

## 6 “Where are they doing politics?”

### Women’s cooperatives as sites of constellations of power

*Selin Akyüz and Kürşat Çınar*

#### Introduction

Doing politics is a contested term. The practices within the act of politics have been deeply analyzed by scholars of political science, sociology, psychology, history, and anthropology. Especially when one focuses on the questions of who is doing politics and where and when s/he is doing politics, the potential answers closely concern feminist scholars. The discussions may extend from the subject of doing politics and the spatial construction of the politics to the issue of performativity. Butler’s canonical term of performativity links performances, gender, and “doing”. For Butler, while gender is a “repetition of acts (...) which are discontinuous”, the audience and the actors themselves “come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (1990, p. 4). Masculinity and femininity and all related binary depictions are also associated with certain practices, discourses, and spaces. Papart and Zalewski (2008, p. 10) claim that some performances of gender produce and also are produced, and that “metaphors act as motors of discourse which work to frame and naturalize masculinist assumptions”. That is, metaphors and assumptions reinforce the relation between masculinity and power, and hence naturalize masculine domination. This naturalization also contributes “to the ongoing struggle to maintain gender hierarchies” (Zalewski & Papart, 1998, p. 203) by which certain qualities, such as aggression, rationality, and bravery are valued as power enhancing and are defined as masculine. This understanding offers a very crystallized narrative of masculinity, or in other words, the rhetorical work of exclusion. While men are identified as the dominating one, women are recognized as the other. A discursive strategy operates in which the masculine/feminine dichotomy is constitutive of the public/private dichotomy (Zalewski & Papart, 1998; Papart & Zalewski, 2008). At this point, what is critical is analyzing the practices and discourses that are circulated across multiple scales. In line with Kofman and Peake’s (1990, p. 315) apt argument “that the political should not be located in specific institutions and that it can take place at any level”, it is important to analyze networks, processes, and overarching structures that shape women’s representation in different spheres of life. Through a lens of feminist critiques, public and private spheres blur

and the multifaceted dimensions of (in)formal networks, or in a broader sense, the inhabited spaces of our lives, especially “local action gain salience” (Secor, 2001, p. 193).

Women’s representation in politics, at national and at local levels, has been mostly examined in literature. Studies on women’s representation in national politics has mainly analyzed their conduct of politics in political parties and parliament, and has aimed to reveal the (in)visible obstacles that they have been facing (Tekeli, 1979; Arat, 1985; Çakır, 2005; Kasapoğlu & Özerkmen, 2013). Very important studies on the absence of women in local politics have also touched upon the “barriers” in Turkey (Alkan, 2005; Cindoglu, 2011). The works that focus on female mayors well map different gendered experiences of women at local level (Alkan, 2006; 2009; Koyuncu & Sumbas, 2016). There are also researches that question different discourses and networks that hinder women’s political agency with respect to masculinist assumptions (Alkan, 2009; Yaras, 2014; Yıldırım et al., 2017). The patriarchal gaze has marked women in politics as wives/mothers/daughters and, thus, limits their agency. Women have faced a more direct patriarchal control in cities, acting as representatives of political parties’ local branches. The conceptualization of “female local politician” is actively created through traditional values and expected gendered roles, hence constructing power relationships and negotiating the boundaries of inclusion/exclusion. According to Cindoglu and Unal (2014), women’s public credibility has been communicated through their sexuality and renders them “fragile”. Masculinist assumptions intervene to their bodies and construct “suitable” places, dictating the boundaries of where they can act within different layers of political action. As stated by feminist scholars, actions limiting mobility of women and their marginalized status “have had a reproducing impact on gender asymmetry via the social space of localities, are obstacles for, not only a more democratic society and realizing the principle values of local self-government, but also women’s empowerment and full citizenship” (Alkan, 2009, pp. 48–9).

