

**THE #METOO MOVEMENT IN TURKEY:
INTERSECTING CONTINUUMS OF ONLINE AND OFFLINE
FEMINIST ACTIVISM**

by
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INTERSECTING CONTINUUMS OF ONLINE AND OFFLINE
FEMINIST ACTIVISM**

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ABSTRACT

THE #METOO MOVEMENT IN TURKEY: INTERSECTING CONTINUUMS OF ONLINE AND OFFLINE FEMINIST ACTIVISM

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Platform

Digital feminist activism has increased since the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies, offering new avenues for combating systemic inequalities and violence. Through the creative use of online platforms, feminist activism has gained unprecedented visibility, fostering mass awareness and transnational solidarity networks. The #MeToo movement, epitomized by the curation of its hashtag, stands as a pivotal moment in the global fight against sexual harassment. My research aims to explore how feminist practices and politics in the struggle against sexual harassment are changing in the continuum of online and offline activism after the emergence of the #MeToo movement in Turkey. This thesis adopts intersectional theory to analyze the underlying power dynamics in both online and offline struggles against sexual harassment, with a particular focus on a feminist solidarity network, the Susma Bitsin Platform (Speak up to End Platform) organized in the cinema, television, and theater industries. Based on a three-year-long online-and-offline feminist ethnography and in-depth interviews with the members of the platform, I analyze the intersecting continuums of feminist activist strategies and solidarities emerging out of the sexual harassment struggle. I utilize the intersecting continuums framework not only to illuminate the intersections of underlying patterns of domination and solidarity but also to identify the ruptures in the sexual harassment struggle, where the possibility of transformation occurs.

ÖZET

TÜRKİYE'DE #METOO HAREKETİ: ÇEVİRİMİÇİ VE ÇEVİRİMDIŞI FEMİNİST AKTİVİZMİN KESİŞEN SÜREKLİLİKLERİ

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Anahtar Kelimeler: #MeToo Hareketi, Cinsel Tacizle Mücadele, Çevrimiçi ve Çevrimdışı Feminist Aktivizm, Kesişimsel Feminist Dayanışma, Susma Bitsin Platformu

Dijital feminist aktivizm, sistemik eşitsizlikler ve şiddetle mücadele için yeni yollar sunan Web 2.0 teknolojilerinin kullanılmaya başlanmasından bu yana yükselişte. Çevrimiçi platformların yaratıcı kullanımı sayesinde feminist aktivizm, kitlesel farkındalığı ve ulus ötesi dayanışma ağlarını teşvik ederek daha önce görülmemiş bir görünürlük kazanmakta. Dijital dünyada bir etiket olarak başlayıp büyüyen #MeToo hareketi, cinsel tacize karşı küresel mücadelede çok önemli bir an olarak karşımıza çıkıyor. Bu araştırma, Türkiye'de #MeToo hareketinin ortaya çıkmasının ardından çevrimiçi ve çevrimdışı aktivizmin sürekliliği içinde cinsel tacize karşı mücadelede feminist pratiklerin ve politikaların nasıl değiştiğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, cinsel tacize karşı çevrimiçi ve çevrimdışı mücadelelerde altta yatan güç dinamiklerini analiz etmek için kesişimsellik teorisini benimsemekte ve özellikle sinema, televizyon ve tiyatro alanlarında örgütlenen bir feminist dayanışma ağı olan Susma Bitsin Platformu'na odaklanmaktadır. Üç yıl süren feminist etnografiye dayanarak, cinsel taciz mücadelesinden doğan çevrimiçi ve çevrimdışı feminist aktivist stratejilerin ve dayanışmaların kesişen sürekliliklerini analiz etmektedir. Kesişen süreklilikler çerçevesini hem altta yatan tahakküm ve dayanışma örüntülerinin kesişimlerini aydınlatmak için, hem de cinsel taciz mücadelesinde dönüşüm olasılığının ortaya çıktığı kırılmaları belirlemek için kullanmaktadır.

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It takes a village to raise a child, they say. So does writing a dissertation. This long, painstaking, and yet transformative journey was made possible thanks to an amazing support and solidarity network that I was so blessed to be surrounded with. Writing this thesis has been like being on a roller-coaster, with all its emotional, intellectual, and physical ups and downs. Each time I was sure that I could not make it, there were wonderful people who supported me, helping me stand up and believe in myself.

My thesis supervisor, Ayşe Gül Altınay, has always been there to guide me to find my voice, heal my soul, and nourish me with her feminist wisdom. Her faith in the possibility of creating a better world with “better stories” based on feminist solidarity will continue to nurture my academic studies. She has always been, and will continue to be a lifelong mentor whom I look up to. I cannot thank her enough for sharing this journey with me.

Beyond the subject matter of my thesis, the entire writing process embodied a powerful example of feminist solidarity. My core committee members, Sibel Yardımcı and Zeynep Gülru Göker, provided invaluable support and enriched my work with their insightful feedback every step of the way. Their solidarity and wisdom have been a guiding light, for which I am profoundly grateful. I would also like to express my gratitude to my jury members, Hande Eslen Ziya and Begüm Özden Fırat, who not only immediately responded to my last-minute requests but also showed me what understanding and caring feminist solidarity in academia could be like.

My family and friends played a crucial role as my support network throughout this endeavor. My partner, Güney, and my daughter, Ada, never stopped supporting me although this journey meant sacrificing our valuable time that could be spent together. My parents, Figen and Sabri, were always there when I needed them. I was able to dedicate extensive time to my thesis because my mother undertook all the cooking responsibilities for months. My father was the courier not only for the food but also for taking our dog for a walk every day. Their selflessness and unwavering support were instrumental in my success.

My cohort and my chosen cohort stood by me, pushed me by the back, and believed in me until the very last minute of this journey. Oğuz Can, with his bright mind and incomparable skills, was always there to answer any of my questions while

simultaneously motivating me with his hilarious gifs sent on a daily basis. Ash, with her empowered soul bold enough to face any challenges, was always there to have my back when I stumbled, making me believe that this thesis could be completed. Damla, with her diligence and solidarity, made me feel that I had a sister to turn to whenever I needed it. How lucky I am to have them as my cohort!

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Also Hande, another sister of mine for more than 30 years, never stopped reaching out to me, showing me the true meaning of friendship. She is the kind of person with whom you catch up as if no time has passed, even if you have not seen each other for years. We have always supported each other and will continue to do so.

My village consisted of amazing people who empowered me to write this thesis. I am indebted to each and every one of them for their unwavering support and solidarity. I also want to thank myself for finding this courage and strength of purpose to draft a thesis on a topic that is so dear but also fragile to me. It required a lot of sacrifice and dedication, which at times made me question my work, yet in the end, I can confidently say it was all worth it.

*To my family who made this journey possible:
my mom, my dad, my partner, my daughter*

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1. INTRODUCTION

After completing my undergraduate studies in English Language and Literature, I wanted to pursue my dream of becoming a documentary filmmaker. Driven by this ambition, I enrolled in a Master's Program in Cinema and Television. Transitioning to a new field of study came with its challenges as I encountered a completely different pedagogy that heavily emphasized practical experience. Yet, I did not give up. I was intent on developing the necessary skills to shoot documentary films. Toward the end of my graduate studies, I started working at a film production company. During my two years in the industry, I gained significant experience regarding the intricacies of film production, and yet my learning was not limited to the field of cinema and television. I found myself subjected to various forms of exploitation and harassment - financial, physical, and mental - which I could not name as such back then. Sadly enough, I was not the only one. Despite my young age, I became aware of the pervasive sexism in the industry, where women of all ages and statures had to maneuver around "unwelcome advances" with creative coping mechanisms. In the midst of learning to master my own coping mechanisms, I had this "eerie" feeling, an "affective dissonance" to put in Clare Hemmings' (2012) words, speaking to me that this should not be my experience. One day, when I realized that I could not take it anymore, I chose not to be a part of a system that kept marginalizing me and left all my education and career behind to embark on a new journey. I was fortunate to have a supporting family and the ability to take refuge in academia.

I thought a lot about my experience in film production when I started working on this dissertation project. I pondered what might have been if the #MeToo movement had existed during my time in the film industry two decades ago, if I had friends to support me and share my experiences, or if there had been a feminist solidarity platform to which I could turn. Perhaps, I would not have given up on my dreams and would now be shooting a wildlife documentary in the Amazon forests. Even as I 'moved on', I had the sense that my journey was not complete; it kept calling me

to tell my story. That is how I found myself writing a thesis on the feminist struggle against sexual harassment within Turkey's cultural production industry.

1.1 Research Statement

This dissertation project started with the larger question of how feminist practices and politics are changing in this rapidly evolving digital world, with a particular focus on the newly emerging #MeToo movement in Turkey. I aimed to explore the transformative potential of feminist strategies developed or imagined not only to support survivors of sexual harassment but also to bring about sustainable systemic changes to the highly sexist world of the cultural production industry. This thesis was initially conceived as an exploration into the impact of digitally mediated activism on offline feminist practices. However, as I proceeded with my research, I realized that solely examining digital feminist activism would overlook the complexity of this multifaceted issue. Therefore, I reframed my focus of analysis to explore the interplay of online and offline feminist activism and its implications for feminist politics in the struggle against sexual harassment in the cultural production industry. The primary research questions guiding this thesis were:

- How are feminists adapting their strategies to navigate the digital landscape, particularly within the context of the #MeToo Movement in Turkey?
- What is the interplay between online and offline feminist activist strategies in struggling against sexual harassment within the cinema, television, and theater industries?
- Can online and offline feminist solidarity networks emerging from the #MeToo movement of Turkey serve as catalysts for systemic changes in dismantling structures of sexual harassment?
- How inclusive and intersectional are the spaces created by feminist solidarity platforms and what are the implications of their activism for feminist politics at large?

By addressing these research questions, this dissertation endeavors to contribute to a nuanced understanding of contemporary feminist activism, spanning online and offline spheres, shedding light on its potential to bring tangible changes and foster inclusive and intersectional feminist politics in the struggle against sexual harassment in Turkey and beyond.

Although the #MeToo movement in Turkey has gained momentum across various sectors, I chose to concentrate on the cinema, television, and theater industries, with a particular focus on the Susma Bitsin Platform. This independent feminist solidarity network operates within these fields and serves as a notable outcome of decades-long feminist efforts, characterized by its unique structure that integrates online and offline feminist activist practices in their sexual harassment struggle. While Susma Bitsin advocates against all forms of gender-based violence, I narrowed the scope of my research to focus specifically on the struggle against sexual harassment, as the #MeToo movement's primary emphasis was on addressing and making sexual violence visible.

My fieldwork revealed four key themes: the newly emerging field of digital activism and its interaction with offline feminist activist practices; the struggle against sexual harassment and its interplay in the continuum between "streets" and "tweets;" intersectional feminist solidarity practices developed around this struggle; and women's disclosures as a "rupture" in the narratives that marginalize survivors of sexual harassment. The chapters in this thesis are organized around these themes, interwoven through the framework of intersecting continuums.

The novelty that this thesis seeks to bring to the field of Gender Studies is the concept of "intersecting continuums" as a framework of analysis. While the interplay between online and offline activist spheres has been emphasized in previous studies (Jain 2020; Greijdanus 2020; Rees 2024; Fischer 2016) conceptualizing this interaction as a continuum in the context of the sexual harassment struggle is novel. Several authors have emphasized the intermingling of online and offline worlds in the struggle against gender-based violence (Nacher 2021; Fileborn and Loney-Howes 2019; Baer 2016; Çağatay et al. 2023), and yet none of these works use the concept of continuum to analyze online and offline feminist activism in the sexual harassment struggle. The concept of continuum serves as a framework that allows us to see the underlying patterns of the sexual harassment struggle whereas the intersecting continuums is the concept that reminds us that there are multiple patterns intersecting at different times in different contexts. Intersecting continuums framework, not only reveals the intersections of underlying patterns of domination and solidarity but also allows us to see the breaking points in these continuums, where the possibility of transformation occurs.

My fieldwork revealed that feminist activist practices carried out in both the physical and digital realms complement each other, particularly in the struggle against sexual harassment. Most of the time, these practices co-exist along a continuum where they might merge or evolve into hybrid forms. Therefore, analyzing only the digital

or only offline activist practices to understand the feminist politics surrounding the sexual harassment struggle would be limited in explaining the contemporary feminist activist space and its impacts. What's more, my fieldwork also revealed that a more comprehensive analysis of the #MeToo movement and sexual harassment struggle in Turkey would be possible by recognizing not only the continuum of online and offline activist spheres but also by revealing the multiple intersecting continuums. This thesis is a search for unveiling the intersecting continuums in the feminist struggle against sexual harassment in the #MeToo moment of Turkey, revealing the intricate and interconnected relations, operating at various levels, individual and collective, and across different contexts.

1.2 The Intersecting Continuums of Feminist Activism

In the first phase of my research, I used the concept of “interplay” to describe the interaction between online and offline feminist activist spheres. However, I soon realized that “interplay” was limited in its scope to reveal the underlying patterns as well as the breaking points of this interaction. Consequently, I began searching for a more comprehensive concept to describe this relationship. While reading Liz Kelly's book *Surviving Sexual Violence* (1988), I became intrigued by the way she conceptualized “continuum” within the context of sexual violence. Kelly introduced the “continuum of sexual violence” to highlight the various ways in which men encroach upon women's physical and personal spaces, ranging from acts of harassment and degradation to more severe acts of rape and murder. Kelly (1988) benefited from two definitions of the term to conceptualize it. The first meaning underscores “a basic common character” underlying various forms of violence such as mistreatment, intimidation, coercion, or threatening while the second frames it as “a continuous series of elements or events that pass into one another and which cannot be readily distinguished” (76). This framing served to document and name these acts of violence but also indicated the absence of clear analytical categories to classify them. In essence, the idea of continuum encapsulated both the prevalent coercive exertion of power by men and its interconnectedness with women's experiences of harassment and violence (Kelly 1988). Despite distinctions between acts of misogyny and sexual harassment, viewing them as part of a continuum highlights their role as precursors to more severe crimes like rape and sexual assault. Within the scope of my research, I argue that recognizing this continuum is vital for making connections between different forms of violence against women and understanding their interconnected nature.

While developing this concept, I also benefited from Karen Boyle's (2019) concept of "continuum thinking," which expands upon Liz Kelly's conceptualization of the continuum with a nuanced perspective. Rather than approaching the continuum as a singular construct, Boyle's (2019) "continuum thinking," emphasizes the significance of recognizing connections while acknowledging the diverse range of experiences that may not always harmonize and necessitate continuums in the plural. Boyle takes the idea further by proposing a variety of continuums, enabling the exploration of connections in survivors' lives as well as the analysis of men's behavior, its meanings, and functions for women's experiences (Boyle and Berridge 2023). In that sense, adopting continuum thinking becomes a political intervention as it enables the recognition of connections across diverse contexts while staying attentive to their specificities (Boyle and Berridge 2023). Building on this approach, I also argue that the common nature of experiences situated in different contexts can be analyzed through the framework of continuums in plural without attempting to establish a hierarchy.

Another conceptualization of the continuum that I was inspired by came from Cynthia Cockburn. Drawing from her work in conflict zones, analyzing the gendered aspects and power dynamics of war, Cynthia Cockburn (2004) conceptualizes violence as a continuum where different types, sites, and instances of violence are interconnected, flowing into one another. For Cockburn (2004), gender relations serve as the "linking thread" through which violence permeates every domain, from home to nation-state, and from cities to international relations. This extends to every moment, including "protests, law enforcement, and militarization," contributing to the explosive nature of violence within these contexts (43). Given that all instances of violence involve a gender component, Cockburn (2004) advocates for a feminist strategy that considers gender differences and specificities. This strategy requires an awareness of how women and men are differently situated with distinct experiences, needs, strengths, and skills, and an understanding of how these differences manifest in various cultural contexts (Cockburn 2004). This feminist strategic thinking should recognize the power imbalance in gender relations and be attentive to how patriarchal power intersects with violent institutions such as the family, military, and state. Emphasizing that to address violence along a continuum, the struggle against it must form alliances, Cockburn (2004) underlines the need for coalitions capable of "acting in many places, at many levels, and on many problems simultaneously" (44). Having this emphasis on the need for forming alliances that can operate on multiple fronts simultaneously in mind, I examine the emerging continuums of feminist solidarity in the #MeToo movement of Turkey.

Building upon Cynthia Cockburn's "continuum of violence," Liz Kelly's "continuum

of sexual violence,” Karen Boyle’s “continuums in plural” and drawing inspiration from the framing of “crisis as a continuum” within the RESISTIRE project (Altnay et al. 2023), I utilize the concept of continuums as a valuable analytical tool in understanding how various experiences intersect to shape women’s lives within contexts marked by unequal power dynamics. The continuums perspective reveals that individual acts of sexual harassment are deeply ingrained within broader power structures. It allows us to see not only the underlying oppressive patterns of these broader systems but also the ruptures where the possibility of transformation can take place and this is where the promise of this framework lies.

Bringing all these nuances together, in this thesis, I argue that viewing the worlds of online and offline feminist activism as a continuum not only highlights the interconnected and evolving nature of feminist practices but also helps us recognize their operations on a spectrum encompassing both digital and physical realms. This continuum spans from traditional offline forms of activism, such as street protests and community organizing to more digital practices, including social media campaigns, online advocacy, and lobbying. My research revealed that in this continuum, feminist activists navigate along the lines of online and offline spaces, harnessing the power of each domain to amplify their messages and engage with diverse audiences. Hence, I argue that understanding the continuum of online and offline feminist activism is crucial for comprehending the complexities and opportunities arising from the intermingling of digital technologies with traditional forms of resistance.

I also propose that the interplay between online and offline feminist activism is complex, interrelated, and multilayered, consisting of many intersecting continuums. By introducing the concept of intersecting continuums, I aim to highlight the interconnectedness of different levels of activist practices and diverse contexts in which these struggles unfold. I analyze the continuums of gender-based violence from the physical to the digital, the continuums of online and offline feminist activist practices developed for sexual harassment struggle as well as the continuums of feminist solidarity networks established at individual and collective levels across varying entities within and outside the cultural production industry.

One layer of continuum appears in the feminist activist practices spanning through the online and offline worlds, however analyzing the origin stories of the sexual harassment struggle reveals many more continuums. There is a continuum of victim-blaming narratives that continue to marginalize survivors and these narratives continue to appear in online and offline spheres. Survivors still face disbelief and backlash not only in real life but also in virtual spaces. Different forms of gender-based violence are carried onto the digital realm as cyber-bullying, cyber-harassment, and

cyber-violence or these cyber-attacks continue to haunt women in their everyday lives. When a woman discloses her experience of sexual harassment online, her sexual orientation, ethnicity, body, or past experiences can all be targeted to marginalize her experience.

The continuum of these marginalizing narratives and oppressive structures intersects with the continuum of online and offline activist practices. Feminist activists make the personal not only political but also digital through online consciousness-raising campaigns, by using hashtags to carry out advocacy, or by forming digital counterpublics opening alternative discursive spaces to spread the feminist word. Feminist activist practices are being utilized by feminist solidarity platforms along the online and offline spheres to promote an equal, intersectional, and inclusive space that is free from all forms of violence. And all these analyses reveal the intersecting continuums of feminist activism.

1.3 Analyzing The Intersecting Continuums Through Intersectionality Theory

The complexities and nuances of the #MeToo movement demand a multifaceted theoretical lens that goes beyond a singular feminist framework. Embracing an intersectional analytical lens is essential for navigating the intricate power dynamics operating at multiple levels, particularly in understanding the persistence of sexual harassment. This approach reveals the underlying dynamics that contribute to its continuation by exposing the intersecting power axes that sustain systemic inequalities. In this thesis, I adopt an intersectionality perspective to analyze the intersecting continuums of feminist activism within the #MeToo movement. By employing this theoretical framework, I aim to explore not only the diverse approaches through which feminist activist practices challenge sexual harassment but also the inherent complexities of feminist activism against sexual harassment within the #MeToo movement.

Intersectionality stands as a pivotal feminist theorization that proposes a reflective analysis of the exclusions within feminist politics and practices. Earlier feminist theories often fall short in capturing the intricate nuances of the diverse experiences of women, underscoring the need for an intersectional lens for an inclusive sexual harassment struggle. An intersectional theory applied to the realm of online and offline feminist activism emerges as an insightful analytical tool to illuminate the diverse voices, experiences, and struggles that collectively shape the dynamic and

multifaceted landscape of the struggle against sexual harassment.

Despite its potential to create inclusive feminist politics, formulating intersectional feminist theory comes with challenges. Leslie McCall (2005) describes intersectionality “as the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far” (1771). Although Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989; 1991) is credited with coining the term ‘intersectionality’ as an analytical framework, the concept has roots in earlier feminist works addressing the simultaneous and multiple positionalities of women of color, lesbian women, or colonial subjects across various power dynamics (Hill Collins 1986; Lorde 1984; Mohanty 1984; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983). These ideas were articulated as “interlocking systems of oppression” (Combahee River Collective 1983), “matrix of domination” (Hill Collins 1990), or “multiple jeopardy” (King 1988). However, it is clear that all these attempts, under different names, share a common goal: revealing the “theoretical hegemony of gender and exclusions of white Western feminism” (K. Davis 2008, 72). Despite these foundational contributions, the continued development of intersectional feminist theory demands a nuanced understanding of its evolving terminology.

Intersectionality emerged as a crucial theoretical framework primarily within the black feminist movement, responding to the inadequacies of both feminist and anti-racist movements in fully capturing the experiences of women of color. Notably, the Combahee River Collective (1983) stands out as a pioneer in this regard, offering an early example of this critical intersectional perspective as far back as the 1970s. The collective analyzed how the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality functioned as effective mechanisms of oppression. Their commitment to struggling against “racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression” underscored the importance of an “integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that major systems of oppression are interlocking” (Combahee River Collective 1983, 210). The prevailing universalization within the second-wave Anglo-American feminist theory, rooted in the experiences of Western middle-class heterosexual women, inadvertently silenced and marginalized the contributions of black and third-world women. Intersectional analysis, therefore, emerged as a vital response to such silencing, aiming to rectify the under-representation of diverse voices within early feminist theory.

This early stage of intersectionality theorizing gave way to intricate analyses of interconnected systems of oppression, such as racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism. The objective was to understand how these systems collaboratively shaped the social conditions under which black women and other women of color lived and labored,

existing in a perpetual state of “invisible but ever-present social jeopardy” (Cooper 2016, 388). Building on this feminist legacy, Crenshaw (1989; 1991) criticized the legal frameworks that inadequately addressed the experiences of marginalized women by focusing solely on race or sex, but not both. Her intersectional framework highlighted the shortcomings of both anti-racist and feminist movements in addressing the unique challenges faced by women of color, particularly concerning violence against women. Crenshaw (1991) argued for the necessity of considering “multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (1245). Patricia Hill Collins (1986; 1990) further developed the theory of intersectionality within black feminist thought, emphasizing the simultaneity of women’s oppression. Collins (1990) contended that the experiences of black women were shaped not only by gender but also by race, social class, and sexuality, highlighting different dimensions of interconnected forms of oppression. Intersectional paradigms served as a powerful reminder that oppression could not be reduced to “one fundamental type” and underscored the idea that “oppressions work together in producing injustice” (Collins 1990, 18). In her analysis of violence, Collins (2017) defined it as “a conceptual glue,” unveiling “a saturated site for intersectionality” where the interconnected power relations become visible (1464).

Amidst the extensive theorizing surrounding intersectionality, it is evident that this framework is ideally suited for exploring how the categories of race, class, and gender intertwine and mutually constitute one another. Rooted in the rich legacy of feminist concerns, intersectionality has succeeded in acknowledging, as framed by Kathy Davis (2008), the differences among women and addressing the issues of exclusivity and diversity. However, the debate arises when determining who should be included in the category of women and which intersecting differences should be considered in the analysis. The “additive” approach, resembling a simplistic add-and-stir analysis, has faced criticisms for its superficiality in capturing the intricate interdependency of oppressive powers. Scholars like Collins (1986) challenged the attempts to insert race and gender into Marxist theory, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to black feminist thought that developed new theoretical interpretations of the interaction itself, rather than prioritizing one facet of difference over others. For my analysis, this emphasis on the simultaneity and mutual constructiveness of categories, without privileging any single facet of difference, remains a crucial aspect of intersectional theorizing.

While the call to develop a new framework for analyzing the interaction itself laid the foundation for intersectional theory, it also came with certain limitations. One notable critique centers on the theory’s assumption of differences as identity categories. Crenshaw (1991) contended that the particular values attached to these

categories and “the way those values foster and create social hierarchies” were more crucial than the categories themselves (1297). In essence, she emphasized that it was not the mere existence of categories, but the social and cultural baggage associated with them and the way they interacted to create oppression that truly mattered. However, this did not imply erasing identity categories. On the contrary, Crenshaw (1991) was highly critical of the poststructuralist claims of “vacating and destroying” identity categories (1299). She stressed the importance of acknowledging that identity politics occur at the intersections of categories, suggesting that engaging with these categories is more fruitful than challenging the possibility of discussing them altogether (Crenshaw 1991). This highlights the need for an intersectional theory to strategically use identity categories without falling into the trap of essentializing them. Instead of challenging categorizations of race, gender, and class, a more desirable approach involves a deeper examination of the material and social consequences resulting from the intersections of these categories for the experiences and struggles of marginalized women.

While Crenshaw used intersectionality to reveal certain fissures in identity politics, showcasing its limitations in meeting the diverse needs within a certain group, Collins took a different stance. Also highly critical of reducing intersectionality to identity politics, which she deemed politically divisive and essentializing, Collins (2000) proposed viewing it as the interaction of categories rather than identity claims. However, this conceptualization also posed risks. Collins (2017) cautioned against “the risk of hypervisibility of abstract power-talk” when categories were treated merely as abstract references to power without analyzing how political domination operates (1465). Substituting “race” for “racism,” “sex” for “sexism,” and “class” for “capitalism” could lead to promoting abstract references to power, potentially rendering the mechanics of domination invisible. Collins (2017) underlined that framing intersectionality in abstract terms without its political, social, and cultural references, could diminish our capacity to do politics. Therefore, conducting an intersectional analysis of violence, as an entry point into questioning the organization of domination across multiple systems of power such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and capitalism requires attention to the interaction of categories without stripping them of their political value.

Collins’ emphasis on contextualizing the categories becomes crucial in my analysis as well where I have multiple categories for a comprehensive analysis of sexual violence. Such analysis requires considering the cultural, historical, and political baggage of our categories rather than working on abstract terms. The conceptualization of race, for instance, has a political significance that can vary across contexts and times, influencing how it intersects with gender. The material consequences of

this interplay significantly impact women's lives, particularly concerning their experiences of violence and oppression. Therefore, throughout my analysis, I argue that recognizing the dynamic nature of these categories and understanding their context-specific manifestations is crucial for a comprehensive analysis of the complexities involved in the sexual harassment struggle.

Still, dealing with categories has its problems for some critics of intersectional theory. For Yuval-Davis (2006), categorical attributes often created the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Instead of identity categories, Yuval-Davis (2006) offered the term "social divisions" as intersectionality's tools of analysis. She defined "social divisions" as "macro axes of social power" involving "actual, concrete people" (195). In her formulation, social divisions manifested in the ways people experienced their daily lives in terms of inclusion and exclusion. The crux of the debate centered not on the relationships between divisions themselves but on the "conflation and separation of the different analytic levels in which intersectionality is located" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 195). She contended that each social division had a distinct ontological basis, making it irreducible to other social divisions. However, recognizing one division as always "constructed and intermeshed" in others did not diminish the salience of each social division (Yuval-Davis 2006, 195). In contrast to fixed identity groupings, different social divisions are emphasized differently in particular contexts and times. The number of social divisions in a particular historical context is not fixed, yet like Collins, Yuval-Davis argued that these divisions are the products of political processes (Yuval-Davis 2011, 157). In other words, the significance of a particular social division depends on historical contexts that shape what matters to whom.

The quest to refine intersectionality and overcome its limitations has taken a pivotal turn with the recognition that relying solely on identity or social categories as inherent attributes falls short. The insufficiency of this approach, often entrenched in essentialism, prompted a transformative shift towards reconceptualizing these categories as dynamic processes, as something "we do" (Staunæs 2003). Butler's (1990; 2011) pivotal role in reformulating gender as something "done", "undone" and "re-done" within a matrix of domination exemplifies this post-structuralist intervention. However, the attempt to deconstruct fixed categories and challenge binary frameworks, although seen as progressive, faced criticisms from feminist theorists focused on gender, class, and race. Their concerns centered on the potential loss of a common ground for feminist theory and praxis, highlighting the ongoing complexity and debates within intersectionality discourse (K. Davis 2008). This tension underscored the evolving nature of intersectional theory, as scholars grappled with the balance between deconstruction of categories and the need for a shared foundation in feminist activism and scholarship.

Despite these tensions, the concept of intersectionality emerged as a transformative framework, offering a political project that aims to render visible the social and material consequences of gender/race/class categories while at the same time aligning with post-structuralist methodologies, encompassing “deconstructing categories, unmasking universalism, and exploring the dynamic and contradictory workings of power” (K. Davis 2008, 74). The resulting collaboration between race/class/gender feminists and post-structuralist feminist theorists has proven mutually beneficial. According to Kathy Davis (2008), by eliminating the limitations of additive approaches to multiple identities, the former ensures a nuanced understanding of these categories while the latter addresses the concerns of abstraction and detachment from tangible realities of women’s lives. In this way, these seemingly irreconcilable feminist theoretical frameworks find some basis for a “mutually beneficial collaboration” through the lens of intersectionality (K. Davis 2008, 74). In other words, intersectionality becomes a meeting ground, enabling diverse feminist perspectives to converge and contribute to a richer, more comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in the lives of women.

There also exists a prevailing concern about intersectionality losing its political content and its genealogy in anti-racist and feminist politics that sees intersectionality as nothing but a “simple listing of differences” (Erel et al. 2010, 64). Rather than reducing intersectionality to mere listings, it is crucial to examine the power dynamics underlying these lists, their interplay, and their exclusions. While listing differences serves to identify who is absent from feminist discourse, it is equally essential to be attentive to these absences. This attention enables a comprehensive understanding of whose voices are being marginalized in dominant discourses, often characterized by whiteness, heterosexism, capitalism, and patriarchy. Additionally, a singular focus on categories of gender, race, and class might risk neglecting other dimensions of intersectional feminism such as sexuality, age, nationality, or disability. Hence, in my research, I try to follow a balanced and inclusive approach to ensure that no dimension is prioritized at the expense of others within the framework of intersectionality.

Overall, intersectionality emerged from reflections on women’s exclusions and served as a crucial concept in analyzing various forms of omissions in feminist theorizing. It is a valuable contribution that prompts us to remain attentive to power dynamics and the need for inclusive feminist politics. Maintaining intersectionality as a central notion in my analytical framework is essential for comprehensively addressing varying forms of exclusions taking place in the sexual harassment struggle. Each new category introduced in intersectional analysis opens up a fresh perspective, encouraging subjects to pose “an(other) question” and explore additional dimensions

(K. Davis 2008, 77). However, it is also crucial not to create a hierarchy of oppressions within the multiplicity of categories. To achieve this, contextualizing and historicizing our analytical frameworks becomes vital. By understanding the context, it becomes possible to recognize that some categories or positions hold greater significance at a given time and may be less prominent in another context. The unpredictable nature of our world necessitates a continual process of asking new questions, as Davis points out, to uncover the complexity and simultaneity of oppression. Hence, in this work, I propose that an intersectional approach is well-suited to capture this intricacy by asking (an)other question.

It is certain that intersectionality provides a theoretical framework that transcends the perception of gender inequality as the only pertinent narrative in comprehending gendered and sexual violence. This framework becomes essential in revealing the collective processes of the social domain, exposing individuals to sexual abuse while limiting their access to acknowledgment and compensation for the damages incurred. By offering a lens through which to reveal the privileges enjoyed by white, heterosexual, and abled-bodied men at the expense of diverse possibilities for women, intersectional analysis becomes a power tool (Buchanan and Jamieson 2016). Simplified and individualized explanations fall short of comprehensively analyzing the multi-sided issue of sexual harassment and assault, as blaming culture or focusing on marginalized identities alone does not suffice. An intersectional lens directs its focus towards the examination of social and cultural circumstances, which both facilitate and restrict specific modes of existence, self-identification, and manifestation for women. In cases of sexual violence, employing an intersectional feminist framework brings to light the experiences of women across varying ages, abilities, cultures, socioeconomic classes, and gender identities (Buchanan and Jamieson 2016). That's to say, the way marginalized women living in multi-dimensional poverty experience discrimination, racism, and economic crisis is not the same as those of white, middle-class, heterosexual women.

Hence, the issue of sexual harassment cannot be explained in simplistic terms as it stems from and is perpetuated by multiple factors, encompassing economic, and political institutions as well as social and cultural norms (Buchanan and Jamieson 2016). As the issue is multi-layered, the struggle against sexual harassment is also multi-sided. In this thesis, I underline that working solely in one area will not be enough to resolve the issue as the struggle needs to take place on multiple fronts. Looking at the interaction of class with sexual orientation alongside sexist legacies of the film industry has more explanatory power than a single analysis of gender within the sector. Therefore, I argue that adopting an intersectional lens emerges as the most appropriate theory to unravel these complexities.

This thesis adopts an intersectional theory to analyze the underlying power dynamics in both online and offline struggles against sexual harassment, specifically contextualized and historicized during Turkey’s #MeToo moment. There is a need for an intersectional analytical framework as the power axes oppressing women and LGBTQI+ work at multiple levels. Recognizing the multi-dimensional nature of gender-based violence, a comprehensive analysis of sexual harassment cannot be conducted by simply looking at gender dimension in isolation but must consider the intersecting power relations of race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, or disability, which collectively shape the experiences of women. Additionally, as the landscape of feminist activism has been transformed with the introduction of digital technologies, an intersectional analytical framework is best suited to capture this complex continuum of online and offline feminist activist spaces. The immediacy and global reach of online platforms have undoubtedly amplified feminist voices and sparked crucial conversations. However, the limitations and challenges within this digital realm, such as the digital gender gap, online violence, and the risk of marginalizing certain voices, call for a nuanced understanding. The legacy of intersectionality, rooted in the reflections on women’s exclusions, serves as a critical contribution, offering a framework that prompts continual questioning, contextualization, and historicization. This thesis argues that embracing intersectionality is not only a theoretical but also a political and practical necessity to address the diverse voices, experiences, and struggles of women that shape the dynamic and multifaceted landscape of feminist activism carried out against sexual harassment in Turkey through the continuum of online and offline spaces.

1.4 The Container

In the context of the #MeToo movement, which witnessed millions of individuals publicly disclosing their experiences of sexual violence, the absence of adequate mechanisms to support survivors has become evident. This has underscored the urgent need for what can be metaphorically termed as “containers” to accompany survivors along their arduous journey toward healing and seeking justice. Coined by Tarana Burke, the notion of “container” symbolizes a supportive vessel that sustains and empowers survivors as they navigate the painstaking process of disclosure and recovery (Synder and Lopez 2017). One of the main findings of this research is the concept of the “container,” a term I employ to draw attention to a critical void in our societal response to sexual violence and the necessity of creating supportive environments to empower survivors. By offering a structured framework for

disclosure and support, the concept of “container” helps to address not only the formidable barriers that often deter survivors from coming forward, such as fear of judgment, retaliation, or disbelief but also the strategies to support survivors in face of potential backlash, thus fostering a climate of solidarity and healing.

In exploring the existing and emerging “containers” within the fields of cinema, television, and theater, this thesis contributes to our understanding of how different mediums can serve as platforms for survivor support and advocacy. These containers not only provide avenues for survivors to share their narratives but also serve as catalysts for raising awareness, challenging entrenched norms, and initiating societal transformation.

This exploration finds resonance within the framework of “tactical repertoires” in social movements literature, particularly within the context of collective action and solidarity. Drawing from Charles Tilly’s seminal works (1978; 2004; 2008), social movements, as manifestations of “contentious politics,” are depicted as deliberate and sustained endeavors by ordinary individuals to effect societal change through unconventional means. According to sociologists Goodwin and Jasper (2015), social movements aim to raise consciousness regarding social inequalities and inspire a re-imagining of societal paradigms. One crucial objective of social movements is to facilitate individuals in envisioning a novel societal framework (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Jasper 1998). Thus, social movements seek to exert influence over a collective reexamination of social occurrences, shift the origins of problems away from prevailing societal misconceptions, and promote engagement in the movement (Storer and Rodriguez 2020).

To achieve these goals, social movements usually employ various forms of collective action, ranging from peaceful protests to more extreme measures like political violence, alongside methods such as pamphleteering, revolutionary activities, and organizing vigils or gatherings (Snow et al. 2019). While traditional claim-making performances like public meetings and strikes remain fundamental, social movements dynamically incorporate cultural elements such as rituals, music, street performances, art, the Internet, and customary behaviors to articulate collective grievances (Taylor et al. 2015). What distinguishes social movements from other political actors is their deliberate utilization of innovative, dramatic, unconventional, and non-institutionalized forms of political expression to influence public opinion and exert pressure on those in positions of authority (Taylor and Van Dyke 2011).

Social movement scholars are increasingly regarding social movements not as mere groups or organizations, but rather as interactive displays or demonstrations of protest where collective entities put forth demands against elites, authorities, or

other entities (Taylor et al. 2015). This perspective, stemming from Tilly’s research (1978; 1983; 2004), focuses on the repertoires and displays employed by social movements to articulate collective demands (Della Porta 2010; Jasper 2015;).

“Repertoires of contention,” as described by Tilly (1986; 2004; 2008), encompass the recurring, foreseeable, and limited set of particular protest strategies employed by groups of individuals to articulate their concerns and assert demands on governing bodies. They characterize the unique combinations of tactics and strategies developed and employed by protest groups over time to collectively assert claims on individuals and groups (Taylor and Van Dyke 2011). These tactical repertoires are characterized by deliberate and strategic modes of asserting claims, varying across societies and historical periods (Taylor et al. 2015). By expanding and adapting their repertoires, social movements enhance their effectiveness and resilience in challenging power structures and fostering change (Taylor and Van Dyke 2011).

Feminist movements, as argued by Fin Mackay (2015), are characterized as profoundly successful, grounded, reflexive, and forward-thinking social movements, constituting one of the oldest and most powerful social justice movements. From their inception in the mid-19th century to their contemporary manifestations, feminist movements have continuously evolved, adapting to shifting social landscapes and embracing diverse tactics to challenge gender inequality. Among the various movements that emerged in the 1960s, feminist movements ultimately became one of the most influential and persistent forces for creating social change (Ryan 1992). They have not only impacted women’s rights but have also intersected with and influenced various other social movements, including those advocating for peace, environmental justice, and LGBTQI+ rights (Taylor 1989). As I reveal in this work, the continuum among these movements takes place through disseminating ideologies, shaping collective identities, employing tactics, and establishing organizational structures that resonate with diverse causes. Overlaps in movement communities, like connections between feminists inside and outside institutions, contributed to the survival of the feminist movement (Staggenborg and Taylor 2005). Even during periods of “abeyance”, feminist organizations have continued to emerge and expand globally (Taylor 1989).

The endurance of the feminist movements can be attributed to the establishment of feminist fields across various domains, their integration into other social movements and public awareness, and the development of tactical repertoires that have contested numerous authorities and cultural norms (Staggenborg and Taylor 2005). These repertoires encompass a diverse array of actions, ranging from mass demonstrations to online activism, consciousness-raising groups to hashtag campaigns

(Hurtwitz and Crossley 2019; Crossley 2015). Scholars have underscored the importance of tactical innovation and adaptation in sustaining feminist mobilization across different contexts and historical periods (Taylor and Van Dyke 2011). The flexibility of feminist movements in utilizing various tactics reflects their resilience and ability to navigate complex social landscapes.

The intersection of the concept of “container” with “tactical repertoires” is particularly evident in the #MeToo movement. Empowered by a newfound awareness, feminists embarked on a series of protests aimed at challenging societal norms, reshaping cultural institutions, and effecting political transformation (Staggenborg and Taylor 2005). Online and offline activism, emerging from the survivor community itself, exemplify grassroots efforts to reshape public discourse and challenge established norms (Storer and Rodriguez 2020). These efforts serve as “containers” for survivors to struggle against sexual violence, fostering solidarity and raising awareness about the pervasive nature of sexual harassment.

Contemporary feminist movements have embraced networked organizing, leveraging digital media tools to rebuild feminist actions and spaces for the twenty-first century (Clark-Parsons 2022). This highly mediated organizing logic empowers diverse participants to shape collective actions, fostering inclusivity and decentralization within the movement (Clark-Parsons 2022). As I reveal in this thesis, the utilization of digital platforms as “containers” for feminist activism reflects the evolving nature of feminist tactical repertoires in the digital age.

Feminist movements in Turkey have been effective in creating survivor-centered “containers” in the struggle against gender-based violence for decades. They tackle the issue of gender inequality and gender-based violence by fostering collective identity and solidarity among women, challenging patriarchal structures, and advocating for survivor-centered policy reforms and institutional accountability (Kama Ozelkan 2014). The concept of the “container” within this movement aligns with efforts to provide support and solidarity to survivors of sexual violence, while also emphasizing the importance of creating safe spaces for survivors to share their stories and seek assistance. Through the tactical repertoires of mobilization, advocacy, and grassroots organizing, the feminist movements centered around the #MeToo continue to amplify women’s voices and pressure authorities to address gender-based injustices, all while embracing an intersectional approach that recognizes the diverse experiences of survivors of sexual harassment.

Feminist movements represent a dynamic force for social change, characterized by their strategic deployment of “tactical repertoires” referred to as “containers” in this work. Through a multifaceted approach encompassing diverse tactical repertoires

for creating supportive environments for survivors, feminist movements continue to challenge gender inequality and advocate for social justice and equality in the #MeToo era and beyond. As we navigate the complexities of contemporary social movements, understanding the interplay between tactical repertoires, supportive structures, and grassroots activism remains crucial in advancing feminist goals and aspirations.

