine culture of trade unions first entails a transformation in the mentality of male unionists. Equally important is the change of women's mentality. Women need to give up behavioral patterns which conform to the masculine culture and get rid of sexist judgments. Otherwise, the masculine culture will prevail even though the number of women in trade unions increases; thus, women's problems will continue to remain invisible. The most important task here falls to the trade unions: it is crucial to devote extensive work for both women and men in order to raise trade union consciousness and ensure gender equality.

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