Other than thinking within the fixed boundaries and/or dualities, questioning alternative sites has the potential to open new avenues of discussions. Hence, women’s cooperatives not being commercial business model per se—operating on principles intrinsic to conducting business such as negotiation, bargaining, book keeping, contract signing, etc.—provide a fertile ground to analyze women’s engagement with local authorities as both recipient and provider. Especially clientelist relationships that they have been developing within local networks and authorities and their decisive role in structuring informal politics provide venues of political participation beyond voting or representation in formal politics. Feminist political geography in general, and electoral geography in particular, interprets these sites and analyzes how women spatialize different forms of being political. Mapping different layers of women’s political engagement through the “conduct” of cooperatives vis-à-vis local authorities is important at this point. How do the members of cooperatives negotiate with local actors? How do “party

support” and “political capital” interact to “gain salience”? By scrutinizing these alternative venues as spaces of conducting politics, this work makes a humble step towards transgressing fixed dualities and formal/institutional places of doing politics. In addition, so as to answer Kandiyoti’s call for “ethnographic specificity” for developing the literature of feminist electoral geography, it is also valuable to map gendered social bases of geographies of party support in Turkey (2011). Turkey offers an interesting case not only because of its low level of women’s political participation at local level but also its political space as a venue for conducting politics in its polarized atmosphere, especially the schism between the secular vs. the conservative segments of society. Due to increasing social interactions, women have been involved with different actors—not only new spaces for doing politics but also new forms of presence constructed. Transgressing place-based politics offer us new “topographies” (Sharp, 2007) of women where processes and networks become more crystallized.

Other than being in open resistance to public and private dualism, this research focuses on spaces within, behind, and above the “designated” spaces for conducting politics. Taking the categories of public and private, formal and informal as not distinctively delineated but rather blurred into and/or overlapping one another would widen the feminist lens to understand masculinized local politics. So as not to limit the understanding of women’s political engagement, such a perspective would enlighten “new” dimensions for women’s participation in local politics and, also in gendered performances of politics. Upon this rationale, this work analyzes women’s cooperatives in Turkey as channeling women’s voices into municipal and national authorities.

In this framework, this research will first describe the milestones of feminist electoral geography and map women’s cooperatives in Turkey. After a brief discussion on the methodology of the research, the study will discuss women as patrons and women as clients within the conduct of local politics at different levels in contemporary Turkey.

### **Feminist electoral geography**

Kofman and Peake’s (1990) argument on the absence of gender in the understanding of spatialized forms of politics and Bell’s (1995) call for integrating sexuality in political geography reformed the foci of the electoral geography discipline. The integration of different sites of power relations, oppression, and domination, has also challenged political geographers’ understanding of territoriality and provided new discussions around multiple understandings of power and the political. A diverse array of topics, namely democracy, nationalism, borders, sexuality, cultural politics, warfare, and citizenship, were encompassed by scholars, but this diversity made it difficult for the development of the discipline as it led to fragmentation (Brown & Staeheli, 2003, p. 248). Brown and Staeheli, in their important work categorize the literature around two main questions: what is political and where is it located

(2003, p. 248)? They describe three approaches to answer these questions and these three interrelated framings mark a “nuanced attention to the social construction of the spatial scale” (2003, p. 253). The first is distributional. This approach mainly evolves around the understanding of power to and power over. Distributional political geography addresses patterns and relations of inequality on the basis of “who gets what, where, when, why, and how” (2003, p. 249). While drawing attention to the unequal distribution of power, they also highlight the significant role of scale, or in other words, with a feminist lens, patriarchal spatial structures. The second approach is the antagonistic one. This perspective focuses on the conflictual dimensions of any interactions that characterize the political (2003, p. 251). The exclusive places that are tactically used by politicians in particular are in the scope of this perspective, especially in the framework of how women construct “their” politics spatially on mobilizing their “constituencies” by using different “sites” (Fincher & Panelli, 2001). The third approach is the constitutive one. This emphasizes processes within the act of politics (Brown & Staeheli, 2003, p. 252). This perspective marks the significance of “spaces of home, neighborhood, work, religious observance, and community, (...) in these spaces that political subjects may be formed and new politics created” (2003, p. 252). While the antagonistic approach develops an exclusive “we”, this one attempts to understand the ways in which an inclusive “we” can be formed. The authors give the example of Secor’s work (2003) on the politics of Islamist parties in Turkey. In her work, Secor (2003) analyzes the ways in which women claim certain spaces and, for the author, this is an ongoing statement to the city that has become visible during women’s daily lives. According to Brown and Staeheli, in this perspective, “politics is constitutive, rather than constituted” (2003, p. 253).