1.5 Conducting an Online and Offline Feminist Ethnography

Letherby (2003) defines methodological thinking as the ability to perceive the dynamic interplay between the research process and its outcomes. Feminist methodologies pay particular attention to inquiring into not only how we generate and analyze data but also the interconnectedness between these processes through a gender-sensitive lens. These methodologies illuminate the often overlooked experiences and perspectives of women, thereby making visible what was previously unseen (Hesse-Biber 2013). As Harding (1987) notes, feminist methodologies place the research on the same critical plane as the subject matter, fostering an understanding that the researcher's perspective significantly shapes every aspect of the research endeavor. In other words, the researcher's feminist perspective reflected in her methodology informs the formulation of research questions, the conduct of fieldwork, the collection and analysis of data, and the interpretation of findings. When this relationship between "the process" and "the product" reflects a feminist perspective, Letherby (2003) argues that we can talk about a methodology that is feminist. Throughout my research, I tried to embrace this feminist perspective, ensuring that it permeated every stage of inquiry. From the inception of my research questions to my immersion in the field, from the data gathering to its analysis, and finally in the narrative of my research findings, I have striven to maintain this feminist lens. Thus, my methodology embodies a commitment to amplifying feminist voices and experiences, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and intersectional body of feminist knowledge.

I call my work a feminist ethnography, yet ascribing a precise definition to it proves challenging. Within academic discourse, feminist ethnography assumes multiple interpretations. For some, feminist ethnography is defined as a framework rooted in feminist epistemology, examining how knowledge is produced from the standpoint of women (Hesse-Biber 2017). For others, it is a range of methods or research practices aimed at advancing social justice (D.-A. Davis and Craven 2016). Broadly, feminist

ethnography can be conceptualized as a way to look at the power dynamics underlying a social interaction through a gender lens. As a feminist with an intersectional lens, sensitive to all forms of domination, I describe feminist ethnography as an attempt at dismantling the inherent power relationships within representations of others. Certainly, any good ethnography should be cautious about the power dynamics and underlying inequalities in research, however, as Davis and Craven (2016) emphasize, what makes feminist ethnography different is its consistent gender analysis both at the start and throughout the project as well as during the analysis or choices regarding the production and circulation of one's work. In line with the formulation by Davis and Craven (2016), I adopt the perspective that feminist ethnography "is a way of telling a story about gender and all of its intersections" within societal structures (8). This entails not only integrating gender perspectives from the outset of the research but also maintaining a consistent reflexivity regarding gender-related nuances during data collection, analysis, and the dissemination of findings.

A significant part of this research was carried out on online platforms. Ethnographic research of online practices has been on the rise with the increasing influence of digital technologies on people's everyday lives. As ethnography is being employed in a variety of fields and by a variety of disciplines, the emergence of terminologies like "virtual ethnography" (Hine 2000; Boellstorff et al. 2012), "cyberethnography" (Robinson and Schulz 2009), "netnography" (Kozinets 2010), "internet ethnography" (boyd 2014) or "digital ethnography" (Murthy 2008; Pink et al. 2016) signifies the evolution of ethnographic practice in the digital realm. The majority of these studies primarily focus on exploring online cultures that exist exclusively within digital spaces (Hine 2000; Kozinets 2010), while others analyze the embeddedness of the digital in everyday life contexts (boyd 2014; Nardi 2010).

However, today's evolving nature of digital technologies blurs the boundaries between online and offline realms, rendering the internet world inseparable from our daily lives. Hence, conducting ethnographic research in online spaces is no longer merely an exploration of virtual environments but necessitates understanding the intricate interplay between digital technologies and offline contexts. It is an attempt to understand how we live and act in a context that is almost always co-constituted and interwoven with digital technologies, content, and communication that necessitate "understanding the digital as situated in everyday worlds" (Pink et al. 2016, 20). In other words, much of the activity occurring online is closely linked to offline practices and environments. Morrow, Hawkins and Kern's (2015) analysis of Urban Homesteading (UH) blogs in the U.S. highlights this interconnectedness. Their on-site fieldwork in UH food-swapping events revealed a significant disparity between

the everyday experiences of the UH blogosphere and the highly gendered, classed, and exclusionary dynamics present in offline gatherings. This dissonance prompted a critical reflection on the validity of virtual observations that resulted from “a placeless and disembodied perspective” (Morrow, Hawkins, and Kern 2015, 532). So, “having a foot,” to put it in their terms, in both realms revealed the inconsistencies between the material experience and its virtual representation (Morrow, Hawkins, and Kern 2015, 532).

This example does not diminish the importance of analyzing online platforms but highlights the reciprocal relationship between online and offline spaces. In my research, recognizing this reciprocity has been vital for comprehending how online communities form and function, as well as their implications in everyday life and social dynamics. Such an approach called for methodologies that not only illuminate the processes of online community formation but also analyze their tangible effects on offline interactions and vice versa. Thus, navigating the intertwined nature of online and offline realms has been one of the important strategies I employed in my research to make visible the multifaceted dynamics shaping the contemporary sexual harassment struggle in the wake of the #MeToo movement.

Indeed, the process of researching online activities extends far beyond mere data collection from behind a screen. While online environments offer unparalleled access to vast amounts of data, it is essential to recognize that extracting this data from its context strips of its ethnographic richness. With this awareness, I conducted my research with a comprehensive consideration of both online and offline contexts. My approach neither fits into the conventional category of “digital ethnography” as I did not solely analyze the online feminist activist practices in the sexual harassment struggle nor does it align merely with “ethnography,” as I did not only pursue feminist activism carried out by Susma Bitsin in the physical world. Instead, my research methodology integrates both online and offline dimensions of sexual harassment activism, examining the intersections between digital and physical spaces. Hence, I characterize my work as “an online and offline feminist ethnography,” a term that involves the nuanced blend of methodologies employed to navigate the multifaceted landscape of feminist activism in the struggle against sexual harassment, where I tell a story about gender and all its intersections.

1.5.1 Semi-Structured In-depth Interviews

One of the ethnographic tools employed in this research for the case study of the #MeToo Movement in Turkey is the use of interviews. In its traditional form,

ethnography highly relies on formal and informal interviews with research participants, along with participant observation, to study the lived experiences and daily activities of a particular culture within its socio-political context from the viewpoint of its subjects (Buch and Staller 2013). Interviewing is a powerful ethnographic tool to reach “people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (Reinharz 1992, 19). For feminist researchers, such a methodology is crucial for the study of women’s experiences. Reinharz (1992) underlines the importance of learning from women’s first-person narratives as “an antidote to centuries of ignoring women’s ideas altogether or having men speak for them” (19). Additionally, in contrast to the objectifying scientific interviewing that perceives women solely as data providers, in-depth interviews offer feminist researchers the opportunity to foster openness, engagement, and the establishment of long-lasting relationships with their subjects (Reinharz 1992).

In my research, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 11 members of the Susma Bitsin Platform. Prior to the interviews, I obtained approval from the Sabancı University Research Ethics Council under the code FASS-2021-43. All research procedures were approved by the Council. Throughout my interviews, I paid utmost attention to carefully craft the questions so as not to cause any discomfort for the participants. As participation in this study was voluntary, I received informed consent from each interviewee, clearly notifying them of their right to withdraw from the interview at any point. They gave consent to audio recording of the interviews and agreed their voices would be anonymous. To ensure anonymity, all my interviewees were given pseudonyms. Any information that my participants requested to keep private has been excluded from this work.

I chose semi-structured in-depth interviewing as one of the core methods of this work because, with this tool, it became possible to create an open space of collective meaning-making between the researcher and participant (Hesse-Biber 2013). Although I had an agenda to follow to better understand the inner workings of the platform, the flexibility in semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask new questions that did not appear to me before the interview. Hence, this dynamic interaction facilitated a space of mutual exploration and inquiry, engendering further avenues for questioning and exploration. Moreover, choosing in-depth interviewing was also a deliberate strategy as these interviews provided valuable insights from the participants (Hesse-Biber 2013). Considering my main purpose to gain deeper insider information about the Susma Bitsin Platform, this method suited the most to gain rich and contextually embedded data from the perspective of my interviewees.

During the semi-structured in-depth interviews, my core guiding questions centered

around particular themes. Initially, I wanted my interviewees to situate themselves in the landscape of contemporary activism, by inviting them to share their personal stories and motivations for becoming involved in the Susma Bitsin Platform. Then, I asked questions about the organizational structure of the Susma Bitsin Platform, aiming to learn about its formation, internal dynamics, and underlying motives behind its activist practices. Moving forward, I directed the conversation towards examining the platform's digital activism practices, with a particular focus on the design of social media campaigns, the kinds of activist strategies, and the synergies between online and offline activist efforts. One of my main areas of research was feminist solidarity, therefore I wanted to learn the specificities of Susma Bitsin as a feminist solidarity platform. I inquired about the kinds of online and offline solidarity practices adopted by the platform and the forms of solidarities emerging out of Susma Bitsin's activism. I also focused on the platforms' advocacy efforts in the fight against sexual harassment in the cinema, television, and theater industries as well as the kinds of envisioned pathways for transforming the deeply entrenched sexism within cultural production spheres. My last questions were about the risks of being involved in a platform like Susma Bitsin and the limitations of being an independent feminist solidarity network like Susma Bitsin. By structuring the interviews around these thematic domains, I was able to capture the multifaceted dimensions of Susma Bitsin's strategies and impact within the context of the #MeToo movement in Turkey and its broader implications within the landscape of contemporary feminist activism.

The Susma Bitsin Platform consists of women with a variety of backgrounds and different levels of professional careers. They call themselves a "group of women filmmakers" (Aytaç 2019), working and studying both behind the scenes and in front of the camera. This group of women filmmakers includes academics, students, film producers, directors, actors, set workers, casting agents, and many more. Some of its members have been active in several social movements, such as the feminist movement, the labor movement, the human rights movement, and the LGBTQI+ movement while some are still affiliated with syndicates, student platforms, or similar independent feminist groups that emerged from Turkey's #MeToo movement, each contributing to the platform with the cultural baggage they bring with them. This collective involves women of all age groups, ranging from 18 to 60. The richness of these experiences was also reflected in my interviews.

Although Susma Bitsin has almost 300 members, only around 15 women are actively involved in its coordination. In my interviews, aside from meeting some of the core members, I was able to reach a diverse sample with varying backgrounds, which provided me with interesting perspectives of academics, film producers, di-

rectors, actors, set workers, and students. Additionally, some interviewees were affiliated with syndicates, student platforms, or similar independent feminist groups that emerged from Turkey's #MeToo movement. This heterogeneous composition provided a rich array of perspectives, enriching the depth and breadth of insights gained from the interviews. The interviews were conducted in two distinct rounds, with seven taking place between September 2021 and January 2022, and the remaining four between September 2022 and January 2023. These two rounds of interviews were important in providing insight into the different phases of the #MeToo movement in Turkey along with the evolution of the Susma Bitsin Platform. The initial round of interviews coincided with a pivotal period in Turkey's #MeToo movement, marked by notable legal victories. On the other hand, the Susma Bitsin Platform was gaining visibility and credibility in the industry. Although it was a non-legal entity, the platform was being referred to by formal institutions, acknowledging its influence in the sexual harassment struggle. The members of the platform were excited about their contribution to these developments and this enthusiasm served as a backdrop to my interviews. Additionally, this round coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic significantly impacted the entertainment industry, it contributed to the development of the Susma Bitsin Platform and its online activist practices. Since the industry came to a halt, members of the platform turned this precarity into an opportunity by carrying their struggle onto online platforms. This process also eased my access to the interviewees, where they had time to spare for long interviews.

The second round of interviews conducted a year later provided a distinct perspective on the evolution of the Susma Bitsin Platform and the broader #MeToo movement in Turkey. By this time, the platform gained significant visibility and influence within the industry, being invited to speak at various institutions ranging from universities to festivals. However, the fervor surrounding the #MeToo movement had noticeably diminished, giving way to a climate of backlash and skepticism about its sustainability and efficiency. This atmosphere was also reflected in my interviews. Although Susma Bitsin was perceived as a sine-quo-non of this struggle, the lack of adequate support mechanisms for the survivors and lack of tangible response from institutional actors had created disillusionment for my interviewees. As the pandemic was over, it became harder to reach members of the platform since they went back to their busy schedules. This was also reflected in the activism of Susma Bitsin. As the platform was based on volunteer work, the hectic lives of the members hindered the activism carried out by the platform. Therefore, carrying out two rounds of interviews provided me the opportunity to witness different phases of the struggle and the platform's engagement over time.

1.5.2 Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

Before conducting the interviews, I obtained informed consent from all participants. The interviews were carried out both in-person and via Zoom, with each session lasting approximately 60 to 100 minutes. In order to analyze my interview data, I employed thematic analysis, drawing upon the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Following their conceptualization of “theoretical thematic analysis,” I approached the analysis deductively, where I applied pre-existing concepts to guide my examination of the data set. This involved identifying keywords and concepts guided by my research question (Braun and Clarke 2006). As Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize, deductive thematic analysis provides a more detailed analysis of some aspects of the data rather than a rich description. To achieve this, I initially transcribed the interviews verbatim and familiarized myself with the data through careful reading and note-taking. After identifying concepts from my research questions, I applied these categories as initial codes to the data. My initial codes included themes such as digital activism, feminist solidarity, disclosure, and sexual harassment. I systematically identified and labeled segments of data that corresponded to pre-determined concepts. These codes served as the building blocks of my thematic analysis. Once I coded my data, I conducted a systematic search for overarching themes, identifying repeating patterns, ideas, or concepts that emerged from the data based on the pre-determined concepts of my research question. After reviewing the identified themes and how they relate to pre-determined concepts, I refined and defined my key themes, ensuring that they capture the essence of my data. Finally, I interpreted the themes within the context of my research question and reported the findings throughout my chapters as the emerging themes also laid the foundation for the organization of my chapters.

In addition to conducting interviews, I participated in both online and physical public meetings organized or attended by the Susma Bitsin Platform between June 2020 to June 2023. These meetings included events such as SU Gender’s 8th of March events in 2021, the Women of the World Festival Istanbul’s workshop in 2021, and Sinema-Tek Days in June 2023. Participating in these meetings was instrumental in complementing the insights garnered from interviews. While interviews provided detailed information about the inner workings of the platform and the individual perspectives of its members, participating in public meetings allowed me to contextualize my data within a broader discourse. By engaging directly with other members of the platform and observing their interactions and discussions, I gained a deeper understanding of the collective ethos and objectives of Susma Bitsin.

1.5.3 Digital Ethnography of Susma Bitsin Platform

A significant part of my research was dedicated to the examination of online activist practices. Hence, to be able to analyze the online domain, I also utilized digital ethnography as a methodological tool (Pink et al. 2016), which involved close observation (Mendes 2015) of the Susma Bitsin Platform. I closely observed the online activities of the Susma Bitsin Platform between June 2020 to June 2023, monitoring their digital presence on a daily basis. Susma Bitsin maintains an online presence across various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. As of March 2024, the platform has around 8000 followers on Instagram with over 200 posts and more than 4000 followers on Twitter with around 700 tweets. Since Susma Bitsin is not an official entity, it does not have a physical office; instead, its members coordinate activities through digital communication channels such as their WhatsApp group.

According to Postill and Pink (2012), the everyday routine of digital ethnography practices involves immersing oneself in online platforms, keeping up to date with trends, and engaging in discussions. These routines include “catching up, sharing, exploring, interacting and archiving” (Postill and Pink 2012, 128). As a close observer of Susma Bitsin, to immerse myself in this online community, I initially identified Susma Bitsin’s social media accounts, including Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. As Facebook is not actively used, I started following the platform’s Instagram and Twitter accounts, checking their activities as an everyday routine. This not only allowed me to catch up with the current activist practices of the platform but also gave me access to previous ones as social media keeps easily accessible records. Postill and Pink (2012) also emphasize that the routines of sharing posts and retweeting links open the researchers to the shared content of others directly while exploring often means clicking on the links provided, leading the researcher to other potential research sites. Although I was a keen follower of the platforms’ social media presence, I kept sharing, exploring, and interacting routines to a minimum. Instead, I chose to remain “invisible.” Sanjek and Tratner (2016) call this choice of the researcher to remain “invisible” as “lurking.” Lurking is the method where the researchers do not join any of the online conversations through tweets, comments, or posts and usually carry it out before the interviews in order to “familiarize themselves with the setting before asking questions” (Sanjek and Tratner 2016, 71). Within the scope of my research, I was “lurking” mainly on Twitter and Instagram in order to familiarize myself with the dynamics of the online discursive space surrounding the Susma Bitsin Platform and the #MeToo movement in general. During this “lurking,” phase, I took “e-fieldnotes” (Sanjek and Tratner 2016)

to keep track of how the movement advanced, what themes emerged, and what kind of new actors got involved in the discussions.

This digital ethnographic work involved a significant archiving routine. I archived screenshots of Instagram posts, tweets, and other relevant visual materials as well as public notices, and interviews delivered by the Susma Bitsin Platform to be able to provide a wider context for my analysis. I also created categories under the names of survivors such as Elit İşcan and Nazife Aksoy who had been influential in the struggle and archived every visual material posted by Susma Bitsin, news pieces, and the interviews given by these survivors in relevant folders. Close observation of Susma Bitsin Platform's online activities was complementary to my interview data, helping me analyze to what extent offline and online worlds of feminist activism around #MeToo are co-constituted and interwoven. With the archived social media posts, I also conducted content analysis. Content analysis is a widely used research method used to systematically analyze the content of textual, visual, audio, or multimedia data (Krippendorff 2004). It helps to reveal the “themes, frames, discourses, story tone” and similar patterns (Mendes 2015, 46). By applying quantitative and qualitative content analysis of Instagram posts and tweets of Susma Bitsin, I aimed to find correlations and patterns in how certain hashtags and Instagram posts supporting survivors, and providing solidarity messages are communicated. While doing this, I not only counted the frequency of these hashtags and posts but also analyzed the treatment of emerging themes by the platform. After finalizing the coding and analyzing coded data, I searched for the patterns for the way the platform carried out online activism in support of survivors of sexual harassment and standing in solidarity with them. Then, I brought these patterns vis-à-vis my findings with other methods and discussed their implications in my chapters.

1.5.4 Limitations of the Research

There were some limitations to this study. One significant constraint was the challenge of reaching a larger number of platform members to conduct interviews. While the COVID-19 pandemic brought significant disadvantages for many researchers, in my case, it allowed me to reach more members of the platform as the cinema, television, and theater industries significantly slowed down, particularly during the first year of the pandemic. Hence, I was able to schedule interviews for extended durations. However, when the sector resumed its normal pace, reaching platform members became increasingly challenging. Initially, I reached platform members through the gatekeeping of a friend. Upon her suggestion, I also reached more peo-

ple. Also, some of my interviewees were recommended by people whom I came across at conferences or meetings. I also met some of my interviewees when they approached me while I was sharing my work publicly. When I wanted to interview more members, I sent an e-mail to Susma Bitsin's address, explaining my research. However, I got no response from the platform with this method.

Moreover, although my interviewees were diverse in the sense that they occupied different positions in the sector, they were educated women with socio-economic privileges. However, my aim was also to reach women in precarious positions who were involved in the Susma Bitsin Platform, which I could not achieve. This drawback restricted the representation of voices from more marginalized and precarious positions within the sector, consequently limiting the breadth of perspectives captured in the data. In further research, addressing these limitations could involve expanding recruitment strategies to reach a more diverse range of participants and ensuring greater inclusivity in the research process to amplify marginalized voices and perspectives.

Additionally, the inability to access closed meetings organized by the platform posed another limitation to my research. These closed meetings, exclusive to women actively working and studying in the cinema, television, and theater industries, were inaccessible to external observers for reasons of safety and trust-building among survivors. Unfortunately, this meant that outsiders to the industry like myself were unable to participate in these sessions, which facilitated the formation of the platform to a great extent. As a result, I missed out on valuable insights into the platform's inner workings and potential conflicts. Although participating in their public meetings allowed me to meet other members of the platform and learn about their perspectives, participating in closed meetings would have offered a deeper understanding of the internal dynamics and challenges occurring within the platform. In light of these limitations, I relied solely on the perspectives of interviewees to navigate the complexities of the platform's operations and dynamics. While interview data provided valuable insights, participant observation in the closed meetings would have offered a deeper understanding of the platform.

One final limitation of this research was not being able to interview former members of the platform who left due to various reasons. Reaching out to these people and discussing their reasons for leaving the platform would provide insight into the inner dynamics and potential shortcomings of the platform. Understanding their motivations to leave could have shed light on any underlying conflicts or challenges within the platform. As I could interview active members of the platform, they generally provided positive feedback. Only a few members offered insights into potential

problems or challenges faced within the platform. A more critical perspective on the platform's operations and feminist politics would have added depth and balance to the research findings. Despite these limitations, the research aimed to provide a nuanced exploration of the Susma Bitsin Platform's activism within the broader context of the #MeToo movement in Turkey.

1.5.5 Positionality

I started this journey as a feminist in her late 30s, who at the same time was a full-time mother, instructor, wife, and daughter. Despite my privileges such as being an upper-middle-class, educated, heterosexual cis woman, enrolled in a Gender Studies program at a distinguished university in Turkey, my baggage of responsibilities limited the time I could dedicate to my research. Nonetheless, my feminist sensibilities nurtured through my academic studies and grassroots activism with organizations like KAMER endowed me with the ability to scrutinize my research through the lens of gender and all its intersections. This feminist epistemology not only guided me while conducting interviews but also informed my approach to analyzing both the online and offline worlds of feminist activism. Moreover, my prior experience of studying and working in the film industry acquainted me better with the power dynamics underlying the sector. This firsthand experience informed the formulation of my research question and guided my exploration of relevant issues. During my interviews, I was reflexive about my experience of working and being harassed in the field. As both an insider and outsider to the field, I possessed a unique perspective that enriched my inquiry. Additionally, having been subjected to sexual harassment in my professional experience within the film industry, I, like many survivors, initially suppressed these memories. However, this perspective also allowed me to appreciate both the promises and limitations of a feminist solidarity network, particularly in its role in empowering survivors to collectively challenge the silence surrounding sexual harassment.

In essence, my personal and professional background, coupled with my feminist sensibilities and reflexive approach, shaped my research journey and facilitated a nuanced examination of feminist activism against sexual harassment within the Turkish context spanning through the online and offline worlds. Through this lens, I was able to bring to light not only the patterns but also the ruptures of this struggle, contributing to ongoing discourse and advocacy efforts in pursuit of gender justice and equality.

All in all, this online and offline feminist ethnography was designed to understand

the intersecting continuums of the feminist struggle around sexual harassment with a particular focus on the Susma Bitsin Platform, emerging as one of the prominent outcomes of Turkey's #MeToo movement. As I previously mentioned analyzing the feminist struggle against sexual harassment within the context of the #MeToo movement would be limited if I only searched for digital activist practices, for my methodology, I also propose that a comprehensive analysis of this topic requires employing both online and offline research methods. That's why, I conceptualize my methodology as online and offline feminist ethnography. By adopting this approach, I aimed to explore the promises and limitations of doing feminist activism within the context of the struggle against sexual harassment, acknowledging the complexities that arise from navigating the online and offline worlds simultaneously.

1.6 A Guide to the Chapters

My chapters are divided thematically. Each chapter analyzes one aspect of the research and interweaves these themes within the framework of intersecting continuums. Chapter 2 is an exploration of the promises and challenges of digital feminist activism for the sexual harassment struggle. As activism has evolved beyond traditional avenues in today's interconnected world, utilizing the potential of digital platforms to amplify voices and catalyze change, activist practices have become an important arena of analysis. Beginning with an exploration of the multifaceted nature of digital activism, I investigate various strategies employed by feminist activists in navigating the digital landscape. Emphasizing the need to view digital activism as part of a broader continuum spanning both online and offline spaces, I argue for a nuanced understanding that acknowledges the unique strengths and limitations of each realm. Rather than privileging one over the other, I advocate for recognizing the intersecting continuums of activism, reflecting the complex nature of the struggle against sexual harassment. The chapter starts with an analysis of the conceptualization of digital activism, tracing its evolution from early discussions on technology's role in mobilization. In earlier debates, we often see polarization where digital activism is discussed as either a powerful tool for change or a superficial, low-risk endeavor. After this overview, I examine the potentials and risks inherent in the online sphere for fostering feminist activism. This exploration traces the historical convergence of feminism and technology in cyberfeminist discussions, paving the way to an in-depth analysis of digital feminist activist practices where I highlight both the promises and precariousness of engaging in this domain. I conclude with a discussion about the emergence of digital feminist counterpublics as a response to

the exclusionary nature of traditional public spheres, offering alternative spaces for marginalized voices to gather and advocate for gender equality.

In Chapter 3, I contextualize the continuum of online and offline feminist activism within the struggle against sexual harassment. I trace the evolution of this struggle from traditional street activism to the digital landscape, examining the contributions of this interaction to the fight against sexual harassment. Commencing with an exploration of the historical origins of the term “sexual harassment” and the feminist movements surrounding it, I delve into the emergence and evolution of the #MeToo movement, wherein women found collective courage to share their experiences of sexual harassment. I argue for the importance of recognizing the intersecting continuums that extend beyond the online-offline continuum. I elucidate the continuums of marginalizing narratives and practices that stand at the intersection of various oppressive power dynamics such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Throughout this inquiry, I utilize Angela Davis’ (1999) conceptualization of “troubling the origins” of narratives, aiming to identify the continuities and disruptions within the broader context of the sexual harassment struggle. By scrutinizing the origin stories of the #MeToo movement and questioning why certain narratives gain prominence while others remain obscured, I prompt a deeper examination of its roots. Through the lens of intersecting continuums, I reveal the intricate connections between past and present social justice movements, emphasizing the ongoing nature of the struggle against sexual harassment within broader historical and societal contexts. The chapter unfolds by examining the origin stories of the fight against sexual harassment, primarily within the U.S. context, before expanding to explore its manifestations across diverse global contexts and within international institutions. By troubling the origin stories of the #MeToo movement along the continuum of online and offline spaces, I underscore the complex interplay between digital and physical realms in shaping contemporary feminist activism against sexual harassment.

In Chapter 4, I utilize the continuum framework to unveil both the entrenched patterns of marginalization and the breaking points within the feminist struggle against sexual harassment in Turkey. As I illustrate, the Susma Bitsin Platform, a product of Turkey’s #MeToo movement within cinema, television, and theater industries, exemplifies the convergence of online and offline feminist activism to combat sexual harassment. Yet, the platform’s emergence signifies not only the culmination of decades-long feminist efforts but also a pivotal moment disrupting the silencing structures within Turkey’s cultural production industry. To elucidate this analysis, the chapter begins by tracing the historical roots of feminist activism in Turkey, particularly during the 1980s, when feminist campaigns and publications played a crucial role in conceptualizing sexual harassment. It then delves into the legal

battles waged by the feminist movement, resulting in legislative amendments that laid the groundwork for the criminalization of sexual harassment. Transitioning from historical groundwork to contemporary activism, the chapter examines how the culmination of feminist efforts materialized in Turkey's #MeToo movement. It highlights the intersectionality of online and offline activism, showcasing the amplification of voices and experiences previously silenced by societal norms. The chapter culminates in a detailed exploration of the Susma Bitsin Platform. By tracing the origin stories of the platform and analyzing the continuum of activist practices against sexual harassment across digital and physical spaces, the chapter unveils the potential for social change and solidarity fostered by intersecting continuums of feminist activism. In doing so, it sheds light on the breaking points within the continuum of silencing and marginalization, offering insights into the transformative possibilities of collective action.

In Chapter 5, the theme of feminist solidarity emerges as a central narrative, binding together the analyses of continuums explored throughout the thesis. Solidarity, within the context of combating sexual harassment, represents a potent force that transcends individual experiences, fostering a sense of community and mutual support among activists. The chapter begins with a discussion of earlier conceptualizations of the term "sisterhood," acknowledging its critiques for essentialist connotations while also highlighting its potential as an empowering concept for feminist struggle when approached through an intersectional lens. It explores how women of color embraced the concept, acknowledging common differences to unite in solidarity. Moreover, it reveals how the journey from sisterhood to feminist solidarity led to the recognition of women's rights as human rights on a global scale. Moving forward, the chapter analyzes the challenges of establishing solidarities, including contested scopes, diverse interpretations, and contextual factors shaping its understanding. Through an analysis of various conceptualizations by feminist scholars, it highlights different facets of solidarity and their potential for political mobilization. It then introduces the complexities of establishing intersectional feminist solidarity, offering specific examples to illustrate the potential and challenges. The chapter concludes by discussing the feminist solidarity practices employed by the Susma Bitsin Platform spanning through online and offline spheres and carried out across various entities of the sector.

In Chapter 6, I frame Turkey's #MeToo movement as a pivotal moment in the struggle against sexual harassment, particularly emphasizing the power of women's online disclosures. As seen globally, the movement gained visibility when women collectively used digital platforms to expose their experiences of sexual harassment, catalyzing a discourse on online disclosures as a feminist method for seeking infor-

mal justice. In this chapter, I frame women’s online disclosures as a tipping point in the continuum of silence surrounding sexual harassment. I argue that these disclosures can be understood as instances of “feminist snaps” as framed by Sarah Ahmed (2017), characterized by sharp sounds and sudden breaks, reflecting women’s collective impatience with systemic injustices. By breaking the continuum of silence, these disclosures rupture the narratives of marginalization and challenge oppressive systems that have long failed to address women’s demands for equality and justice. To support this argument, I begin with an examination of the continuum of feminist practices, tracing the evolution from consciousness-raising and speak-outs of the second-wave feminist movement to awareness-raising campaigns through online platforms. Analyzing the call-out culture created by survivors, I highlight the dual nature of disclosures as both empowering and potentially vulnerable. Then, I explore survivors’ pursuit of informal justice through online disclosures, driven by the impunity surrounding sexual violence and the lack of adequate support mechanisms. I address the potentials and pitfalls of perceiving these disclosures as digilante feminist practices, drawing on Emma Jane’s (2017) framework. Furthermore, I emphasize the importance of developing comprehensive support systems that address the intersecting power dynamics shaping experiences of sexual harassment. Grounding the discussion in the Turkish context, I highlight the significance of the feminist principle “woman’s statement is essential.” The chapter concludes with an analysis of the support mechanisms provided by the Susma Bitsin Platform in solidarity with survivors of sexual harassment, illustrating the transformative potential of collective action in fostering justice and accountability.

2. PRECARIOUS BUT PROMISING POTENTIALS OF THE DIGITAL

I became interested in the #MeToo movement after I attended an inspiring talk by Cynthia Enloe, organized by Sabancı University in collaboration with Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in 2019. Enloe's speech, emphasizing the importance of milestones in the feminist struggle paving the way to the #MeToo, reminded us that the #MeToo movement did not happen out of the blue. One of the milestones she mentioned was Anita Hill's struggle against sexual harassment in the 1990s, whose name I heard for the first time. Her story astounded me. Back then, I did not know that if Anita Hill and all the women who set the milestones of the feminist struggle against sexual harassment were not brave enough to speak out, there would be no #MeToo movement to write a dissertation thesis on.

Hence, when I decided on the #MeToo movement as my topic, I thought that I would be writing a thesis on digital feminist activism. That's why, I initially started my research by looking for digital feminist activist practices carried out in the sexual harassment struggle. Upon my decision, my supervisor, Ayşe Gül Altınay, gave me Paolo Gerbaudo's influential book *Tweets and The Streets*, which had been recommended to her by renowned sociologist and media researcher Ayşe Öncü. Focusing on new social movements triggered by the rise of social media around the world, Gerbaudo's (2012) book pointed to the significance of digital tools in mobilizing people but also underscored the central role played by "the streets." Gerbaudo's nuanced analysis discussed how social media was being utilized, how it functioned during and after the formation of movements, and what activists did with it through the cases of Indignados in Spain, Arab Spring uprisings in Egypt and Occupy Wall Street in the U.S. (Gerbaudo 2012). He argued that digital media undeniably played a significant role in the social movements of 2011, and yet the actual impact was much more complex and nuanced than what technology-savvy thinkers predicted. Digital media, rather than establishing new online realms to replace physical interactions, functioned as complementary to traditional face-to-

face gatherings and served as a means to facilitate the development of novel forms of gatherings as well as in-person interactions (Gerbaudo 2012).

After reading Gerbaudo's book and digging deeper into the feminist activism carried out in the struggle against sexual harassment, I realized that if I only analyzed the "tweets," I would be ignoring the contributions of the "streets" to feminist politics on sexual harassment. Conversely, if I only focused on the physical realm, then my research would be missing the "precarious but promising potentials" (Fischer 2016) of the digital world of activism toward creating a meaningful change for a just and equal world. Although the mainstream portrayal of the #MeToo movement focused on Alyssa Milano's tweet, reaching up to millions of people in just 24 hours, this analysis missed the decades-long struggle of Tarana Burke. Burke started #MeToo on MySpace as early as 2006 to support survivors of sexual harassment in the black community by building her work on the legacy of the black feminist movement in their struggle against gender-based violence and discrimination. However, it was Milano's tweet that created what Fileborn and Loney-Howes (2019) call the "rupture" in the discourse of sexual harassment where, for the first time, women collectively spoke out against sexual harassment and the institutions held both the perpetrators and themselves accountable in this crime, starting to develop more comprehensive support mechanisms for survivors of sexual harassment.

This realization also made me inquire into other social media movements that had become viral before the emergence of #MeToo such as #NiUnaMenos and #BlackLivesMatter. I remembered closely following the developments of these social justice movements on social media and was aware of the fact that these movements, although initiated with a hashtag, resulted in offline demonstrations on an unprecedented scale and were, undoubtedly, connected to the decades of feminist and anti-racist struggles preceding them. Thinking about #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, and #BlackLivesMatter together also made me realize the importance of an intersectional lens when analyzing these movements as the struggle lies at the intersection of multiple power dynamics, including – and remaining not limited to – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, and disability. I concluded that an analysis of the struggle around sexual harassment carried out through "tweets" and "streets" would be severely limited if it did not incorporate the framework of intersectionality, which serves to understand the complex interplay of power dynamics within digital and physical spaces.

Recognizing the intersectional and interconnected nature of online and offline activist spheres, I started this thesis with an inquiry into the precarious and at the same time promising potentials that digital activism offers to the feminist struggle

against sexual harassment. Hence, throughout this chapter, I analyze the variety of strategies that feminist activists employ to develop the potential of digital technologies alongside the challenges they face. While doing this, I argue that it is important to conceptualize digital activism as part of a continuum that spans both online and offline worlds. As my research revealed, a nuanced understanding of activism necessitates recognizing the unique strengths and limitations of both the digital and physical spaces. As each realm offers distinct opportunities for engagement and impact, prioritizing one form of activism over the other would not be enough to capture the potentialities inherent in each sphere. Nb I also contend that it is not possible to talk about a single continuum of online and offline worlds but intersecting continuums as the struggle of sexual harassment is a multifaceted issue, hence the struggle against it has been shaped by intersecting continuums.

In order to achieve this, the chapter starts with an analysis of how digital activism is conceptualized, tracing its roots back to early discussions on the utilization of technology for mass mobilizations. These debates often framed digital activism as either a powerful tool of opportunity or as a form of feel-good, low-risk activism. It then transitions to an in-depth examination of the multifaceted potentialities and risks of the online world in fostering change. Building upon this analysis, the chapter traces the historical convergence of feminism and technology brought together in the early discussions of cyberfeminism. Then, it provides a detailed analysis of digital feminist activist practices, discussing both the promising and precarious aspects of the field for feminist politics. The chapter concludes with a discussion of digital feminist counterpublics, representing a significant shift in feminist activism by providing avenues for solidarity, advocacy, and resistance in the struggle for gender equality and social justice.

2.1 Digital Activism: How is It Called?

The advancement of digital tools has facilitated an emerging participatory culture, fundamentally altering the landscape of activist practices. With the increasing use of online platforms, individuals have found it effortless to communicate, mobilize, and share information. Activists as well as other political groups have discovered that new media platforms offer powerful means to question and disrupt popular cultural norms, which, in turn, leads to unique opportunities for self-expression and engagement. Today, social groups with different interests can create communities, raise their voice, increase their visibility, express alternative views, and discuss, or

engage with mainstream media culture and political discourse thanks to the use of websites, mobile devices, digital videos, blogs, collaborative platforms, social networking platforms, and open-source applications (Lievrrouw 2011). Particularly after the introduction of user-friendly Web 2.0, which allowed for the proliferation of user-created content for sharing information and social networking (Mitra-Kahn 2012), the diversity of online tools and platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, various e-blogs and e-zines gave activists the opportunity for immediate sharing of content and active engagement with other people within their online community as well as with a transnational audience. What's more, these new tools have been deployed to harness "collective intelligence" where people are able to read, write, and share their own content, thus "collectively sorting out the 'best' material" (Norden-son 2017, 29). In that sense, the new architecture of the digital world has facilitated the formation of multiple online communities collectively resisting the dominant discourses.

In this rapidly changing world, new concepts such as 'digital activism,' 'online activism,' 'cyber-activism,' 'e-activism' or 'internet activism' have emerged to refer to activist practices. Broadly defined, 'digital activism' refers to the utilization of digital technologies like cellular or internet-enabled devices to foster social and political change (Rees 2024). Initially, terms such as 'cyber-activism' and 'e-activism' were employed to describe activism conducted through the Internet, with 'social media activism' later coined to specifically address activism facilitated by social software applications (Joyce 2010, ix). Sandor Vegh (2003) introduced 'online activism,' defining it as "a politically motivated movement" relying on the internet's technological affordances to reach traditional activist goals (71). Vegh (2003) delineated two strategies within online activism: "internet-enhanced," which utilizes the internet to bolster traditional advocacy techniques, and "internet-based," which relies solely on internet activities such as website hacking or virtual protests (72). These actions mainly aimed at achieving certain goals such as reacting against the authorities and dominant systems.

On the other hand, Sandoval-Almazan and Ramon Gil-Garcia (2014) expanded the scope, defining 'internet activism' as utilizing electronic communication tools like e-mails, podcasts, and social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook alongside YouTube. This approach emphasized accelerating communication among citizen movements and distributing local knowledge to a wider community. As can be seen, digital activism is a newly emerging and contested arena where there is no consensus regarding the appropriate terminology for the use of digital technologies in activist practices. Within the scope of this research, I use digital activism and online activism interchangeably, reflecting a comprehensive and inclusive approach

to encompassing all forms of social and political activist practices that make use of digital affordances.

2.2 Promises and Pitfalls of Digital Activism

The impact of digital technologies on politics and social movements is a complex and multifaceted issue that has been widely debated. Some scholars approached digital technologies as a tool of opportunity (Castells 2015; Shirky 2008; Karpf 2010) that can mobilize masses (Karpf 2010) and facilitate future collective action (Kende et al. 2016) while others perceived it as a challenge for social movements, characterized by low-efficacy and low-risk online collective actions without any tangible means to any group (Morozov 2009; Christensen 2011; Kristofferson, White, and Pelosa 2014). Questions surrounding the efficacy, sustainability, and potential co-optation of digital activism persist, raising critical concerns about its long-term impact on societal transformation. Thus, understanding the promises and pitfalls of digital activism is essential for navigating the complexities of contemporary activism and harnessing its transformative potential for a more just and equitable world.

2.2.1 What are the Promises?

In an era defined by rapid technological advancements, digital activism has emerged as a transformative force shaping the dynamics of democratic public spheres. Through its expansive reach and interactive capabilities, digital media has facilitated unparalleled access to information, fostered citizen journalism, and enabled diverse voices to contribute meaningfully to public discourse. Scholars like Castells (2015) emphasized the significance of digital activism, citing concrete examples such as the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, where activists “planned the protests on Facebook, coordinated them through Twitter, spread them by SMSs and webcast them to the world on YouTube” (60). The Egyptian revolution demonstrated the transformative potential of digital technologies in galvanizing mass movements and resisting oppressive regimes by disseminating information, amplifying dissenting voices, circumventing traditional media censorship and government control, subsequently inspiring similar uprisings across the region, collectively known as the Arab Spring (Castells 2015). Similarly, Shirky (2008) underlined the revolutionary impact of social media, describing it as a catalyst for “an epochal change” that improves people’s “ability to share, cooperate, and act together” as it is being utilized by “everyone

from working biologists to angry air passengers” (304). This democratizing potential of digital media is celebrated for its capacity to increase access to public discourse and empower individuals from all sections of society to shape societal narratives and influence political processes. By providing a platform for different voices to be heard and amplified, digital activism opens up new avenues for civic engagement and democratic participation.

Digital activism also plays a crucial role in rapidly disseminating information and engaging global audiences, thereby quickly raising awareness about social, political, and environmental issues. Unlike the traditional methods that required going to people’s doors or asking them to sign petitions on street corners, digital campaigns offer the possibility of unparalleled reach and speed, enabling activists to connect with a larger, often global, community with just one click or a social media post. Rees (2020) underlines the efficacy of digital activism campaigns reaching millions and facilitating awareness-raising on a massive scale. For instance, the rally behind Greta Thunberg and the Fridays for Future movement witnessed the support from millions of young people across the world, all mobilizing to address the issue of climate crisis. What began as Greta Thunberg’s personal decision to boycott school on Fridays evolved into a global phenomenon. In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Fridays For Future movement transitioned to online strikes in 2020, and as of 2022, the youth-driven climate initiative had 14 million individuals engaging in various events and campaigns led by the youth to raise awareness about the climate crisis (Martinez Sainz and Hanna 2023).

The importance of digital activist practices utilizing social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube is also evident in several prominent global social movements. For instance, the Indignados movement in Spain actively used Twitter to organize and propagate alternative narratives, ultimately paving the way to the 15 May Protests all over Spain (Postill 2014). According to Postill (2014), the “nano-stories” shared via Twitter about the power abuses during the protests were short-lived, and yet over time, they accumulated to create a strong sense of community among millions of people (57). This collective narrative formation served as a potent portrayal of popular resistance against political and economic corruption (Postil 2014). This movement exemplified the capacity of digital activism not only to facilitate organizing efforts and engender a shared sense of solidarity among disconnected individuals but also to enhance people’s participation in shaping societal narratives and influencing political processes, thereby contributing to a more democratic public sphere.