Upon this outline, it is important to discuss power relations and spatialized forms of politics from a feminist standpoint. Political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists have well argued that networks within institutions in and the general discourse on local politics is masculinist, and they have analyzed different constructions of those gendered networks, institutions, and the resultant discourse. However, an engagement with feminist geography is missing in the understanding of local politics. While doing politics exceeds designated spaces, the political self with her/his gendered characteristics is actively produced in the relations. Hence, it is very important to read spatial power relations and the “politics of location” (Mountz & Hyndman, 2006, p. 455) from a feminist perspective. Here, at this point, there is an important nuance that one shall be careful about. Feminists have well documented the “less valued” and relatively invisible side of (in)formal politics: “Women have been shown to be strongly involved in local, community-based activities, campaigning for example around issues to do with housing, education, food, safe play areas for children, and so on and so forth” (Laurie et al., 1997, p. 132). While the gendered processes within the act of politics, as discussed by the literature, are in parallel with domestic roles of women, this understanding reproduces the public and private binary. As discussed by

Yaras, there is a need for “different analytical tools to analyze the interaction between the gender roles in the institutions of politics and in other social institutions” (2014, p. 111). Feminist political geography has the potential to offer such tools as it focuses on the intersecting sites of informal activities and gendered political engagements. In addition, feminist electoral geography opens wider venues as it questions the interactions between political cleavages and geographies of party support.

Electoral geography has traditionally focused on voting behaviors, party systems, and regionalization, or in other words, institutionalized politics (Woolstencroft, 1980; De Miguel, 2017; Kavianirad & Rasouli, 2014). Studies on electoral geography revealed the significance of scale while analyzing geographies of party support patterns, voter turnout trends, voter cleavages, and regionalization (Meleshevich, 2006; Sui & Hugill, 2004; West, 2005; Agnew, 1996; Rohla et al., 2018). However, there is lack of research that integrates the feminist lens into the analysis of these scales. Especially, other than the works on gendered electoral behavior (Secor, 2004; McClurg et al., 2012), studies on ideological preferences and processes that manifest social cleavages may evince channels and sites that link “political culture, patriarchal structures, and patterns of women’s representation in particular settings” (Secor, 2004, p. 265).

McGing (2014, p. 9) marks an important point when she writes “numerous empirical studies, mostly in political science, have tested the extent to which women ‘make a difference’ to politics. The work of electoral geographers provides insight here: if women representatives are making a difference, *where* are they doing?” She asks an important question as most researches focus on parliament and other institutional spaces: “are feminist political scientists exploring the wrong places?” (McGing, 2014, p. 9). The convenience of “working at home” facilitates access to networks, working with interest groups to gain salience and also funding for the local area (Cain et al., 1984 cited in McGing, 2014, p. 9). While there is research on women as voter and voted (Richardson & Freedman, 1995; Norris, 1996; Childs, 2004), there is a lack of studies on the role of party ideologies and political cleavages. In this framework, Secor’s (2004, p. 261) apt question has the potential to add significant insights: “how [do] social cleavages and geographies of party support interact to provide particular constellations of power and support in a society?”

### **Patron-client relations and their significance in spatialized constructions of politics**

According to Cinar,

clientelism is a selective, particularistic, and hierarchical mutual support system in which politicians and political parties offer material favors (such as jobs and goods) to electors in exchange for political support. It is selective and particularistic because it is targeted toward an exclusive

group of voters based on their political preferences, thereby discriminating against the remainder of the society.

(2017, p. 109)

Clientelism is hierarchical as it entails an asymmetrical relationship between a powerful politician (be it national or local) and his/her “client” of material and social backing (see also, Stokes et al., 2013). Clientelism by its nature is based on inclusion *and* exclusion of certain segments of society based on political inclinations and preferences. It incorporates a stick-and-carrot approach in which it entails both rewarding mechanisms for loyal clients (in the form of material support as well as provision of social networks at the local and national level) and punishing those who are disloyal to the political patron (in the form of obstructing business contracts or firing or eliminating “unruly” mavericks, etc.). Clientelism is prevalent in societies in which the state fails to provide citizens with even basic services (such as security, infrastructure, and health). This is especially the case for poorer citizens who cannot afford these services on their own and people who live in isolated localities beyond the state’s full coverage of basic public goods (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). To this regard, clientelism stands as a substitute for such citizens, whereby they can get access to material and social benefits from their political patrons in exchange for their political support.

Linking clientelism to the realms of political geography and electoral geography, we observe that clientelism comes in different forms in different spatial settings. On the one hand, rural clientelism, which entails normative bonds of deference and loyalty to the local patron and Weberian notions of traditional authority, is usually observed in underdeveloped and secluded localities, such as Andalucía and Galicia in Spain, Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia in Turkey, and rural sections of Thailand (Cinar, 2016; Hicken, 2007). On the other hand, in urban forms of clientelism (which is more prevalently observed in the urban periphery), there is competition between different providers (aka political machines) for the provision of selective and particularistic incentives in a Downsian framework of politics in which political actors are motivated by desire for power, income, and prestige (Cinar, 2017). Urban clientelism is salient in many parts of the world, including Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico (Stokes, 2005; Magaloni, 2006), as well as in Turkey (Bayraktar & Altan, 2013; Sayarı, 2014; White, 2002). Within the realm of political and electoral geography, patron-client relationships act as linkages between the local and national political arenas (Sayarı, 2014, p. 657). In many settings, clientelism incorporates the horizontal social networks of mutual help and assistance as well as vertical networks of patronage relations (White, 2002). To this end, as is the case for the women in women’s cooperatives (the focus group of this chapter), people may become both the “patron” and the “client” in those relations in which a person explores clientelistic relations with local and national politicians (Bayraktar & Altan, 2013), while the same person offers clientelistic services to the members of her cooperative in the form of jobs.



The study of clientelism at the intersection of feminist studies and political and electoral geography offers us a fertile ground for research. In light of an extensive fieldwork based on women's cooperatives in Turkey, this chapter aims to shed light on these linkages and how women aspire to increase their share in "distributional" socioeconomics and politics, look for ways to cope with "antagonistic" interactions in public life, and "constitute" new forms of presence in expanding spatial construction of politics. While the major focus of our analysis will be the role of patron-client relationships in shaping women's interactions in socioeconomic and political life, we offer several other insights regarding the functions of women's cooperatives in new dimensions of women's presence in the public realm.

### **Feminist political geography at work: The case of women's cooperatives in Turkey**

Women's cooperatives are unique organizations thanks to their economic as well as social targets of attaining affluence, equality, and social progress while also (mostly) preserving a horizontal, non-hierarchical organizational structure (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Eccarius-Kelly, 2006; Ferguson & Kepe, 2011; Jones et al., 2012; Majee & Hoyt, 2011). Both throughout the world and in Turkey, the main case study of this research, the scope of operations of women's cooperatives, spans various sectors such as agriculture, handicrafts, food, and child and elderly care (Bacon, 2010; Cinar et al., 2019; Datta & Gailey, 2012; Ferguson & Kepe, 2011). According to a recent survey of women's cooperatives in Turkey, out of 63 active cooperatives, 42 are identified as enterprise cooperatives (67 percent) and 18 are agricultural cooperatives (29 percent), while the remaining cooperatives operate in small arts, consumers, and manufacturing (Duguid et al., 2015).

This chapter will focus on the varying functions of women's cooperatives in the creation and expansion of the spatial construction of politics at the individual and group levels, exploring the ways women engage in interactions with several political actors at the local and national levels and how this relates to their presence in the public realm.