Similarly, Zeynep Tufekci (2017), in her book *Twitter and Tear Gas*, emphasizes the

importance of social media use on the emergence and dynamics of the Gezi Park Protests in Turkey. The Gezi Park Protests started as an act of resistance by a few people toward the government's urban construction plan of the last open space remaining in Taksim, one of the most crowded places in Istanbul, on May 29, 2013. In a few days, it has turned into one of the biggest mass protests of the country in decades. It was a self-organized resistance that denied formal politics and organization and digital media played a vital role in its formation and advancement (Tufekci 2017). During the protests, as the mass media was heavily censored, broadcasting documentaries on penguins, people by taking out their phones to document and share the violence perpetrated by the police created their own medium for spreading news and this was signaling the emergence of a new public that has transformed into "a digitally networked public sphere" (Tufekci 2017, 47). The viral spread of these citizen-generated posts and tweets not only resulted in a global audience witnessing the unfolding of events momentarily but also led to more and more people showing up in Gezi Park to protect the last park standing near Taksim Square. All of this would not be possible if people had not created and shared their own narratives through their own social media accounts. Tufekci (2017) describes the Gezi Movement as a "come-seemingly-from-nowhere protest" resulting from "a global cultural convergence" of hopes and practices of protesters organized on such a large scale through Twitter but was "filled with tear gas, leaderless, networked, euphoric, and fragile" (xv). Despite the fragility, the Gezi Park Protests exemplify the power of digital activism to rapidly disseminate alternative narratives, mobilize masses, and catalyze collective action on an unprecedented scale.

Another promise digital activism offers is being an arena to give voice to those who are silenced, in this way contributing to the formation of a more inclusive and participatory public space. Mainstream media often follows a particular narrative or agenda, however, digital platforms allow for the creation of alternative narratives that challenge dominant ideologies and promote different perspectives. When ordinary citizens tweet about their personal stories of oppression or discrimination on social media, it serves as a powerful counter-narrative to the issues overlooked by mainstream media. In this way, this narrative can be used as a pressure to force those in power to take action on the neglected issues. For instance, #BlackLivesMatter, initiated on social media in 2013 following the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the killing of Trayvon Martin, gained international visibility after the shooting of Michael Brown by a white police officer (Ray, Brown, and Laybourn 2017). The movement's online campaigns along with marches and protests drew attention to issues of police brutality and racism against black communities (Ince, Rojas, and Davis 2017). Tara L. Conley highlights #BlackLivesMatter as emblematic of a

new generation of activism where activists like Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi utilized Twitter, Vine, and Instagram to challenge systemic racism and sexism by sharing the stories from their own perspectives (Bobadilla 2014). #BlackLivesMatter, via the power of a hashtag, shared people's experiences with the public who would be clueless otherwise, mobilizing thousands of people to challenge systems that continue marginalizing black communities (Bobadilla 2014). This example underscores the transformative potential of digital activism in empowering marginalized communities and affecting societal change by amplifying their voices and mobilizing collective action.

As the visibility of marginalized voices increases through digital activist practices, digital activism is also acknowledged for creating more intersectional perspectives, recognizing that many individuals confront multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously. This approach helps bring to light the experiences of marginalized communities who navigate intersecting systems of oppression. Mia Fischer's (2016) ethnographic work on the #Free_Cece campaign illustrates how social media activism effectively challenged the mainstream media's racialized and transphobic coverage of events. In 2011, Cece McDonald, a black transgender woman, and her friends faced racist, homophobic, and transphobic insults by a group of white, working-class bikers. Two groups engaged in a physical fight and during the confrontation, Dean Schmitz accidentally fell on Cece, who was holding a pair of fabric scissors, and died (Fischer 2016). Although there were conflicting testimonies about the event, Cece was arrested as both an instigator and an aggressor in the incident. In response to Cece's arrest, queer and anarchist communities mobilized to form The Cece Support Committee, which utilized digital platforms and started online campaigns to expose the state-sanctioned violence perpetrated against Cece, emphasizing the intersectional dimensions of her experience (Fischer 2016). This case exemplified how digital activism facilitates the dissemination of marginalized narratives and challenges dominant discourses perpetuated by mainstream media. By providing a platform for marginalized voices to be heard and shared, digital activism fosters greater awareness and understanding of intersectional forms of violence and discrimination.

In addition to fostering more inclusive and intersectional political spaces, digital activism also holds a strong potential to pressure organizations and formal institutions to take action. The case of Sleeping Giants, an online activist movement based in the U.S. during the Trump administration, is a significant example of this potential to create change. Beginning as an anonymous Twitter account, Sleeping Giants is dedicated to combating hate speech and disinformation. Its most effective online activism was targeting Breitbart News, a far-right online publisher notorious for

spreading hate speech. By publicly urging organizations to withdraw their advertisements from Breitbart, Sleeping Giant effectively mobilized a widespread boycott, leading to over 4000 companies blacklisting the platform, causing a staggering 90 percent decline in its advertisement revenue (Li, Bernard, and Luczak-Roesch 2021). As the movement gained momentum, its online advocacy expanded to include sponsors of Fox News, suppliers associated with the Trump administration's family separation policy and online platforms profiting from disinformation and hate speech (Li, Bernard, and Luczak-Roesch 2021). The case of Sleeping Giants can be viewed as a notable instance of online activism, showcasing its concrete effects on the financial gains of Breitbart and the subsequent refusal of major advertisers to support it. What's more, the widespread dissemination of the Sleeping Giant movement on a global scale and the copying of its strategic toolkit by other initiatives such as #StopFundingFakeNews, underscore the significance of digital activism in holding powerful actors accountable (Li, Bernard, and Luczak-Roesch 2021). Through innovative tactics aimed at encouraging corporate bodies to take a stance against the purveyors of hate speech and misinformation, Sleeping Giants demonstrated a unique form of digital activism that resulted in tangible outcomes.

One important aspect exemplified by Sleeping Giants is its status as a solely digital activism case, with no offline mobilization efforts, yet remarkably effective in achieving its goals. However, in the majority of influential digital activism cases I have exemplified, such as #BlackLivesMatter, the Gezi Park Protests, or Fridays For Future, it is possible to observe some form of convergence between these two spheres, which I frame as the continuum of online and offline activism. This continuum can be exemplified by trans rights activist Leslie Feinberg's support for the case of Cece McDonald. Aside from taking an active part in online campaigns in support of Cece, Feinberg not only attended McDonald's trials but also took her advocacy to the physical realm by spray-painting the hashtag #FreeCece on government center walls, leading to her arrest (Fischer, 2016). According to Fischer (2016), Feinberg's move was carrying the hashtag from the virtual world of the Internet to the material, thus blurring the boundaries between online and offline spaces. For her, this shows that social media and "on-the-ground activism" go hand-in-hand as inseparable facets of effective advocacy (764).

Within the scope of this thesis, I argue that rather than perceiving online and offline activism as two distinct spheres, the convergence of both forms of activism can be empowering for social movements. This is not to undermine the efficacy of digital activism in isolation, but rather, I contend that perceiving online and offline activist spheres as complementary to each other is also a promising aspect of contemporary activist spaces. I analyze this relationship through the framework of intersecting

continuums, which underscores the dynamic interplay between digital and physical spaces in contemporary social movements, emphasizing the importance of harnessing the strengths of both realms to effect meaningful change.

Numerous global activist movements, including Fridays for Future, the Gezi Park Protests in Turkey, the 15 May Protests in Spain, and the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the U.S, exemplify this continuum of online and offline activism expanding into national or global movements against violence, discrimination, and inequalities. This convergence of online and offline efforts allowed activists to mobilize resources, organize protests, rallies, and meetings, and engage in face-to-face interactions with communities affected by social injustices. In turn, the content generated through offline activism fueled social media campaigns, amplifying the voices of activists and reaching a broader audience. Their evolution into widespread, impactful movements underscores the increasing interconnectedness of online and offline spheres, where activism in one realm amplifies and reinforces activism in the other. This reciprocal and mutual reinforcement is one of the key themes I will be dwelling on throughout my thesis. By conceptualizing this relationship as a continuum between online and offline activist spaces, I emphasize the empowering and transformative potential of this interplay, highlighting its significance in driving social change.

2.2.2 What are the Pitfalls?

Despite the promises, digital activism has faced criticism on many grounds. One significant critique evolves around the tendency to overly rely on digital media for mobilization and the formation of social movements, often at the expense of acknowledging the role of human actors. Christian Fuchs (2012), in his critique of Castells' influential work *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2015), argues that formulations similar to Castells where the internet is the main factor for the emergence of movements result in a technological determinism. According to Fuchs (2012), such perspectives overlook the complexities of social change by attributing it solely to technological advancements. He argues that it is not the internet itself that creates social change, but rather the “human actors who are embedded into antagonistic economic, political and ideological structures of society” (781). By reducing the dynamics of social movements to technological determinism, there is a danger of obscuring the intricate interplay between human agency and structural forces. Thus, any analysis that overlooks the central role of human agency risks oversimplification and fails to capture the multifaceted nature of social change.

In addition to criticisms against the neglect of human agency, digital activism is

also considered to be an ineffective way to create meaningful societal change. In his famous line “The revolution will not be tweeted,” Malcolm Gladwell (2010) argued that digital activism prioritizes “weak-tie connections” that provide people access to information over “strong-tie connections” that help people endure in challenging situations. For Gladwell (2010), digital activism gives a floor for activists to voice their opinions, and yet that barely creates an impact. This superficial engagement limits the impact of digital activism, as it fails to cultivate the strong bonds necessary for an enduring commitment to a cause. Similar to Gladwell, Morozov (2009) characterizes digital activism as “feel-good” activism, often criticized for its minimal political and social impact. This form of activism has been labeled as ‘couch activism,’ ‘slacktivism,’ or ‘clicktivism,’ referring to online campaigns with no or little political and social impact (Morozov 2009; Christensen 2011). Morozov (2009), who coined the term ‘slacktivism,’ criticized the online campaigns for creating an illusion on the part of the subject for leaving a meaningful impact on the world just by clicking on a petition or joining a Facebook group, thus avoiding the risks of traditional forms of activism where the person faces the threats of arrest or police brutality. He contends that the ease of engagement online fosters a sense of accomplishment without necessarily translating into tangible change in the offline world (Morozov 2009). Shulman (2009), analyzing large-scale e-mail campaigns utilized by interest groups to raise awareness about environmental issues in the U.S., exemplifies the inefficacy of such slacktivist practices through the case study of 1000 MoveOn.org-generated e-mails sent to the Environmental Protection Agency. Based on the findings, he argues that only a few of these e-mails contain new information for authorities to consider. As a result, the governing bodies easily scan and delete these generic e-mails without ever reading their content, which poses a significant challenge to the effectiveness of these kinds of initiatives (Shulman 2009).

Another precarity online activism brings is the risk of replicating the oppressive power structures of the offline world. Although digital activism is lauded for opening up a more democratic and non-hierarchical public space, it is also not exempt from dominating power relations. According to Schradie (2014), ideology, hierarchy, and inequality continue to play a critical role in digital activism. Contrary to the argument that digital activism fosters non-hierarchical structures, Schradie (2014) contends that organizations with more hierarchical structures and heavy bureaucracy tend to dominate the infrastructure for online activism. This leads to what she terms a “digital activism gap,” which contradicts theories implying that the low costs associated with digital activism lead to increased participation and collective action (Schradie 2018, 1). Instead, this gap highlights deeper inequalities between working-class and middle/upper-class groups, resulting in a more hierarchical digi-

tal activist space. Hence, digital activism poses significant challenges for organizations that have limited resources and more working-class members (Schradié 2018). What's more, organizational resources and individual discrepancies with regard to access, skills, empowerment, and time result in higher costs for online participation for working-class groups, thus contributing to the digital activism gap (Schradié 2018). In such a hierarchical digital activist space, while middle/upper-class voices become dominant, working classes are marginalized and deprived of the ability to influence the public sphere, advocate for their rights, and achieve social change. As Schradié (2018) emphasizes, digital activism is not just a matter of individual choice but is also shaped by social factors such as class, race, and gender, emphasizing the need for a recognition of the intersectionality of these factors in understanding the digital activism gap.

As activist practices are carried onto digital platforms, they aim to create new democratic spaces for self-expression and public discourse, free from censorship. However, authorities have also adapted their strategies by employing new tactics for surveillance and repression in the digital realm. Tufekci (2017) highlights how governments resort to hacking and exposing dissidents' private and personal information as a means to humiliate or intimidate, rather than directly confronting their political expressions. In contrast to traditional totalitarian approaches rooted in imposing fear and information censorship, contemporary strategies involve “demonizing online mediums, and mobilizing armies of supporters or paid employees who muddy the online waters with misinformation, information glut, doubt, confusion, harassment, and distraction, making it hard for ordinary people to navigate the networked public sphere, and sort facts from fiction, truth from hoaxes” (Tufekci 2017, xxviii). For instance, the case of Cece, a transgender woman who killed her abuser, illustrates the extent of surveillance on social media platforms. Cece's private Facebook account and the Support Committee's blog have been used by the police to reach her personal conversations and this was done with the collaboration of site operators (Fischer 2016). This example underscores not only the prevalence of surveillance on social media but also the ease with which personal data obtained from commercial sites can be weaponized against users.

Aside from facing surveillance and censorship from governments, activists also confront the risk of ad-financed platforms utilizing algorithms to manipulate the visibility of activist messages. These algorithms prioritize advertiser-friendly content over activist messages, creating what Tüfekçi (2017) describes as “echo chambers.” They not only bring “like-minded” individuals together but also can turn them against each other, ultimately alienating many activists from the political discourse (Tufekci 2017, xxix). Similar to echo chambers, digital activist practices are affected

by “filter bubbles”, which Eli Pariser (2014) defines as the prediction engines that continuously generate and filter “a theory of who you are and what you’ll do and want next”, thus construct an individualized realm of information for the users, profoundly reshaping how they come across ideas and information (10). These bubbles have a centrifugal force and are invisible, hence the person is involuntarily involved in it. This also has societal consequences when a large number of people start to live “a filter-bubbled life” (Pariser 2014, 13). Therefore, the power of the echo chambers and filter bubbles comes from their capacity to shape the perception of the world for the users especially when these chambers and bubbles are at the hands of commercialized enterprises.

In addition to echo chambers and filter bubbles, algorithmic filtering embedded in social media platforms functions as a mechanism that controls users’ online experiences. Most social media platforms rely on non-transparent corporate algorithms, which dictate what one sees on their feeds. In her analysis of the Ferguson events, Tufekci (2014) observed that Facebook’s algorithmic filtering failed to update the newsfeed synchronously with offline developments, raising her concerns about crucial events like Ferguson being “buried in algorithmic censorship.” Similar to Tufekci, Anatoliy Gruzd underlined that algorithmic filtering of the shared content has the risk of impeding the protesters’ capacity to raise awareness for their particular campaign (quoted in Zerehi 2014). As social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are commercial enterprises, their proprietary algorithms responsible for content filtering on social media are not accessible to the general public, giving these entities control over the content displayed on user screens (Zerehi 2014). It is clear that algorithmic filtering determines whether one will come across controversial or political content, significantly impacting one’s capacity to interact with such issues. Therefore, these filtering mechanisms, either utilized by governments or commercial enterprises, can be considered significant tools for manipulating digital activist practices.

In summary, digital activism, while initially celebrated for its potential to democratize public discourse and drive societal change, faces substantial criticism on several fronts. One major critique is its tendency to prioritize digital mobilization over acknowledging the agency of human actors in social movements. Furthermore, digital activism has been criticized for its perceived ineffectiveness in achieving tangible outcomes. Activists also encounter significant challenges from governments’ surveillance and censorship tactics, as well as from the creation of echo chambers, filter bubbles, and algorithmic filtering on social media platforms, which can manipulate the visibility and impact of their messages. Therefore, while digital activism offers new avenues for advocacy, its effectiveness, and inclusivity are hampered by various

structural, technological, and societal barriers.

So far, I have discussed the promises and challenges of digital activism within contemporary activist space. In the following section, I will explore the intersection of digital activism and feminism, drawing on existing literature about the relationship between technology and feminist discourse. Then, I will move on to a deeper analysis of digital feminist activist practices, their potentials and precarities as well as implications for feminist politics.

2.3 Technology and Feminism Meet in Cyberfeminism

The convergence of technology and feminism emerged as a significant force in the late 80s and early 90s, initially analyzed under the term ‘cyberfeminism.’ This fusion was a response to the mainstream media’s heralding of a new postfeminist era during the 1990s, highlighting the need for feminist engagement in cyberspace (Everett 2004). Donna Haraway’s cyborg (1991), a hybrid human and machine, has been one of the earliest feminist symbols of the utilization of technology to create new meanings, new beings, and new worlds for feminist thinking. The initial fruits of cyberfeminism were seen in the field of art through a women’s collective known as VNS Matrix. This group of women identified themselves as “power hackers and machine lovers,” and drafted the Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century in 1991, exhibiting it on an 18-foot-long billboard and at different galleries in Australia (Scott 2016). The year 1997 marked a breakthrough in women’s involvement in new media technologies as cyberfeminist influence spread across theoretical, critical, and activist spheres. This change was heralded by the First Cyberfeminist International convened in Kassel-Germany, the Million Woman March held in Philadelphia, and the emergence of new-media books such as *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women + the New Technoculture* by Sadie Plant, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* by Sherry Turkle (Everett 2004, 1279). These developments underscored the growing intersections between feminism and technology, highlighting the potential for technology to serve as a catalyst for feminist thought, activism, and cultural production in the digital age.

Sadie Plant (1998) was one of the first feminists to explore the concept of ‘cyberfeminism’ as early as 1991. She emphasized the significance of viewing technology as a space for women to get involved in new forms of work and play that would be liberating as they will be able to attain new arenas to claim power and authority, ultimately challenging patriarchal structures. Plant (1998) argued that digital

technologies blurred the boundaries between categories of humans and machines and provided its users with alternative identities by choosing their disguises, thus offering a platform for self-expression and empowerment. Hence, the internet and cyberspaces could contribute to creating a new form of society that might have the liberatory potential for women. Plant's early articulations of cyberfeminism laid the groundwork for subsequent feminist engagements with technology, emphasizing the transformative potential of digital technologies in reshaping gender dynamics and creating more inclusive and equitable societies.

In addition to discussions about the liberatory and empowering potential of cyberfeminism, the concept has also raised discussions about how to situate it within feminist thinking. Indeed, the concept was not a single theory or movement with a clearly defined political agenda but involved a diverse collection of theories, discussions, and actions centered around exploring the interplay between gender and digital culture (Flanagan and Booth 2002). Jessie Daniels (2009) argued that it would be better to refer to multiple 'cyberfeminisms' rather than a single definition since a discussion of cyberfeminism as a "monolith" would result in a totalizing narrative. Daniels (2009) underlined that the common ground of diverse forms of cyberfeminisms was their "sustained focus on gender and digital technologies and on cyberfeminist practices" which encompass the experimental and active involvement of women in different internet technologies (102). By recognizing the diversity of cyberfeminist perspectives and practices, it becomes possible to appreciate the richness and complexity of feminist engagements with technology. This plurality allows for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of cyberfeminism, reflecting the diverse experiences of women navigating digital spaces.

Cyberfeminisms are united in their exploration of gender issues within the digital realm and the proactive engagement of women in shaping and utilizing internet technologies to advance their cause. However, this involvement also comes with challenges. Faith Wilding (1998), an influential cyberfeminist, emphasized the tendency within the movement to "define cyberfeminism by refusal" for the fear of "making the mistakes of past feminists" which involved "exclusion, lesbophobia, political correctness, and racism" (7-8). Wilding (1998) underlined that the internet was not "a utopia of nongender" but was "already socially inscribed with regard to bodies, sex, age, economics, social class, and race" (9). In other words, cyberspace reflects and perpetuates existing hierarchies and inequalities, including deep-seated sexism and racism. Therefore, being alert to these power dynamics is vital when attempting to redefine cyberspace through a feminist lens. Wilding (1998) deemed the insertion of feminism into cyberspace as a radical act and emphasized that although feminism has been brave enough to overtly and covertly resist and interrupt

patriarchal beliefs, traditions, and social structures, “a politically smart and affirmative feminism,” using the feminist knowledge of previous struggles, “can model a brash disruptive politics aimed at deconstructing the patriarchal conditions that currently produce the codes, languages, images, and structures of the Net” (9).

Similar to Wilding, Rosi Braidotti (1996) called for women to engage in cyberspace to challenge the patriarchal status quo as she saw cyberspace bearing a liberatory potential. She noted, “The new is created by revisiting and burning up the old,” hence women need to “undertake the dance through cyberspace” if they want to make sure that “the joysticks of the cyberspace cowboys will not reproduce univocal phallicity under the mask of multiplicity” (Braidotti 1996, 25). Her call for women to undertake the dance was an invitation to engage with this new form of technology in a subversive and counter-hegemonic way, actively shaping and transforming digital environments. However, she also emphasized the importance of attending to the potential risks inherent in cyberspace, cautioning against the replication of patriarchal power structures. It is probably with this power of dance through cyberspace that feminist wisdom is utilized to transform digital environments. Yet, it is also crucial to remember that cyberspace is not a neutral space, but rather one that is shaped by the same power structures that exist in the physical world. As I aim to reveal in this work, Braidotti’s call can be seen as an earlier recognition of the continuum of dominating power structures spanning online and offline worlds, which she proposes to disrupt by burning up the old to create a more equal and inclusive cyber world. Throughout this thesis, I will also be pursuing these continuums of power structures between online and offline spaces and feminist efforts to dismantle these structures to foster more equitable societies.

Initially celebrated as an empowering attempt to redesign cyberspace by creating new languages, new programs, new identities, and subjectivities, cyberfeminism has faced significant criticism for its limited attention to the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression. While cyberfeminism primarily focused on gender issues, it failed to adequately address the ways in which gender intersected with other social identities and power structures. Despite the claims for fluid identities, the internet has been scrutinized for making “some identity choices unavailable, some unavoidable” while policing and limiting how people could define themselves (Lovink 2005, 61) Particularly in the earlier stages, the internet was not welcoming people of color but a normative white user (Lovink 2005). Cyberfeminism has been critiqued for not fully considering the digital divide, and the uneven access to and use of digital technologies among different social groups. The emphasis on digital spaces inadvertently marginalized those who lacked access to technology, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities. Hence, in contrast to its claims for inclusivity and accessi-

bility for diverse women, cyberfeminist literature presumed “an educated, white, upper-middle-class, English-speaking, culturally sophisticated readership” (Fernandez, Wilding, and Wright 2002, 21). These criticisms highlighted the need for cyberfeminism to evolve and adopt a more intersectional and inclusive approach that addresses the complexities of power dynamics and inequalities within digital spaces.

Early studies of cyberfeminism mostly approached feminism’s engagement with online spaces in a binary framework, categorizing it as either inherently liberatory or inherently oppressive. On the one hand, this new cyber-media was perceived as a potentially transformative space for feminism, offering opportunities for “new languages, programs, images, fluid identities, and multi-subject definitions,” so that gender does not matter anymore (Wilding 1998, 9). On the other, this optimism was countered by criticisms highlighting the male-dominated nature of cyber-space, which mirrored offline gender oppressions (Schulte 2011). However, contemporary cyber-feminism literature has evolved to offer a more nuanced and multi-sided gender analysis of the operations of the internet, examining its operations and structures in relation to the political forces and its potential for fostering social justice and feminist activism. Scholars like Wajcman (2007) advocate for moving beyond the simplistic dichotomies like technophobia vs. technophilia, instead propose to conceive of the gender-technology relationship as “fluid and flexible”, neither to be pre-existing each other nor as fixed/unalterable but co-constructed (Wajcman 2007, 287). This perspective recognizes that gender dynamics and technology influence each other in complex ways, neither inherently patriarchal nor explicitly liberating. The following section explores the evolution of feminism, transitioning from cyberspace to the digital realm.

2.4 Cyber to Digital Feminism

The transition from “cyberfeminism” to “digital feminism” marks a subtle yet significant evolution in feminist discourse within the digital sphere. While cyberfeminism initially emerged in the 1990s to explore the possibilities of the internet as a tool for women’s empowerment and activism, the term ‘digital feminism’ reflects a broader and more inclusive approach to addressing gender issues in the digital age. Digital feminism recognizes that the digital landscape is no longer limited to just cyberspace but encompasses various digital technologies and platforms, including social media, mobile apps, and data analytics. By adopting the term ‘digital feminism,’ activists and scholars signal a more comprehensive and contemporary understanding of how

feminisms operate and engage in the rapidly changing digital environment.

Courtney Martin and Vanessa Valenti (2013) in their report *#FemFuture: Online Revolution*, describe digital feminism as “harnessing the power of online media to discuss, uplift, and activate gender equality and social justice,” underlining the effect of this power as being first of its kind where one individual is empowered to reach tens of thousands to take action on one particular issue (6). Currently, this power is being utilized by almost half of the world’s population. As of April 2023, 64.5 percent of the world are internet users while nearly 60 percent are actively engaging in social media platforms (Petrosyan 2023). Especially, young people aged between 19 and 29 are now the “power users of social networking,” with 93 percent logging onto the internet daily and 89 percent of young women actively participating in social networking sites (Martin and Valenti 2013, 7). In the Turkish context, 80.9 percent of adult women are internet users in comparison to 89.1 percent of male users (TUIK 2022). This widespread connectivity signifies a paradigm shift in how information is disseminated and activism is conducted. As can be seen from these numbers, the internet and social media continue to play a vital role in the everyday lives of people and the high number of female internet users underscores the potential for digital platforms to catalyze feminist movements.

The rise of digital technologies has had a profound impact on the feminist movement, leading to a revival and transformation often referred to as the shift from third-wave to fourth-wave feminism (Munro 2013; Baumgardner 2011; Rivers 2017; Martin and Valenti 2012; Cochrane 2013). This shift is characterized by the proliferation of feminist tools and activism on digital platforms by creating blogs, e-zines, podcasts or videos. The fourth wave is distinguished by its heavy reliance on communication technologies, particularly on social media platforms like Twitter for its existence and operation (Zimmerman 2017). According to Clark-Parsons (2022), although the fourth wave has “descended from the tides of previous generations” as the previous waves heavily relied on “singular leaders” or “big-name organizations,” this new form of feminism rests on “media and everyday media makers, users, and consumers” (Clark-Parsons 2022, 4). In other words, rather than influential figures of the previous waves who were considered to be the leaders of the feminist movement, everybody with access to digital platforms is easily involved in this new form of feminism.

Whether we are going through a fourth wave is debatable, and yet it is clear that more and more young feminists are utilizing the affordances of the Internet, hence the effects of new technologies on feminist debates and activism should be considered more. According to Munro (2013), although the claims of a feminist fourth-wave

have been disputed by scholars who argued that the increased use of the internet is not enough to call it a new wave, it is obvious that the rise of the internet “has facilitated the creation of a global community of feminists who use the internet both for discussion and activism” (23). Despite the controversy about the potentialities of the fourth-wave feminism, the issue of intersectionality as a response to the exclusionary mainstream feminism still remains a vital issue to be handled. Thus, according to Munro (2013), what makes the fourth-wave politically promising is its potential to amplify the voices of women marginalized by the dominant discourses. Additionally, Baumgardner (2011) resembles the goals of the fourth-wave to the third, varying from reproductive rights, trans inclusion, intersectionality, and eliminating privilege, where fourth-wavers make use of social media and similar technologies to disseminate their activism and feminist messages. However, contrary to previous waves, digital technology is a given for the feminists of the fourth-wave, where they are born into this technology and are always online (Baumgardner 2011). That’s to say, digital platforms are incorporated into the lives of a considerable number of younger generations of feminists, which makes a discussion of the possibilities and limitations they offer more important.

Digital feminists harness the power of digital technologies for a variety of purposes such as to advance feminist causes, raise awareness, and foster solidarity in challenging patriarchal norms. According to Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2019), the promise of digital feminism lies in its capacity to offer an easily accessible and succinct way of addressing feminist concerns across various media platforms. This accessibility facilitates widespread dissemination of feminist perspectives, enabling activists to engage with audiences on a scale previously unimaginable. Controversial feminist journalist Meghan Murphy (2013) emphasizes that the primary goal of digital feminism is to spread the feminist message to the widest audience and stimulate as much conversation as possible. By reaching an audience that has never been seen before, digital feminists are harnessing both the promises and the perils of the digital. In the following section, I will be discussing the opportunities and challenges of carrying out digital feminist activism and its implications for feminist politics.

2.5 Promising Potentialities of Digital Feminism

Feminists employ a variety of strategies to develop the potential of digital technologies, using these tools to connect, foster support networks, raise awareness, and

collectively address gender-based violence and discrimination through political and cultural discourses. Various digital activist tactics such as creating feminist blogs, organizing hashtag campaigns, engaging in online advocacy and lobbying, sharing experiences of sexual harassment, and calling out perpetrators online, digital archiving and data activism open up new arenas of resistance for feminists (Jane 2017). As Baer (2016) underlines, these newly emerging digital platforms hold significant potential for widespread dissemination of feminist ideas, introducing new ways to talk about gender and sexism, establishing connections among diverse communities, and enabling the emergence of novel ways to protest. According to Jain (2020), social media has played a pivotal role in the democratization of the feminist movement by increasing accessibility, promoting diversity, disseminating feminist knowledge, and facilitating political mobilization and community building across borders. As social media technologies advance and increase the capacity to engage in activism, feminist activists, writers, bloggers, or social media users creatively harness this power of the digital realm to advocate for gender equality and social justice in innovative ways.

Feminists once claiming the streets in rallies against gender-based violence, are now mobilizing in the immediate and hyper-visible world of the Internet across borders forming transnational alliances. By spreading campaigns against gender inequality through tweets, Instagram posts, or TikTok videos, feminist words can now reach millions of people. The Slutwalk movement serves as a compelling example of the wide reach of digital feminist campaigns. Organized initially online in Toronto in response to a police officer's comment which said women should stop dressing like "sluts" if they do not want to get raped, this digital feminist activism campaign immediately turned into a transnational movement performing 200 walks worldwide (Mendes 2015). This demonstrated the extent to which feminists can interweave the power of streets with the possibilities of the digital world.

Hashtags have also emerged as one of the most effective tools for feminist activism. By incorporating hashtags into tweets, the users create what Nathan Rambukkana (2015) refers to as "hashtag publics," digitally networked communities where individuals exchange ideas and experiences, call for change, coordinate actions, and make their voices heard. Viral hashtag campaigns, often referred to as "hashtag feminism," are organized to address different forms of gender oppression. These campaigns utilize hashtags to discursively connect people and create online communities by thematically grouping topics, allowing the users to easily join discussions on particular topics (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019).

A successful attempt at hashtag feminism is Laura Bates' #everydaysexism project. Started as a Facebook event in 2012, it evolved into a viral hashtag where women

shared their experiences of sexual harassment. The hashtag #everydaysexism reached 17 countries and garnered almost 50,000 disclosures of sexual harassment on its first anniversary (Cochrane 2013). Similarly, hashtags like #BeenRapedNeverReported were used by thousands of girls and women to share their own accounts of sexual violence following the allegations of sexual assault against Canadian radio personality Jian Ghomeshi (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019). The #MeToo movement originated on MySpace by Tarana Burke as a way to connect black survivors of sexual harassment and assault to available resources. A decade later when Alyssa Milano's tweet went viral on social media, millions of women around the world shared their previously silenced and invisible stories through the use of hashtag #MeToo. This collective sharing of experiences helped to raise global awareness about the prevalence of sexual harassment and served as a catalyst for holding powerful men accountable for the crimes they perpetrated (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018). As a result, women marginalized from political discussions were given a voice to bring sexual harassment out of its confinement to the private sphere and into the public discourse by digitally 'calling out' their experiences of harassment and abuse.

Hashtags were also utilized for feminist advocacy. The #BringBackOurGirls social media campaign emerged to ask for international help after Boko Haram terrorists abducted more than 300 girls from a school in Nigeria in 2014. The hashtag was curated and successfully employed by both individuals and feminist groups to raise awareness and put pressure on the U.S. and Nigerian governments to take action (Khoja-Moolji 2015). Hence, the advocacy carried out with hashtags has been the voice of Nigerian girls and pushed international actors to take action on a grave issue that would otherwise be invisible to such an audience. Notable hashtags such as #MeToo, #BringBackOurGirls, and #YesAllWomen have been retweeted and shared globally by politicians, celebrities or academics to highlight the prevalence of violence against girls and women (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019). Through these hashtags, digital feminists actively challenged misogyny, addressed gender-based violence, and mobilized for collective action. In that sense, hashtag activism has proven to be a powerful tool for feminist movements, enabling individuals to unite their voices, share their stories, and advocate for change on a global scale.

Additionally, hashtags functioned as modern-day equivalents to the consciousness-raising groups of the second wave of feminism. According to Bennet (2014), the second-wave motto "the personal is political" was pivotal in politicizing women's personal experiences and connecting them to broader feminist politics. Just as consciousness-raising groups played a crucial role in personal empowerment for numerous women back then, "the intimate personal stories curated in hashtags like #WhyIStayed" fulfill a similar function in the digital age (Bennett 2014). Tradition-

ally, feminist organizing has taken various forms, from oral to written communication, telephone chains to flyers. However, participation in feminist activist practices such as rallies or consciousness-raising groups was necessary to hear about feminist concerns. Bennet (2014) believes that hashtag campaigns like #WhyIStayed are significant as they are able to bring issues to the masses, which would otherwise be confined to small activist circles. These hashtags allow not only feminists but also people from diverse backgrounds to engage in discussions about issues such as rape, domestic violence, or abortion rights (Bennet 2014). In essence, hashtags serve as a modern tool for consciousness-raising, amplifying personal stories, and connecting them to broader social and political contexts.

In addition to hashtag campaigns reaching millions of women, feminists have effectively appropriated humor and creative satirical formats through digital tools (Lawrence and Ringrose 2018). By incorporating humor into their activism, feminists hijacked online discussions and were able to vocalize feminist critiques not only informatively but also by using the power of laughter (Rentschler and Thrift 2015). For instance, in the case of the #SafetyTipsForLadies hashtag, feminists employed humor and call-out culture to critique victim-blaming narratives. They achieved this by mocking traditional rape prevention discourses, which focus on what women wear and do, through their tweets (Rentschler 2015). Moreover, feminist memes served as a “weapon of cultural critique” in the face of sexist culture (Rentschler and Thrift 2015, 331). Particularly, feminist memes on Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr used feminist humor as an awareness-raising strategy and mobilized people into political action while encouraging them to challenge systems of inequality and oppression in contemporary society (Bore, Graefer, and Kilby 2018; Kanai 2016; Rentschler and Thrift 2015).

Feminist blogging has also been an effective strategy to denaturalize sexism and misogyny embedded in the digital domain while raising awareness about different forms of gender-based violence. These blogs functioned as the new awareness-raising tools that reclaimed the personal as political (F. Shaw 2012; Keller 2016; Crossley, 2015). According to Jain (2020), feminist blogging utilized to spread the feminist word in the vast domain of the digital space is the feminists’ call for “micro-rebellions.” For example, the “When Women Refuse” blog was created as a micro-rebellion site to accentuate the killing of women for rejecting the advances of men and has been used as a site to share women’s experiences of sexual violence since then (Jain 2020). Similarly, the “Blank Noise Project” was initiated by 24-year-old Jasmeen Patheja in India to create awareness about street-based harassment, which then turned into “a critical node within broader youth-led online activism in India,” consisting of four blogs with Facebook, YouTube and Twitter presence,

spanning in 17 cities across India (Mitra-Kahn 2012, 114). Feminist blogs such as *5Harfliler*, *Çatlak Zemin*, and *Reçel-blog* in Turkey now serve as feminist memory platforms, connecting personal and collective feminist memories through testimonies and storytelling (Göker 2019). In addition to these, feminist blogging has also been instrumental in revealing exclusions not only in dominant systems of power but also within the mainstream feminist and anti-racist struggles. Catherine Steele (2016), in her study of the Black celebrity gossip blogs, argued that Black women make use of these blogs to “talk back” to systems and structures of domination that exclude or exploit women of color and challenge their exclusion from mainstream feminist and anti-racist activist communities which have made black women’s voice and concerns invisible.

Feminist campaigns organized through the use of online petitions, social media sites or hashtags have also been vital strategies to struggle against gender inequality and gender-based violence. In the case of Özgecan Aslan’s murder ¹ in 2015 in Turkey, campaigns were organized by feminists through an online petition via change.org, reaching over one million signatures to demand laws for the prevention of gender-based violence (Yılmaz 2015). Moreover, the hashtag campaign #sendeananlat (#tellyourstory) was used by millions of women to disclose their stories of sexual harassment, revealing the prevalence and magnitude of the problem in Turkey (Alikılıç and Baş 2019; Dede Özdemir 2015). These online campaigns played a crucial role in holding governments accountable and advocating policy changes. In response to public pressure and feminist activism, an amendment of the Turkish Penal Code was brought to the agenda of the parliament and eventually Turkish government passed Law No. 6284 On the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women, also known as the “Özgecan Law” (Alikılıç and Baş 2019). Similar to online campaigns organized subsequent to Özgecan Aslan’s brutal murder, Indian digital feminists started the “Nirbhaya movement” upon the rape and murder of a 23-year-old woman by spreading hashtags like #Delhibraveheart on social media (Jain 2020). This movement drew global attention and pressured the Indian government to amend rape laws, introducing stringent punishments including the death penalty for perpetrators of rape, acid attacks, or stalking (BBC News 2020).

Employing digital technologies for carrying out feminist activism has also been celebrated for its capacity to provide grounds for discussing issues discarded by the mainstream media as well as its potential to give voice to the marginalized. Mar-

¹On February 11, 2015, when she was traveling in a minibus, the driver attempted to rape Özgecan Aslan in the province of Mersin. Before being stabbed and beaten to death with an iron club, Aslan pepper-sprayed the driver. Driver disposed of her body in a river in Tarsus with the help of his father and a friend. After the body was found, the driver, father, and friend were taken into custody and admitted to the crime. All three were found guilty and given life sentences. The following year, the driver was killed in prison (Dede-Özdemir 2015).

tin and Valenti (2013) emphasize the need to use online activism to strengthen the voices of marginalized communities and argue that online spaces today are important tools used by feminists to share and analyze their stories, raise awareness, and discuss challenging issues such as sexism, transphobia, queerness, and nationalism, which mainstream media usually avoids. Loza (2014) also underlines that online feminism makes visible what is not actually invisible, but what people refuse to see. She emphasizes the critical importance of social media for women of color to “broaden and radically redefine the very field of feminism,” helping them to speak across “borders and boundaries” (Loza 2014). In her analysis of the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen curated by black feminist activist Miki Kendall, Vasquez (2013) emphasizes that this hashtag provided women of color the opportunity to openly convey the pain of being silenced, overlooked and dismissed. Hence, women who are excluded and marginalized not only from society but also within the mainstream feminist movement are able to find the power of their voices through online platforms and are able to share them.

Importantly, there has been much discussion about how digital feminism has the ability to advance intersectional feminism. Adrienne Shaw (2014) underlines that digital works carried out by groups or individuals who are marginalized due to their gender, race, sexual orientation, class, nationality, and religion should be celebrated. She notes that dominant discourses persist “because marginalized voices are excluded, histories of outsiders are forgotten, and those with access to the means of cultural production define culture” (A. Shaw 2014, 276). Challenging these dominant discourses, digital platforms have empowered underrepresented groups to share their stories and advocate for social change. For instance, Twitter has been credited for giving Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and transgender women of color a platform to draw attention to injustices and inequalities without having their voices reframed by the mainstream media (S. Williams 2016; Clark 2016; Gunn 2015). In this way, digital feminism has facilitated the amplification of marginalized voices and the dissemination of alternative narratives, promoting intersectional understanding of social issues.

Today, more and more people are engaging in online practices of resistance and continuing these actions offline, or taking their physical world problems to the more visible realm of the digital, or resisting simultaneously in both realms. As I have mentioned earlier, this interplay between online and offline activist spaces has been an empowering practice and paved the way for new forms of activist practices. This continuum of online and offline worlds of activism also has been crucial in increasing the effectiveness of feminist campaigns, not only by making these issues visible to a larger audience but also by building new forms of solidarity networks across borders

to fight against every form of violence and discrimination. One striking example of this continuum is the #NiUnaMenos (#NotOneWomanLess) movement. Originating as a simple hashtag to challenge the prevalence of femicides in Argentina, #NiUnaMenos spread first to all over Latin America and then to the rest of the world through transnational alliances. Triggered by the murder of a 14-year-old girl, feminists organized mass digital media campaigns that mobilized thousands of people in street assemblies and carried out collective symbolic performances to end violence against women (Fuentes 2019). What began as a digital rallying cry evolved into a multifaceted movement, harnessing the power of both online and offline platforms to raise awareness and build global alliances against gender-based violence. In collaboration with and inspiration from Polish women's Black Monday Protests against the abortion ban, #NiUnaMenos called out for and organized an international women's strike on March 8, 2017 (Karakuş 2020). The culmination of years of feminist activism, both online and offline, led to tangible outcomes for the #NiUnaMenos movement, which was the legalization of abortion in Argentina (Karakuş 2020). The continuum of tireless efforts of feminists exploiting the potentials of the digital and physical has led to meaningful changes and advanced the struggle against gender-based violence and discrimination. It is this transformative potential of the continuum of online and offline feminist activism that I will be searching for throughout my thesis.

All in all, feminists utilize a variety of strategies to harness the potential of digital technologies for activism, advocacy, and community building. Through a variety of digital tools, including social media, blogs, and hashtags, feminists aim to raise awareness, foster solidarity, and address systemic issues of gender-based violence and discrimination. On the one hand, hashtag campaigns serve as powerful tools for organizing, mobilizing, and amplifying marginalized voices, facilitating feminist discourse, connecting individuals across borders, and challenging dominant narratives surrounding gender and sexuality. Feminist blogging serves as a means to reclaim personal experiences as political, denaturalize sexism in digital spaces, and foster collective empowerment. Humor and satire are also utilized as effective tools to critique patriarchal norms and engage audiences in dialogue on feminist issues. Its potential to create intersectional activist spaces amplifying the voices of marginalized women promotes inclusive narratives in digital spaces. As digital activism intersects with offline efforts, it opens new avenues for feminist activist practices. However, despite the transformative potentials of digital feminist activism, there are limitations and challenges inherent in this novel form. In the next section, I will be analyzing these precarities.

2.6 Precarious Side of Digital Feminism

Digital media is changing feminist practices and politics, offering new avenues for activism and feminist voices to be heard on a global scale. The vast scale and immediate visibility feminism attained through the use of online platforms is now considered an important boost to promote feminist change, despite the current backlash and the debates around post-feminisms (Rivers 2017; McRobbie 2009). However, despite the potentialities of digital feminist activism, it is not an ideal space without inequalities, thus does not eliminate the already existing disparities of the offline world. In fact, similar inequalities continue to recur in digital spaces (Fischer 2016; Fotopoulou 2016; Latina and Docherty 2014). Particularly, the problem of the digital gender gap is excluding a significant portion of women around the world from participating in digital feminist activism. Hence, although the accessibility rates are increasing, the digital divide continues to be a problem.

The concept of the “digital divide” underlines the disparities in access to and proficiency with digital technologies, which disproportionately affect marginalized communities, including disadvantaged women. These disparities are not solely determined by gender but are also influenced by intersecting factors such as class, race, age, ethnicity, language, or disability barriers (McCaughey and Ayers 2003). Apart from these, Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2017) also identify other factors including confidence, technological savviness, emotional resilience, and social status. Additionally, Schulte (2011) notes that the digital divide is not all about access but also about “the skills needed to access knowledge, services, communities” (738). According to Fotopoulou (2016), all these problems create a “digital underclass” of feminists, comprising both young women with limited technological access and older women lacking digital skills, access and social support (45). Therefore, digital technologies hold “simultaneously promising, yet precarious capabilities” (Fischer 2016, 758) to produce a social change for women and that is something to be cautious about.

In terms of feminist organizing, this new digital world marked by its immediacy and ephemerality burdens feminist organizations with its requirement for a constant update not to be left technologically behind. In fact, digital feminist activism has a considerable influence on the relations between generations of feminists (Fotopoulou 2016; Schuster 2013). Julia Schuster (2013) emphasizes a “generational divide” in women’s feminist activism. For her, digital activism is highly critical for young women and yet, it is “only visible to those who use it” (8). Numerous young women engage in feminist activism actively and opt for online activism as their primary

means of political involvement. However, according to Schuster (2013), this choice creates a barrier for those who are not familiar with this type of organizing, hence rendering young feminists “invisible” not only to the general public but also to older generations. Additionally, Fotopoulou’s (2016) research with women’s NGOs in London reveals that there is growing anxiety among feminists about catching up with developing technologies due to a widening knowledge and digital literacy gap. Particularly, an older generation of feminists who were involved in the Women’s Liberation Movement felt isolated because of connectivity problems as they believed that the digital and generational gap alienated them from current developments and younger feminist activists (Fotopoulou 2016). Hence, it is notable that there is a growing generation gap between younger feminists with higher digital literacy skills and older feminists who prefer traditional activism tactics.

Another dimension of digital exclusion encompasses individuals who are not familiar with the feminist jargon and practices specific to online feminist communities, which also evolve over time. According to Munro (2013), the necessity to create abbreviations for some feminist terms due to Twitter’s character limit resulted in new terms such as WOC (Women Of Color), TERF (Trans Exclusive Radical Feminism), or Cis (Cisgender), which can be overwhelming to catch up with for certain individuals. What’s more, despite having enough digital literacy skills, platform literacy is the cause of another form of exclusion. Latina and Docherty (2014) emphasize that platform literacy is vital as users need to know exactly what they are searching for, otherwise, they might miss the hashtags they are looking for due to the rapid movement of Twitter. Additionally, language barriers also create accessibility problems for marginalized voices in the larger global context. As English is the language of the majority of online feminist movements, limited content in local languages poses an obstacle to women’s participation at the grassroots level (Bachmann and Proust 2020).

Another precarity digital feminist activism holds is the continuation of gender-based violence in the digital realm. Gendered digital violence can manifest in various ways, encompassing online harassment, stalking, usurping control over a partner’s social media accounts, non-consensual recording, and dissemination of images or voice, manipulation of images, publicizing personal information without consent, coerced sexual acts, dissemination of revenge porn, defamation, humiliation, hacking, and the use of misogynistic and homophobic hate speech (Şener 2021). When such violence is exacerbated by “algorithmic bias,” online spaces become highly toxic places for feminist activists (Şener 2021, 7). Particularly, online violence takes extreme forms and volumes for women of color, trans women, disabled women, fat women, and those with intersecting identities (West 2015). Lindy West (2015), a

controversial feminist writer critiquing rape jokes in the comedy world, experienced extreme online attacks, ranging from threats to saw her up with an electric knife to comments on being too fat to be raped, ultimately leading her to leave Twitter despite its crucial role in her career. She used the platform to write jokes, do politics, teach feminism, and engage in conversation “for free” but in return received extreme forms of online violence (West 2019). In reflecting on her experience, West (2019) wrote; “I talked back, and I was ‘feeding the trolls.’ I said nothing, and the harassment escalated. I reported threats, and I was a ‘censor.’... I had to conclude, after half a decade of workshopping, that it may simply be impossible to make this platform usable for anyone but trolls, robots, and dictators” (189). Her narrative is indicative of failing to create safe and inclusive online spaces, especially for marginalized women.

The inadequacy of social media platforms in creating effective mechanisms to combat online violence leaves users to deal with the toll of any abuse on their own. This lack of effective struggle mechanisms alienates feminist subjects and similar marginalized communities from digital activism where these platforms were initially celebrated for their capacity to give voice to the marginalized. In the struggle against online abuse, the focus is usually on the perpetrators euphemized as “trolls” and yet there is a need to hold the “real, flesh-and-blood owners” of digital platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, accountable for the occurring online abuse (Adams, Applegarth, and Simpson 2020, 8). Although there are policies of these platforms against hate speech and harassment, it is usually the algorithms attributed agency for regulating user engagements, which serve to exonerate the networks and their proprietors from accountability (Adams, Applegarth, and Simpson 2020). Hence, attributing the algorithmic agency as an excuse for online harassment leaves marginalized women the most vulnerable, posing a great risk for digital feminist activists, as these platforms become toxic and unsafe places for activism.

Another concern about engagement with digital feminist activism arises around the issue of whose voice and words are heard through this new form of feminist activism. While digital feminist practices have gained global visibility, the amplified popularity of feminism does not ensure that every voice is heard equally. As the product manager of Twitter, Mollie Vandor, expressed in 2015, the conversation about feminism has grown by 300 percent on the platform over the past three years, and the tweets containing the word “feminism” increased by 64 percent after Beyoncé’s 2014 Music Awards show in front of the word “feminist” (Ford 2015). Various expressions and talk around feminisms have been mainstreamed by the power of digital media and celebrities are playing a key part in this mainstreaming. Yet, the wide reach feminism obtained does not necessarily mean that everyone’s voice is heard. The issue

of who can speak and whose voices are prioritized remains a crucial point to discuss. Mainstream digital feminism, in particular, faces criticism for potentially erasing certain voices and perspectives while amplifying others, hence is often denounced for being “elitist” by focusing on the concerns of white, middle-class, heterosexual women (Goldberg 2014; Murphy 2013).

Examining three cases of white feminist activism, Sandberg’s “Lean In” and “Ban Bossy” campaigns, “One Billion Rising” campaign, and Martin and Valenti’s *The Future of Online Feminism* report, Jessie Daniels (2015) critiques the dominance of white women in shaping the discourse of digital feminism, positioning them as “architects and defenders of a particular framework” (42). Daniels (2015) underlines that although the first and second waves of feminist movements have been criticized for their hegemonic whiteness, digital feminist activism still lacks “a systematic critique of whiteness” (42). Similarly, Eriksson-Krutrök and Akerlund (2023) provide the example of white influencers gaining significant visibility while engaging with the #BlackLivesMatter Movement on TikTok. In some instances, these influencers assumed leadership roles within the movement and used their participation to enhance their personal brands (Eriksson Krutrök and Åkerlund 2023). Additionally, the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen was also curated by Miki Kendall in reaction to mainstream feminism’s privileging of white feminism when Vanessa Valenti, the author of the #FemFuture report, and several other white feminists defended so-called feminist academic Hugo Schwyzer upon his confessions of racial discrimination against women of color (Loza 2014). Kendall blamed digital feminism for being exclusionary and not valuing the perspectives of women of color. However, she was in return criticized for creating “a big chunk of the Twitter aggression” by Michelle Goldberg in the article titled “Feminism’s Toxic Twitter Wars” (Thelander-sson 2014). As Lola Okolosie (2014) argues, while white feminists with their strong media presence are able to shape the parameters of the discourse, black feminists usually enter online debates in a reactionary position given the failure of the feminist movement to embrace intersectionality and view black voices as legitimate and central to the debates rather than marginal. Okolosie (2014) notes that despite this predominance of white feminist voices, black feminists were able to use social media, particularly Twitter and the feminist blogosphere, to speak not from the margins of the debate but as centered in their own right.

Ironically, silencing the efforts of women of color, perhaps unconsciously but not coincidentally, has been the case with the viral hashtag #MeToo. When Alyssa Milano, a white, wealthy, heterosexual Hollywood celebrity tweeted to write “me too” if women were sexually harassed, it was used 12 million times within the first 24 hours of its release, hinting at the magnitude of the problem (Fileborn and Loney-Howes

2019). The hashtag turned into an act of solidarity among survivor women on an unprecedented scale and even resulted in material consequences for some perpetrators like Harvey Weinstein, who was sentenced to 23 years. As Fileborn and Loney-Howes (2019) argue, #MeToo created a “rupture” in public discussions and perception of sexual harassment and violence (338). However, it initially failed to recognize the legacy of a black feminist activist Tarana Burke who created a platform on MySpace as early as 2006 to raise awareness and support black women and girls against sexual violence (Corsi, Thissen, and Zacchia 2019). It was thanks to the efforts of black feminists like Alicia Garza, one of the founders of the #BlackLivesMatters movement, who instantly responded with a tweet acknowledging Burke’s work, writing “#MeToo. Thank you @TaranaBurke for bringing us this gift of #MeToo almost 10 years ago. Still powerful today” (Garza 2017). Although Milano immediately acknowledged Burke’s work and the two worked on this movement together, the issue of whose voices are heard and whose issues are visible in digital feminist practices highlights the need for an intersectional analysis.

While the transformative impact of digital media on feminist practices and politics is undeniable due to unprecedented visibility and reach for feminist activism, it also holds limitations in creating an egalitarian space, perpetuating offline disparities, and introducing new challenges. The digital gender gap, worsened by factors of class, race, age, ethnicity, language, or disability, limits the access and participation of a significant portion of feminists. Exclusions also persist for activists unfamiliar with the evolving digital feminist jargon, platform literacy, and language barriers, further complicating the accessibility of online feminist communities. The continuation of gender-based violence in digital spaces, exacerbated by algorithmic biases, poses significant risks for turning platforms into toxic environments. What’s more, addressing only the problems of the white, middle, or upper-middle class, cisgender feminism undermines that digital feminism does not reach and affect all women equally. The hegemonic heterosexual whiteness of mainstream digital feminism emphasizes the need for a systemic critique of its exclusions and a commitment to intersectionality. To be able to realize the full potential of digital feminist activism, its inclusivity, accessibility, and affordability should be increased. In the following section, I analyze the emergence of digital feminist counterpublics, fostering alternative discursive spaces for inclusive and intersectional feminist politics.

2.7 Digital Feminist Counterpublics

In authoritarian regimes where the government maintains significant control over mainstream media outlets, the freedom of expression is severely endangered, street protests are suppressed, and overall, access to the public sphere is limited, social media platforms emerge as crucial alternative spaces for dissidents to express their views and engage in discourse. These digital platforms serve as alternatives that challenge mainstream narratives, amplify voices that have been historically silenced, and provide a sense of community and solidarity. Feminists have utilized these online spaces as alternative public spheres and started to come together on these platforms to engage in discussions, activism, and resistance related to gender equality and social justice. As a result, the convergence of digital technologies and feminist activism brought forth the notion of “digital feminist counterpublics”, which emerged as a response to the limitations of the traditional public spheres.

The notion of feminist counterpublics has been coined as a reaction to the exclusionary character of the Habermasian public sphere. For Habermas (1989), the ‘public sphere’ in liberal democracies is defined as a forum for deliberation between the government and society where social actors congregate as citizens to discuss common issues upon mutual agreement. In this public sphere, all citizens are allowed to participate in the formation of public opinion and this, in turn, forms the dialogical character of politics (Habermas 1989, 138). However, despite the claims that “access is guaranteed to all citizens,” the Habermasian public sphere is accessible only to “an educated, male bourgeoisie and enlightened nobility” due to being grounded in rational and universal values (Felski 1989, 165). This exclusionary character of the Habermasian public sphere has been criticized and led to the emergence of the concept of ‘counterpublics.’ Rita Felski (1989) underlined that the political changes subsequent to Habermas’s influential work in 1962, particularly the radicalization of student organizations during the 1960s and the emergence of new social movements in the 1970s and 1980s, have prompted theorists to propose the emergence of counterpublic spheres which were seen as vital oppositional entities within the framework of late capitalism. These counterpublic spheres tried to distinguish themselves from the “homogenizing and universalizing logic of the global mega-culture of modern mass communication,” which they perceived as a degraded pseudo-public sphere and sought to “raise their needs and voice oppositional values” neglected by the cultural industry (Felski 1989, 166).

Feminists have also been vocal in critiquing and highlighting the constraints of ideologies around the public sphere, emphasizing the fact that what was considered

to be public domain was in reality highly exclusive. Pateman (1989) and Fraser (1990) have been the leading critics of the Habermasian public sphere where they revealed that in liberal democratic societies, the public sphere has often been an exclusionary space based on the establishment of hegemonic ‘universals’ which in fact involved the white, middle-class heterosexual male identities. According to Pateman (1989), theories around the public sphere assume that both the “public world” and “the categories through which it is presented . . . are sexually neutral or universal, including everyone alike” (3). However, this is true only when individuals are “disembodied” and an embodiment would reveal that this supposedly “neutral” or “universal” individual is, in fact, male and “women, womanhood and women’s bodies” are confined to the private, representing “all that is excluded from the public sphere” (Pateman 1989, 4). Fraser’s (1990) critique, on the other hand, highlighted the lack of gender and class consciousness in the Habermasian public sphere, which strongly resonated with feminist and marginalized groups globally. Fraser (1990) underlined that the marginalization of women from the public sphere has created “subaltern counterpublics” to develop “alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech” (61). Fraser’s (1990) counterpublics serve as “parallel discursive arenas” where marginalized groups form and release counter-discourses to the mainstream interpretations of their “identities, interests and needs” (67). These counterpublics are not merely spaces for the marginalized to convene but also places of strategizing protest activities aimed at the broader publics and it is in this dual function that the liberatory potential of the counterpublic lies (Fraser 1990, 68).

Acknowledging these spaces is particularly important in a system that deprives marginalized groups of the means to shape public opinion and challenge the dominant public discourse. Hence, counterpublics can be seen as tools that make the invisible visible, providing a chance to alter the hegemonic public opinion. Fraser (1990) gives the example of late-twentieth-century U.S. Feminism as a “subaltern counterpublic” with its new language to describe social realities including sexism, sexual harassment, marital rape, date and acquaintance rape, disseminated through various channels such as journals, bookstores, publishing houses, movies and videos, research centers or academic programs. Through the new language feminists developed, they are able to re-identify their needs and identities, thus eliminating some of the disadvantages in the official public spheres, and broadening the discursive space. Additionally, disseminating the view of deeming domestic violence as a pervasive systemic feature of a male-dominated society rather than being a private matter was possible through the feminist subaltern counterpublics created (Fraser 1990). In that sense, the feminist counterpublics not only create a sense of

community and solidarity based on gender within the feminist movement but also aim to persuade society about the legitimacy of feminist arguments, challenging the prevailing systems of power through political engagement and theoretical analysis (Felski 1989). Hence, the formation of feminist counterpublics becomes vital for an inclusive democratic space and for making the feminist words heard.

The formation of the public sphere and counterpublics in the digital sphere has also been a matter of discussion. dana boyd defined “networked publics” as “spaces and audiences that are bound together through technological networks” (2008, 125) and emphasized the need to conceive of networked publics as being reshaped by networked technologies while being “simultaneously a space and a collection of people” (2011, 41). boyd (2011) underlined that networked publics are different compared to other forms of publics in terms of their architecture where networked technologies reconfigure the flow of information and the way people engage with information and each other. boyd’s (2011) networked publics are more than publics brought together through digital tools but are transformed by the affordances of networked media, by its properties and potentials. In that sense, networked publics are crucial spaces for people to interact, socialize, and connect with others beyond their close circle, families, and friends, and yet are constrained by the technological potentials of the digital space.

Networked publics have also been analyzed for the role of ‘affect’ in their formation. Papacharissi (2016) examined the emotional processes that facilitate communication and consciousness-raising in the online environment and introduced the concept of “affective publics.” She defined affective publics as “networked publics that are mobilized and connected, identified, and potentially disconnected through expressions of sentiment” (Papacharissi 2016, 311). Borrowing from Jodi Dean’s (2010) argument of affective attachments to social media bearing the potential of producing “feelings of community,” Papacharissi (2016) contended that, depending on the context, these affective attachments can fuel a movement, fostering a sense of community, or can trap individuals in a continuous cycle of passive spectatorship. In her analysis of hashtags #egypt and #owls, Papacharissi (2016) argued that content and news streams related to these hashtags were “affective in nature” and shaped the emergence of public formations through discourse. She referred to these formations as “affective publics,” signifying the role of emotions and feelings in their formation. Hence, rather than assuming a passive stance, the collaborative discussions formed around hashtags on social media could be seen as manifestations of “structures of feeling” and these were considered revolutionary since they enabled one to collectively envision a shared future (Papacharissi 2016, 321).

However, despite its revolutionary potential, change is certainly not always guaranteed when affective publics are formed. According to Papacharissi and Trevey (2018), affective publics have unique ways of formation and distinct digital footprints based on the socio-cultural context and political economy factors but this does not necessarily lead to a collective action. That is to say, starting a social media campaign may not necessarily lead to major or even minor changes depending on the socio-political and cultural context. In fact, when a viral social media campaign fails to create transformation, people feel disappointed, and yet, according to Papacharissi and Trevey (2018), it is the expectations that fail people. The symbolic change brought by social media activism is creating forms of expression that can redefine the significance and function of institutions within society. And even if the impact is liminal and transient, affective publics afford power, the power to reimagine institutions aimed to change. Therefore, Papacharissi and Trevey (2018) note that social media offers new ways to change the dynamics of attention in policymaking and open “windows of opportunity,” which is not achieved through traditionally organized group-based political action, but rather via individually articulated political expressions that can elevate the visibility of issues to the agenda of decision-makers through the framework of connective action (94).

These publics convening through connective action are different from crowds and leaderless formations. What brings these publics together is “affective;” the bonds of sentiment that connect people at a certain time on a common feeling about a certain issue, which may or may not cross paths again, and yet in that moment of connective action, “the commonly shared sentiment” directs the attention to that particular issue and imbues it with an “affectively charged frame” (Papacharissi and Trevey 2018, 95). Through this affectively charged frame, decision-makers are more likely to take action on issues that are being talked about by a large number of people and when new actors are involved in the discussion, hence when social media is used to frame political expression by individuals and issues are raised to the level of decision makers’ awareness, it is likely that ‘windows of opportunity’ for change are created. This might be the point where the potential of social media activism to create change lies as it helps us reimagine and question the existing policies and change the priorities of policymakers. It is also important to note that these “windows of opportunity” are created when new actors become aware of the problem, feasible policy solutions are available to address the problem, and policymakers are both willing and capable of taking action to resolve it (Papacharissi and Trevey 2018, 94). It is not to say that windows of opportunity always result in positive change, but even the possibility of it is something to consider.

The rise of online technologies has opened some significant windows of opportuni-

ties for women and girls to form and engage in networked publics and disseminate counter-hegemonic discourses where issues such as sexual harassment and assault can be discussed and handled in ways that go against accepted social and legal norms (Salter 2013). Hence, digital technologies have played an important role in the development of online feminist communities, or what Keller (2016) calls the “networked counterpublics.” Drawing on danah boyd’s formulation of ‘networked publics’, Keller (2016) analyzed feminist blogging of girls and the ways these blogs are used as a “discursive space” for girls to grow their feminist identities which would not be possible to practice in their daily life, at school or at home. These girls explore feminist counter-narratives through personal reflections and interactions with each other, thereby creating “networked counterpublics” (Keller 2016, 80).

Similar to Keller, Mendes (2015) argues that feminist blogs have been vital platforms for establishing networks, communities, and counterpublics that strive to challenge hegemonic ideologies concerning sexual assault and rape culture. In her analysis of Slutwalk movement, Mendes (2015) examines how social media had facilitated the growth of networked counterpublics, which served as online spaces for feminists to come together, establish connections, develop opinions, share emotions, and bring attention to specific issues that demand action. Despite the weak-ties of these groups, Mendes (2015) emphasizes that the digital connections between different groups at least fostered a sense of unity within the Slutwalk movement, granting it credibility and showcasing how feminists worldwide are collaborating to combat rape culture. Feminist bloggers were mobilized as networked counterpublics to spark the Slutwalk movement, narrated their own “counter-memories”, and named their own “meanings of the movement” (Mendes 2015, 191).

Additionally, in their analysis of how feminist activists utilized Twitter to engage in feminist politics, Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2019) argue that Twitter functions as a “digital pedagogical platform” for the formation of “digital feminist affective counterpublics” (100). Platform affordances such as reaching previously excluded populations, immediacy of the dialogue and connection, and increased visibility are all considered important factors for the formation of these feminist counterpublics (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019). And yet, the affective motive behind sharing stories of sexual violence as a strategy to raise awareness is what creates these “digital feminist affective counterpublics,” where one participant perceived the internet as an opening to “express feelings otherwise stored away” (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019, 104). As seen in these examples, with the introduction of digital technologies, the counter-hegemonic voices of feminist activists raised in digital affective counterpublics have become increasingly influential in making the feminist voice heard.

This chapter was an attempt to discover the promises and challenges of digital feminist activism toward creating a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable digital space for feminist voices. Through various digital activist tactics such as hashtag campaigns, feminist blogging, and online petitions, feminists have harnessed the power of the digital realm to connect, raise awareness, and collectively address gender-based violence and discrimination. The emergence of transnational alliances and the amplification of marginalized voices underscore the transformative impact of digital feminism, facilitating intersectional understanding and challenging dominant discourses. However, amidst these achievements, it is crucial to recognize the limitations and challenges inherent in this novel form of activism, including issues of accessibility, inclusivity, and the potential for co-optation. Nonetheless, the emergence of digital feminist counterpublics, as a response to the exclusionary nature of traditional public spheres, offers alternative spaces for marginalized voices, including feminists, to gather and advocate for gender equality, opening “windows of opportunities” for transforming the sexual harassment struggle. In the following chapter, I explore how the struggle against sexual harassment evolved from “streets” to the “tweets,” creating the “digital feminist counterpublics” that open up their own alternative discursive spaces to demand change.

3. FEMINIST ACTIVISM AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT: FROM STREETS TO TWEETS

The previous chapter was a search for the possibilities and limitations of feminist activist practices in the digital space. As I have shown, digital feminist counterpublics utilize a variety of online tools to harness the power of the Internet and open what Papacharissi and Trevey (2018) term “windows of opportunity” for feminist politics, striving to promote social justice. While doing this, I conceptualize digital feminist activism as part of a continuum that spans both online and offline worlds. In this chapter, I contextualize this continuum framework within the struggle against sexual harassment. I move on to an analysis of how this struggle has evolved from the physical realm of “streets” to the digital sphere of “tweets” and explore the implications of this interaction for feminist activism in the fight against sexual harassment. I begin by tracing the initial conceptualizations of the term “sexual harassment,” and examining the feminist struggle surrounding it. From there, I discuss how this struggle paved the way for the emergence of the #MeToo movement, wherein women found the collective courage to speak out about their experiences of sexual harassment. My analysis of this topic has revealed that the continuum of feminist activism, occurring both online and offline, is just one aspect to be examined. In fact, there are more continuums to be analyzed. Hence, in this chapter, I not only pursue the continuums of online and offline feminist activism but also unveil the continuums of gendered patterns that marginalize survivors, creating narratives of disbelief and victim-blaming. What’s more, I underline that these continuums of marginalizing narratives stand at the intersections of multiple power dynamics such as race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and geographical location. Throughout the chapter, I keep Angela Davis’ advice to “trouble the origins” of the narratives chosen to start a movement.

Angela Davis, in her book *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1999) argues that blues women’s audacious recognition of domestic abuse in their songs precedes the second-wave feminist movement’s naming of intimate partner violence and abuse.

According to Davis (2020), although this identification of abuse in blues songs did not result in a political transformation, it undeniably contributed to the establishment of a platform upon which contemporary political awareness regarding gender violence could prosper and evolve. Underlining the need to ‘trouble’ the origins of the #MeToo movement initially being associated with Alyssa Milano, Angela Davis (2020) notes, “Genealogies should always be questioned because there is always an unacknowledged reason for beginning a certain moment in history as opposed to another” (29). She argues that a significant portion of the initial efforts undertaken by black feminism and radical women-of-color feminism revolved around correcting the historical account of the feminist movement, which emphasized that white women were not the sole group that confronted misogyny and patriarchy. In fact, it was women of color who frequently approached these challenges in a more multifaceted and intersectional manner (A. Davis 2020).

Building on Davis’ invitation to ‘trouble the origins’, I argue that a framework of ‘intersecting continuums’ would serve us better to conceptualize the complex origins and workings of the #MeToo movement. Despite the predominant representation of white, middle, or upper-middle-class heterosexual celebrities in the forefront of the mainstream media during the early days of the #MeToo movement, delving into the genealogy of this movement has unveiled the unacknowledged origin stories of these moments. Therefore, in this chapter, I pose questions such as why a particular moment was chosen as the origin story, what remains unacknowledged, and what aspects are not visible in such a narrative. In this way, I aim to prompt a deeper examination of the #MeToo movement’s roots. By adopting the intersecting continuums framework, I try to reveal that these moments do not emerge spontaneously but are intricately connected to both preceding and subsequent social justice movements. Hence, this framework encourages an understanding that extends beyond isolated incidents, emphasizing the ongoing nature of the struggle against sexual harassment and its connection to broader historical and societal contexts.

The chapter starts with a discussion of the origin stories of the struggle against sexual harassment in the feminist movement, primarily within the U.S. context. Initially, it explores how the term “sexual harassment” is conceptualized, examining its nuances within feminist theory and its implications in legal, societal and political domains. This analysis lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the multi-faceted nature of the struggle against sexual harassment around the world. Subsequently, the narrative widens its scope to explore how the term is navigated across diverse global contexts and within the framework of international institutions. The chapter concludes by “troubling” the origin stories of the #MeToo movement along the continuum of online and offline spaces.

3.1 The Origin Stories of the Sexual Harassment Struggle

While the experience of sexual harassment may have a long history and geographical spread, its naming and problematization in modern history are relatively new. The emergence of the movement against sexual harassment can be attributed to the confluence of various social movements that were prevalent in American society during the 1970s, including the women's movement, the civil rights movement, the labor movement, the gay and lesbian rights movement as well as sexual revolution (Baker 2005). Drawing upon the foundations established by these social endeavors, activists struggling against sexual harassment utilized the principles, strategies, and support networks derived from their participation in these movements. This multifaceted approach allowed them to articulate experiences with sexual harassment and counteract such behaviors across a wide spectrum of settings. Particularly, the activists leveraged the institutional response that governments developed in the wake of the civil rights and women's movements. This strategic use of state structures enabled activists to push for the establishment of laws specifically targeting sexual harassment.

The initial focus of the struggle against sexual harassment centered on women's experiences within the workplace. Naming of the concept has played a pivotal role, particularly in the judicial struggle. The legal framework of the concept was influenced by the notion of racial harassment, emerging from racial discrimination cases when judges acknowledged that racial discrimination could be perpetuated not only through explicit company actions but also through creating work environments that made black workers feel subordinate and different (Schultz 1998). The conceptualization by the anti-racist movement, highlighting hostile environments and institutional attitudes as the causes of discrimination, served as a model for framing the discourse on sexual harassment.

The term "sexual harassment" (in the English language) was coined for the first time in a press release on April 3rd, 1975 after Lin Farley, Susan Meyer, Karen Sauvigné and several other women decided to give a name to women's experiences of abuse revealed through a speak-out they conducted (Baker 2008). On April 21, when Farley testified about sexual harassment for Carmita Wood during a hearing by the New York City Human Rights Commission chaired by Eleanor Holmes Norton, a key figure in shaping the legal struggle against sexual harassment, the term began to appear in various sources (Baker 2008). The New York Times covered the story with the title "Women Begin to Speak Out Against Sexual Harassment at Work" contributing widely to its publicity (Nemy 1975). Farley (1978) later theorized

the term in her book *Sexual Shakedown: The Sexual Harassment of Women on the Job*. This sequence of events highlighted the evolution of the term “sexual harassment” from its inception during a grassroots speak-out to its integration into legal discourse, demonstrating the interconnectedness of activism, media coverage, and scholarly contributions in shaping the narrative around this pervasive issue.

The feminist movement played a significant role in this conceptualization. Lin Farley, a long-standing activist in radical feminist politics, collaborated with Susan Meyer and Karen Sauvigné, both of whom were anti-war activists joining the radical feminist political struggle in the early 1970s (Baker 2008). As all were familiar with the role of sexual violence in women’s oppression, Farley, Meyer, and Sauvigné convened a consciousness-raising group at Cornell University in 1974 and discovered that each woman in the group had a story of quitting a job or being fired due to some form of sexual harassment or assault (Baker 2008). As the pervasiveness of the problem of sexual harassment was gradually revealed, Farley, Meyer, and Sauvigné mobilized the Women’s Section of the Human Affairs Program at Cornell University in 1975. Their activism took a concrete turn when they supported Carmita Wood, a Cornell employee who had to resign due to attacks from her supervisor Boyce McDaniel. Wood, despite facing these hostile conditions, was not granted compensation by the court as she appeared to have left on her own will. Farley and her friends hired a lawyer for her and subsequently won the case against sexual harassment (Hirshman 2019). After discussing what to call these behaviors ranging from ogling to forced sexual relations, they decided to term all such actions “sexual harassment” which created a “watershed” moment for women’s struggle against sexual violence (Hirshman 2019, 20).

In order to reveal the prevalence of the problem, Meyer and social scientist Diedre Silverman conducted a survey focused explicitly on the issue of sexual harassment. In the survey, sexual harassment was defined as “any repeated and unwanted sexual comments, looks, suggestions or physical contact that you find objectionable or offensive and causes you discomfort on your job”² (Farley 1978, 20). This deliberate effort to quantify and articulate the experiences of sexual harassment aimed to shed light on the prevalence of the problem. In a recent interview with Brooke Gladstone, Lin Farley agreed that before conceptualizing sexual harassment, the acts of the perpetrators were not considered occupational damage, and women were

²In the earlier conceptualization of sexual harassment, the term included offensive gestures, suggestive remarks or physical contact perpetrated by individuals. However, its definition and understanding have evolved significantly over time and across different contexts, extending even to include online manifestations. In the Turkish context, while the legal framework delineated sexual harassment from assault, categorizing actions involving physical contact as assault, feminist discourse broadened the term to encompass unwanted comments, looks, or suggestions along with physical interaction, often without clear-cut boundaries. Throughout this thesis, I will use the term sexual harassment in its broadest sense, including physical, verbal, and digital dimensions.

often unaware that sexual harassment was a common experience (Gladstone, n.d.). The act of naming sexual harassment marked a transformative milestone, sparking nationwide discussions as the terminology functioned as a crucial “bridge,” connecting women who had previously suffered in isolation (Swenson 2017). This shift in perspective, from isolated incidents to a recognized pattern of behavior, not only raised awareness about the ubiquity of sexual harassment but also united women in a shared acknowledgment of their experiences.

With the power of naming, feminists started not only to articulate their experiences of sexual harassment but also to theorize them. This newfound agency spurred a collective effort among feminists to lobby for amendments to existing laws, advocating for the recognition of sexual harassment in the workplace as a crime. Simultaneously, feminists fervently pushed for fundamental social and economic changes that could protect women from sexual harassment. In its initial conception, feminist scholars regarded sexual harassment as a profound manifestation of gender inequality. This perspective posited that men in positions of power exploited subordinate women, framing sexual harassment not as a product of sexual desire or misinterpreted flirtatious behavior, but rather as an expression of male dominance and control over women (Zippel 2006). The shift in the discourse from individual acts to a systemic problem enabled a broader understanding of the root causes of sexual harassment, fostering a united front in the pursuit of legal recognition and societal transformation.

Catherine MacKinnon, a pivotal figure in the theorization of sexual harassment within the legal realm, significantly shaped the discourse with her groundbreaking book *Sexual Harassment of Working Women* (1979). In her work, she argued that sexual harassment constituted a form of sex-based discrimination as it contributed to women’s unequal social and economic status. Defining sexual harassment as “unwanted imposition of sexual requirements in the context of a relationship of unequal power,” MacKinnon’s conceptualization revolved around the central theme of power dynamics, particularly “the use of power derived from one social sphere to lever benefits or impose deprivations in another” (MacKinnon 1979, 1). This emphasis on unwantedness and unequal power relations has laid the foundation for the legal as well as the feminist political framework surrounding sexual harassment. Additionally, MacKinnon’s claim that sexual harassment is a form of sex-based discrimination within discrimination law found resonance with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The commission adopted this perspective, incorporating it into its Guidelines on Discrimination Because of Sex in 1980, thereby contributing greatly to the development and consolidation of the term in the legal context (Crouch 2001). MacKinnon’s influential ideas and legal framework have

since underpinned the understanding and approach to sexual harassment within the legal arena in the U.S. context.

One of her major contributions was distinguishing between two distinct forms of sexual harassment, elucidating them as *quid pro quo* and *condition of work*³, both leading to women's experiences of sexual harassment and positioned on the two ends of a continuum (MacKinnon 1979). *Quid pro quo* harassment, as highlighted by MacKinnon (1979), occurs when a supervisor punishes a subordinate for refusing sexual advances, usually resulting in loss of job-related benefits for women. Another manifestation is the "condition of work" where exchanging sex for employment is less explicit, however, the work environment becomes so hostile with unwanted sexual comments, sexual jokes or sexist insults that women cannot continue their work (MacKinnon 1979). MacKinnon (1979) noted that "a constructive discharge, in which a woman leaves the job because of a constant condition of sexual harassment, is an environmental situation that becomes *quid pro quo*" (254). That's to say, if a woman leaves her job due to the sexual advances of her employer, it is not different from a woman's position who loses her job and benefits due to rejecting the sexual demands of her supervisor. In essence, leaving one's job due to being exposed to sexual harassment and losing it for not returning sexual demands lies at two ends of the continuum of the legal framework to conceptualize sexual violence. This nuanced distinction by MacKinnon has been crucial in providing clarity to the legal understanding of sexual harassment, ensuring that both explicit and implicit forms are recognized within the broader framework. By positioning these forms on a continuum, MacKinnon's conceptualization has facilitated a more comprehensive approach to addressing sexual harassment, acknowledging the different manifestations and power dynamics at play within the spectrum of workplace interactions.

3.1.1 Feminists Organizing with the Power of Naming

Feminist activism in the United States set the example for the struggle against sexual harassment around the world, hence the developments in the U.S. context have played a critical role in shaping the trajectory of this movement worldwide. Naming the term spurred the formation of feminist groups dedicated specifically to the struggle against sexual harassment. A notable organization, Working Women United (WWU), was established in 1975 as a non-profit entity with a singular focus on combatting sexual harassment. In addition to its advocacy efforts, WWU

³"Condition of work" was later theorized as "hostile environment." The earlier legal cases were *quid pro quo* sexual harassment cases and as the concept was extended to include hostile environments in 1986, the laws were amended to include offensive conduct as well (see Crouch 2001).

established the Working Women Institute (WWI), a research branch working on educating the public and engaging in litigation on sexual harassment issues of working women. Their multifaceted approach included conducting surveys on women workers, organizing speak-out sessions on sexual harassment, and actively supporting individuals like Carmita Woods in her legal case (Weeks et al. 1986). Another group, Alliance Against Sexual Coercion (AASC), was established in 1976 as a grassroots organization committed to supporting victims of sexual harassment and raising public consciousness on the issue. As the activists founding the group were previously active in the anti-rape movement, they listed sexual harassment under the broader umbrella of violence against women (Baker 2005). This interconnected network of organizations exemplified the collaborative and multifaceted approach adopted by feminist groups in the U.S., which served as a blueprint for similar movements around the world.

Feminist solidarity networks also played an important role in expanding the reach of the struggle against sexual harassment into different arenas. As outlined by Weeks et al. (1986), feminists of the time embraced coalitional politics that were primarily built on interpersonal connections, informal exchanges between different groups, and interdependent leadership positions. This collaborative strategy aimed to exert pressure and motivate policymakers to make changes, particularly in elevating sexual harassment as a prominent social concern. Hence, although WWU and AASC were the prominent organizations directly addressing sexual harassment, other women's groups also stood in solidarity to combat this pervasive issue by means of distributing pamphlets and position papers, having their leaders testify in government hearings, and submitting *amicus curiae* briefs. This multi-layered solidarity, as part of a larger coalition, projected the impression to policymakers of a vast constituency that anticipated decisive measures (Weeks et al. 1986). Although not exclusively focused on sexual harassment, these women's groups worked with dedicated organizations like WWU and AASC on an ideological level. Through such collaborations, they collectively conveyed the urgency and significance of addressing sexual harassment, creating a formidable front that compelled institutions to amend their policies.

Even if national or global structural changes did not occur immediately with the naming of sexual harassment, feminists have utilized this power of naming to push the institutions. To the demands of women for recognition and action against sexual harassment in the workplace, institutional responses began to unfold in the U.S. context. Federal, state, and local governments collaborated with feminist groups, labor unions, and organizations representing women of color and blue-collar workers to develop governmental policy documents on sexual harassment (Baker 2005). In 1979, the U.S. Federal Government initiated an investigation to evaluate the extent of

sexual harassment among its employees (Weeks et al. 1986). A significant milestone occurred on November 10, 1980, with the issuance of guidelines by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on sex discrimination under the chairmanship of Eleanor Holmes Norton (Baker 2005). This step was instrumental in the legitimization of the struggle against sexual harassment. The guidelines not only prohibited sexual harassment as an act of sexual discrimination, violating Title VII of the Civil Rights Acts, but also broadly defined it as “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature” referring to both quid pro quo and hostile environment harassment (Baker 2005, 116). In other words, the guidelines clarified that both forcing women into sexual activity in return for job-related benefits and the creation of a hostile working environment were a violation of Title VII. Additionally, the guidelines deemed the employee fully responsible for sexual harassment perpetrated by supervisors, colleagues, and even non-employees, under specific conditions that were explicitly outlined (Brownmiller and Alexander 1992). The issuance of these guidelines constituted one of the most powerful legal bases for women’s judicial struggle against sexual harassment.

In addition to legal efforts, pressure was exerted via several publications, bringing the issue of sexual harassment to the forefront of public attention. This approach ensured that the struggle was not confined to the legal arena but also extended to raising awareness among the public around the issue. In 1976, Mary Bralove, in the *Wall Street Journal*, narrated the stories of women courageously disclosing the sexual advances of their bosses and clients (Bralove 1976). In the same year, *Redbook* magazine published in its November issue the results of a survey conducted with 9000 women, revealing that 88 % of its subjects had experienced sexual harassment (Baker 2005). From 1977 to 1982, the issue of sexual harassment was covered in 82 articles circulating in a variety of magazines, with the highest number of 21 articles published in 1980 (Weeks et al. 1986). Notably, this peak in publications coincided with the same year the EEOC amended its guidelines on sexual harassment. Women’s individual and collective efforts all paved the way for policy changes and contributed to raising public awareness surrounding the issue of sexual harassment. The convergence of legal amendments, public awareness campaigns, and media coverage created a synergistic effect, amplifying the impact of the struggle against sexual harassment.

On an international scale, an important turning point in the institutional struggle against sexual harassment occurred with the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, enforced in 1981. Despite the absence of a specific prohibition on sexual harassment within CEDAW during its adoption, the

convention served as a critical reference point for the struggle on an international level. As a legally binding human rights convention, CEDAW identified any form of ‘discrimination, deprivation or restriction’ based on gender, preventing or intending to prevent women from enjoying their human rights as a violation of individual human rights, obliging states to ensure equality between men and women across all arenas (Acar and Ertürk 2011, 285). According to Acar and Ertürk (2011), the “revolutionary” character of CEDAW within the international human rights regime lies in the multidimensional approach to women’s human rights, encompassing all spheres from political to economic, cultural to family life and this universality applies to all women regardless of their ethnicity, marital status, or religion. A decade later, with the pressure of feminist interventions, CEDAW was updated with a recommendation to explicitly address the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. In 1992, CEDAW’s General Recommendation No.19 on violence against women directly defined sexual harassment as a discriminatory practice in Article 11, emphasizing its role as a serious obstacle to women’s empowerment, creating a hostile work environment (“CEDAW General Recommendation No.19 Violence against Women” 1992). Following CEDAW’s recommendation, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women organized by the United Nations approved the Beijing Platform for Action which explicitly addressed issues related to sexual harassment in the workplace. The platform urged the governments, trade unions, employers, community and youth organizations as well as non-governmental organizations to collaborate in eliminating sexual harassment (Asmat and Mehboob 2016). These steps in building international human rights mechanisms have been vital in the ongoing struggle against sexual harassment, creating a framework for addressing and preventing gender-based discrimination globally.

3.1.2 Women’s Legal Steps

Feminist activism against sexual harassment has been shaped by a diverse group of people. According to Baker (2005), black women were the first ones to initiate influential legal actions while white middle-class feminists conducted extensive efforts to raise awareness on this matter; representatives of blue-collar working-class women pushed authorities to implement regulations prohibiting a wide range of harassing behaviors. The struggle lies at the intersection of all these women’s efforts.

One of the most daring struggles took place in the legal field. After the gradual formation of a legal lexicon for struggling against sexual harassment, women’s court cases played a pivotal role in legitimizing the issue. Two landmark legal cases in the

United States that contributed to the recognition of sexual harassment as a form of workplace discrimination based on sex under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were *Williams v. Saxbe* in 1976 and *Barnes v. Castle* in 1977. In the case of *Williams v. Saxbe*, Diane Williams, a black public information specialist, faced termination of her contract after declining the sexual advances of her supervisor Harvey Brinson where Williams sued him for quid pro quo sexual harassment and won the case (Kolhatkar 2014). This case marked a turning point in women's legal struggle against workplace sexual harassment, as it was one of the first instances where sexual harassment was deemed "treatment based on sex" within the meaning of Title VII (MacKinnon 1979, 60). Despite previous unsuccessful cases of sexual harassment complaints, Williams' triumph established a precedent by recognizing sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination. Following the Williams case, Paulette Barnes, a black payroll clerk, won the quid pro quo lawsuit in 1977 in the Court of Appeal, despite initially losing it (Kolhatkar 2014). The court acknowledged that she was a victim of sex discrimination, further reinforcing the legal recognition of sexual harassment as a form of workplace discrimination. These legal milestones not only legitimized the struggle against sexual harassment but also set a precedent for future cases, affirming that such harassment constituted a violation of Title VII and was a form of sex-based discrimination.