In our research, we conducted an extensive fieldwork in 2017 on women's cooperatives throughout Turkey. A recent World Bank report on women's cooperatives states that there were 63 active cooperatives (Duguid et al., 2015), though this number reduced significantly due to the emergency rule in Turkey between July 2016 and July 2018 (several women's cooperatives were closed down, especially in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey during the emergency rule). In our fieldwork, we contacted 23 women's cooperatives throughout Turkey, which corresponds to nearly half of the currently active cooperatives for the time being (see Figure 6.1 for our fieldwork map). In our study, we employed a non-random, purposive, and maximum variation sampling method so as to make sure the range of people and sites from which the sample is selected is representative of the larger population geographically, socioeconomically, and politically. In our research, we conducted





semi-structured in-depth interviews with several members of women's cooperatives. In nine of the women's cooperatives, we were able to conduct group interviews with multiple members of women's cooperatives assuming different positions in the cooperatives. Individual in-depth interviews lasted around an hour, while group interviews in each cooperative lasted around two to three hours. To ensure the privacy and anonymity of our respondents, we use pseudonyms throughout the article.

### **Women in the distributional networks of politics and socioeconomics**

The questions of “who gets what, where, when, why, and how” in the distributional aspects of social constructions and divisions of power (both political and resultant social and economic powers) shed light on the patriarchal spatial structures and how women deal, cope, and bargain with these structures. In our research, we have found that some women's cooperatives aspire to create their own spaces in the public realm so as to be more independent from the constraining forces of patriarchal and political structures.

We do not want a political actor or agency above us. The municipality offered us help but we did not want it. We do not want to be one of the propaganda tools of the machine politics. Some of the cooperatives work under the patronage of mayors—the provision of subsidies, workplace, money, etc. Whenever the mayor changes, the cooperatives are affected very badly. They would not have been affected this way if they had been more impartial to politics. Same goes for the cooperatives in the Southeast Anatolia region—they are also dependent on municipalities. They have been closed down after the emergency rule.

(Solmaz, Ankara)

Solmaz's narrative well exemplifies how women are well aware of the masculinist networks that function within local politics. This also marks how women explicitly estimate the cost-benefit of political support and also implicitly cope with antagonistic interactions between “other” cooperatives and the municipality.

Our membership has reached to 150 during our establishment. We all know each other in the neighborhood. We stand together to solve our problems, on our own. We do not work simply for the sake of our members. We do whatever we can for every one of us in our vicinity. (Pinar, İstanbul)

We have to be active, we have to be everywhere. You cannot do our stuff with the mindset of a civil servant. We have used our local networks here, we have done everything through cooperation [*imece*].

(Hülya, Artvin)

Two quotes by the representatives of women's cooperatives highlight the significance of women solidarity, especially when the need to create their own

spaces within the parameters of local politics is apparent. So as to increase their share in distributional politics, women expand their presence and make strategic use of their networks.

Furthermore, other women's cooperatives have aspired to create and use networks with national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private firms so as to have a higher say and higher share in distributional issues.

We have prepared cloth carry bags for The Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) and The Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (KESK). They supported us via these transactions.

(Emek, Ankara)

We have got in touch with the Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (KEDV). They have offered us seminars and training programs.

(Figen, Adıyaman)

We have got in contact with universities. We have prepared for the United Nations (UN) support programs. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has paid for the establishment costs. We have cooperated with KEDV. Petrol Ofisi—a private gas station company—has given us space for our products.

(Yıldız, Gaziantep)

All three examples, especially the last one, reveal how the widening of scale attributes to the growing of the women's cooperatives. Their contact and collaboration with other associations, unions, and universities might have helped women to gain salience within their local settings.

Yet, for many women's cooperatives, the patronage networks with local and national political actors were crucial to continue their operations.

I have talked to the governor and mayor regarding the production of buckwheat [a produce which this cooperative tries to process and sell]. I also know the chair of the Chamber of Commerce—maybe he can help us buy the machinery to process buckwheat. Everything will be figured out once I complete these meetings.

(Nilgün, Ankara)

This narrative illustrates how some women feel the urge and need to be incorporated into patron–client relationships so as to have a presence in distributional issues. Although the gendered networks of governor, mayor, and chair of Chamber have initially hindered women's active participation, the way women negotiated with those local actors challenges masculinist constellations of power.

Our mayor took the initiative in our cooperative. She chose me as the president. Thanks to her support, we finished off our debts. We have remained afloat with the help of our mayor.

(Filiz, Konya)

It is very hard to do and continue the business without the support of municipalities. Local politicians already support those who are close to themselves. This is a bitter reality.