In addition to these two quid pro quo cases, another tide-turning incident was the case of *Meritor Savings Bank v. Mechelle Vinson* in 1986. In this case, for the first time, an employee brought a lawsuit alleging a hostile environment to the Supreme Court under Title VII of The Civil Rights Act of 1964. Unlike previous cases, Vinson was not denied promotion but faced various forms of insulting behaviors from her supervisor Sidney Taylors, ranging from exposing himself to raping her (Dworkin 1993). As Vinson was not denied her job benefits, she could not sue her supervisor for quid pro quo harassment, therefore the court adopted a hostile environment framework. According to Crouch (2001), the significance of the Meritor case lies in its establishment of the legitimacy of sexual harassment claims under Title VII based on both quid pro quo and hostile environment. Another critical aspect of the case was challenging the perception that the perpetrator's behavior, previously considered natural and private, was no longer accepted. As noted by Hirshman (2019), "the formerly 'natural' and 'private' sexual conduct was hereafter subject to the law" in the workplace, clarifying that sexual harassment leading to a hostile environment was considered illegal (51). The impact of this case was substantial as it was followed by a surge in sexual harassment charges, with 9,354 cases filed in the five years following the court decision (Roofeh 2020). This legal milestone not only expanded the scope of recognized sexual harassment claims but also reinforced

the accountability of individuals for their behavior in the workplace, challenging previously tolerated conduct and establishing new legal standards for a safer work environment.

The initial steps taken by women survivors have laid the foundations of the legal struggle against sexual harassment. In a later interview, MacKinnon emphasized the importance of naming sexual harassment and highlighted that designating it as a form of sex discrimination in the realm of law has provided both past and present survivors with a profound realization that they were not to blame nor were they alone in their experiences (Kolhatkar 2014). This acknowledgment has granted survivors “the dignity of a civil rights violation and a forum for accountability and relief” (Kolhatkar 2014, 57). These cases were vital for framing the struggle against sexual harassment as a type of discrimination based on sex and as a violation of women’s civil rights under Title VII, shifting the responsibility from harassers to employers, thus leading to a more systemic approach that pushed institutional preventive measures against sexual harassment (Baker 2008). However, despite acknowledging the importance of these developments, Linda Hirshman (2019) calls Vinson’s case “a dark victory.” Employers, faced with the new strict regulations, began implementing policies that strictly forbid sexual harassment, organized training on the issue, and set up human resources departments for accepting complaints. Yet according to Hirshman, these measures were often put in place to show the court that the employer had done everything to prevent sexual harassment cases and could not be held accountable for its employees’ behavior. After setting up these policies, companies often ceased monitoring their implementation and efficiency for women (Hirshman 2019). These already-existing-but-not-operating mechanisms had discouraging effects on women, yet feminists persisted in their efforts to push the boundaries of social, political, and legal arenas to make sexual harassment visible and hold perpetrators accountable. So far, I have analyzed the formation of the feminist struggle around sexual harassment from its conceptualization and theorization to its implementation across various realms. In the following section, I will focus on the continuums that have emerged in this struggle and explore its implications for feminist politics surrounding sexual harassment.

3.1.3 The Intersecting Continuums of the Feminist Struggle Against Sexual Harassment

Although women’s lobbying and advocacy with regard to sexual harassment had positive impacts on legal, social, and political arenas, the struggle has also been

rough with many challenges on multiple fronts. Naming and conceptualizing the term have been vital steps to be taken and yet this did not guarantee success in every case. The multi-layered nature of sexual harassment posed limitations on analyses solely focusing on the gender aspect of the issue. According to Scales-Trent (1981), the activism of black women safeguarding themselves against sexual harassment can be attributed to both more severe forms of harassment they faced and their longstanding familiarity with discrimination. This recognition emphasizes the need for an intersectional approach that considers the underlying power dynamics of sexual harassment beyond its gender dimension.

From an intersectional standpoint, it is vital to recognize that the vulnerability of black women to sexual harassment stems from their marginalized position in American history. Firstly, the enduring legacy of slavery perpetuated the stigmatization of black women as sexually available, promiscuous, and unprotected by black men. Secondly, due to the historical backdrop of slavery and oppression, black women were left in a more economically vulnerable position (Scales-Trent 1981). As highlighted by Hirshman (2019), black women disproportionately initiated and pursued legal actions for sexual harassment compared to the overall population and these significantly higher numbers could be attributed to their position at the bottom step of the inequality ladder where gender, race, class intersected, leaving these women vulnerable to poverty. The precarious circumstances faced by women like Paulette Barnes, an entry-level Environmental Protection Agency clerk, Sandra Bundy, a low-level worker at the DC Corrections Department with five children from five marriages, and Mechelle Vinson, a nineteen-year-old high school dropout with a teenage marriage, all stem from the intersections of their gender, race, and class (Hirshman 2019). That's to say, the intersectional nature of sexual harassment played a pivotal role in the high number of lawsuits opened by black women in the early days of the struggle. Therefore, an analysis of sexual harassment, particularly in the cases of black women, cannot ignore the issue of gender alongside race and economic vulnerability.

On the other hand, the early cases can be considered as a triumph, particularly for black women and women with diverse backgrounds engaged in various social movements. In the following pages, I will try to highlight the continuums of the sexual harassment struggle, taking place not only through intersecting identities of women but also through various social movements influencing the feminist struggle against sexual harassment. The subjects of three tide-turning cases - Diane Williams, Paulette Barnes, and Mechelle Vinson - were all black women experiencing sexual harassment at the intersections of gender, race, and class. However, according to Hirshman (2019), the courage of black women came from their involve-

ment in anti-racist activism in the 1970s. Baker (2008) states that racial civil rights activism, which emerged in church gatherings, involved practices of calling out and testifying against oppression. When Paulette Barnes was sexually harassed by her superior, she initially sought help from lawyers involved in racial justice activism. Both Williams and Barnes had been a part of the anti-racist movement and had previously worked in government agencies specifically designed to address race discrimination, making them familiar with the civil rights principles and procedures (Baker 2008). Being sexually harassed in institutions meant to combat discrimination was a source of anger for these women and yet they turned this anger into a collective effort with their experiences in anti-racist organizing. According to Lipsitz (2017), these landmark cases paved the way for conceptualizing sexual harassment as a civil-rights violation that adversely affected women collectively, rather than being viewed as an individual matter. In essence, I argue that these tide-turning cases not only shed light on the intersectionality of gender, race, and class for analysis of sexual harassment but also underscored the transformative potential of the continuum of various social movements, influencing the understanding of sexual harassment as a collective civil rights violation.

Aside from legal cases, it is also possible to trace the intersecting continuums in different arenas that played a pivotal role in shaping the sexual harassment discourse. For instance, Eleanor Holmes Norton, also affiliated with the civil rights movement, was the chair of EEOC when the guidelines against sexual harassment were issued (Lipsitz 2017). The contributions of figures like Spottswood Robinson III, not black, not a woman but a civil rights attorney and judge, were also instrumental in the victories of the Williams, Barnes, and Vison cases (Baker 2008). Beyond civil rights connections, the second-wave feminist movement also left a significant imprint on the formation of the struggle against sexual harassment. Both organizations like WWU and AASC and feminists such as Lin Farley, Karen Sauvigne, and Susan Meyer, were white middle-class feminists affiliated with radical feminist groups such as New York Radical Feminists and Lesbian Feminist Liberation (Baker 2008). Leveraging feminist knowledge, strategies, and tools, all these figures effectively theorized sexual harassment and conducted consciousness-raising on a public level.

The convergence of civil rights, anti-racist, and feminist activism in the sexual harassment struggle, led by influential figures from diverse backgrounds, has not only shaped the legal landscape but also the socio-political spheres. As noted by Hirshman (2019), “The movements against oppression do not just intersect; they build on the ones that went before” (47). This analysis highlights how the continuum framework elucidates the interconnectedness and progression of these movements, indicating that the sexual harassment struggle is deeply rooted in the knowledge,

practices, and principles of the civil rights, anti-racist, and feminist movements. Hence, emphasizing the continuum framework serves to ‘trouble’ the simplified origin stories as underlined by Angela Davis, which often attribute the sexual harassment movement solely to educated white women. The diversity of the coalition involved, spanning civil rights groups, anti-racist activists, feminist organizations, unions, and employee associations, underscores the collaborative effort to establish sexual harassment as a punishable crime (Lipsitz 2017). This thesis argues that recognizing the continuum among these struggles is essential to develop stronger feminist politics in the ongoing struggle against sexual harassment as it allows us not only to acknowledge the patterns embedded in these intersecting continuums but also to reveal the ruptures that occur along these continuums.

3.1.4 The Continuums of Anita Hill v. Clarence Thomas Case

The Anita Hill v. Clarence Thomas case unfolded in 1991 when Anita Hill, a black law professor, accused Clarence Thomas, her boss and the U.S. Supreme Court nominee, of sexual harassment during their earlier tenure at the EEOC. Like many other instances involving powerful men, Hill lost the lawsuit, and Thomas took his seat in the Supreme Court (Roofeh 2020). Despite the legal outcome, the extensive media coverage of the case not only brought the issue of sexual harassment to the forefront of the U.S. public attention but also served as a catalyst for introducing the concept to the rest of the world. This case contributed greatly to the mainstreaming of the discourse around sexual harassment, creating widespread public consciousness. However, the aftermath of the case spurred controversial discussions, where misogynistic, racist, and gendered stereotypes persisted within the emerging narratives.

The earlier legal cases involved instances where white men harassed black women, introducing racial implications into the discourse. This racial dimension played a significant role in raising awareness among black women regarding the discriminatory nature of their experiences. According to Crenshaw (2019), black women faced vulnerability due to both racial bias and harmful stereotypes, which portrayed them as expecting lesser nurturance, being more compliant, and less likely to be believed when they spoke out. Hence, well before Hill’s testimony, black women were aware of how their race and gender made them susceptible to various forms of harassment. However, in Hill’s case, a black woman was sexually harassed by a black male supervisor, resonating with the cases of Williams, Barnes, and Vinson where the perpetrators were also black men. Anita’s case demanded a different layer of in-

tersectional analysis as it deviated from the white-men-against-black-women framework. To point out this aspect, during the Hill v. Thomas hearings, a significant number of black writers emphasized the need to analyze sexual harassment within the context of race and gender relations in the United States (Chrisman 1992; Hill and Jordan 1995; Morrison 1992b).

According to Baker (2008), Thomas skillfully reframed Hill's allegations of sexual harassment against him as a case of racially motivated political harassment by denoting the investigation as a technologically advanced form of public lynching aimed at blacks who dare to challenge societal norms, which he termed as "a high-tech lynching for uppity blacks" (Kuźma-Markowska 2008, 93). According to Kuźma-Markowska (2008), the Hill v. Thomas case revealed the interconnectedness of gender and race where it not only rekindled debates around stereotyping black women as promiscuous Jezebels⁴ or black castrating matriarchs but also provoked the issues of "race solidarity" and "race/gender priority" (91).

Thomas, with his rhetorical skills, played on stereotypes, depicting Hill as a lascivious black woman seeking to castrate "an uppity black" who has earned his place through hard work and climbed the success ladder of the American system. This maneuver positioned Hill as a black matriarch, tarnishing the reputation of a self-made black man. In contrast, by accusing a black man and speaking out in front of an all-white Senate, Hill was seen as damaging race solidarity, breaking the rule of not criticizing or accusing black sisters and brothers in front of white people (Kuźma-Markowska 2008). She was portrayed as "the black-women-as-traitor-to-the-race" (Painter 1992, 204). What's more, although Thomas' lewd remarks and repeated harassment infused with pornographic content were considered a "down-home style of courting that affirmed their shared racial background" (Crenshaw 2019, 18), these behaviors were misconstrued as flirtatious acts typical in the black neighborhood. Hill was accused of witch-hunting her 'brother' from the neighborhood. By misconceptualizing 'normal' deeds and accusing a black man who is working for the benefit of his community, Hill was seen as disrupting the priority of the anti-racist struggle over gender.

Along with the accusations of disrupting racial solidarity and race-over-gender priority, Hill was subjected to racist, misogynist, and sexist stereotypes as well. Committee members stereotyped her as a furious and sexually unbalanced woman while the Republican senators portrayed her as a woman with evil intentions and a debatable background. The derogatory labels of being a "nymphomaniac" and a "lesbian" were

⁴Jezebel is a stereotypical black woman portrayed as an oversexed character who not only insinuates but also instigates sex. This image has been haunting black women for centuries (Painter 1992).

also directed at her (Baker 2005, 145). Morrison (1992) suggested that the focus during the hearings was on why Hill would make these accusations rather than understanding the narrative context of her testimony. Consequently, Hill found herself confined to conflicting stereotypes by the press and the Senate members, portrayed either as a man-hating lesbian or as a seductive figure who could be captivated and then harshly rejected by men (Morrison 1992). Despite these attempts at categorization, Hill resisted such simplistic labels. According to Morrison (1992), Anita Hill was “a mixture heretofore not recognized in the glossary of racial tropes: an intellectual daughter of black farmers; a black female taking offense; a black lady repeating dirty words” (xvi). As a result, Hill’s portrayal of events led to an exchange of stereotypes rather than a genuine investigation into the truth of her testimony.

Examining the complexities of the Hill v. Thomas case, Morrison (1992) brought attention to the nuanced interplay of race and class dimensions. This intersection, where being black is often equated with being poor, can be exploited to promote exclusionary and elitist agendas, with race strategically used as a stand-in for class. Morrison underlined the manipulation of victimhood by Thomas when he referred to his working-class background to garner sympathy. He identified himself as a victim of a selection process that he, more than anyone else, knew was designed to assess the candidate’s merit. For Morrison (1992), Thomas played this ‘poor innocent black boy’ card with his words ‘My father was a doorman’ very skillfully in front of an audience, particularly with whites, who failed to discern the income disparities between a doorman in Washington D.C. and a clerk at the census bureau (xxi). His strategic use of the working-class background as a tool for victimhood manipulation, particularly among white audiences, further exemplifies the complexities surrounding the intertwined issues of race and class in the broader discourse of the case.

Although Hill received immense criticism, ranging from mockery to death threats from individuals of both black and white communities, her case stood as a pivotal moment in bringing the issue of sexual harassment into the agenda of mainstream media, instigating widespread conversations among the general public. Smith (2020) asserted that Hill’s testimony was widely acknowledged for giving a voice to those who were afraid to speak out, with sexual harassment complaints to EEOC doubling in the five years following her testimony. Despite facing political and media mockery as well as abuses from some anti-sexual harassment activists, Hill found crucial support among black feminist activists. Barbara Ransby, Deborah Ling, and Elsa Barkley Brown sharply criticized the committee’s dismissal of Hill’s claims and the subsequent defamation she endured. In a significant act of solidarity, they organized solidarity actions and, with the help of over sixteen hundred donations,

placed a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* on November 17, 1991, under the headline “African American Women in Defense of Ourselves” (Smith 2020). Crenshaw (2019) noted that this advertisement aimed to expose the intersectional dynamics of racism and sexism in Hill and Thomas’ case, highlighting how black women’s experiences were undermined and undervalued.

Unfortunately, in this case, the solidarity established among black feminist activists failed to bridge the gap between the anti-racist movement and the feminist struggle against sexual harassment. Crenshaw (2019) credits the black feminist frameworks for surpassing the limitations of only race-focused or only gender-focused approaches, asserting that intersectionality serves as an essential tool for comprehending the obscured facets of the historical narrative, which have potentially jeopardized our understanding. She notes the *Hill v. Thomas* conflict has etched itself into history as “a colossal failure of intersectional organizing” (Crenshaw 2019, 20). The potential predicament faced by Anita Hill was that she found herself caught in the middle of an anti-racist movement that emphasized the experiences of black men, and a feminism that failed to fully acknowledge the influence of race on society’s perception of black victims. The issue of sexual harassment, much like feminism itself, was predominantly seen as a concern of the white community, making it inconsistent with the goals of anti-racism. While many white feminists seemed to be largely unaware of the racial nuances that shaped the confrontation between Thomas and Hill, anti-racism advocates, familiar with the devastating impact of lynching on black men, responded to Thomas’ call for racial solidarity (Crenshaw 2019). As a result, both camps engaged in arguments that failed to effectively communicate with one another, ultimately hindering the objective of fostering solidarity between antiracist and feminist movements, “an alliance Ms. Hill’s testimony might have, in a better world, solidified” (Crenshaw 2019, 18).

In essence, the *Hill v. Thomas* conflict stands as a historical testament to the challenges of forging solidarity between anti-racist and feminist movements. It also highlights the need for intersectional frameworks in addressing the multifaceted nature of the sexual harassment struggle, ensuring a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics and all its intersections. Additionally, this case not only underscores the continuums of debates over race solidarity and gender/race priorities but also reveals intersecting continuums of oppressive narratives, perpetuating enduring stereotypes that plague black women. In the forthcoming chapters, I will be referring to these continuums of marginalizing narratives within contemporary feminist activism, particularly through the case of Susma Bitsin Platform. Despite the important gains of the feminist struggle against sexual harassment since Anita Hill’s case three decades ago, survivors who choose to speak out against their perpetra-

tors in the digital realm still encounter these narratives of marginalization, disbelief, and victim-blaming. As this work reveals, by elucidating these continuums, it also becomes possible to discern the ruptures that occur and identify windows of opportunities for advancing the feminist struggle against sexual harassment.

3.1.5 Different Contexts, Different Struggles

Feminist activism in the U.S. has been a pioneer in shaping the policies addressing sexual harassment with the courts and state agencies at the forefront, advocating for equal opportunities for women. It was almost ten years after sexual harassment was named that the term entered the lexicon of international institutions while different countries developed varying policies on the issue. The struggle against sexual harassment gained momentum in the late 1970s, and subsequently influenced Canada and the United Kingdom in the early 1980s. The majority of European Union member states did not enact legislation until the 1990s before the initiatives undertaken by the European Commission and the U.S. Senate hearings of Hill and Thomas (Zippel 2006). The legislation ratified during the 1990s provided distinct interpretations of sexual harassment and established diverse mechanisms to hold the perpetrators and employers accountable, encompassing civil and labor laws as well as criminal statutes.

The definition of sexual harassment as unwanted conduct of a sexual nature was asserted in the nonbinding 1991 European Commission Recommendation on protecting the dignity of women and men at work with its annexed Code of Practice on measures to combat sexual harassment (E. Collins 1996). Feminist activists around Europe first pushed the European Union to adopt sexual harassment measures before adapting and implementing them in their home countries (Zippel 2006). In a significant step, the 2002 European Union Directive on Equal Treatment, a legally binding document for member countries, explicitly designated sexual harassment as a form of discrimination based on sex (Zippel 2006). The issuance of these documents, particularly the binding directives, has been influential in shaping the landscape of the struggle against sexual harassment among member states.

The United Nations addressed sexual harassment on an international scale for the first time during the 1985 World Conference on Women in Nairobi, with the document titled “Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women” playing a crucial role in disseminating the concept globally (Zippel 2006). In the meantime, women continued to file lawsuits against sexual harassment around the world, yet due to different policies of the institutions and countries, women’s struggle had

varying results. While the UN was taking steps in the struggle against sexual harassment and playing a pivotal role in its diffusion, it also faced sexual harassment accusations within its own body. In 2004, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, was accused by a female staff member of sexual harassment. Lubbers denied the allegations on the grounds that she had grown “a friendly gesture” in her mind into sexual misconduct (Lynch 2005). Not surprisingly, Lubber’s narrative was similar to claims made during the Hill V. Thomas case that Hill misunderstood Thomas’ down-home style of courting, highlighting a pattern of blaming victims and doubting their testimonies. Concurrent with these allegations, the UN was also confronted with scandals involving sexual abuse of women and children by UN peacekeepers in Congo. The allegations against Lubbers, along with broader incidents of sexual abuse, eventually led to Lubbers’ resignation despite Kofi Annan’s rejection of the complaints for not having substantiated evidence (Lynch 2005). Therefore, if it was only the sexual harassment accusations of Lubbers by his staff, probably this would not be enough for him to face the consequences of his actions. As can be seen, the patterns of disbelief and victim blaming continued despite the changing contexts.

Aside from the steps taken by international and supranational institutions, the conceptualization as well as the struggle against sexual harassment spread across the countries with slight nuances in different contexts. One of the major differences was conceptualizing sexual harassment in the legal struggle. In the U.S. context, sexual harassment was initially framed as a form of crime based on discrimination against a particular group and it had been legitimized on the grounds of gender equality. It was initially challenged not because of being a form of sexual deviance but because it jeopardized women’s employment opportunities. Earlier cases, brought under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, sex, or national origin, held employers accountable for sexual harassment taking place among employees, making them pay compensation or punitive damages due to loss of employment opportunities (Dworkin 1993). However, this approach had limitations, as feminists advocating against sexual harassment had to emphasize certain aspects such as discrimination based on sex or its negative effects on employment opportunities while downplaying other dimensions like acts of sexual violence outside the workplace (Saguy 2003).

In the European Union (EU) context, sexual harassment was defined as a violation of the dignity of workers, primarily discussed within the framework of power abuse (Zippel 2006). A notable distinction emerged when examining the reforms of the French legal system on sexual harassment, implemented through the Parliament in 1992, as opposed to the U.S. system where court interventions were prevalent. The

French legal approach appealed more to quid pro quo forms of sexual harassment rather than discrimination based on sex (Saguy 2003). Besides, in French law, sexual harassment was categorized as a form of interpersonal violence. According to Saguy (2003), when a male supervisor terminated the employment of a female subordinate due to her refusal to engage in an affair with him, he was found guilty of a penal misdemeanor, with sole responsibility resting on him rather than his employer. Unlike the U.S. legal system, this act was not condemned as sex discrimination but a misdemeanor similar to the crime of rape, as the supervisor exploited his position of authority to coerce the woman into engaging in a sexual relationship, much like a rapist used physical force to compel his victim into sexual activity. In other words, The French legal system categorized sexual harassment along with rape, sexual battery, and exhibitionism under the section on sexual violence rather than sex discrimination as in the U.S. legal system. However, unlike rape, which was considered a crime, sexual harassment was a misdemeanor, receiving a minor penalty (Saguy 2003). The juxtaposition between the French and the U.S. approaches demonstrates how distinct institutional, political, and cultural frameworks can cultivate remarkably divergent understandings of sexual harassment.

As institutional, political, and cultural structures have been influential in shaping the fight against sexual harassment, feminist activism in India has played a central role in this struggle. The arrival of the struggle against sexual harassment in India was towards the end of the 1990s. In 1997, the Indian Supreme Court issued a groundbreaking decision known as the Vishaka judgment, mandating all establishments to adhere to guidelines aimed at preventing and addressing sexual harassment in the workplace (Chaudhuri 2010). The Vishaka guidelines were a response to the incident of the gang rape of Bhanwari Devi, a social worker at the village level and a member of the women's group Saathins, who was dedicated to combating child marriages and multiple marriages in rural areas. Before the incident, Devi intervened to halt the marriage of Ramkaran Gujjar's one-year-old daughter. Then, she was raped by five men, including Ramkaran, in 1992 in the presence of her husband (Maity 2016).

According to Chaudhuri (2010), the Vishaka judgment marked the first acknowledgment and definition of sexual harassment of women in Indian workplaces. Before 1997, women workers experiencing sexual harassment had no specific recourse apart from filing complaints under sections of the Indian Penal Code. Additionally, workplaces and employers were not held accountable for ensuring the safety and security of their female employees (Chaudhuri 2010). The Vishaka judgment not only was a groundbreaking moment but also set the stage for subsequent struggles against sexual harassment in the legal and social landscapes. With the decades-long pres-

sures coming from feminist organizations, another significant change occurred in the legal struggle against sexual harassment in 2013 with the introduction of the Sexual Harassment of Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, which was grounded in the Vishaka Guidelines (Government of India Ministry of Women and Child Development 2015). Similar to Devi's incident, after another infamous gang rape case that infuriated the Indian public on a wider scale with the power of social media, Indian Criminal Law was amended with public pressure, bringing more severe punishments for rape and sexual harassment (Sharma 2022). These legal developments showcased a dynamic response to societal demands for increased protection and redressal against sexual harassment in both workplaces and broader public spaces and the Indian feminist movement played a pivotal role in this.

Despite the legal actions taken in India, the established guidelines were either not properly implemented or not implemented at all, hence the judgment was mostly disregarded both by public and private employers (Gupta and Hajra 2007). In reaction to this neglect, a women's rights initiative Sanhita conducted research about women's experiences of sexual harassment, breaking the silence around this complex issue and showcasing its prevalence in various cities of India (Gupta and Hajra 2007). The findings of Sanhita's research revealed that women in a precarious position on the power spectrum, including recruits, widows, apprentices, divorcees, single women or those working on a contractual basis, were the most vulnerable to experiencing sexual harassment (Gupta and Hajra 2007). Additionally, women from marginalized caste and ethnic communities, religious or sexual minorities, and disabled or transgender individuals were particularly prone to being subjected to sexual harassment (Gupta and Hajra 2007). The case of Bhanwari Devi served as an exemplary illustration of such vulnerability. The Vishaka guidelines were issued after her brutal gang rape, a consequence of her audacious transgression of both her low social caste and her gender role (Gupta and Hajra 2007). Sanhita's years of experience with women underscored the multilayered nature of sexual harassment and the need for an intersectional analysis to address it. Women's precarious positions at the intersections of gender, race, class, ethnicity, caste, religion or able-bodiedness exposed them as more frequent victims of sexual harassment. The struggle against sexual harassment requires an understanding that considers these intersecting aspects to effectively address and combat this pervasive issue.

The introduction of the notion of sexual harassment in Japan can be traced back to the late 1980s, influenced by the United States and disseminated through media and publications (Hibino 2010). The term *sekuhara* for sexual harassment, gained prominence in mainstream media in 1989, however became a part of Japanese lexicon after the Fukuoka case, a landmark lawsuit won in 1992 as a hostile environment

sexual harassment. The case involved a single woman working in a small publishing company in the city of Fukuoka, who faced harassment from her supervisor, leading to her resignation after he spread rumors about her for having a promiscuous reputation (Marikkar 2009). The court ruled that the plaintiff's right to dignity and sexual equality had been violated, holding the employer responsible for failing to create a gender-equal working environment (Marikkar 2009).

With the amendment of the Law for Equal Employment Opportunity for Men and Women in 1997, holding employers accountable for preventing sexual harassment against female employees, the struggle gained a solid foundation both in public and private entities in Japan (Hibino 2010). These developments not only provided protection for women but also contributed to a shift in mindset among women regarding sexual harassment. As a result, the silence regarding the issue was broken. As Marikkar (2009) noted, in 2008, a total of 8,140 female employees in Japan filed sexual harassment complaints with the Equal Employment Opportunity offices, which corresponds to 64 % of the overall 12,782 reports made by women to regional governments concerning EEO matters, indicating a significant rise since 2005. However, in contrast to the Indian context, Marikkar (2009) argued that women employed in high-ranking positions with greater power and autonomy in Japan had the potential to be seen as threats to men within organizations that have historically been dominated by men. As an increasing number of women advocate for gender equality and secure managerial roles, they become more susceptible to experiencing sexual harassment due to holding positions of power traditionally reserved for men (Marikkar 2009).

Lin Farley in a piece published in *The New York Times*, expressed her disappointment with the progress of the struggle back in 1975. She wrote, “[G]iving the behavior a name has done much to change our rules, it has done far less to encourage the conversations I had envisioned back in 1975 that I believed would help to change our culture. Nor has it changed the power dynamics that allow sexual harassment to flourish” (Farley 2017). Similarly, Linda Gordon, in her 1981 essay “The Politics of Sexual Harassment,” shared her disappointment with the institutional progress but emphasized the need for feminist solidarity. She underlined the importance of viewing sexual harassment as a systemic issue, “a fundamental form of oppression” prevalent in society rather than an individual manner or a style (Gordon 1981, 14). While acknowledging the significance of legal and administrative measures against sexual harassment, Gordon warned against the overreliance on state institutions, emphasizing the need to focus on the “power to define sexual harassment” and the “women’s movement” as a reliable protection for women rather than “the threat of official punishment” (Gordon 1981, 14). She concluded her essay by asserting

that “our primary goal should be to raise the consciousness of other women about the kind of treatment they deserve, and about their capacity to defend each other’s ‘individual’ rights collectively” (Gordon 1981, 14). Her emphasis on the feminist movement creating secure spaces for women against sexual harassment, rather than placing trust in laws and the state for change served as a prescient warning for almost 50 years. In the following years, both the legal and administrative systems failed to bring justice to women facing sexual violence, often protecting the abusive employers, bosses and all others in power positions. However, although the disappointments about progressing the sexual harassment struggle within the political, legal and social domains persisted, the emergence of digital feminist activism marked a pivotal turn in the ongoing struggle. The following section will explore the evolution of the struggle when “tweets” are added to the “streets.”

3.2 The Struggle Against Sexual Harassment in Digital Spaces: The Hashtag #MeToo

After almost fifty years of feminist struggle against sexual harassment and just before the world learned about the sexual abuses of Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission published a report on workplace harassment, indicating that nearly 60 % of women in the U.S. workplaces experienced various forms of harassment ranging from unwanted sexual attention to overt coercion (Feldblum and Lipnic 2016). With so much prevalence and yet so much silencing, sexual violence in general and sexual harassment in the workplace in particular continued to be a burning issue.

The emergence of the #MeToo movement, sparked off by a tweet from a Hollywood celebrity Alyssa Milano encouraging women to respond with “me too” to her tweet if they had experienced sexual harassment or assault (Milano 2017), marked a watershed moment. This movement took an immediate turn when black feminists, by troubling this moment, changed the narrative into one that recognized the legacy of the black feminist activist Tarana Burke who had initiated a platform on MySpace as early as 2006. Burke’s platform aimed at raising awareness and supporting black women and girls against sexual violence, using the phrase “me too” (Corsi, Thissen, and Zacchia 2019).

In the wake of the disclosures surrounding Harvey Weinstein’s sexual abuses, extensively covered by the mainstream media (Kantor and Twohey 2017; Farrow 2017), the silence has been shattered on social media globally. Within the first month of its

release, 2.3 million #MeToo tweets spread to 85 countries across the world, hinting at the magnitude of the problem (Suk et al. 2019). In the following years, it started to give concrete results, stripping several men of their power positions (Levenson, del Valle, and Moghe 2020; Rummler 2020). Within almost a year and a half, 417 high-profile men from different industries have been disclosed for sexual harassment in the U.S., as revealed by the research done by Temin & Co. with the spark of the #MeToo moment (Green 2018). As the #MeToo movement gained global attention, facilitated by the viral hashtag that emboldened women to speak out against their perpetrators, this powerful mobilization underscores the culmination of years of feminist struggle. It has propelled the issue of sexual harassment to the forefront of mainstream media agendas and has prompted public institutions, ranging from governmental bodies to private corporations, to engage in substantive discussions about the pervasive problem of sexual harassment.

3.2.1 Paving the Way to the #MeToo Moment

While Alyssa Milano's tweet and the disclosures of Weinstein's sexual assaults were often portrayed as the tipping moment in the struggle against sexual harassment, this thesis contends that it is essential to "trouble" this genealogy to reveal how feminist efforts paved the way to this moment. Feminist activism, initiated offline and later flowed into online mediums, played a crucial role in creating a rupture in the narrative surrounding sexual harassment. This work emphasizes the need to question these ruptures as well as the need to explore the intersecting continuums of feminist activism that brought the power of offline and online advocacy together, ultimately transforming the #MeToo moment into a global feminist movement resisting sexual harassment.

During the early days of digital activism, online feminist journalism and blogs played a vital role in creating awareness among the public about feminist issues with a particular focus on sexual harassment. In the U.S. context, the seeds of the #MeToo movement were planted with influential feminist publications such as Jezebel, a commercial and celebrity online magazine, Pamela Meritt's blog Angry Black Bitch, and popular web publications like Slate or Salon, all of which dedicated attention to feminist concerns. Additionally, key figures harnessing the power of the internet to spread feminist ideas contributed greatly to this movement. Prominent voices such as Rebecca Traister, who framed the movement's narrative of anger in her book *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger* (2019), Lauren Bruce, the founder of one of the largest feminist blogs Feministe, Jessica Valenti from

Feministing advocating for sexual equality, and Jodi Kantor, the journalist behind the Harvey Weinstein story with a background in Slate (Hirshman 2019) have been extremely influential in the online feminist struggle against sexual harassment. Their collective efforts laid the groundwork for the emergence of the #MeToo movement.

Long before the tipping moment arrived, women involved in feminist blogging or journalism were already exposing perpetrators on their platforms. In 2010, Jenna Sauers (2010a), a former model, took a bold step by publishing an article on Jezebel titled “Meet Terry Richardson, The World’s Most F—ked Up Fashion Photographer,” where she exposed the renowned fashion photographer Terry Richardson. Through the story of Jamie Peck, Sauers (2010a) recounted instances of Richardson pressuring young early-career models to give nude photos while simultaneously, getting naked and demanding models to ejaculate himself. Sauers raised critical questions about the nature of consent in these situations, considering the precarious status of these young early career models vis-à-vis the well-established figure of Richardson, a wealthy, famous and influential name in the field (Sauers 2010a). She underlined that while nudity might be common in the fashion industry, it did not mean that the responsibility of creating a safe work environment was denied, stressing the importance of protecting the subject’s dignity at work. Recognizing the power dynamics within the industry that often silence many, Sauers (2010a) concluded her article by encouraging others to share their stories of sexual harassment by Richardson, ensuring anonymity for those who chose to come forward.

Two days after issuing her call, Sauers took further action by publishing another article titled “Exclusive: More Models Come Forward with Allegations Against Fashion Photographer” (2010b). In this piece, she revealed that she had heard from modeling agency bookers to photographers, from fashion writers to magazine editors, all suffering from Richardson’s sexually abusive behaviors and yet were afraid to come out due to his immense power in the industry. Sauers finished the article by saying “In a witch-hunt, the witch is the blameless one: but Richardson, like any predator, is a powerful individual who manipulates and victimizes the weak. When they speak out against him, people try to silence them. The power structure protects its own. But why should sexual harassment be tolerated?” (Sauers 2010b). After these articles, Jezebel continued to cover the unfolding story of Richardson in the following months where Sauers continued to publish follow-up stories on the subject. Sauers resistance to the silencing of the survivors presented one of the earliest steps taken toward the #MeToo movement.

More disclosures of the abusers from several industries continued to flow and feminist activists used the power of the internet to break the silence surrounding the

issue of sexual harassment. Women journalists continued to unveil perpetrators in different sectors which gradually paved the way for Harvey Weinstein's exposure. The exposure of sexual harassment by public figures such as Donald Trump, Bill O'Reilly, Roger Ailes, and Bill Cosby has significantly contributed to the tipping moment (Hirshman 2019). Trump's unrestrained confidence in telling a news reporter to grab women by their pussies before the U.S. elections in 2016, Fox News host O'Reilly's exposure by The New York Times for sexually harassing five women and paying settlements for their harassment claims, and Cosby's infamous trial that involved drugging and sexually assaulting women (Farrow 2017), collectively sparked a public and media reckoning, prompting a deeper exploration into these dark stories.

Interestingly enough, despite Weinstein's known history of sexual harassment spanning more than two decades, the revelation of his abusive actions did not surface until 2017. Particularly, the publication of two newspaper articles was critical in bringing his misconduct to light (Farrow 2017; Kantor and Twohey 2017). Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey (2017) in their article titled "Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades" published in the New York Times on October 5, 2017, revealed multiple allegations of sexual harassment against Weinstein, featuring an opening story from a renowned Hollywood star Ashley Judd. With skillful journalism supported by legal documents, internal correspondence from Weinstein's companies, and e-mails, they unraveled a three-decade-long saga of sexual harassment and abuse. Their reporting also shed light on a disturbing pattern in Weinstein's abusive behavior, involving actions such as wearing a bathrobe, exposing himself, asking for a massage and demanding oral sex or engaging in rape (Kantor and Twohey 2017).

A very similar pattern came to light five days later in Ronan Farrow's article titled "From Aggressive Overtures to Sexual Assault: Harvey Weinstein's Accusers Tell Their Stories" published in The New Yorker. According to Farrow (2017), Weinstein and his associates kept women's allegations out of sight with non-disclosure agreements, payoffs or legal threats. In this article, Farrow (2017) shared his interview with Asia Argento, an actress and director, explaining the reasons for Argento's silence regarding her rape by Weinstein, citing her fear of Weinstein's power to 'crush' people. According to Hirshman (2019), what made Weinstein's sexually abusive behaviors acceptable was the "universe of institutional structures of harassment, in his company, in the film industry and American law and legal practices. Quite as if Catharine MacKinnon and Paulette Barnes and Mechelle Vinson never walked the earth, Harvey Weinstein's entire adult life reveals a society organized to empower abusers" (205). Certainly, it was not merely a coincidence that Weinstein's exposure came at a time when women were no longer willing to remain silent about their

experiences due to powerful and years-long feminist advocacy and awareness-raising on the issue. This universe, as Hirshman describes, began to shatter under the persistent feminist struggle that harnessed the power of both traditional methods and online platforms.

3.2.2 Troubling the Origin Stories of #MeToo

The disclosure of Weinstein's actions, facilitated by dedicated feminist journalists through mainstream publications and survivors utilizing digital mediums, can be likened to the *Hill v. Thomas* case of the 1990s in terms of garnering global recognition for the issue with the amplifying power of social media. However, this reading of the #MeToo moment tends to overlook the contributions of Tarana Burke and the black feminist movement in the struggle against sexual harassment. It was unfortunate that the tipping moment was initially associated with Milano's tweet as the phrase 'me too' had been a part of Tarana Burke's activism against sexual harassment among marginalized black women and girls since 2006. When reminded of Tarana Burke's work, Milano was quick to acknowledge the role of the black feminist legacy in this moment. Milano said this was a happy coincidence as it gave way to standing in solidarity with women of color and acknowledging their leading role in the struggle against sexual harassment (Hirshman 2019).

How would the narrative look like if the continuum of black feminist legacy into the #MeToo movement was not acknowledged? As Burke repeatedly stated, "me too" was not about taking powerful men down but it should be about using the power of empathy to support survivors of sexual violence on their healing journeys (Burke 2020). As the viral hashtag was tweeted, Burke, despite her shock about the way things were advancing, wrote on Twitter "It Made My Heart Swell to See Women Using This Idea - One That We Call 'Empowerment Through Empathy'" (Burke 2017a). In a second tweet, she was also making emphasis on the need for taking this hashtag into a movement of community healing, tweeting "It's Beyond a Hashtag. It's the Start of a Larger Conversation and a Movement for Radical Community Healing. Join Us" (Burke 2017b). In reference to the hashtag #Metoo, Burke said, "'Me Too' became the way to succinctly and powerfully, connect with other people and give people permission to start their journey to heal" (Murray 2017). It is very likely that if Diana Williams, Paulette Barnes, and Mechelle Vinson did not set the terms of the legal struggle, Tarana Burke's grassroots activism would not be predating this so-called online moment of #MeToo. If Burke had not grounded her work upon the mottos "empowerment through empathy" and "reliance on support

and solidarity,” the tipping moment of #MeToo would possibly not have arrived. The rich history of black feminist activism, integral to the development of #MeToo, would remain obscured. On the other hand, if it were not for the ambitious feminist journalism of women reporters, Weinstein’s universe would still not be shattered by the voices of women from all around the world. In essence, acknowledging the black feminist legacy, embracing principles of empathy and solidarity, and recognizing the pivotal role of feminist journalism, collectively unveil the multifaceted continuum that shaped the #MeToo movement, reminding us that true progress against sexual harassment requires a holistic understanding of its roots, advocacy, and the power of collective voices.

In emphasizing the transformative power of the #Metoo movement, MacKinnon (2020) underlined, “The alchemy of #MeToo is beginning to transform what has been a privilege of power into a disgrace so despicable that not even many white upper-class men feel they can afford it around them” (44). What made #MeToo possible was the turning point of legally naming and defining sexual harassment as sex discrimination, accurately labeling the experience as a result of dynamic structural inequality. This categorization is intricately linked to gender dynamics, with significant connections to white supremacist and class-based dimensions, including considerations of poverty and economic vulnerability. For MacKinnon (2020), gender inequality is multifaceted and inherently unstable, deriving complexity from the presence of several intersecting factors that contribute to unequal treatment including race, ethnicity, religion, social class, disability, sexuality, and age. These factors, in turn, reciprocally influence gender dynamics. The instability of gender inequality stems from its flawed foundation rooted in a fallacious belief in the inherent inferiority of women and the natural superiority of men - a concept commonly referred to as ‘difference’ (MacKinnon 2020).

Framing sexual abuse as a form of power inequality gives these acts a ground to be legitimized as a violation of rights. Both the decades of collective struggles of women and the theoretical framework behind the struggle that allowed legal, political, and cultural changes made the watershed moment of #MeToo possible. The power of naming sexual harassment, delegitimizing it as a violation of civil rights, and recognizing its intersections with gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, religion, ethnicity, and age are crucial elements that paved the way for the #MeToo moment. This transformative juncture was made possible through decades of theoretical and practical collective feminist activism. The diligent work of journalists guided by their instincts to elevate the news value of the usually silenced sexual harassment stories and the amplifying effect of social media, where millions of survivors found inspiration in each other’s contagious courage to share their own stories or stand

in solidarity with the survivors were instrumental. The complex and intersecting continuums of feminist activism, manifest both online and offline, have played a crucial role in bringing the issue of sexual harassment to the forefront, with the #MeToo movement serving as a powerful testament to the persistent efforts of feminists worldwide.

As can be seen, the #MeToo movement is not novel or has arisen unexpectedly out of nowhere, nor is it self-generated. In fact, when examining the motivations behind the inception of this movement, its inspiration from pre-existing movements, and its contribution to the global fight against sexual harassment, the common query frequently posed is why it materialized at this particular moment. What was the turning point that allowed Milano's tweet to go viral within hours and spread to 85 countries, which then transformed into a movement with feminist solidarity networks, moving the online struggle to a more grounded level? There is no simple answer to this question, nor a single one. It might be the power of social media, or the culmination of decades-long feminist efforts, or both. By examining why certain moments, names, and places are highlighted over others, we unravel the intricate threads of this narrative. Shifting our perspectives to understand the intersecting continuums among these stories offers profound insights. What if we view these events not as isolated moments but as intersecting continuums? This shift prompts a reevaluation of feminist politics, emphasizing the importance of continuity over singular moments. Understanding the continuums unveils the complexities that might remain unnoticed when fixating on a single origin story. The intersecting continuums enable us to discern the multiple layers of power axes flowing from one particular moment into another, sometimes building upon existing structures and at other times creating ruptures paving the way to new layers and new continuums. In the case of #MeToo, the continuums of decades of feminist theorization, intersecting with the continuums of various human rights movements, the continuums of empowering reciprocity of online and offline feminist activism, all paved the way for the MeToo movement, creating a rupture in the mainstream narrative of sexual harassment, proposing many alternatives to the struggle.

3.2.3 The Power of the Hashtag

Although sexual harassment entered the lexicon in the 1970s, the powerful abusers of the entertainment industry soon established their own system to cover their harassment stories with money to silence women, by threats to victims' careers, or by legal mechanisms such as non-disclosure agreements. However, what they failed to foresee

was the transformative power of digital activism carried out through hashtags. The power of hashtags has previously been harnessed to organize large-scale online and offline protests such as #BlackLivesMatter for anti-racist activism (Ince, Rojas, and Davis 2017) or #NiUnaMenos (Fuentes 2019) for feminist activism against gender-based violence. Hashtag activism, characterized by a significant volume of comments and retweets in response to a hashtagged word, phrase, or sentence, possesses a unique narrative power. According to Yang (2016), the most influential hashtag activism cases have distinct narrative forms with a beginning, a crisis/conflict, and an end. People participate in this collective narrative by expressing their personal thoughts, feelings and stories by their hashtags. Giving the example of #BlackLivesMatter, Yang (2016) contends that personal tweets, comments, and hashtags, when artistically brought together through slogans, pictures, jokes, news links, videos, or songs, create a collective narrative for the fight for racial justice that might not be represented in mainstream media. Yang (2019) underscores that the power of hashtag activism lies in the sharing of personal narratives and their connection to social issues through hashtags.

This personalized and artful storytelling turning into a protest narrative can also be considered a characteristic of the #MeToo movement. Considering the hashtag #MeToo as creating a platform where sexual harassment survivors could share their personal narratives of abuse, a privilege they have been denied by the legal system or by mainstream media, via the power of the hashtag, it became possible to perceive the movement as a space where survivors articulated their anger and grief in their own words, reclaiming the agency to be heard (Chandra and Erlingsdóttir 2020). This characteristic, according to Chandra and Erlingsdóttir (2020), made it possible to define the #MeToo movement as revolutionary, marking an unprecedented and historic event where survivors had the absolute entitlement to speak up or choose silence in their own narratives and on their own terms.

Although the visibility of the #MeToo Movement has increased with a lawsuit and certain media coverage, the media was incapable of providing extensive coverage to numerous narratives of women in the same manner as hashtag activism could achieve (Hirshman 2019). According to Hirshman (2019), it was the multitude of women's narratives of sexual harassment that evoked feelings of sympathy among the readers and turned the #MeToo moment into a viral digital activism practice. It was millions of women's personal and artfully embroidered narratives flooding through the internet, creating networks and turning into solidarity platforms that the system of powerful men in the entertainment industry could not foresee. When Alyssa Milano tweeted to write "me too" if women were sexually harassed, it was used 12 million times within the first 24 hours of its release by women sharing their personal

stories or support messages (Fileborn and Loney-Howes 2019). This hashtag evolved into an unparalleled act of solidarity among survivor women, marking a significant rupture in public discussions and perceptions of sexual harassment and violence (Fileborn and Loney-Howes 2019, 338).

Not only does the power of hashtags create this rupture in the mainstream narratives, but also the #MeToo movement has transcended its initial focus on white, heterosexual upper-class celebrity women (Rife 2017). This evolution has seen individuals of different sexual orientations embracing the movement, moving away from its original emphasis on sexual harassment suffered by cisgender women at the hands of men. The scope of the movement broadened to include other genders and different forms of harassment, rendering it dynamic, open to questioning, and adaptable to disparate cultures, genders, sexualities, and socioeconomic classes (Kagal, Cowan, and Jawad 2019; Ison 2019; Gill and Orgad 2018). However, Although this opening towards a more intersectional approach has been appreciated, it did not guarantee equal access for all vulnerable and marginalized groups to the support mechanisms created by the movement.

Despite the significant strides made by the #MeToo movement in empowering women and fostering an atmosphere of support for survivors, concerns persist regarding its equitable impact, particularly for those in more vulnerable and marginalized positions. Engel (2019) argued that although the #MeToo movement has indeed empowered women to find their voices, leading to an “unprecedented amount of support,” this outpouring was mostly accessible to privileged women as in the cases of Hollywood stars disclosing their stories of sexual harassment (12). Engel (2019) contended that an “average woman” still lacked the same kind of support that she would receive when she was to disclose her own harassment story. This discrepancy raises questions about the applicability of hashtag’s power to women in various professions and socioeconomic situations, including single mothers in service industries, women in the construction business, law enforcement, or the military, who distinctly suffer from a spectrum of harassment from subtle incidents such as being groped or sexual jokes to more severe forms like mass rapes (Engel 2019). Engel’s argument delves into the complex intersectionality within the #MeToo movement, emphasizing that its impact is not uniformly experienced across different demographics. The challenges faced by women in less privileged positions, fearing job loss, being labeled as troublemakers, or potential retaliation for rejecting advances, highlight the limitations of the movement’s effectiveness for every woman. While the hashtag #MeToo has undoubtedly brought empowerment to many, its reach and effectiveness are still contingent on various factors, making it essential to address and rectify the existing gaps in its impact on women from diverse backgrounds and circumstances.

To address the unequal access of the marginalized, a solidarity initiative called Time's Up was founded by 300 women from the entertainment industry, exemplifying the transition of online solidarity into the offline arena. Time's Up aims to confront systemic power inequalities hindering the progress of marginalized groups and has initiated a legal defense fund to specifically address sexual harassment allegations (Haring 2018). The Time's Up Legal Defense Fund has been critical for supporting women with precarious financial situations, notably aiding ten women and girls in a lawsuit against McDonalds for sexual harassment. Since 2016, McDonalds has been facing allegations of sexual harassment, however, it was only after the fall of Weinstein and the establishment of Time's Up Legal Defense Fund that these women could reach strong legal support to confront one of the biggest companies in the U.S. (Da Silva, 2018). An important case supported by the fund involved women organizing around the Fight for \$15 campaign, filing three rounds of complaints, with two of them funded by Time's Up (Jones 2019). While these lawsuits did not bring immediate miracles, they underscore the impact of the #MeToo movement in empowering women to come together and collectively demand safe working environments. Sarah Jones (2019) notes that despite minimal corporate response, the organizing efforts have not only shed light on the persistent issue of sexual harassment but also have evolved into an intersectional collective advocating for higher wages and the right to unionize. This intersectional solidarity emerging from women's struggles around sexual harassment emphasizes the broader objective of seeking safe and equal working conditions for all, transcending gender, class, and race power relations. Hence, the power of the hashtag both flowed into the offline world and led to the formation of intersectional feminist solidarity emerging from the struggles around sexual harassment, addressing the complex interplay of power dynamics in women's lives.

3.3 #MeToo Around the World

The global diffusion of the #MeToo movement has been marked by both promises and challenges. Alyssa Milano's call on October 15, 2017, on social media led to an overwhelming response within a short span - half a million Twitter users and 4.7 million Facebook mentions in just 25 hours (Sen 2020). The impact continued to grow, with over 24 million impressions on Twitter between October 2017 and December 2019, highlighting the sustained momentum of #MeToo (UN Women 2020). UN Women (2020) conducted a comprehensive review of the hashtag's use from 2017 and 2019, providing global data on the reach and nature of the move-

ment. By 2020, the countries with the highest use of the hashtag were the United States, Japan, India, Brazil, and the UK. In Turkey alone, #MeToo was hashtagged 50672 times within a two-year period (UN Women 2020). This global reach underscores the movement's ability to transcend geographical boundaries and resonate with individuals worldwide. Social media users discovered numerous methods to establish #MeToo connections across the world by appropriating digital platforms for their own purposes, as instruments and manifestations of global solidarity. The movement has now permeated multiple languages from French to Spanish, from Korean to Turkish, manifesting itself across diverse geographical regions spanning from Kenya to the Philippines and from Japan to Mexico (Sen 2020).

As was the case in the U.S., instances of scandalous sexual harassment cases around the world preceded the emergence of the #MeToo movement, generating diverse and often conflicting reactions among the public. One notable precursor was the case of Dominique Strauss-Kahn. In 2011, Strauss-Kahn, the former International Monetary Fund Chief and the former French presidential hopeful, sexually assaulted Nafissatou Diallo, a West African immigrant single parent, when she entered his hotel room for cleaning while he was staying in New York (Gilmore 2018). When Diallo alleged Strauss-Kahn in criminal court, the charges of attempted rape and sexual abuse were dropped by the prosecutors on the ground of having "substantial credibility issues" (M. Williams 2012). Then, Diallo applied to civil court to seek justice, where Straus-Kahn was found guilty but this decision did not gain as much public attention as the initial phase of the scandal. A year later, Strauss-Kahn settled with Diallo, reportedly involving a significant payment of \$6 million (M. Williams 2012).

Although Strauss-Kahn faced consequences for his actions, including the loss of his job at the IMF and his chance to run for the French presidency, the credibility of his testimonies was not challenged to the same extent as Diallo's. In fact, he received support from fellow politicians, IMF colleagues and the French public, who argued that the incident was based on consent or dismissed it as a behavior of a French Casanova or a sensual man (Gentleman 2021). This trivialization of the perpetrators' abusive actions closely resembled the patterns in the Hill v. Thomas case, where Anita Hill's allegations were framed as a misunderstanding of Thomas' court-ing behaviors. Examining the intersection of Diallo's personal narratives in various legal contexts, including criminal court, civil court, and the court of public opinion, Gilmore (2018) demonstrated how the discourse surrounding rape was manipulated to instill doubt with regard to Diallo's credibility. Diallo's testimony was confined within a dichotomy of "he said/she said" narrative, ultimately transforming her from a "sympathetic victim to a tainted witness" (136). The tendency to disbelieve

women's testimonies regarding sexual harassment was very common in the courts of public opinion. On the other hand, Strauss-Kahn's life was not as profoundly affected as Diallo's given her precarious position as a black immigrant single-parent woman. After resigning from the IMF, Strauss-Kahn worked in advisory positions for South Sudan, Russia, and Ukraine and married for the fourth time (Gentleman 2021). On the contrary, Diallo had to quit her job, leave her home, and endure a tarnished reputation due to Strauss-Kahn's legal team. Despite the challenges, Diallo expressed her satisfaction in a later interview about her contribution to encourage more women to step forward, creating in "mini wave of fury" that foreshadowed the emergence of the #MeToo movement (Gentleman 2021).

Diallo's resistance, along with that of many women, paved the way for #MeToo in France. Two days before Milano's tweet, French journalist Sandra Muller initiated the hashtag #balancetonporc, translating to "rat out your pig," encouraging her followers to name and shame their harassers in the workplace. The hashtag gained momentum with one more tweet disclosing a sexual harasser from the media industry by name. Within a month, the hashtag had been tweeted 496,000 times by a diverse range of women, including journalists, academics and speakers (Pavard, Rochefort, and Zancarini-Fournel 2020). With the influence of Alyssa Milano's tweet, both #MeToo and #balancetonporc became dominant in France's #MeToo movement. Both hashtags significantly raised awareness about sexual harassment across different sectors, especially among the younger generation. The French #MeToo moment also transformed into similar online and offline collective actions. For instance, Caroline de Haas established #NousToutes (#WeAll) to bring women together for the November 25th demonstrations on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Around 50,000 people joined the demonstrations across France with the call of #NousToutes, marking it as "the largest feminist mobilization France has ever known" (*France 24* 2018).

The French #MeToo movement also expanded its criticism along the axes of gender, class and racial identities. Podcasts like Rokhaya Diallo and Grace Ly's podcast *Kiffa ta race*, exploring the complexities of racial identity, Victorire Tyailon's *Les couilles sur la table*, delving into the topic of masculinity and Camille's podcast series on intricate realms of gender and sexualities stood alongside the work of Afro-feminist YouTubers focused on building networks around the notions of non-integration, intersectionality and misogynoir - a term combining misogyny and black (Pavard, Rochefort, and Zancarini-Fournel 2020). The 'mini-wave of fury' initiated by Diallo has transformed into a tsunami with the #MeToo movement, playing a significant role in the formation of different forms of online and offline collective activism in the French context.

Despite its success, the French #MeToo movement also yielded contradictory results, leading to a polarization of the public debate. The politics of disclosing the perpetrators as a feminist method was harshly critiqued. An open letter published in the French Daily *Le Monde* on 9 January 2018 and signed by one hundred French writers, scholars, and artists, including Catherine Deneuve and Catherine Millet, characterized the #MeToo movement as “going too far” labeling it a puritanical “witch hunt” (Chen 2018). The letter argued that the movement portrayed women “as poor little things” and its signatories dissociated themselves from this form of feminism (Wemaere and Barnell 2018). Some signatories, who had also stood by Strauss-Kahn, defended the “freedom to importune,” expressing worries about a potential deterioration in heterosexual romantic relationships. They argued that sending the ‘pigs’ to ‘slaughterhouses’ would only serve the interests of opponents of sexual freedom, religious extremists and the most conservative individuals (Pavard, Rochefort, and Zancarini-Fournel 2020). In that sense, this backlash against #MeToo translated into a defense of the reputation and rights of powerful men. However, this open letter sparked significant controversy among feminist circles, particularly among younger generations, with accusations that the signatories were “rape apologists” (Poirier 2018). These younger feminists were uncomfortable with having their methods dismissed, “their ideological perspectives belittled, and their political positions questioned” (Chandra 2020, 101). The French #MeToo movement, while successful in raising awareness about sexual harassment and fostering collective activism, faced a polarized public debate marked by significant criticism and backlash, particularly from prominent figures defending the reputation and rights of powerful men, highlighting the complex challenges and differing perspectives within the feminist discourse.

The promises and challenges faced by the French #MeToo movement resonate with similar experiences in countries often considered as leaders in gender equality. The Nordic countries, including Norway (Sleire 2018), Sweden (Booth and Munro 2017), and Iceland (Fontaine 2021), known for their progressive stance on gender issues, were not exempt from allegations and demands for accountability for sexual harassment, which was very similar to women’s cries for social justice for sexual abuse in countries ranked lower in gender equality (Schwab et al. 2019). In the particular case of Iceland, the movement gained momentum almost concurrently with Milano’s tweet, and yet, as was the case in other countries, the #MeToo movement did not appear out of the blue but the continuum of previous cases and diligent work of years-long feminist activism made its emergence possible. Hence, the Icelandic feminist movement had previously organized hashtag campaigns against sexual harassment such as #þöggun (suppression) and #konurtala (women speak out), #höfumhátt

(out loud) and joined transnational campaigns like Slutwalks and #freethenipple long before #MeToo reached its tipping moment (Erlingsdóttir 2020). The involvement of the renowned Icelandic singer Björk in the movement by sharing her experience of sexual harassment without naming the perpetrator marked the early days of the movement. Although Björk did not reveal the perpetrator's identity, Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier was soon exposed on social media (Fontaine 2017).

According to Irma Erlingsdóttir (2020), the most significant contribution of the #MeToo movement to Icelandic feminist activism is shedding light on the systemic nature of sexual harassment and the complete inadequacy of the existing legislative and regulatory frameworks in addressing it in the workplace. Importantly, the movement welcomed women from diverse social classes who were previously not affiliated with feminist causes but who were fostering an inclusive feminist solidarity (Erlingsdóttir 2020). Another significant feature of Iceland's #MeToo movement was prioritizing the structural inequalities leading to sexual harassment rather than solely focusing on naming and punishing the perpetrators. Hence, women's disclosures usually did not involve perpetrators' names. Towards the end of 2019, around two thousand narratives were disseminated by women from various vocations, community associations, and establishments while an excess of seven thousand women supported the case by signing petitions and carrying out advocacy to bring measures against sexual harassment (Erlingsdóttir 2020). As a result, the movement's emphasis on collective action and advocacy marked a significant shift in the discourse on sexual harassment in Iceland.

The impact of the #MeToo movement has also reverberated beyond Western contexts, as demonstrated by its influence on feminist movements in countries like France and Iceland. The Chinese feminist movement has been actively organizing anti-sexual harassment campaigns on social media platforms Weibo and WeChat since the 2010s. However, China's tipping moment arrived when Luo Xixi disclosed her professor's sexual harassment during her PhD studies on social media. Following this post, numerous Chinese women began sharing their own experiences of sexual abuse via social media throughout 2018 (Zeng 2020). In a country where state control over social media is very powerful, and collective actions are not tolerated, young feminists in China ingeniously brought discussions of sexual harassment to the public sphere by employing the hashtag #Ricebunny. This homophonic alternative to 'me too' served as a workaround to avoid state censorship. With the wave of disclosures, around 60 perpetrators have been disclosed, including a media host, a Buddhist abbot, and award-winning scholars, as of 2020 (Jun 2020). In parallel with the worldwide #MeToo campaign, China's #RiceBunny not only created public awareness regarding sexual harassment but also fostered solidarity

networks among victims. This newfound awareness and solidarity sparked conversations about sexual harassment and delved into related issues of consent, testimony, false accusations, and the exercise of control and manipulation within various power dynamics (Jun 2020).

Building on the global momentum of #MeToo, the Chinese feminist movement both faced the challenges of state censorship and used online platforms strategically to expose sexual harassment. Despite the authorities' attempts to suppress the movement by employing cyber police to close social media accounts, deleting related content, and harassing, intimidating and even detaining activists (Jun 2020), Chinese feminists ingeniously navigated these restrictions. The government's cyber police and censorship actions did not restrain the movement; instead, similar to other #MeToo movements, China's feminist struggle against sexual harassment translated into offline feminist activism. According to Jun (2020), in 2017 a feminist workshop was organized, fostering collaboration between women's organizations and volunteers dedicated to combating sexual harassment. This collaboration laid the foundation for collective action and demonstrated the resilience of the feminist movement in the face of repression. Women's organizations working in the field of law offered free legal aid to survivors filing lawsuits, while feminist campaigns continued to raise public awareness and advocate for policy changes. June (2020) noted that "in an era when social movements are suppressed, women's organizations have attempted to embed themselves invisibly into #MeToo, to provide a strategic framework and coordinate actions behind the scenes, and to keep a low profile about their organizational affiliation" (354). With the continuum of online and offline feminist activism strategically designed to challenge a repressive authoritarian context, the Chinese #MeToo movement found its own innovative ways to spread its word about the struggle against sexual harassment.

The global phenomenon of #MeToo has transcended borders, sparking transformative discussions and mobilizing diverse communities worldwide. From its inception in the United States, the movement has evolved into a multifaceted, intersectional struggle against sexual harassment. Examining the movements in various countries, including the United States, France, Iceland, and China, reveals the complex dynamics at play. France, often considered a frontrunner in the fight for gender equality, witnessed both the success and backlash of the #MeToo movement. In contrast, Iceland's movement prioritized addressing structural inequalities leading to sexual harassment, emphasizing inclusivity and collective activism. Expanding this global perspective, the Chinese feminist movement, facing stringent state controls, ingeniously navigated censorship through the #RiceBunny hashtag, exposing sexual harassment and fostering solidarity among victims. This highlights the movement's

diverse manifestations across cultures, challenging power dynamics and sparking crucial conversations on consent and control within various contexts.

3.3.1 #MeToo's Reverberations on an International Level

#MeToo has been perceived differently in different countries and feminist activists developed their own strategies along the lines of online and offline activism. The movement has not only spurred individual empowerment and collective action but has also catalyzed substantial policy changes on an international level. A notable example is the transformative impact #MeToo had on the International Labor Organization (ILO). In 2019, ILO adopted the Convention on Violence and Harassment, hailed as a powerful tool inspired by the #MeToo movement (Varia 2019). This convention outlined the governmental responsibilities in safeguarding individuals from workplace violence, extending beyond traditional working hours to encompass social activities, work-related relationships, and associated spaces. It also mandated the incorporation of national laws against workplace harassment and violence, alongside the implementation of preventive strategies, including informatory campaigns. The convention also necessitated the enforcement of these measures through inspections, investigations, and redress for victims, which included mechanisms for lodging complaints, whistleblower protections, and compensations, to ensure safe working environments (Varia 2019). While worker organizations had long advocated for such a convention, according to Nisha Varia (2019), the surge of the #MeToo movement on social media in October 2017 infused the energy and urgency to the ongoing discussions surrounding the treaty that commenced in 2018. The lead negotiator on behalf of workers, Marie Clarke Walker, emphasized how #MeToo empowered her to counteract skepticism about the existence and prevalence of sexual harassment, especially since media coverage extensively amplified the issue after the advent of #MeToo (Varia 2017). This intersection of online activism and international policy changes underscores the enduring impact and influence of #MeToo on shaping conversations, policy frameworks, and global efforts to combat workplace harassment and violence.

In tandem with the global momentum generated by the #MeToo movement, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women addressed the need to struggle against sexual harassment to empower women and girls by pursuing effective prevention and elimination programs and strategies. This commitment was articulated through two separate reports in 2017 and 2018 (UN Women 2017; 2018). The 2018 report notably identified sexual harassment as “a form of violence and violation and

abuse of human rights,” recognizing its impediment to achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls (UN Women 2018, 11). Emphasizing the need to develop preventive and protective measures for sexual harassment in workplaces and schools, the report also addressed the broader issue of cyber harassment, a term entering the UN’s lexicon (UN Women 2018). The synchronicity of these two reports with the #MeToo movement around the world suggests a deliberate alignment of feminist advocacy and lobbying efforts, yielding tangible results.

As a response to the impact of the #MeToo movement, UN Women, in collaboration with the International Labor Organization (ILO), published a crucial handbook titled *A Handbook: Addressing Violence and Harassment against Women in the World of Work* (UN Women and ILO 2019). Another publication, *Towards an End to Sexual Harassment: The Urgency and Nature of Change in the Era of #MeToo* (Sen et al. 2018), framed sexual harassment as a human rights violation intertwined with sex and gender inequality, acknowledging the intersections with race, ethnicity, age, disability sexual orientation, social class, and indigenous status (Sen et al. 2018). These recommendations documents were important to bring the issue to the agenda of international actors, offering policymakers a framework for implementing effective preventive and protective measures. On an international scale, this development represents a significant stride for feminist activism, offering a framework that addresses the human rights dimension of sexual harassment and advocates for an intersectional analysis in the struggle against it.

According to Purna Sen (2020), the #MeToo movement has undeniably emerged as a global phenomenon, transcending socio-economic disparities and permeating societies with varying levels of gender equality, whether possessing established legislation against sexual harassment or not. This movement has effectively laid bare the pervasive nature of sexual harassment and its intricate connections with various forms of sexual violence. Contrary to misconceptions framing it as a “Hollywood phenomenon” or specific to industrialized countries, #MeToo can be characterized by its prevalence and multi-layered impact, not confined to any particular context (Sen 2020, 251).

In an interview with Cynthia Enloe, Laura Bates (2017) asks Enloe whether the Weinstein scandal would act as a “tipping point” for changing public awareness and attitudes towards sexual violence. Enloe’s response, highlighting the prior instances like Anita Hill’s or Dominique Strauss-Kahn’s cases, suggests the need to depend on the feminist movement in revealing the “sustainability of patriarchy” (Enloe 2017) to catch the momentum (Bates 2017). Enloe emphasizes the importance of collaboration with other feminists, acknowledging that the recent global disclosures

of sexual violence under #MeToo do not allow one to “sit back on laurels.” Instead, it necessitates concerted efforts with feminists more committed to denaturalizing discourses around sexual harassment (Bates 2017).

The global conversation on sexual harassment ignited by #MeToo has led to material consequences for the perpetrators and structural changes in many cases. The indispensable role of digital media in fostering visibility and prompting action cannot be denied. However, as Enloe’s call for collective action in struggling against sexual violence reveals, the sustainability of patriarchy is hard to struggle against. Even in the arenas where #MeToo has gained significant success, feminists should be alert to the intersections of powers at work that continuously try to keep women oppressed. Hence, the struggle against sexual harassment must be persistent, intersectional, and attentive to continuums.

4. THE ORIGIN STORIES OF THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT STRUGGLE IN TURKEY

One of the milestones of the sexual harassment struggle Cynthia Enloe talked about in her speech at Sabancı University was the “Campaign Against Battering” that took place in 1987 in Turkey when feminists mobilized in the streets to struggle against gender-based violence. As I started working on this thesis, I realized that this milestone was one of the key feminist efforts that paved the way for the formation of the #MeToo movement in Turkey. Therefore, in this chapter, I also try to “trouble” the origin stories of the sexual harassment struggle in Turkey and pursue the emerging intersecting continuums of feminist activism with a particular focus on the Susma Bitsin Platform, an independent feminist solidarity network organized in the field of cultural production to struggle against sexual harassment. In the Turkish context, the longstanding presence of feminist activism as well as the continuous efforts of feminists to struggle against sexual harassment contributed significantly to the conceptual recognition of sexual harassment. However, the subsequent years revealed the persistent challenges in translating these theoretical advances into tangible societal changes. Hence, the struggle against sexual harassment in Turkey, similar to the global movements, has grappled with deeply ingrained gendered societal norms, institutional resistance, and the lack of comprehensive legal frameworks to address this multifaceted issue.

As I discussed in the previous chapters, the continuum framework allows us to see the underlying gendered, racist, and sexist patterns along with socioeconomic and geographical factors that continue to not only marginalize the survivors but also disrupt the feminist struggle against sexual harassment in general. However, this continuum framework also makes it possible to see the breaking points in these patterns. In this chapter, I am also looking for these breaking points. As I reveal in detail, the Susma Bitsin Platform, as a prominent outcome of Turkey’s #MeToo movement in cinema, television, and theater industries, employs both online and offline feminist activist practices on a continuum to struggle against sexual harass-

ment. However, just as the #MeToo movement did not emerge in one day as a viral hashtag, the Susma Bitsin Platform is a culmination of decades-long feminist activist practices carried out in Turkey and beyond. Hence, the platform is not only one end of the continuum of these activist practices but also a breaking point in the continuum of silencing structures and practices of sexual harassment in the cultural production industry.

To unpack this analysis, the chapter opens with tracing the historical roots of feminist activism in Turkey, contributing to the conceptualization of ‘sexual harassment’, particularly during the 1980s through feminist campaigns and publications. It then moves to a detailed analysis of the legal struggles undertaken by the feminist movement, resulting in significant legislative amendments that paved the way for the criminalization of sexual harassment. Building upon this groundwork, the chapter transitions to an analysis of how the culmination of feminist efforts, both online and offline, manifested in the #MeToo movement of Turkey. The chapter concludes with a detailed exploration of the Susma Bitsin Platform, emerging as an intersectional feminist solidarity network to break the continuum of silencing and marginalizing practices against sexual harassment in the cultural production industry. By tracing the origin stories of the platform and examining the continuum of activist practices carried out against sexual harassment across digital and physical spaces, the chapter offers insights into the transformative power of feminist activism in driving social change and fostering solidarity.

4.1 Theorizing Sexual Harassment via Feminist Campaigns

On one end of the continuum of the feminist struggle against sexual harassment in Turkey lies the feminist publications and campaigns organized in the 1980s, aimed at raising public awareness and urging policymakers to create a society free from sexual harassment. Among these practices, one significant initiative, as Cynthia Enloe mentioned, was the “Campaign Against Battering,” (Dayağa Karşı Kampanya) which started on May 17, 1987, becoming a crucial milestone in the combat against gender-based violence. What mobilized feminists for this campaign stemmed from a controversial decision by Judge Mustafa Durmuş in Çankırı, who rejected a woman’s divorce case on the grounds that beating was not a valid reason for divorce. Shockingly, the judge based his decision on the proverb “Never spare a stick in a woman’s back and a brat in a woman’s belly!” (Yüksel 2010). This judgment triggered outrage within feminist circles, even prompting some to file a lawsuit against

the judge.

The feminist response to this decision culminated in the first mass organizing effort of its kind. The “Campaign Against Battering” launched with a march that started in Kadıköy ferry port and ended in Yoğurtçu Parkı⁵ with the participation of around 2500 women. Contrary to the perception that the goal of this gathering was to unveil the prevalence of violence against women in Turkey, the true objective, as highlighted by Paker (2021), was to unequivocally say “no” to domestic violence – an issue perceived as alarmingly common and socially legitimate. It was to call on all women to unite against the violence they experienced, to find ways to oppose it together, and to stand in solidarity. Stella Ovadia (2005) emphasized the historical significance of this march, noting that it was the first authorized march after the 1980 coup d’état, surpassing expectations and resonating more powerfully than previous events. The unexpected scale of participation enhanced the legitimacy of the feminist struggle against gender-based violence in public opinion (Ovadia 2005). This event marked a turning point, both in terms of feminist activism and public discourse surrounding gender-based violence, spotlighting the urgency of challenging deeply ingrained societal norms.

After the visibility brought by the Campaign Against Battering, feminists initially mobilized around the issue of sexual violence. As sexual harassment was a newly emerging concept in the feminist lexicon, there were some concerns about which terminology to frame the second campaign. Handan Koç, one of the founders of the “Purple Needle Campaign” (Mor İğne Kampanyası), recounted the discussions they had about whether to adopt the term sexual harassment as it sounded unfamiliar and unintelligible for many since it was a translation of a foreign concept (*Feminist* 1990, 17). As a result, feminists started heated discussions about the scope of the term, what could count as sexual harassment, and what would “feminist politics” of sexual harassment be like (Balsoy 2021). This dilemma mirrored the experiences of feminists in the U.S., where articulating and naming the issue of sexual harassment necessitated a prior process of sharing personal experiences, disclosures, and collective discussions.

Before sexual harassment became the framework of the next campaign, feminists in Turkey started to describe their own encounters with harassment, sharing them with each other, and collectively addressing the issue before officially naming it. The campaign mottos such as “Our dress is not an invitation to groping!”, “Nights and

⁵After this march, Yoğurtçu Park has become a feminist symbol of resistance. During the Gezi Movement in June 2013, a group of feminists convened in this park and formed Yoğurtçu Kadın Forumu (Yoğurtçu Women’s Forum) to discuss about feminist issues, organize meetings and activities (“Yoğurtçu Kadın Forumu” 2021).

streets also belong to women!” “Molestation with eyes, hands, and words is rape!”, “If one is molested, then all are!”, “Do not blanket molestation, expose it!”, “Do not feel ashamed, speak up! Do not keep silent, prick the needle!” emerged organically from the collective consciousness, reflecting women’s shared experiences and determination (Karakuş 2008). Women’s collective experience sharing eventually led to shifting the feminist terminology. After these campaigns, terms like “beating” and “smacking” were conceptualized as “violence against women” and “groping” and “walloping” were replaced by “sexual harassment” (Balsoy 2021).

After conceptualizing and theorizing the concept, feminists decided to organize a campaign dedicated to the struggle against sexual harassment. The Purple Needle Campaign was inspired by the feminist initiative organized in Ankara. Aksu Bora (1989) detailed how feminist circles in Ankara engaged in discussions about their experiences of street molestation for several months. These conversations culminated in the framing of the Campaign Against Molestation, held in October 1989. In Istanbul, feminists conducted similar discussions about their understanding of molestation and sexual harassment. After deliberation, they concluded that sexual harassment was a broader concept than molestation, therefore sexual harassment was chosen as the frame of the Purple Needle Campaign (*Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs* 1989). For a comprehensive analysis of the issue, the campaign was compartmentalized into three sections, each addressing sexual harassment in distinct contexts: the streets, the workplace and the home (*Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs* 1989, 14). This strategic compartmentalization allowed the campaign to delve into the multifaceted nature of sexual harassment, acknowledging its prevalence across various settings and emphasizing the need for a nuanced approach to combatting it.

The Purple Needle Campaign adopted various activist practices to amplify its message and challenge the pervasive issue of sexual harassment. These initiatives included the campaign launch on a ferry with the participation of journalists on November 2, 1989, opening booths at the TÜYAP Book Fair and Ortaköy, the organization of three meetings at Bilim Sanat Kültür Hizmetleri Kurumu (BİLSAK-Science Arts Culture Services Institution) (*Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs* 1989, 14). However, one of the most radical and attention-grabbing actions of the Purple Needle Campaign involved targeted interventions in beer houses and coffee houses which were traditionally designated as men-only spaces. The rationale behind these actions was to draw attention to the fact that sexual harassment was isolating women from certain public spaces.

Gülnur Savran (2005a), a renowned feminist figure who was also a participant in the campaign, recounted the diverse reactions elicited by these actions from the

mainstream media of the time. Responses ranged from blaming women for harassing men in these spaces to dismissive portrayals of these ‘ladies’ ridiculing themselves by imitating Western ideals, with feminism being perceived as old-fashioned and defended by “a few sharp minds” (Savran 2005a, 87). Despite initial resistance and mockery, Savran (2005a) emphasized a notable shift in both the media reception and societal perception over the following decade. This transformation became evident when numerous women journalists and individuals attended court hearings, expressing solidarity with Zeynep Uludağ⁶, who, in 1996, had killed her perpetrator in self-defense after enduring sexual harassment. According to Savran (2005a), with this incident, what had been formulated seven years ago politically and ideologically with the campaigns against sexual harassment was firmly embedded in those women. The courageous response of women who felt threatened and stood up for their rights marked a heartening evolution in societal attitudes (87).

While the Purple Needle Campaign aimed to address sexual harassment under three distinct categories – in the streets, at the workplace, and at home – it predominantly emphasized the issue of street harassment. According to Karakuş (2007), sexual harassment at work and home received minimal attention, with only a few articles and BİLSAK meetings discussing these aspects. The primary reason for this oversight was the fact that feminists involved in the campaign did not experience sexual harassment at work and at home as bitterly as the way they experienced it in the streets and dealing with sexual harassment from men they knew face-to-face was challenging (Karakuş 2007). This narrow focus on street harassment was criticized by some of the feminist activists of the time, particularly for sidelining women’s deeper problems related to sexual harassment in the workplace and at home. Handan Koç (1990), in an article for *Feminist*, scrutinized the campaign’s neglect in addressing women’s experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace. She wrote “There was a lot to discuss, I think we don’t only experience being groped, being subjected to jokes that degrade our sexuality, being molested in the workplace. In the workplace, women’s menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, abortion are ignored. All regulations are against women” (Koç 1990, 19). Koç lamented that the Purple Needle Campaign, despite its significance, did not sufficiently amplify the voices of women dealing with these broader workplace challenges (Koç 1990). These campaigns, though instrumental in bringing women’s problems to the public agenda, had the potential to expand their scope to encompass a more comprehensive range of challenges faced by working women. However, due to the predominant focus

⁶On July 23, 1995, four women, including Zeynep Uludağ and her mother, were subjected to sexual harassment by a group of men while they were having dinner. Zeynep Uludağ defended herself and her mother by grabbing a knife from the table and wounded one of the attackers, who later lost his life. Uludağ was sentenced to 6 years 8 months, then the decision was overturned by the Court of Appeal and reduced to 27 months (Karakuş 2023a).

on street harassment, the feminist struggle in the workplace remained somewhat overshadowed.

Despite its limited focus, the Purple Needle Campaign has been one of the most memorable campaigns of feminist activism in the 1980s. Particularly, the strategic choice of the purple needle as the campaign symbol for creating awareness about sexual harassment was significant. According to Altınay and Arat (2009), the sewing needle, an indispensable tool for women in their domestic space, was changed into a symbolic instrument of defense against sexual harassment in the public sphere. This redefinition framed sexual harassment as an assault, emphasizing the need for women to defend themselves (Altınay and Arat 2009). Similarly, Balsoy (2021) underlined that the purple needle served as an essential empowerment tool; it may have been small, but inflicted pain; its familiarity made it less intimidating for women, yet it remained effective; by drawing attention to the harasser rather than the victim, it empowered women to shed the burden of shame. For Koç (2011), the purple needle played a crucial role in shaping the perception of sexual harassment as a crime with consequences for the perpetrator. It established a feminist tradition of self-defense, reinforcing the idea that women had the right to protect themselves and fostering a sense of collective resistance against harassment. The purple needle, through its symbolic power, contributed to the broader feminist discourse on autonomy, agency, and the acknowledgment of women's right to defend themselves against sexual harassment.

In the struggle against sexual harassment, aside from feminist campaigns, two important feminist magazines also played a critical role. *Feminist* and *Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs* magazines, which came to life as a result of the gains achieved through consciousness-raising groups, actions, and organizations brought about by the feminist movement of the 1980s, can be shown as examples of independent feminist publications that have played an important role in shaping the theoretical and practical framework of the concept of sexual harassment in Turkey. The first issue of *Feminist* was published in 1987 and until 1990, a total of 7 magazines were published. *Feminist* magazine addressed the problems of women's sexuality and their right to have a say on their own bodies through the concept of patriarchy while opposing the idea that women's place was limited to family, to the private sphere (Koç 2005). The discussions of sexual harassment entered the feminist lexicon of the magazine, particularly after the Purple Needle Campaign. *Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs* started to be published in May 1988 and published 12 issues until September 1990. In three issues, 7th, 8th, and 9th, the issue of sexual harassment was handled in detail. In the 9th issue, *Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs* dedicated an entire section to the Purple Needle Campaign, discussing sexual harassment with the contributions

of significant feminist thinkers of the time ranging from Aksu Bora to Banu Paker (*Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs* 1989). It included theoretical articles on issues such as violence, sexual harassment, and rape that have been on the public agenda through the campaigns, and these theoretical contributions simultaneously fed the whole process of the campaigns (Savran 2005b).

Interestingly, the articles published in feminist magazines like *Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs* hinted at the need for an intersectional approach to combat sexual harassment, even before the term “intersectionality” became widely recognized in the Turkish context. It was acknowledged that women who were unskilled, inexperienced, young, old, or who were afraid of losing their jobs or had little chance of finding another were particularly threatened more by sexual harassment. The intersectional dimensions extended to widows living alone with children, mothers reliant on their work for livelihood, and married women, particularly those perceived as approachable, who were harassed more easily because they unjustly deemed to have “asked for it” (*Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs* 1990, 19). As the issue of sexual harassment was intersectional, the struggle mechanisms to be developed had to be multi-layered. The need for speaking up about women’s experiences, increasing public awareness about the issue, and sharing and standing in solidarity with each other were provided as the most important struggle mechanisms against sexual harassment. Also, organizing campaigns such as Purple Needle, establishing and raising the issue through women’s commissions and women’s bureaus, and organizing women’s groups in trade unions to take measures against sexual harassment were proposed as more solid mechanisms (*Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs* 1990). During this early period, legal amendments were not foregrounded, and the emphasis was on women organizing among themselves and advocating for unionized preventive and protective measures.

The 1980s witnessed successful feminist campaigns and feminist publications, and yet sexual harassment against women continued to be a widespread phenomenon. Due to its pervasiveness, a second Purple Needle Campaign was held 18 years later, after two women tourists were sexually harassed by a group of men during New Year’s Celebrations in Taksim Square on 31st of December 2007. As the footage was shared in mainstream media channels, the police initially detained five perpetrators and then released them with a fine of 57 Turkish Liras under the Law of Misdemeanors because the women were not Turkish citizens, hence could not file complaints about the incident. According to Koç (2011), feminist lawyers insisted on pursuing the case under Article 103 of the Turkish Penal Code, arguing that the collective nature of the assault should be considered as a crime of sexual harassment. In response to this incident, feminists launched the second Purple Needle Campaign, raised their voices to expose sexual harassment of women by men everywhere, ev-

ery day, by selling purple needles on Mis Sokak at Taksim every Friday between 8 and 10 pm for eight weeks (Karakuş 2023c). Karakuş (2023b) recounted that, during the Purple Needle Again Campaign, feminists challenged the narrative that portrayed sexual harassment in Taksim as the work of a few drunken men. While selling needles, they emphasized that factors such as going out at night, the clothes women wear, laughing loudly and simply being a woman were enough for men to harass women and that the attack in Taksim was not an isolated incident (Karakuş 2023c). Hence, they continued to repeat their slogans, including “Not Misdemeanor but Sexual Harassment!” “Don’t Be Ashamed but Shout!” and “Don’t be Silent, Prick the Needle!” (Karakuş 2020b).

The Purple Needle campaign, despite facing limitations in raising awareness about sexual harassment in the workplace and at home while remaining impactful in addressing street harassment, soon evolved into a new campaign. “No To Law No. 438 Campaign” triggered by a watershed moment when four perpetrators, who kidnapped and raped a sex worker in Antalya, received sentence reductions by 2/3 pertaining to Turkish Penal Code (TPC) No. 438 due to the plaintiff being a sex worker (Tekeli 2010). After the decision of the Court of Appeal indicating that “a chaste woman” and “a prostitute” cannot be equal when granting sentence reductions, lengthy discussions around sexual violence in Turkey were held by feminists who were already rallying against inequality embedded in the legal system, state, and society’s treatment of sexual violence against sex workers (Tekeli 2010). Feminist activists mobilized against the perceived hypocrisy of the law and society, leading to the annulment of Law No. 438 in 1990 (Tekeli 2010). This significant achievement marked a turning point in challenging discriminatory legal provisions and highlighted the commitment of the feminist movement in Turkey to confront systemic issues related to sexual violence and harassment. The campaign’s success illustrated the potential of collective action in influencing legislative changes and advocating for a more just and equitable legal framework. In the next section, I will be exploring these legal gains and challenges feminists faced in the struggle against sexual harassment.