(Seval, Trabzon)

I have talked to the mayor. The MP from *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (the Republican People's Party, the RPP) also came to talk to us. I have got in touch with everyone. We have talked about the importance of women's cooperatives. Then, thanks to the support of the mayor, we have created our founding committee. It has been a great advantage for us that we have a woman mayor here.

(Nilay, İzmir)

The term "support" is very critical at this point, as all three narratives of representatives of cooperatives illustrate. While the financial "aid" may create another level of hierarchy between the cooperative and governing authorities, the emotional "encouragement" may turn into a distributional gain. Hence, the nuance between different forms of supports endanger not the output but the processes that shape women's presence.

Every women's cooperative under the patronage of municipalities advance considerably.

(Esin, İstanbul)

The mayor always says "Elder-sister [*abla*], you just say the word". I know how things work here. The most important things are social networks, dialogues within.

(İclal, İzmir)

It is important to note that many women's cooperatives choose to be (or in many cases are obliged to be) under the tutelage and patronage of political actors, especially at the local level. The patron-client networks that they engage with and that they create help them construct and/or build upon the avenues of distributional domains. This is both the case for the localities ruled by the governing *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (the Justice and Development Party, the JDP) (as is the case for Filiz in Konya) as well as localities governed by opposition mayors (as is the case for İclal and Nilay in İzmir). Finding presence in the distributional networks through patron-client relationships help these women get their share in the distribution of power and economic resources. However, one should note that these patronage networks are contingent upon

the continuation of the roles of both the “patron” as well as the “client”. The mayor should continue to be present in his/her office to provide his/her clients with these services. The clients should also continue to “support” the standing mayor so as to have access to patronage resources and (for the presidents of women’s cooperatives) to create their own patronage networks within their cooperatives (the presidents of women’s cooperatives in a way also become “patrons” in distributional networks within the cooperatives, extending services and membership to loyal members).

The issue of contingency also points out the fragile nature of these patronage networks. While these patronage networks are *the* life source for many women’s cooperatives, their fragility leaves the cooperatives open to potential financial stress in the cases of the removal of these clientelistic networks (e.g., due to changes in the electoral office, rifts between politicians and the women, etc.). For instance, in one of our interviews, we have been told that a seemingly very successful women’s cooperative in Nevşehir in Central Anatolia (who got the backing of the JDP mayor) is faced with the removal of their offices and work stations (all of which were provided by the municipality) when the new mayor from the opposing RPP got into the office and stated that he cannot support a cooperative once under the patronage of his biggest rival political party. As this example presents strikingly, the lack of institutionalization and financial independence and the dependency on patron–client relationships leaves many women’s cooperatives prone to existential crisis. This also shows us the hardships members of women’s cooperatives face in their efforts to partake in distributional networks in the public realm and also “documents patterns and relations of inequality” as the distributional perspective has raised (Brown & Staeheli, 2003, p. 249).

### **Cooperatives as “topographies” of women’s empowerment**

As politics, especially at the local level, have spatialized in male dominated spaces, this has reproduced the private/woman and public/man dichotomy. This process has also led women to make spatial tactics to maneuver for masculinized networks and institutions. For not only attempting to position themselves to utilize resources but also for creating a “we” of effective agency, women formed groups that exclude some others.

We have first accepted those from Meram (a town of Konya). Now we are also accepting those coming from out of Meram. We are accepting newcomers from towns of Konya. But we still want that our villagers produce the jam.

(Filiz, Konya)

This is our home. We have learnt cooperation, unification and act together here, in this place. We have learnt to say “we” not “me”.

(Selma, Eskişehir)

I am the president of the cooperative. The members are all locals. They are all living here. My network is my biggest support mechanism. I just give a call and ask help or support. It happens. We are like a family but I am their elder sister [*abla*]. They say me that without me they would fall apart.

(Iclal, İzmir)

Creating a space for certain groups of women as a strategy to protect group identity is very apparent in the narratives given above. Most of the participants of the research positioned the cooperative as a place to constitute a “we” for women, especially those who are with them, are involved in activities or are living in the same city, village, or neighborhood. This is a supportive mechanism as Iclal mentioned, especially when they engage with political actors.

There are women who work under the counter as opponents. Our work is harder, we have more expenses than them.

(Hulya, Artvin)

On the other hand, the other dimension of creating a form of us identity has the risk to bring agonism and, implicitly, to promote hierarchical power relations among the members of the cooperative.

Friends who are working here all already inclined to define themselves as someone. They are telling I have this responsibility in this cooperative or I am the president of it and this and that... When one becomes the president, she is bragging about being the president...

(Nilgun, Ankara)

There is no class difference in cooperatives. There shall be no boss.

(Alev, Ankara)

That spirit of togetherness has lost when she had joined our group. The interests were on the table. It was about sharing the cake. The fights began. (...) There were sides and polarizations. I have felt myself as hypocrite. It was like a boss who was shouting slogans on Labor Day. We were asked to leave. They started to foist. It was like a divorce between partners, two different camps. The name of the cooperative was like our child that we did not want to give up. It was like the fight over joint child custody. We failed.

(Emek, Ankara)

While women are aspiring to increase their share, they create relations based on patronage. The vertical networks of patronage relations, as a “political site”, trigger unequal distribution of power among women in the cooperative.

Especially the case of the cooperative in Ankara well exemplifies this. The distribution of power triggers agonism and antagonistic relations in return.

I asked them not to use the title of president. It was against the feminist spirit, movement. But when woman gains such status, she wants to use all those powerful titles. They do not want to lose the chance to be called as such. I am the president, I am a board member... They are using them.  
(Seval, Trabzon)

All of a sudden, they started to call me president.  
(Figen, Adıyaman)

The last two quotes by the representatives of women's cooperatives mark how a cooperative creates a space for widening woman's engagement while it becomes a site for contestation. Women may (un)consciously reproduce the traditional masculinist hierarchies that have historically excluded them. This also marks a reproduction of an unconventional form of presence for women in a cooperative. In addition, while some participants placed women's cooperatives as opposed to masculine groups and masculinized spatial political engagement, such examples allow us to re-conceptualize cooperatives as configurations of different social practices.

As opposed to these quotes, the narratives shared below mark another angle of the forms of political interaction. They highlight multivocality as a way of doing politics. This constitutes another form of presence for women and also a way to cope with hierarchical overarching structures.

There must be common consciousness. There must be collective consciousness. We have attempted to internalize horizontal institutionalization. We are also experiencing some problems as all the other organizations are facing with, but we always find a way to solve them.  
(Nilay, İzmir)

There is no competition, the aim is same. You are not the target of this, all of the women are.  
(Gunay, İzmir)

We have multivocality. We are not multi-headed. There is no hierarchy. We have already created harmony among each other.  
(Kevser, İzmir)

Borrowing Sharp's (2007) evocative notion on understanding the importance of connecting differences, "topographies", at this point, it is important to evaluate a form of feminist politics that transgresses place-based macro-politics. The micro-politics of everyday life is also very important as "the webs of power and social relationships that are the basis of connection" are

constructive for women's political engagement, which triggers empowerment (Staeheli & Kofman, 2004, p. 6). Beyond place-based politics and the conventional understanding of doing politics, women who are mobilizing networks and connections with varying forms encourage bonding and, in return, point to the need to develop a kind of "feminist politics that celebrates jumping scales" (Sharp, 2007, p. 382).

### **Women's presence as the patron and the client**

The constitutive approach to the political in the literature of feminist political geography marks a critical point that underlines the processes. Politics is not about the formal settings, rather political subjects are formed and politics are created throughout the ongoing processes within the act of local politics. In parallel to the discussions given in the previous part on topographies of women's empowerment, understanding "the ways in which an inclusive 'we' can be created" (Brown & Staeheli, 2003, p. 252) is significant. The participants were generally talking as "we" while they were narrating about their accomplishments.

We were on TV. We are very active on social media.

(Ayse, Ankara)

Our friends acted in Şekerbank (a Turkish bank) commercials.

(Sıdika, Zonguldak)

Women need to be more visible. We are a means to achieve this. We are agents, actors... We are working together.

(Gonul, Hatay)

The presence/visibility of women and evidences of changed attitudes can also be read as spatial strategies of publicity. It is not only asserting "the personhood of women" but also doubling her roles as the patron and the client (Brown & Staeheli, 2003, p. 253). She is becoming the provider of the venues that enable women to reach resources and also the user of those resources through channels created through the conduct of local politics.