4.2 Legal Struggles Against Sexual Harassment

The awareness brought by feminist campaigns and publications in the 1980s in terms of theorizing sexual harassment found its equivalent on legal terms quite late. Although one of the earliest legal achievements was the annulment of Law No.438, it

was not directly related to sexual harassment. The 90s marked a period when state-orchestrated sexual harassment and violence were more widely discussed within the feminist movement. The Legal Aid Office Against Sexual Harassment and Rape in Custody (Gözaltında Cinsel Taciz ve Tecavüze Karşı Hukuki Yardım Bürosu), co-founded by feminist lawyer Eren Keskin, was established with the aim of addressing the cases of sexual harassment and assault perpetrated by the state on a judiciary level (Keskin and Yurtsever 2006). In the first decade of the 2000s, sexual harassment became intertwined with broader discussions around sexual violence and rape. Particularly after sexual harassment of women at Taksim Square during New Year celebrations, the rape and murder of Pippa Bacca⁷, the abduction and rape of a woman by men dressed as police officers in Avcılar-Istanbul, the release of Hüseyin Üzmez⁸ from prison after sexually abusing a 14-year-old girl, the parliament candidacy of Ayşe Tükürükçü, a former sex worker who revealed her rape by her uncle at the age of 7, a group of women within feminist movement established Stop Harassment and Rape Initiative (Ö. Akıncı and Çolak 2009). With the leadership of this initiative, a coalition of lawyers, psychologists, forensic experts, independent activists, and feminist organizations from across Turkey convened under the roof of the Women Against Sexual Violence Platform. The platform carried out advocacy for developing struggle mechanisms against sexual violence such as Rape Crisis Centers. As a result of their activism, the Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence was established on August 8, 2014 (Esmer 2023). Through these collective efforts, the feminist movement in Turkey continued to push for legal and institutional changes to address sexual harassment, building upon the foundation laid by earlier campaigns and advocacy.

The significant gains in the field of law against sexual harassment came in the 2000s. Especially, the amendments made to the Turkish Penal Code (TPC) No. 5237 Article 102 in 2005 with the efforts of the feminist movement were very important. This change marked a crucial milestone as it categorized sexual harassment as both a crime of discrimination and a violation of the right to work. Prior to 2005, interventions in an individual's sexual life were judged based on concepts of general morality and decency, with sanctions imposed from a moralistic point of view. However, with the amendment, sexual harassment crimes started to be evaluated within the frame-

⁷Italian artist and activist Giuseppina Pasqualino di Marineo, better known as Pippa Bacca, together with her artist friend Silvia Moro, started her journey for world peace under the name "Bride of Peace." On March 8, 2008, Bacca was raped and then strangled to death near the village of Tavşanlı in the Gebze district of Kocaeli, during the journey that started in Milan and was planned to end in Tel-Aviv via Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine (Karakuş 2023d)

⁸Hüseyin Üzmez was a 76-year-old journalist in one of the conservative newspapers of Turkey. He was arrested for sexually abusing a 14-year-old girl. After 6 months in prison, he was released upon the Forensic Medicine report stating that the child's mental and physical health was not impaired. This case caused outrage among feminists who pursued the lawsuit and organized several protests (Karakuş 2023c).

work of bodily inviolability and the usurpation of individual freedom, representing a shift away from the code's previous moralistic orientation (*BÜ'de Kadın Gündemi* 2020). Furthermore, the addition of the criterion of "touching and not touching" the body to the definition of these crimes was a notable development. Under the current legal system, any physical contact is automatically deemed as sexual assault, while non-physical actions such as words and looks are categorized as sexual harassment. Importantly, the perpetrator's satisfaction with lustful desires is not the determining factor; rather, the focus is on whether the actions are sexually motivated (Keskin et al. 2011). This differentiation of the concept became an important reference point for feminist activism carried out in the second decade of the 2000s, providing a clearer legal framework for addressing instances of sexual harassment and assault.

The reforms to the Turkish Penal Code also addressed sexual harassment in the workplace, reflecting a broader recognition of the issue within legal frameworks. Article 105, paragraph 2 of the Turkish Penal Code specifically criminalized sexual harassment in the workplace, framing it within the context of abuse of influence stemming from hierarchy and power inequality, increased the penalty by half taking into account the perpetrator's comfort of working in the same workplace (Balkır 2015). With these developments, the definition of sexual harassment was expanded to involve a range of inappropriate behaviors, including offensive and unwanted sexual comments, anecdotes, glances, proposals, physical contact, or decoration of the workplace with photographs, cartoons, or objects containing sexual content that could create a hostile work environment (Keskin et al. 2011, 56). Alongside the reforms to the Turkish Penal Code, amendments were made to the Turkish Labor Law to address sexual harassment and assault in the workplace. Although Labor Law No. 4857 did not explicitly define sexual harassment, it included provisions aimed at preventing such behavior and protecting the harassed employees with reference to violation of the dignity of the subject, giving the employee the right to terminate employment for just cause (T.C.Cumhurbaşkanlığı İdari İşler Başkanlığı Hukuk ve Mevzuat Genel Müdürlüğü 2003).

During these discussions, feminists emphasized the importance of establishing support mechanisms for survivors of sexual harassment, advocating for a comprehensive approach involving various sectors of society. Women's organizations, women's solidarity networks, and feminist groups as well as civil society organizations across different fields and unions were advised to take their stance against sexual violence and harassment by incorporating provisions into their regulations and policies addressing these issues (Tosun 2009). In an interview with Kadriye Bakırcı, alongside highlighting the significance of international and domestic laws aimed at combating sexual harassment in the workplace, she outlined several individual actions that

could be taken. Among these actions, raising awareness and initiating organized efforts to address the issue were deemed crucial (Yurdalan 2009). Bakırcı also stressed the importance of providing training to the syndicate members about the social, psychological, and legal dimensions of harassment. Additionally, she emphasized the necessity of establishing support mechanisms for survivors and implementing provisions against sexual harassment in the workplace, including the formation of complaint boards and the imposition of sanctions against perpetrators (Yurdalan 2009).

One response to these calls for taking a stance against sexual harassment and establishing support mechanisms for survivors came from academia. In order to struggle against sexual harassment, the universities started to establish Sexual Harassment and Assault Units (Cinsel Taciz ve Saldırı Birimi - CTS) aimed at making sexual harassment experienced within universities more visible, raising awareness and changing academic culture (Uygur and Şimşak 2018). The pioneering effort was led by Sabancı University in 2007 with the publication of the “Principle Document for Preventing and Providing Support Against Sexual Harassment” and the establishment of the “Committee for Measures and Support against Sexual Harassment” (Altınay et al. 2018). This initiative was later followed by Ankara University in 2011 and Boğaziçi University in 2012, marking a significant step towards the sexual harassment struggle within state universities. By 2021, over 20 units had been established across universities, convening under the Inter-university Network Against Sexual Harassment and Assault (CTS Ağı) (Kalem, 2021). According to Uygur and Şimşak (2018), one of the most effective results of the CTS Network and its work was the reflection of basic standards on what should be done in universities regarding sexual harassment and assault in the Gender Equality Position Paper of the Council of Higher Education. Kalem (2021) also underlines that the CTS network represents a new form of institutionalization within the feminist movement in Turkey, serving as a mechanism to combat gender-based violence in academia, particularly sexual harassment. This growing network of university-based support units demonstrated a significant shift within the sexual harassment struggle as it was a tangible response to the demands of feminists.

For decades, the feminist movement has carried out different forms of activism to combat sexual harassment and raise societal awareness of the issue. Particularly since the 2010s, there has been a notable increase in the establishment of in-house mechanisms aimed at effectively addressing and investigating incidents of harassment. Within this framework, civil society organizations, trade unions, and universities have developed ethical principles and policy documents against harassment. Recent initiatives such as the publication of a handbook by the ILO Turkey office

on the prevention of violence and harassment in the workplace signify significant progress in this regard. This comprehensive document not only identifies different forms of violence against women, including a separate section on sexual harassment and assault but also outlines the legal and administrative steps to be taken for its prevention in detail, with particular reference to addressing crimes of sexual harassment such as minor/major sexual assault and sexual abuse in accordance with relevant laws and regulations (Güllü and Çiftçi 2022). The publication of such a comprehensive handbook marks a significant milestone in the ongoing struggle against sexual harassment and assault in the workplace. It underscores the importance of proactive measures, institutional support, and legal frameworks in safeguarding the rights and dignity of individuals and fostering safer work environments for all.

In an interview carried out in 2011, Hülya Gülbahar, a prominent feminist lawyer in Turkey, emphasized the novelty of women speaking out in public and in front of their social circles about their experiences of sexual harassment or discrimination, both within Turkey and globally. She noted that previously women either remained silent or paid a price for speaking out. The silence was slowly being shattered and yet Gülbahar expressed that the era of the perpetrators facing the consequences for their actions had not yet fully materialized in Turkey or elsewhere (Keskin et al. 2011, 42-43). Nonetheless, almost a decade later, the landscape has shifted dramatically with the advent of the #MeToo movement. Women's courageous speak-outs against sexual harassment have catalyzed a reckoning for perpetrators, challenging long-standing power structures and societal norms. The movement has empowered survivors to share their stories, hold perpetrators accountable, and demand justice and systemic change. While challenges persist, the #MeToo movement in Turkey represents a significant step forward in the ongoing struggle against sexual harassment to uphold the rights and dignity of all individuals.

4.3 The #MeToo Moment of Turkey: #sendeanlat, #uykularınızkaçsın and #susmabitsin

The #MeToo Movement made its way to Turkey almost a year after its initiation in the United States. However, before its arrival, women in Turkey had already started sharing their experiences of sexual harassment stories on social media platforms. This surge of online activism was sparked by the tragic rape and murder of Özgecan Aslan in February 2015, leading to the curation of #sendeanlat (#tellyourstory) hashtag on Twitter (Dede Özdemir 2015). Initially tweeted by İdil Elveriş, a Law

professor from Bilgi University, on 15 February, the hashtag went viral after the renowned actress Beren Saat shared her own story of sexual harassment without naming her perpetrators (Birkner 2018). Throughout the campaign, the #hashtag was used in more than 1 million tweets (Alikılıç and Baş 2019). This hashtag started an online and offline conversation about the prevalence of sexual harassment in Turkey and became a turning point in the public debate. Unlike its U.S. counterpart, #sendeanlat focused on sexual harassment in various contexts rather than solely in the workplace. Over time, #sendeanlat was associated with the global #MeToo movement and started to be known as Turkey's local #MeToo hashtag. In January 2018, BBC News launched a series under the #sendeanlat hashtag, encouraging women to share their "me too" stories through their own platform, arguing that the #MeToo movement in Turkey has not been effective (*BBC News* 2018).

Contrary to the assumption of BBC News that the #MeToo movement did not create an impact in Turkey as it did around the world, the movement indeed catalyzed significant change, particularly within the film and television industry. As women started to speak up about their experiences of sexual harassment around the world, this has empowered women working in the film and television industry in Turkey not to remain silent about their experiences of sexual abuse any longer. One of the first incidents that triggered feminist organizing in the sector occurred when cinema critic Kerem Akça made misogynistic remarks, targeting director Vuslat Saraçoğlu for not deserving the award granted to her film *Borç* at the 37th İstanbul Film Festival in 2018. Akça claimed that Saraçoğlu was given the award because she was pampered by Pelin Esmer, an independent filmmaker and a member of the jury of the festival competition. Akça argued that Saraçoğlu was worthless without Gökhan Tiryaki, a director of photography (*BÜ'de Kadın Gündemi* 2020). Akça's derogatory comments sparked outrage within the industry, leading to a petition signed by 150 women filmmakers. The campaign was not publicized and kept within the film industry, yet it demanded that Kerem Akça apologize to women in public, The Society of Cinema Writers (SİYAD) reviewed Akça's membership and international organizations were informed about the situation. Despite these efforts, Akça and his supporters faced no repercussions for their misogyny (*BÜ'de Kadın Gündemi* 2020). Soon after this incident, a renowned actor Talat Bulut was accused of sexual harassment by a costume assistant, during the filming of the popular TV series *Yasak Elma*. Feminists mobilized under the hashtag #BizTakipteyiz, publicly disclosing the incident. A group of feminist directors and producers working in the Turkish movie industry declared a public notice saying that they will not be working with the perpetrator in their own productions (Mater 2021). They sent a letter to the producer of the series and the channel, demanding that they should stop working

with a harasser. Although the producer promised to terminate his contract if Bulut was found guilty, the lawsuit ended in non-prosecution and the perpetrator continued his role in the TV series. Nevertheless, these two cases have started a wave of feminist organizing around the issue of sexual harassment, with women harnessing the power of social media to amplify their voices and demand accountability.

The case of young actress Elit İşcan, who bravely spoke out about being sexually assaulted by her cast mate Efecan Şenolsun during the filming of the TV series *Yaşamayanlar*, sheds light on the pervasive culture of impunity and victim-blaming within the entertainment industry. Despite promptly reporting the assault to the crew, İşcan was met with dismissive responses and excuses for the perpetrator's behavior. Her subsequent attempts to seek support from the production company and casting agency were met with silence, leading her to share her experience on social media (Aytaç and Tabak 2019). When Elit disclosed her story, she faced backlash and was blamed for damaging the perpetrator's career. During this process, her identity was revealed on social media while the perpetrator remained hidden. Not surprisingly, Elit İşcan lost the case. Efecan Şenolsun, on the other hand, faced minimal consequences, even securing another contract in a different TV series. This case highlighted the continuum of systemic failures to address and struggle against sexual harassment in the entertainment industry. However, despite the challenges İşcan faced, her resilience and courage inspired countless women in the industry, encouraging them to organize, stand in solidarity with each other and collectively demand justice.

The aftermath of these incidents sparked a feminist uprising, with independent filmmakers uniting under the banner "Mor Yapımcılar" (Purple Producers). This collective action laid the groundwork for a wave of feminist disclosures and organizing around the #MeToo movement in Turkey. The hashtag #susmabitsin (#speakup-toend) was curated by feminists, which became a trending topic soon. However, this digital activism around the hashtag was also taken to a further level, where women working in the film and television industry established an independent platform called "Susma Bitsin" (Mater 2021). The platform aimed to support women from all backgrounds working and studying in the industry against sexual harassment. The solidarity fostered both online and offline marked a significant shift in the fight against sexual harassment, offering a new path toward change for the feminist movement in Turkey.

While women in the film industry were breaking their silence, a turning point occurred in December 2020, when a prominent author, Hasan Ali Toptaş, was publicly accused of sexual harassment by an anonymous Twitter account. This dis-

closure triggered a deluge of similar allegations against not only the same perpetrator but also other powerful men in the field of literature. The flow came like a tsunami, making hashtags such as #metoo, #susmabitsin, #uykularinizkacsin (#mayyouloseyoursleep) the trending topic on Twitter. The incident was widely recognized as Turkey's long-awaited #MeToo Movement, drawing attention from mainstream media (*Milliyet Gazetesi* 2020). As the survivors and perpetrators involved famous people, mainstream media paid attention to the issue and conducted interviews with the women organizing the disclosures on Twitter (S. Akıncı 2020). The tweets emphasized solidarity and gave support to each other not to feel alone in their experiences.

What distinguished this moment from previous ones was the proactive response from various institutions. Publishing houses swiftly terminated their contracts with the accused authors and editors, while numerous visual and written projects that included the authors' works were canceled (*Evrensel* 2020a). The Writers' Union of Turkey issued a call to action against sexual harassment and assault (*Evrensel* 2020b), marking a notable departure from past indifference or complicity. For the first time in Turkey, the perpetrators faced material consequences for their actions and this was to a great extent possible by the feminist activism carried out online and offline. Discussions surrounding feminist disclosures and the feminist dictum "woman's statement is essential" became central to the feminist agenda, prompting disclosures in various sectors ranging from academia to sports, from medicine to law.

This moment pushed institutions to take action in the struggle against sexual harassment by establishing gender units, issuing policy documents, or conducting surveys to reveal the prevalence of the issue and to highlight the need for mechanisms to struggle against sexual harassment. One of the first publications was a survey conducted in 2021 by the feminist solidarity group Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu (Women in Performing Arts) in collaboration with the feminist research company Dissensus. According to the report, which surveyed 552 participants including actors, playwrights, dancers, dramaturgs, directors, and academics in the cinema, television, and theater industries, 85 percent reported experiencing sexual harassment, assault, or mobbing. This number increased to 95 percent as participants started to identify certain behaviors as sexual harassment and assault while answering the questions (Dissensus 2021). This survey was significant as it was concrete evidence of the impact of the #MeToo moment in Turkey and addressed the data gap regarding the prevalence of sexual harassment, assault, and mobbing in the cultural production industry. It also sheds light on the existing and non-existing mechanisms for addressing sexual harassment within the industry, serving as a call to action for institutions and policymakers to establish effective support mechanisms.

Another survey highlighted the need for support mechanisms for survivors to combat sexual harassment. The report by Sinema TV Sendikası (Union of Cinema-Television) carried out in 2022 with 265 workers employed in TV series and movie sets revealed that 64 percent of participants believed that there insufficient mechanisms to sanction perpetrators of sexual harassment, assault, and violence. Solutions offered by the participants to prevent sexual harassment included awareness-raising training, imposing sanctions on perpetrators, changing the discourse, and organizing and establishing sustainable support mechanisms (Sinema TV Sendikası 2022). In order to fight against sexual harassment in the cinema and television industries, the report recommends that entities in the cinema and television industry develop their own internal policies and procedures to create work environments free from violence and harassment. It cites decisions made by international organizations such as Netflix⁹ and the Producers Guild Of America (PGA)¹⁰ as important guidelines. Given that film and television sets are predominantly male-dominated and can be breeding grounds for violence and sexual harassment due to factors such as the violence-prone working environment, lack of prevention procedures, and long and irregular working hours, the report emphasizes the need for policies created collectively with the participation of production companies, broadcasters, unions, and all employees (Sinema TV Sendikası 2022).

Indeed, the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements globally, and hashtags like #sendeanlat, #uykularınızkaçsın, and #susmabitsin in Turkey have empowered women to speak out against sexual harassment and abuse. Reports played a critical role in providing a picture of the industry with regard to the prevalence of sexual harassment and the mechanisms to be developed to prevent it. The continuum of online and offline feminist efforts paved the way to an awakening not only among the public but also among the members of the cultural production industry about the prevalent and internalized nature of sexual harassment. These efforts culminated in the #MeToo moment of Turkey, which marked a significant turning point in the discourse surrounding sexual harassment and abuse.

The thesis poses a question about whether this moment will evolve into a feminist movement characterized by solidarity, healing, and change. This depends on various factors, including sustained activism, institutional responses, and societal attitudes

⁹Netflix introduced a new sexual harassment policy as a direct consequence of the #MeToo movement in 2018. The company gave training to its staff and introduced a code of conduct that banned staring at anyone for more than five seconds, non-consensual hugging, flirting, asking, and distributing a colleague's phone numbers without permission (Hooton 2018).

¹⁰PGA introduced "Anti-Sexual Harassment Guidelines" in 2018 which outlined clear protocols to prevent sexual harassment both on and off the set. They address key areas such as recognizing sexual harassment, defining what constitutes a hostile work environment, and dispelling common myths about sexual harassment. The PGA advises all productions to adhere to federal and state harassment laws and to conduct in-person anti-sexual harassment training for all cast and crew members (Kay 2018)

towards gender-based violence. If stakeholders continue to prioritize the issue, implement concrete measures to address it, and support survivors, the #MeToo moment has the potential to catalyze lasting changes and contribute to the broader feminist movement for gender equality and justice. In the following section, I will explore the potentials explored by the Susma Bitsin Platform through its online and offline feminist activism.

4.4 #SusmaBitsin: The Continuum of Activism from Streets to the Digital Against Sexual Harassment

Susma Bitsin began to form in 2018 when a group of eight independent women producers convened during a panel organized by Film Mor (Film Purple) and founded a WhatsApp group for networking, named Mor Yapımcılar (Purple Producers). The number of members increased to around 40 as they added feature-length and short-film producers to the group. For a while, Mor Yapımcılar remained inactive. By the time the platform began to form, the #MeToo movement had already gained momentum globally and started to have consequences for influential figures within the entertainment industry. This simple yet profound call to action sparked a global wave of empowerment, as survivors from all walks of life courageously shared their stories, exposing the pervasive issue of sexual harassment and advocating for systemic changes and accountability.

The #MeToo movement in Turkey gained momentum as more and more women felt empowered to speak up about the experiences of sexual harassment they faced. In the cinema and television industry, key incidents, such as the disclosures involving Talat Bulut and Efekan Şenolsun, prompted women who were already organizing within groups like Mor Yapımcılar to take action. One of my interviewees called this moment “being pushed by the back” to take a position for these recent speak-outs of the two women. A spontaneous call for women to convene and discuss recent developments in the industry circulated among friendship networks and colleagues. This informal call evolved into a gathering where nearly 150 women shared their experiences of violence and abuse in the cinema and television sector. Another interviewee defined this networking as “people mobilizing each other in an organic way.” During this meeting, 14 women disclosed their sexual harassment stories, sparking a crucial dialogue about the pervasive issue within the industry. Organizers emphasized the importance of confidentiality, ensuring that all participants agreed to keep the discussions confidential. This commitment to secrecy was maintained in subsequent

meetings organized by Susma Bitsin, with participants assuring that disclosures remained confidential, both within the physical meeting spaces and in virtual discussions. This created a safe environment for survivors to share their experiences without fear of repercussions.

After the first meeting held on November 4, 2018, the organizers planned to hold these meetings twice a year or in every season. However, women's demands to convene and share their experiences increased significantly. Initially, there was not a highly organized platform behind these attempts. And yet, when the peak moment of #MeToo arrived in Turkey after the exposure of Hasan Ali Toptaş on Twitter, even inactive members of the Susma Bitsin group demanded a more organized effort from the platform to hold meetings and address sexual harassment in the industry.

To facilitate organization, the platform initially formed an e-mail group and drafted principles outlining how to support survivors of sexual harassment and the sanctions to be imposed on the perpetrators. This anti-harassment and discrimination principles document indicated clearly the intersectional space the platform wanted to create. Particularly, article 2 of this policy document underlined that sexual harassment, discrimination as well as homophobic and transphobic violence are unacceptable in the workplaces, on the film sets, and in offices (Aytaç 2019). Article 5 also underlines that if a person is subjected to violence, they have the right to contact the producers, expose the experience, and exercise all their legal rights, holding the producers accountable for making the necessary interventions (Aytaç 2019). In my interviews, Susma Bitsin members emphasized that these principles are read aloud at the beginning of each production directed and produced by women involved in the platform, signaling a commitment to addressing sexual harassment in the industry. These small steps eventually led to the formation of an independent feminist solidarity platform known as the Susma Bitsin Platform, which aimed to provide support and advocate for changes in addressing sexual harassment in the cultural production industry. In the following sections, I will elaborate on the online and offline feminist activist practices developed by Susma Bitsin to struggle against sexual harassment in the fields of cinema, television, and theater.

4.4.1 Consciousness-raising Through Closed Meetings

The Susma Bitsin Platform initiated significant activism through closed meetings, primarily prompted by women's demand to share their experiences in the cinema and television industry. Although the initial meetings of the platform were held face-to-face, due to the pandemic and the resulting curfews, these meetings were

compulsorily taken to online spaces. These gatherings were exclusive to women working or studying in the film and television industry. Women from the theater field were also welcomed in the following meetings. According to Hande, a founding member of the platform, closed meetings were highly successful in creating feelings of safety and fostering feminist solidarity among participants. In the early meetings, which also coincided with the heated online and offline debates of the #MeToo's peak moment in Turkey, a significant number of women shared their own harassment stories. This made the platform aware of not only the need for women to talk about their experiences but also the extent of the phenomenon in women's lives. As Fileborn and Loney-Howes (2019) emphasized, #MeToo has created a 'rupture' in the discourse around sexual harassment in Turkey, and Susma Bitsin has taken the tide to widen this rupture and quickly organized to create awareness about such an invisible yet common problem. Social media played a significant role in creating this rupture along with young and early-career women in the film industry leading the movement. About the disclosure of Talat Bulut by the costume assistant, Hande told me that this position was her first professional experience in the field and she was only 19 years old. Without the #MeToo movement, she may not have spoken out about the incident because she would have thought that it was a natural part of the job. With this rupture #MeToo created, women started to speak out against sexual harassment and assault as the normalizing curtain over these actions was unveiled.

The closed meetings organized by the Susma Bitsin Platform have emerged as crucial empowerment spaces for women in the cinema, television, and theater sectors. Susma Bitsin utilized the platform's Instagram and Twitter accounts effectively to reach out to women, inviting them to join these experience-sharing meetings. Throughout this thesis, I reveal how these closed meetings, functioning as modern-day equivalents of consciousness-raising meetings of the second-wave, can be framed within the continuum of feminist activist practices transitioning from offline to online spaces. They represent an upgraded version, merging digital tools with the traditional feminist methods, where women from the industry organize through friendship networks to share their experiences of sexual harassment, recognize the prevalence of the issue, and discuss the ways to support each other through this process. In creating this solidarity network, these women benefited the most from what technology offers to them. Hence, the pamphlets of the second wave became the Instagram posts calling out for women to meet, while the mottos were shared via tweets, and the feminist magazines were replaced by online blogs. The activist practices of the second wave evolved with the new tools of the digital world, playing a critical role in feminist organizing and empowerment. As a result, closed meetings, harnessing the

power of the digital world, have become new avenues for consciousness-raising among women facing sexual harassment in the cinema, television, and theater industries.

The four physical closed meetings were held in 2019 and one in 2020 before the pandemic hit. As the pandemic made physical gatherings impossible and slowed down the sector, women found the solution of online meetings. However, the disclosure of Hasan Ali Toptaş on Twitter and the following disclosures in the field of literature towards the end of 2020 reignited the discussions around the prevalence of sexual harassment in different sectors. The platform not only continued to hold closed meetings more often as there was a demand from women to talk about their experiences but also started a series of online panels organized with particular themes for raising awareness. The group invited psychiatrists, lawyers, gender specialists, and feminist activists to talk about a variety of subjects ranging from gender-based violence to mobbing and women's sexuality to gender equality. The impact of these panels was significant, as they not only provided a platform for discussion but also increased participants' gender awareness. One interviewee, Merve, a student in the field of theater, mentioned that participating in these online panel series significantly increased her gender awareness. In case something happens, she said that she knew she could reach Susma Bitsin as well as the lawyers and psychologists she met through these panels. She added: "Knowing these people has been an important plus point and created significant awareness for me." Similar to Merve, Özge, a film producer, also described the importance of these meetings as follows:

"Physical meetings were more episodic. After going online and Hasan Ali Toptaş's disclosure, the number of women who were triggered by the wind of disclosures and wanted to share their experiences increased a lot. Hence, the number of our meetings in that period also increased. After a while, we realized that in Susma Bitsin, we set out to struggle against all kinds of inequalities in our sector, not just sexual harassment and assault, which we talked a lot about at the beginning. Thus, we wanted not only to talk about the issues that hurt us all deeply but also to distract ourselves a little bit by holding more meetings where we could both learn and have fun. For instance, the ones we held with Seven Kaptan and Hazal Sipahi¹¹ were not only informative but also incredibly fun. In these panels, together with the experts on that particular theme, we learn about things that we think we know but realize that we do not. And we are empowered in this way. These panels are the new awareness-raising and empowerment practices."

¹¹Seven Kaptan is a psychiatrist who specializes in gender identity, sexual orientation, and sexual dysfunction. Hazal Sipahi is a feminist activist, the producer, and the host of the podcast Mental Klitoris, in which she handles the issues of sex, sexuality, sexual health, sexual violence, gender, and pleasure from a sex-positive approach.

The emphasis placed by Özge on the importance of the online panels as awareness-raising and empowerment mechanisms underscores the strategic approach adopted by the Susma Bitsin Platform. Transitioning the meetings online has also proven to be a crucial strategy in expanding the reach and visibility of these events, allowing them to connect with a broader audience. The platform used social media such as Instagram and Twitter to promote the events, with calls for participation posted on its official accounts. Additionally, individual women affiliated with the platform, as well as those associated with syndicates and feminist organizations cooperating with the platform, also shared these posts on their own accounts. Then, Susma Bitsin retweeted or reposted them in its stories or tweet floods. This collaborative approach amplified the reach of the platform's messages and created a wider solidarity network consisting of professional women, students, interns; women in front of and behind the scenes; and women from all positions and ranks of cinema, television, and theater fields. By combining these strategies, the platform not only widened the scope of its advocacy but also developed collective and individual empowerment mechanisms.

However, transferring closed meetings to online spaces due to the pandemic presented both opportunities and challenges for the Susma Bitsin Platform. On the one hand, moving the meetings online increased the participation rates as it became more accessible for women in the cinema, television, and theater industry. Since the sector was almost 'shut down' due to the pandemic, many of its members were confined to their homes and lost their income to a large extent (Dissensus 2021). This digital format allowed individuals with similar experiences to come together in ways that would not have been possible otherwise. Yet, conducting meetings in online spaces also introduced new challenges. Susma Bitsin members I interviewed emphasized that providing support to women sharing their experiences of sexual violence in online spaces has become one of the biggest challenges for the group members. While the meetings served as safe spaces for women to speak about their encounters with sexual harassment and to realize they were not alone, the absence of physical presence posed difficulties for organizers in providing immediate support and solidarity. Hande noted:

“We heard some experiences that were highly traumatic. At some point, not being able to stand side by side, or offering physical comfort to these women during these discussions bothered us. We even used our WhatsApp groups to find out whether someone lived close to the survivor to support her, maybe she could drop by her to see if she was doing ok. Sexual harassment is a kind of traumatizing experience and women's support and solidarity function as one of the most important healing mechanisms for survivors sharing their experiences in these meetings.

Nonetheless, that women were alone at home or did not have anyone to share and speak about the experience afterward due to its secrecy has been one of the biggest challenges of online closed meetings.”

Overall, online closed meetings expanded the access and participation of the members. They not only served as crucial awareness-raising mechanisms but also underscored the importance of finding innovative ways to provide support and solidarity to survivors in digital spaces, ensuring that they feel heard, validated, and supported. However, it also revealed that these online mechanisms were limited as the struggle against sexual harassment required support mechanisms developed both digitally and physically.

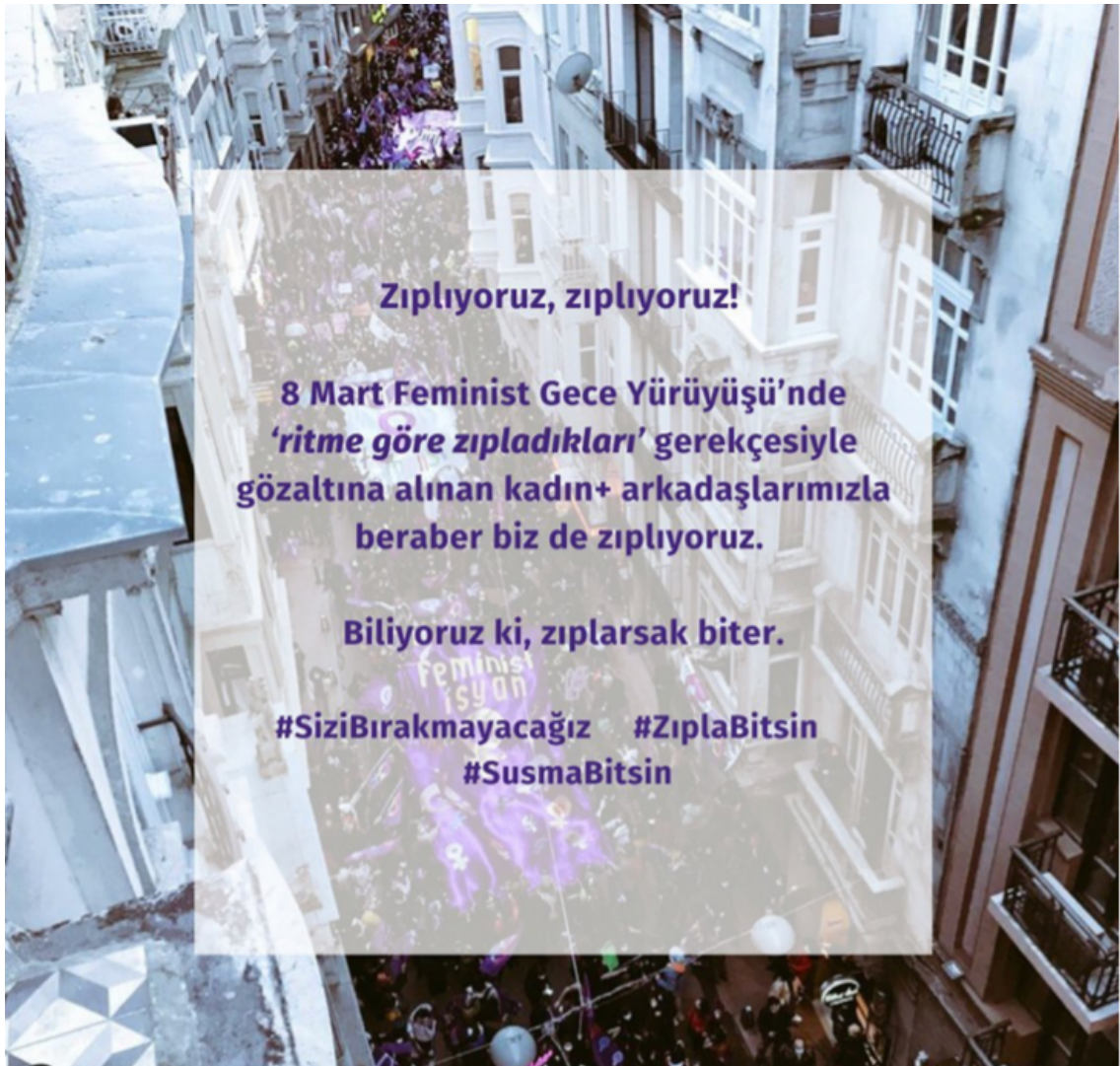
4.4.2 The Power of Feminist Humor

In addition to closed meetings, Susma Bitsin also utilized the power of video activism, representing a creative and impactful approach to raising awareness about sexual harassment. In its initial stages, it started a video series which was titled #İşteBuTaciz (#ThatsHarrassment) and posted video clips on its social media accounts. These videos, inspired by real incidents and representing various forms of harassment, served to highlight the prevalence of the issue not only within the film sector but also in broader society. They were foreign productions but subtitled by the video group formed within the platform to make them accessible to a wider audience in Turkey, further amplifying its message of awareness and advocacy. The intention to produce original videos from a Turkish context, as mentioned by Özge, underscores the platform’s efforts to tailor its activism to the local cultural context and address the specific nuances of sexual harassment within Turkish society. The concept of creating a “Humor Series” to challenge the normalization of harassment through humor was particularly innovative, aiming to disrupt societal perceptions and attitudes surrounding the issue. However, this attempt was incomplete and the #İşteBuTaciz series remained the only video activism carried out by the platform.

Yet, the use of humor continued to be an effective activist tool of the platform. It was particularly visible in the social media campaign launched after the detention of feminists participating in the Feminist March. The feminist movement in Turkey has been facing increasing pressure from the Turkish government with regard to its street activism. On the 8th of March Feminist Night Walk organized in 2021, the police scattered the crowd with force and detained some of the feminists participating in the walk because they ‘jumped to the beat.’ After this irrational

justification for custody, Susma Bitsin effectively turned the situation into a form of protest through humor. The hashtags #zıplabitsin (#jumptoend) and #SiziBırakmayacağız (#WeWontLeaveYouAlone) were curated to resist unjust actions by the authorities through humor. The campaign’s message, “We know that if we jump, it will end,” cleverly highlighted the irony of the situation while also conveying a sense of determination and solidarity among feminists (See Figure 4.1). The adoption of the #jumptoend hashtag by other feminist organizations and individuals further amplified the campaign’s impact, demonstrating the power of collective action in challenging oppressive systems. Videos of women jumping in front of Çağlayan Court House while they were waiting for the release of their friends were shared on social media to stand in solidarity with the women detained.

Figure 4.1 Instagram post of Susma Bitsin in support of women detained after 8th of March Feminist Walk



In another instance, when Deniz Bulutsuz disclosed her experience of violence and

sexual harassment by the actor Ozan Güven on Twitter, solidarity messages and hashtags by individuals and various platforms in support of Deniz Bulutsuz flooded Twitter. Susma Bitsin also posted an immediate solidarity message indicating that they were inspired by her courage, promised to follow the case, and demanded that all parties of the sector respond to violence against women, particularly pointing Ay Yapım, the production company of Ozan Güven's then employer. Right after this viral incident, Kerem Bürsin, a celebrity actor, posted a support message for Bulutsuz on Twitter, resembling Deniz's courage to a beam of light, and promised that he would do his best to support women who go through similar traumas. Elit İşcan, by tagging Susma Bitsin, replied to Kerem Bürsin's tweet, saying that she would be happy to see Kerem in her fourth trial against Efecan Şenolsun (See Figure 4.2). The viral response to Elit İşcan's ironic tweet, garnering over 1400 likes, 263 retweets, and 11 comments, underscores the resonance of humor as a tool for social commentary and feminist activism. Susma Bitsin by retweeting Elit's tweet further amplified its visibility. The comments on İşcan's tweet, including playful suggestions like "You should have fired a missile! Missile! We stand by you!" (Füze atsaydın füze!!Yanımdayız) demonstrated how humor could serve as a vehicle for critique and solidarity.

Figure 4.2 Elit İşcan's tweet replying to Kerem Bürsin indicating that she is also expecting his support for her own case



As can be seen, by using the power of humor, Susma Bitsin, and feminist activists not only criticized the irrational and unjust treatment of an authoritarian regime that turned "jumping" into a criminal act but also called attention to the double standards of the film industry where some cases were visible and valued more than others.

4.4.3 Demanding Change Through the Continuum of Online and Offline Activism

In addition to the significant visibility and awareness brought by Susma Bitsin around the issue of sexual harassment, the platform also employed feminist advocacy to force institutions to take action. The case of Nazife Aksoy exemplifies the potency of Susma Bitsin's feminist advocacy in prompting institutions to address sexual harassment and hold perpetrators accountable. Nazife Aksoy, a stage actress, won her legal struggle against her fellow actor Uğur Arda Aydın for sexually assaulting her during a play they were acting together. Throughout Nazife's case, Susma Bitsin organized online campaigns and attended the trials physically to support her, "not letting her walk alone"¹² in this struggle. This case has been vital in Turkey's #MeToo movement as it was the first publicized legal win of the movement in the industry. Although Elit İşcan's case has inspired many women to disclose their stories and take legal action, she has lost the case to Efecan Şenolsun. In Nazife's case, for the first time, a public case of sexual harassment was finalized in favor of the survivor in the field of theater. The perpetrator was sentenced to two years and six months in prison.

The ripple effects of Nazife's legal victory extended beyond the courtroom, impacting other spheres of the cultural production industry. On the day of the final trial, Uğur Arda Aydın was about to have a premier of his solo play in Istanbul Municipality Theater. However, on the same day, the court ruling was issued and the news spread immediately. Through coordinated online campaigns and relentless advocacy efforts, Susma Bitsin and feminist activists called on the theater to cancel the play in light of the court's ruling. Despite initial silence and delays in the theater's response, feminist activists persisted in holding the institution accountable. The Municipal Theater first announced that they postponed the play and then canceled it. However, this process has taken so long that it infuriated feminist activists. During this process, platform members and other feminist activists following the case started to mention the social media accounts of the Municipality Theater with their tweets and messages for not responding immediately, for postponing the play instead of canceling it, and for even scheduling the play on the night of the trial. Hande told me that she wrote a message from her personal account on the post published by the Municipal Theater to promote the play and asked: "What do you plan to do as your lead actor is sentenced to imprisonment?" The initial reaction of the municipality was to delete the post. And yet, this clumsy attempt could

¹²This is a feminist motto coined to emphasize the importance of feminist solidarity during the feminist protests and was also widely used as a hashtag on social media.

not prevent feminist activists from taking the screenshot of the post and reposting it on their own accounts. In the second post on the social media account of the Municipal Theater, it stated that they postponed the play. This time Hande posted the question: “Why? Couldn’t the actor memorize the screenplay?” Through using the power of feminist humor via her tweets, she not only criticized the lack of action but also reminded the municipality that they were being monitored closely. Similar to Hande, Duru also emphasized the power of social media for feminist advocacy and the need for institutions not to underestimate this power. She said:

“In the age of social media, everyone needs to be very careful. There are people following every move you do closely. I think that’s where the power of digital activism comes from. If you fail as an institution to respond to an act of sexual harassment, I can nail it there in a second and it’s independent of who I am. It is also independent of how many people follow me. Something written by someone with 75 followers can now be shared by 500,000. It was not like that in the past. It used to stay within that community of 75 people. Now one tweet from an individual account becomes viral immediately, being shared by millions of people.”

After the floods of tweets, mentions, and messages from feminist activists, the Municipality Theater finally posted a statement on its social media account, stating that they suspended the contract of the perpetrator and emphasized their devotion to work for the empowerment of women and girls (See Figure 4.3). One year later, when the imprisonment was approved in the court of appeal and the decision was finalized, the Municipal Theater announced the termination of the contract of the perpetrator through its Twitter account (*Birgün* 2022). As Hande reflected in our interview, this victory was not only a testament to the strength and resilience of survivors of sexual harassment but also to the collective efforts of feminist activists who rallied together to challenge impunity and demand accountability. After this achievement, Hande remembers writing to her friends in the WhatsApp group saying that they have a role in this success.

Figure 4.3 İstanbul Municipal Theater’s tweet about suspending Uğur Arda Aydın’s contract due to his sentencing



The case of Nazife Aksoy and the activism surrounding it, both online and offline, played a crucial role in bringing attention to the issue of sexual harassment and assault within the cinema, television, and theater sectors in Turkey. Through the continuum of online and offline feminist activist practices, Susma Bitsin challenged the mainstream narratives and provided a platform for survivors' voices to be heard. By harnessing the power of social media, Susma Bitsin created “parallel discursive arenas” (Fraser 1990) where survivors could openly discuss their experiences and challenge the normalization of sexual harassment and assault. By opening spaces, I argue that Susma Bitsin’s online activism formed the digital feminist counterpublics of film, television, and theater industries. By countering the discourses around the normalization of sexual harassment in the movie sets, these digital feminist coun-

terpublics mobilized, connected, and sometimes disconnected through “expressions of sentiment” as Papacharissi (2016) has emphasized. It was feelings of uneasiness, anger, sadness or empathy towards the injustices and inequalities experienced by women that mobilized and connected feminists and fostered the Susma Bitsin community around the struggle against all forms of gender violence and injustices in the entertainment industry. The affective motive behind sharing the stories of sexual harassment with the wider public both by the survivors and by the Susma Bitsin community as a strategy to raise awareness and defy the hegemonic discourses made the formation of digital affective feminist counterpublics possible. As Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2019) emphasized, digital feminist counterpublics provided these women “an opening to express feelings otherwise stored away” (104).