Some of us consider to be a mukhtar. We are encouraging her. The people around us are noticing the change in us.

(Ayse, Ankara)

We are doing handcrafts to our prime minister. We gave a table cloth as a present to the president, Mr. Erdoğan. I also told to our governor that her office desk is not fancy enough for a woman, then we made one for her as well.

(Filiz, Konya)



Mutually constructive relationships between women and the actors in local—even national—politics uphold rules and patterns of expectations for women’s representation. In particular, the potential answers to the question of “where are women doing politics?” expand. The acts of women at cooperatives, in addition to women at home and/or women at municipalities, offer a space for analyzing different constellations of power. The presence of women in varying social spaces emboldens her to gain salience.

Women do not know how to walk, so cooperatives shall make them learnt. After being a member of the cooperative, I see some of them in Samanpazari (a bazaar in old town of Ankara), I can notice how they have changed.

(Solmaz, Ankara)

I have thought I have not had shells, but I had. I was always socializing with same women. I have overcome this with the help of the cooperative.

(Emek, Ankara)

Thanks to the cooperative, I raised my status within the family.

(Derya, Mardin)

The quotes by the representatives of women’s cooperatives hint some nuances of female empowerment as well. Although discussions around female empowerment are not within the scope of this research, it is important to note that women in cooperatives not only acquire some material benefits but they also use this ability effectively for positive change. Higher self-confidence and improved status within the society and family are some of these gains shared by participants.

I used to have difficulty talking. Now I give interviews on TV.

(Günay, İzmir)

A friend of ours told me I am not whom I used to be. I can answer questions easier than before. I am more confident. I don’t need to lean on anyone now.

(Nergis, İstanbul)

Our goal is to reach out to women who have fears. Let her come out of her household, greet people, see a flower, keep her spirit up. Our goal is to make her chat with other people. For her to breathe...

(Pinar, İstanbul)

Women who constitute new ways of presence in expanding spatial constructions of politics transgress conventional understanding of not only being visible in public life but also transgressing boundaries of “doing local politics” as active agents within it.

## Conclusion

This research has attempted to analyze women's cooperatives as sites where different constellations of power are observed. Analyzing different practices and discourses throughout processes within the "management" of cooperatives offers a fertile ground to spatialize women's political engagement in local contexts in Turkey. While feminist literature has well discussed women's "proper" place and the resultant discourses, it has highlighted the significance of masculinist assumptions that have had an impact on the (re) construction of gender asymmetry. The characteristics of the woman politician are expected to be in tune with patriarchal control while they are acting as the representative of political parties in public life. However, other than doing politics as mayors, members of city councils, or women's branches at the local level, scrutinizing different venues has the potential to offer "new" dimensions for gendered performances of politics.

The literature on feminist geography with three interrelated perspectives—distributional, antagonistic, constitutive—provides a broad analytical framework, while women's cooperatives as sites of power relations among women and/or vis-à-vis men in politics offers an alternative room. In our research, we have discussed women's cooperatives not only as sites of gathering women but also channeling their voices in varying terms. Reading different spatial arrangements revealed women's roles in distributional networks of politics as active agents. Cooperatives as "topographies" of a woman's channeling different needs and aspirations for sorting "things" out embolden her to have different roles. Based on the narratives, it is observed that women have maneuvered between being the client of the service(s) or patron of the whole process(es). In addition, borrowing from the work of electoral geographers, discussing where women are doing politics is critical, especially when integrating the role of party support in the form of close relations with the powerful actors discloses horizontal and vertical networks in local politics.

Women in cooperatives engage with different issues ranging from manufacturing, management of money, human resources, and marketing. Hence, they have expanded spatial constructions of local politics while masculinist assumptions have already designed her "proper" place. This work is a humble step that sheds light on unconventional spaces where women negotiate the boundaries of inclusion/exclusion. It is important to analyze blurred and/or overlapped spaces with a critical feminist lens to reveal different ways in which performances are experienced and negotiated so as to map "topographies" of women not devoid of political agency.

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