What’s more, the affective attachments to women survivors’ narratives of sexual harassment fueled the #SusmaBitsin movement. The collaborative discussions around Elit and many more survivors acted as manifestations of ‘structures of feeling’ as Papacharissi (2016) called them. And this made it possible for many feminists involved in the platform to form the digital affective feminist counterpublics, collectively envisioning ‘a shared future’ that is free from any form of gender-based violence. It is also these ‘structures of feelings’ that gave the capacity to ‘redefine’ the significance and functions of institutions and gave the power to ‘reimagine’ institutions aimed to change, thereby opening the ‘windows of opportunities’ Papacharissi and Trevey (2018) has emphasized. As seen in Nazife’s case, digital affective feminist counterpublics, via effective social media campaigns, gained the power to “redefine” and “reimagine” Istanbul Municipal Theater and pressured the institution to take action towards being an institution of zero-tolerance for violence.

Through their online and offline advocacy efforts, Susma Bitsin not only raised awareness about the prevalence of sexual harassment but also pushed for systemic changes within the sector. By creating spaces for survivors to share their stories and amplifying their voices through digital platforms, Susma Bitsin contributed to shifting societal attitudes and fostering a culture of accountability and empowerment. Employing affective online strategies coupled with offline feminist tactics, the platform not only raised awareness about the prevalence of sexual harassment but also fostered solidarity among women. In doing so, they exemplified the transformative potential of carrying out online and offline activism on a continuum in challenging dominant discourses and advocating for gender justice.

5. SOLIDARITY AS CONTINUUM: FROM GLOBAL SISTERHOOD TO INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST SOLIDARITY

One of my interviewees told me that “solidarity played the leading role” in their struggle against sexual harassment. So does the theme of solidarity in this thesis. Feminist solidarity is the binding concept that brings my analyses of continuums together, hence it is where the intersecting continuums are visible the most. Within the context of combating sexual harassment, solidarity represents a powerful force that transcends individual experiences and fosters a sense of community and mutual support.

The chapter opens with a discussion of the earlier conceptualizations of the term “sisterhood.” Sometimes criticized for its essentialist connotations in assuming common oppression experienced by all women around the world, the term “sisterhood” has also been used with an intersectional lens, especially by feminists of color who have drawn attention to its potential to bring women together around a recognition of differences. This chapter also shows that in the journey from sisterhood to feminist solidarity, one of the common grounds established by feminists with varying political inclinations around the world was the acknowledgment of women’s rights as human rights. The “solidarity of difference” as put forward by Desai (2005) formed in international conferences played a vital role in the significant gain of feminist politics in getting gender-based violence recognized as an internationally significant political issue.

The chapter then moves on to an analysis of the challenges of establishing solidarity with its contested scope, applications, and diverse factors shaping its understanding within various social contexts. After an analysis of varying conceptualizations of solidarity by different feminist scholars, each emphasizing distinct facets of the term and exploring its potential for political mobilization, the chapter introduces the potentials and challenges of establishing intersectional feminist solidarity, by providing specific examples around the world as well as from Turkey. Building on this the-

orization of feminist solidarity and its historical making, the chapter concludes by analyzing the feminist solidarity practices employed by the Susma Bitsin Platform, inquiring into the intersecting continuums of solidarity established through online and offline activist practices.

5.1 From Common Oppression to Common Differences

The notion of sisterhood as a concept within the feminist movement has sparked considerable debate due to both its promising potential and inherent limitations. In its initial conceptualizations, it was seen as a unifying force that could accommodate differences among women where women were perceived as collective counterparts to men, assuming that all women had similar experiences and common interests (Qi 2010). Popularized by the women's liberation movement, the term gained prominence as a rallying cry for second-wave feminists in the late 1960s and early 70s, emphasizing the unity of women in their collective struggle against patriarchy. The iconic slogan "Sisterhood is Powerful!" emerged as a motto adopted by radical feminists during peace demonstrations taking place in January 1968, aimed at raising awareness among their "antiwar sisters" (Siegel 2007, 23). Siegel (2007) highlights how feminists, both within and outside the New Left, began to perceive themselves as "sisters" forming alliances in a shared struggle against common oppressions and oppressors. Hence, sisterhood evolved beyond a mere conceptual framework to become a "contagious" and also "powerful" force (46). Second-wave feminists, disillusioned with the male-dominated politics of solidarity of the Left, emphasized the importance of feminist sisterhood as a crucial avenue for collaboration, friendship, collective action, and emancipation (Mitra 2023). Rooted in aspirations for women's equality and gender justice, feminist sisterhood became a vital means of fostering collaboration and driving social change.

Robin Morgan, an influential feminist figure, has utilized the concept of global sisterhood in her notable trilogy of books: *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), *Sisterhood is Global* (1984), and *Sisterhood is Forever* (2003). In the introduction to her first book, Morgan (1970) portrayed her own transformation into a "feminist" committed to "Women's Revolution." This transformation was rooted in her radicalizing experiences of motherhood and active participation in consciousness-raising groups within the women's liberation movement (xiv-xv). Morgan's essentializing and universalizing perspective, both as a mother and as a sister in the women's revolution, contributed to her understanding of the reality behind women's oppression where

patriarchy remained as the common enemy. Mirta (2023) argues that Morgan failed to define what sisterhood precisely stood for, suggesting that it was based exclusively on a biological concept of cisgender women and their shared experiences as women. In this scheme, gender as the primary source of women's global oppression created an illusion that all women were also suffering from the same kind of gender oppression (Bunch 1987). However, this narrow understanding failed to account for the diversity of women's experiences shaped by intersecting factors such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality.

While feminists like Morgan based their arguments on the essentializing understanding of women as subjects of global sisterhood based on common gender oppression across all geographical and historical lines, feminists of color and those from the global south were already proposing alternative conceptualizations of the term, pointing to the need for being not only more inclusive but also more intersectional. Instead of an essentializing and exclusionary conceptualization marked by a history of racism and colonialism, women of color "reimagined" the concept of sisterhood in the organizations of writers such as "The Sisterhood," which included members like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker as well as in the feminist political organizations like Combahee River Collective (Mitra 2023, 435). June Jordan (1985) has been one of the earliest critics of essentialist frameworks and singular categories of gender, race, and class where she highlighted the importance of an intersectional understanding of these oppressive forces which would then lead to ultimate connections among women. In the midst of these reimaginings, Audre Lorde emphasized the transformative potential of sisterhood for women of color. Lorde (1984) highlighted how sisterhood could serve as a tool for maintaining social autonomy in authoritarian contexts imposed by patriarchal structures and violence intended at women. Hence, sisterhood, as envisioned by women of color during this period, was a radical act of worldmaking, rooted in a vision of social liberation founded on an entirely alternative form of social interaction (Lorde 1984). Women of color embraced sisterhood as a means of carving out spaces for empowerment and resistance, transforming the concept into a tool for social change that aligned with their unique struggles and aspirations.

Another feminist thinker who also reimagined the possibilities of sisterhood was bell hooks. hooks (1986), in her article "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women," offered a critique of bourgeois and white women's liberationists. She challenged the emphasis on the idea of "common oppression" and the notion of "common enemy," considering them deceptive and distorted platforms that obscured the "true nature of women's varied and complex social reality" (127). Sisterhood as a concept disguised the reality of hierarchical power relations among women where

many women were also exploiting and oppressing other women and the true nature of women was split by “sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices,” hence delusional and romantic notions about common oppression would not be enough to eliminate these divisions despite the merit in acknowledging the experiences all women have in common (hooks 1986, 127-8). Instead, hooks (1986) proposed a different approach, advocating for “working through hostility to arrive at understanding and solidarity” (138). In hooks’ vision, achieving political solidarity among women required navigating differences and changing distorted viewpoints, rather than eliminating them. In her words:

“[t]o experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood. . . . Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment. In the feminist movement, there is a need for diversity, disagreement, and difference if we are to grow. . . . We can be sisters united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression, united in political solidarity” (hooks 1986, 138).

In this reimagining, women could become sisters bonded by shared interests, beliefs, and goals as well as by mutual recognition of diversity and collective efforts to combat sexist oppression through political solidarity. In this way, it becomes possible to envision a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of sisterhood that acknowledges and addresses the complexities of women’s experiences and relationships.

Similar to hooks’ emphasis on uniting common differences, an important call to organize across differences came by two Chicana writers Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (1983) when they published *This Bridge Called My Back*, a collection of more than 50 essays from various women of color. This work was a confrontation of the calls for global sisterhood and tried to show how diverse women’s narratives were at the intersections of their experiences of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Moraga and Anzaldua’s “bridge” metaphor was an attempt to conceptualize sisterhood among different groups of women, fostering coalitions not only among women of color but also with white women. In that sense, their vision of sisterhood was distinct, grounded not in common identity categories but “in a lived experience of coalitional consciousness” (Zaytoun and Ezekiel 2016, 205). Anzaldua expanded on these ideas in *Borderlands* (1987), introducing the concept of *mestiza* to highlight the fluidity and queerness of identities. This notion emphasized the importance of recognizing the multifaceted nature of individual identities and their intersections. Anzaldua’s vision went beyond acknowledging differences; it celebrated the complexity of identities and underscored their significance in building feminist coalitions

across differences and borders.

The notion of ‘global sisterhood’ has also been denounced by postcolonial feminists who argued that it not only silenced the multiple voices of women from the so-called global south but also overlooked the complex intersections of race, class, and gender oppression influenced by colonialism and imperialism. Swarr and Nagar (2010) asserted that global feminism, rooted in the idea of sisterhood, tended to prioritize Western feminist agendas and perspectives, resulting in homogenizing the experiences of women in colonial and neocolonial contexts. A prominent post-colonial feminist Chandra Tapalde Mohanty expressed her reservations about universalizing women’s experiences in the formation of sisterhood in her influential essay “Under Western Eyes” (1984). Mohanty (2003b) argued for recognizing differences among women to enhance the understanding of connections, emphasizing the importance of diverse communities and identities forming alliances and solidarities that transcend borders. She rejected the idea of a ‘global sisterhood’ in favor of building a “non-colonizing feminist solidarity across borders” (503). Emphasizing the need for defining solidarity through “mutuality, accountability, and recognition of common interests as the basis of relationships among diverse communities,” Mohanty (2003a) envisioned a more inclusive and respectful feminist alliance (7).

Additionally, Mohanty (2003a) conceptualized solidarity as a “praxis-oriented” and politically active struggle. She believed that solidarity, rooted in diversity and “common differences,” could rectify unequal power dynamics among women (Mohanty 2003a, 7). For her, such solidarity was the most principled way to cross borders to decolonize knowledge and criticize anti-capitalist practices. She envisioned solidarity as a form of “community or collectivity among women workers across class, race, and national boundaries that is based on shared material interests and identity in common ways of reading the world” (Mohanty 2003a, 144-5). This perspective underscored the importance of comprehending women’s oppression worldwide as common but also as influenced by local histories, economies, and politics. Hence, the concept of sisterhood, as advocated by Mohanty, embraced all the differences in women’s experiences and oppressions at the intersections of power relations, including gender, class, race, and ethnicity as well as social, economic, and geographical circumstances. The call is for a more inclusive and flexible form of solidarity that acknowledges and respects these differences.

Overall, the exploration of the concept of sisterhood revealed a dynamic and evolving landscape marked by nuanced perspectives of feminists based on discussions surrounding identity and difference. The essentialist notion of a shared inner bond of womanhood that would eventually lead to feminist sisterhood was rejected as

sisterhood could not be perceived as a pre-given but created through the practice of working together (Lakämper 2017). This perspective challenged the idea of a fixed, inherent connection among women and highlighted the importance of building solidarity through shared actions and efforts. As this section reveals, the legacy of women of color played a crucial role in the reconceptualization of sisterhood as shared actions and efforts, resisting the essentializing narratives and offering alternative frameworks that centered on intersectionality. Hence, in this chapter, I argue that it is through the recognition of these intersecting legacies as continuums within feminist discourse that we can better analyze the ways contemporary conceptualizations of feminist solidarity have been enriched.

5.2 Common Differences United for Women’s Human Rights

The legacies of women of color and feminists around the world have profoundly influenced the way international agencies conceptualize sisterhood. This influence was particularly evident in the emergence of the concept of sisterhood as a prominent theme in international conferences, notably during the UN’s International Decade for Women (1975-1985) and the subsequent world conferences held in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing, (1995). These conferences served as crucial platforms where women from various parts of the world came together to discuss and advocate for gender equality and women’s rights. Within these spaces, prominent feminist figures like Betty Friedan, Robin Morgan, and Gloria Steinem, positioned themselves as key advocates of global sisterhood, hinting at the dominating voice of white, middle-class, heterosexual U.S. feminism. (Olcott 2017).

Despite being the largest and most diverse platforms for women’s engagement, both geographically and socially, these conferences still lacked intersectional perspectives for issues of representation and addressing women’s problems. According to Olcott (2010), at the UN’s International Women’s Conferences, amid the dissensions related to strategies and tactics for improving women’s conditions, intricate networks of alliances and hostilities materialized. The dominating rhetoric of the white, middle-class, heterosexual concerns of the U.S. feminists created these tensions as their concerns did not fully address the realities of women’s oppression at the intersections of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. In that sense, achieving a unified global sisterhood proved challenging as identities and ideologies disrupted channels of communication (Olcott 2010). Olcott (2010) notes that “as different actors pulled

at these threads of identity, they collectively unraveled the ‘women’ at the center of International Women’s Year” (283).

Nevertheless, the efforts of feminists of color and women from the global south resulted in shifting the discourse from the concept of global sisterhood to a politics of difference within the UN’s International Women’s Conferences (Hewitt 2011). Desai (2005) underlined that these four global conferences, subsequent forums, and regional and national meetings characterized by controversy all contributed to challenging the notions of common oppression where gender and sexuality were seen as the sole basis of women’s problems. Women from southern parts of the world emphasized the inclusion of development issues, nationalism, and neo-colonialism in the discourse. These divergences among women eventually led to the recognition of what Desai (2005) calls “solidarities of difference” where women continued to convene, share their experiences of inequalities, and fight for justice (322).

While the UN conferences underscored the complexities and challenges inherent in forging a truly inclusive and intersectional sisterhood, forming these solidarities of differences was instrumental in advancing the global women’s rights agenda. Particularly, the 1985 Nairobi Conference was seen as a crucial moment marking a transition from “contention” to “solidarity” (Desai 2005). This shift culminated in the solidarity of women finding a common voice despite their differences, ultimately paving the way for a milestone in women’s human rights struggle. The discussions around women’s human rights gained momentum at the 1993 Vienna Conference and the rallying cry “women’s rights are human rights” subsequently became a paradigm in Beijing in 1995 (Desai 2005). This paradigmatic shift of framing women’s rights as human rights, brought about by solidarity of common differences, proved to be critical in the struggle against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

In this paradigm, gender-based violence was recognized unequivocally as a violation of human rights, marking a profound shift in global consciousness. It was no longer viewed as a private matter or an inevitable consequence of womanhood, but rather as a violation of human dignity (Bunch and Reilly 1994). Non-state actors also emerged as key players in the protection of women’s human rights, signaling a broader commitment to addressing gender-based violence and discrimination (Bunch and Reilly 1994). This recognition of women’s rights as human rights also catalyzed profound transformations in the struggle against violence at both national and international levels (VIDC 2023). In that sense, the feminists uniting around common differences in these conferences not only emphasized the need for a discursive shift that highlighted the importance of acknowledging diverse experiences of women around the world but also formed a new referential frame for the feminist

struggle against gender-based violence on an international level.

Although feminists involved in the struggle on an international level eventually formed what Desai (2005) called “solidarities of difference,” uniting on the shared ground of women’s human rights, reconciling the claims for diversity with the need for unity has not been without challenges. The early conceptualizations of feminist sisterhood were essentialist in their assumption that all women shared common experiences solely because of their gender, oversimplifying the complexities of women’s lives and experiences. The emphasis on common oppression silenced the unique experiences and perspectives of working-class women, LGBTQI+ people, and women of color while allowing white middle-class women to overlook their own involvement in systems of oppression based on race, class, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Conversely, focusing on diverse, racial, cultural, and sexual identities within feminism posed challenges, often contributing to a loss of a common ground for collective action (Lyshaug 2006). These criticisms led to the reconceptualization of the term, and then to the emergence of the concept of feminist solidarity, which emphasized inclusivity and intersectionality as well as the importance of working collaboratively to foster a diverse and supportive feminist community.

5.3 Solidarity as a Contested Term

The concept of solidarity has led to dynamic discussions on its scope, applications, and diverse factors shaping its understanding within different social contexts. It can manifest in various forms, ranging from social, political, and economic to cultural domains. In a broader sense, solidarity, as articulated by Dai (2016), transcends mere collective action, embodying a nuanced interplay of shared bonds and distinct objectives that are different from self-interest. Its underpinnings are rooted in shared life experiences, notably patterns of oppression. The essence of solidarity resides in one’s sense of identity and interdependence with others, serving as a means to actualize particular personal or collective interests that cannot be achieved without establishing connections with others as solidarity empowers and exerts influence in the face of opposition (Dai 2016). This nuanced perspective underscores the intricacies of solidarity, inviting a deeper exploration into its manifestations and implications within various contexts.

In the realm of contemporary activist networks aiming to counter neoliberal policies, different aspects of solidarity are being emphasized. Reitan (2007) identifies a significant shift from altruistic solidarity towards two distinct forms, reciprocal

and identity solidarity. Altruistic solidarity indicates ascribing “worthiness” and displaying “sympathy” for the suffering of individuals who are geographically distant (Reitan 2007, 20). Reciprocal solidarity, on the other hand, emerges when activists, NGOs, or social movements connect the suffering of others and their own and this connection initiates “empathy with” others and a sense of “ultimately interconnected fates” among participants (Reitan 2007, 20). Solidarity based on a shared identity, as Reitan (2007) argues, forms when activists mutually share a similar fate, and confront common threats and adversities; all stemming from sharing a common identity. Reitan (2007) posits that these three forms of solidarity are not mutually exclusive and usually transnational activist networks convene utilizing all three. However, she emphasizes the centrality of identity within these networks while cautioning against embracing reified and fixed identity categories. Instead, she suggests recognizing identity as “dynamic, contingent, contested and socially constructed” categories that do not dominate one another (Reitan 2007, 239). What reactivates these categories as political is the fact that they are being threatened by neoliberal globalization in particular ways (Reitan 2007, 239). In this context, it is important to go beyond fixed identity categories as the common ground but perceive threats of neoliberalism to the multiple identity categories as the binding factor for the formation of solidarities.

The contested nature of solidarity often stems from differing perspectives on who is considered part of the community and what issues should be prioritized. In navigating these complexities, varying and sometimes conflicting interpretations of the concept of ‘solidarity’ abound, ranging from the arguments that solidarity arises from shared identities (Reitan 2007) to those proposing the emergence of solidarity from shared interests (Rupp and Taylor 1999). Within feminist, queer, global justice, and labor movements, a prevailing perspective aligns solidarity more closely with an intersectional approach (Tormos 2017). Although the need for shared identities for forming solidarities has been emphasized (Taylor and Whittier 1992), this universalizing and essentialist explanation which results in prioritizing the voice of the privileged has been criticized by feminists and queer theorists (Weldon 2006b) on the grounds that participants to a social movement are not uniform. Instead, individuals establish their sense of self in relation to various intersections of gender, class, race, sexual orientation, geographic location, and citizenship (Tormos 2017).

Within the broader framework of solidarity, feminist solidarity emerges as a distinctive manifestation that centers on the shared experiences, struggles, and aspirations of women. Defined as a fundamental tenet of mutual support among individuals, collectives, and institutions dedicated to safeguarding women’s rights, feminist solidarity not only acknowledges the historical and contemporary injustices faced by

women but also signifies a commitment to collective action for achieving gender equality. According to Sweetman (2013), this form of solidarity plays a crucial role in enhancing women's capacity to confront violence, abuse, exclusion, and impoverishment rooted in gender alongside the intersections of various forms of oppression. Through collectively engaging in activism, women can consolidate their combined expertise, awareness, and resources, thereby facilitating the pursuit of strategies that would otherwise be challenging to undertake individually (Sweetman 2013). This mutual dedication to collective action is centered on understanding gender dynamics underpinning the economic, social, and political isolation of women under diverse circumstances. Ultimately, the overarching objective of feminist solidarity is to deconstruct the discrimination and marginalization of women (Sweetman 2013). This multifaceted approach, rooted in mutual commitment and shared analysis, establishes feminist solidarity as a powerful source in addressing gender inequalities and dismantling systemic barriers faced by women.

Despite being a powerful source of feminist activism, forming feminist solidarity networks that are built on mutual commitment grounds also has its challenges. The gender inequalities and systemic barriers do not affect women equally, hence under which common grounds the collectives would be formed has been a matter of contention. On the one hand, the concept of global sisterhood that relied on essentialist notions of women and women's shared experiences of oppression has proven to be highly exclusionary. This realization led to a shift in terminology from global sisterhood to feminist solidarity. On the other, criticisms of such politics proposed denying the category of women altogether to create a more inclusive feminist politics of solidarity. However, the emerging identity politics debate also left feminist politics at an impasse, resulting in a fragmentation of the feminist movement. According to Allen (1999), there were two undesirable ends to the identity politics debates: either the concept of women was embraced to establish a foundation for discussing the common experiences of oppression that unite women and enable collective feminist political action, yet leading to marginalization or exclusion of certain groups from feminist discourse, or the notion of women was completely rejected to avoid the exclusionary nature of previous understandings of sisterhood, and yet in return, depriving women of the capacity to explore the connections that could unite and advance a common cause. Allen (1999) posits that both of these options are problematic. She proposes a formulation of the concept of solidarity that not only acknowledges the power of feminists when they "act in concert" but also addresses and mitigates the issue of exclusion inherent in identity politics (104).

Following Hannah Arendt's interpretation of solidarity as a form of power that arises from collective action rather than as a "sister-feeling" naturally emerging from the

sharing of a “pregiven, fixed, and hence repressive identity,” Allen (1999) argues that Arendt provides the ground for contemplating about how individuals within opposing social movements can be unified in a manner that not only embraces and safeguards difference but also refrains from excluding and repressing it (104). Although Arendt is critical of the idea that sameness can be the driving force of any political action, she nevertheless asserts that political action becomes incomprehensible when one disregards “any and all notions of commonality among actors” (Allen 1999, 105). In this way, it becomes possible to emphasize a dialectical relation between commonality and difference, as well as between equality and distinction. In this political view, solidarity is perceived as an outcome that is attained through “mutual promise or a shared commitment to act in concert” rather than an exclusive unity that is assumed beforehand (Allen 1999, 110). As a result, such understanding of solidarity provides feminists with a means of comprehending what is necessary for establishing relations of solidarity among distinct individual women and men of varying races, social classes, ethnicities, and sexual orientations, who, due to their disparities, possess different degrees of empowerment.

For the feminist movement, acknowledging differences among women while working and becoming empowered collectively toward the common goal of achieving gender justice has been pivotal. Hence, instead of striving for commonality, the goal for women has been to “find common differences” (Pruchniewska 2016, 739). Pullen and Vachhani (2019) stressed the importance of understanding that feminists assembled in solidarity may not necessarily, nor should they, strive for unity, but rather need to possess the capability to work through their disagreements and differences to form stronger bonds and develop feminist politics in face of addressing intersecting oppressions. Gilbert’s (2018) perspective further illuminates this issue by asserting that relations of solidarity are not rooted in the presumption of a shared or singular identity but require to “work across differences without trying to suppress them,” turning these differences into productive forces that contribute to collective feminist agenda.

Gilbert (2018), by giving the example of the Grunwick struggle of 1976-78 when women of color and white male postal workers organized a strike, argues that this was an act of solidarity where anti-racism, feminism, and class struggle assembled. This act of solidarity operated by transcending differences and leveraging those differences to the group’s advantage, aiming to maximize the possibilities for all the participants of the struggle to realize their creative potential and attain collective freedom (Gilbert 2018). This group came together based on common interests, not on a shared identity, and that was what mattered for the formation of solidarity. And it was usually mobilizations in expression and defense of the common interests of

women that feminist movements have been the most successful. Gilbert (2018) notes that solidarity is not about uniformity or unidirectionality; instead, it grows out of horizontal social connections that emphasize equality and shared participation. What's more, solidarity is inherently democratic and can be formalized within a democratic framework where each group evolves into a powerful collective entity by manifesting its creative potential within its inherent complexity (Gilbert 2018).

In contemporary feminist practice, solidarity networks created by feminists provide support for those who share the common goal of challenging unequal gender relations in different parts of the world. And yet, according to Steans (2007), such solidarity projects recognize the intricacies of identities, values, and knowledge stemming from diverse subject positions and experiences. In this framework, complexity and plurality are reframed as sources of strength rather than weaknesses. Steans (2007) underlines that “[a]t different times and in different locations, through periods of accord and conflict, unity and fragmentation, the meaning and the possibility of solidarity has been worked out in the process of political struggle” (743). Thereby, conflicts rising within politics of solidarity, despite potentially disrupting gender solidarity bonds, cannot be framed as opposite to cooperation as conflicts might subsequently catalyze reflection and dialogue. A feminist approach founded on dialogue and respect for differences may result in short-term, flexible, and strategic solidarities and this adaptive response is essential for addressing the diverse needs of women in different parts of the world who face strikingly similar challenges (Steans 2007).

Aligning with Steans's emphasis on dialogue, Parashar (2016) introduces the terms “empathetic dialogue” and “empathetic critique” to address the challenges to feminist solidarity. Empathetic critique is about the understanding that feminism, as a political movement, should fearlessly address the most discomfiting issues and pose unsettling questions while expressing anger. Rooted in empathetic dialogue, it seeks to motivate action and emphasize potential involvements in various narratives of oppression, guided by rules of self-reflection and acknowledging privilege (Parashar 2016, 123). This approach highlights the transformative potential of feminist solidarity through empathetic discourse, encouraging dynamic and inclusive engagement with the multifaceted challenges faced by the movement. For Parashar (2016), feminist solidarity is especially crucial when women's rights are under attack, hence intersections of gender, class, race, religion, and ethnicity should not solidify into impenetrable realms of identity politics or conversations that stop progress. Instead, these interactions should provide opportunities for critical inquiry and resistance (Parashar 2016). Fostering solidarity via greater self-reflection as well as with more inclusive practices with a critical language grounded not only in concern

but also in empathy is essential, particularly in the face of challenges to women's rights.

Similar to the discussions surrounding the concept of sisterhood, the exploration of feminist solidarity within feminist discourse reveals its dynamic nature and multifaceted applications across various social contexts. Manifesting various forms, solidarity transcends mere collective action, embodying a nuanced interplay of shared bonds and distinct objectives. The contested nature of solidarities arises from differing perspectives on inclusion and prioritization within feminist discourse. While feminist solidarity has been instrumental in addressing gender inequalities and systemic barriers, challenges persist in navigating diverse perspectives and identities within the movement. This tension has led to a reevaluation of the concept, proposing a framework that acknowledges the power of collective action while eliminating exclusionary practices. In that sense, feminist solidarity emerges as a distinct manifestation rooted in mutual support and collective action to dismantle gender inequalities along with intersecting oppressions. Embracing complexity and plurality as sources of strength becomes essential for building inclusive solidarity movements capable of addressing the diverse needs and challenges faced by women around the world.

5.4 Different Faces of Feminist Solidarity

Within the landscape of feminist theory and praxis, the pursuit of an all-encompassing feminist solidarity proves to be a complex issue. Recognizing the diversity of women's experiences and perspectives, feminist thinkers have grappled with the complexities of forming inclusive coalitions that bridge voices from the margins to the center. The challenge lies in accommodating these differences among women without compromising the principles of inclusive feminist solidarity politics. Feminist scholars have differed in their conceptualizations of solidarity, emphasizing various aspects and exploring its political potential. This disparity arises from the diverse theoretical commitments of each scholar as well as the nuanced connotations that solidarity appears to encompass in the context of feminist thought.

Jodi Dean (1996) introduces the concept of 'reflective solidarity' as an attempt to reconcile the tension between difference and universality. She argues that reflective solidarity creates spaces that accommodate differences while maintaining the potential for "a universal, communicative 'we'"(8). Unlike historical conceptualizations of solidarity as a dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them,' Dean emphasizes that 'we' encompasses

the relationship between ‘you’ and ‘me,’ fostering a communicative understanding of the term. Once the communicative nature of the term ‘we’ is understood, the importance of difference in fostering solidarity can be appreciated. Additionally, for Dean (1996), disagreements, questionings, and conflicts can be viewed as characteristics of bonds that bind people together rather than as something divisive. In that sense, reflective solidarity can be conceived as being open to difference, allowing disagreements among women to serve as sources of solidarity. It proposes working toward “an inclusive and ultimately universal understanding of the ‘we’ discourse” rather than the ‘we’ of identity politics (Dean 1996, 11). Describing reflective solidarity as conceiving the ties connecting us as communicative and open, Dean (1996) emphasizes its capacity to create a space for accountability. This openness enables an awareness of exclusions, asking for responsibility for those exclusions and attempts to include the marginalized others in the collective ‘we.’ While reflective solidarity may not include all the voices and experiences, it exposes the deliberate exclusions and blind spots present in stories that shape collective self, leading to critical questioning of the expectations of the group.

Dean (1996) also introduces the notion of a “situated third,” suggesting that adopting this perspective allows individuals to be aware of their exclusions and take responsibility for them while trying to include marginalized voices. Reflective solidarity acknowledges the inherent duality of being both an insider and an outsider for its members and reminds us that “we are always situated in a variety of differing groups, all of which play a role in the development of our individual identities” (Dean 1996, 34). This perspective encourages taking responsibility for others and oneself, going beyond fixed identity categories, groups, or communities. Dean (1996) envisions reflective solidarity as nurturing the possibility of a collective community that encompasses “a community of us all” (34). For her, reflective solidarity is a “mutual expectation of a responsible orientation to relationship” (Dean 1996, 29). Mutual expectation refers to the communicative aspect of different uses of ‘we’ while responsibility stands for holding ourselves accountable for our exclusions from the viewpoint of the situated third. Orientation to relationships stresses the need to recognize mutual expectations without categorizing them into restrictive norms (Dean 1996). This form of solidarity recognizes and respects differences while using them as a basis for building connections and shared goals. It relies on the communicative dimension of the term ‘we,’ aiming to turn disagreements and conflicts into foundations for solidarity as we take responsibility for our exclusions.

Another theorization of feminist solidarity is introduced by Sandra Bartky. Bartky (2002), drawing from Max Scheler’s concept of “Mitgefühl” which can be translated as “feeling with,” calls this notion “fellow feeling” and underscores the affective

dimension of solidarity. Bartky (2002) argues that a true fellow-feeling occurs when one identifies with and moves alongside the “Other.” She distinguishes this as the “‘highest’ form of feeling with,” stating its inapplicability in situations when there is a discrepancy between the advantaged and disadvantaged positions of women as “the cause of the misery of the one are often absent from the lives of the other” (Bartky 2002, 74). Bartky (2002) critiques attempts to deny privilege by living under similar conditions, asserting that true solidarity involves working actively to eliminate the misery of others rather than merely sharing their circumstances.

Participating in demonstrations, according to Bartky, serves the purpose of conveying messages to those who are protested against but also allows feminists to become “emotionally infected” by one another (Bartky 2002, 76). Such emotional infection is empowering for its subjects where the physical presence of others eliminates the feelings of isolation and defeat, making it a powerful catalyst for solidarity. Bartky’s concepts of “feeling with” and “emotional infection” are also inclusive as they allow bringing people together from diverse social backgrounds through shared emotions. In her formulation, feminist solidarity is attainable through political and affective alignment with the experiences of others. “Feeling with” entails a sympathetic disposition arising from not only aligning affectively with others but also an understanding of the context of others’ sufferings, which is a type of politically aware affective influence marked by emotional and physical nuances (Bartky 2002).

Affective dimension of feminist solidarity has also been emphasized by Clare Hemmings. Borrowing from Elspeth Probyn’s reflection on the discrepancy between one’s sense of self and the way the world judges that self, creating a kind of feminist reflexivity, Hemmings (2012) argues for negotiation of this epistemological and ontological difference where feminist reflexivity on this discrepancy might produce diverse feminist perspectives within discourse. This discrepancy, which she calls ‘affective dissonance,’ denoting the incongruities as well as disparities between one’s embodied sense of self and the self-observed by the eyes of others, is a pathway towards solidarity (Hemmings 2012). In Hemmings’ formulation, affective solidarity relies on a spectrum of affects such as rage, frustration, misery, passion, pleasure, and desire for connection rather than simple empathy. The feelings of being misplaced, “feeling an ill fit with social descriptions, feeling undervalued” can all function as a catalyst for politicized action that aims to transform the ontological and epistemological dissonance feminists feel (Hemmings 2012, 149). In other words, it is a form of politics that arises from a sentiment of inequality and false representation. This dissonance, whether experienced as fury or fervor, serves as the foundation of an understanding that gives rise to criticism and alternative worldviews.

However, Hemmings is concerned about the transition from affective dissonance to affective solidarity, about how one's individual experience leads to collective feminist action. She contends that this shift, driven by critical dissonance and the power to mobilize political action, holds more transformative potential for feminist politics than identity politics alone (Hemmings 2021). In her view, affective dissonance can serve as a starting point for shared experiences that foster affective solidarity, creating a community where alternative values and perspectives can emerge, allowing individuals to feel differently. This shared dissonance, when intertwined with social inequalities and resonate with others' experiences, opens the door to political feminist action, challenging the status quo and envisioning collective change (Hemmings 2012). Hemmings underscores that while recognizing shared dissonances does not always guarantee mobilization, the mere possibility is a crucial point to hold on to. She notes, "[a]ffective dissonance cannot guarantee feminist politicization or even a resistant mode. And yet, it just might" (Hemmings 2012, 156). This acknowledgment of possibility becomes a valuable starting point to think about the potentialities of feminist collective action, marking affective dissonance as a crucial and transformative force within feminist politics that fosters affective solidarities.

Expanding the discussion on nuanced perspectives related to feminist solidarity, Wiedlack et al. (2020) propose an understanding of "queer solidarity as working together," which is a practice that requires acknowledging the dynamic and multifaceted nature of individuals' identifications and affiliations within the intricate network of social divisions including race, class, gender, sexuality or age (24). Considering solidarity as a form of "working together," rather than exclusively relying on moral, affect-driven, or identity-based unity, presents the opportunity to view differences not as hindrances but as essential elements of this collaborative effort (Wiedlack et al. 2020). In that sense, such understanding highlights the value of embracing diversity within a shared work of solidarity. In addition to being diverse, solidarity as working together should strive to be profoundly collaborative, devoid of hierarchies, characterized by respect, grounded in open dialogue and needs to negotiate a common goal, set clear guidelines for involvement while incorporating elements of care and support (Wiedlack et al. 2020). According to Wiedlack et al. (2020), bringing together the notion of solidarity as "a structure of feelings" and as "working together" allows us to recognize the role of working through affects, feelings, and desires as integral aspects of the collaborative effort that constitutes solidarity. Considering solidarity as "working together" also enables one to recognize the challenging, unpleasant, and demanding facets of solidarity, and yet it reframes feelings of frustration and disappointment as part of the process rather than an indicator of failed solidarity (Wiedlack et al. 2020).

The multifaceted exploration of feminist solidarity encompasses diverse dimensions, each shedding light on the intricate nature of collective action. From Dean's reflective solidarity to Bartky's fellow-feeling, from Hemmings' emphasis on affective dissonance as a transformative force in feminist politics to Wiedlack et al.'s proposition of queer solidarity as working together, the discussions underline the collaborative and dynamic aspects of solidarity. This chapter argues that these varying dimensions of feminist solidarity act on a continuum, where it becomes possible to see one form of solidarity transitioning into another in different contexts with different actors. This thesis also reveals that different forms of solidarity can intersect by embracing differences, be they affective, identity-based, or contextual, and work on a continuum to find common grounds to struggle and enrich the feminist collective action. In recognizing challenges, frustrations, and demands inherent in feminist solidarity, these diverse perspectives collectively contribute to a more inclusive, resilient, and intersectional feminist praxis that values collaboration, openness, and the pursuit of shared goals to achieve a gender-equal world.

5.5 Intersectional Feminist Solidarity

Within the context of feminist solidarity, the concept of intersectionality emerges as a crucial lens through which to view the diverse positionalities of women and marginalized individuals. This perspective encourages feminist solidarity to transcend a one-size-fits-all approach, prompting inclusivity and fostering alliances that acknowledge and respect diverse identities and experiences within the feminist movement. Emphasizing collaboration, collective action, and acknowledgment of shared goals, feminist solidarity, when brought together with the principles of intersectionality, becomes attuned to the nuanced experiences of individuals situated at the intersections of multiple positions. Intersectional feminist solidarity encourages a collective awareness of the diverse identities and experiences within the feminist movement, fostering a solidarity that is truly inclusive and capable of addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by intersecting systems of oppression.

According to Tormos (2017), 'intersectional solidarity' can be defined as a framework involving a continuous and iterative process of establishing connections and coalitions among diverse social groups, achieved through the negotiation of power asymmetries. This concept is further explored by Ciccio, Porta, and Pavan (2021), who describe intersectional solidarity as a transformative manifestation of feminist politics that inherently incorporates considerations for social inequalities other

than gender, scrutinizes its privileges and prejudices, and recognizes struggles for women's rights that occur under a different name. It can be considered as "an ongoing political process of building cooperation by altering power asymmetries within and between organizations and groups located at different intersections of class, race, gender, sexuality, religion, and able-bodiedness, and across geographical boundaries" (Ciccia, Porta, and Pavan 2021, 176).

When discussing intersectional solidarity, it also becomes crucial to consider diverse experiences and intersecting power imbalances among various social groups that are marginalized in multiple ways through various interactions between varied social structures and experiences. Feminist activists engaged in intersectional solidarity, as articulated by Tormos (2017), are expected to act with "an intersectional consciousness," which entails a "recognition of oppression as constituted by multiple and interacting social structures"(712). This acknowledgment of differences might bring a reevaluation of activist practices and organizational structures, thereby encouraging the development of more inclusive decision-making frameworks and leadership structures as well as endorsing social policies that tackle various manifestations of oppression (Weldon 2006a). In that sense, critical examination of activist practices and organizational structures evolves into creating truly inclusive policies responsive to the diverse needs and experiences of marginalized groups. It also might allow for greater representation and participation from individuals with intersecting identities.

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (2021) offers practical strategies for enhancing greater representation and participation within intersectional feminist solidarity. Their guidance focuses on cultivating inclusive practices and organizational structures to empower collaborative efforts and advance equality for women of all backgrounds. On an individual level, the ways to build intersectional feminist solidarities include critical self-reflection, recognition of bias and naturalized forms of discrimination; being truthful about privileges along the power axes of gender, race, class, culture, age, education, or ability; holding ourselves and others accountable for the way these power dynamics operate in one's everyday life; and building trust among feminists which heavily relies on honesty, transparency, accountability and commitment (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women 2021). On an organizational level, the guide proposes to acknowledge the diversity of feminist analyses and perspectives which would allow for being welcoming to new and differing points of view and let one out of the echo chambers; to find a common ground that would strengthen feminist organizations' capacity to accomplish their differing goals and work for the ultimate goal of achieving equality for all women; to collaborate, co-create and collectivize knowledge through experience

sharing (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women 2021). On the level of feminist organizations, the guide offers to avoid professionalization of feminist activism which would make invisible the varying areas of expertise women would contribute to the movement; to make sure that diversity of women's voices is achieved and marginalized voices' contribution is acknowledged; to build equal relationships based on reciprocity and mutual respect; to encourage intersectional and interdisciplinary work across varying feminist fields and campaigns; and to promote transparent, honest and accountable collaborations (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women 2021).

An example of intersectional feminist solidarity that employs some of the strategies offered by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women is presented by Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin's (2013) ethnographic work on the ways the Asian Immigrant Women's Association (AIWA) implements an intersectional framework. Their work contends that AIWA's adoption of intersectionality is not solely due to having members suffering from racism, sexism, imperialism, class exploitation, and language discrimination. Rather, it emerges from a culmination of women's experiences that enabled the organization to realize the underlying power dynamics as well as to see the need for forming new identities to confront the multifaceted influence of these power relations. For Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin (2013), intersectionality, as a tool of analysis, can be employed strategically in order to "take inventory of differences, to identify potential contradictions and conflicts, and to recognize split and conflicting identities not as obstacles to solidarity" but as valuable indications of unresolved issues and as opportunities to establish new alliances (923). In that sense, AIWA strategically provides women with multiple entry and engagement points at the intersections of their varied and multi-faceted identities, viewing them as tools to be employed in "complicated, flexible, and strategic ways" (Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin 2013, 918).

In the strategic intersectional feminist solidarity framework, AIWA women recognize that their disadvantaged and disempowering identities might also position them at the core of meaningful social transformation. Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin (2013) argue that many women who were involved in this platform realized the fact that "their personal troubles" were in fact "part of larger structures of domination and oppression" (919), highlighting the transformative potential of intersectional solidarity where individual experiences are woven into a collective narrative that challenges and seeks to dismantle oppressive structures. In that sense, an intersectional framework, by bringing up the dominant culture's biases, marginalizations, and doubts, does not lead to fragmentations but rather opens these silenced issues to discussion (Zack 2005). Similarly, in analyzing the transnational gender-based violence

movement, Weldon (2006a) highlights that although this movement has not succeeded in eliminating violence against women, it has been immensely influential in creating global awareness and resource allocation to the issue. For Weldon (2006a), the success of these movements is based on the strategic cultivation of “norms of inclusivity.” Developing these norms provides an important step towards solidarity, shedding light on a method of maintaining solidarity and enhancing policy influence without “denying or sublimating the differences and conflicts among activists” (56).

Despite its transformative power, establishing intersectional feminist solidarities comes with challenges. Alison Bailey (2009) argues that solidarity work consumes a lot of time and is emotionally challenging. Hence, the formation of an effective coalition necessitates achieving a state of balance between the labor invested within one’s ‘home’ groups and within broader coalitions. As ‘home’ can be considered as a nurturing space, contrasting sharply with the demanding task of coalition-building, the conversations taking place after establishing solidarity might be tense, frustrating, and even divisive (Bailey 2009). It is true that an intersectional feminist solidarity will require naming tensions, pains, and anger of the marginalized groups and this experience might result in ending coalitions. Thereby, some of the feminist entities might seek to withdraw to the safety of their “home” before going back to coalition spaces again (Bailey 2009). However, this does not mean that intersectionality brings fragmentation to the feminist movement because it asks for accountability for one’s own prejudices, discrimination, and negligence. On the contrary, according to Bailey (2009), establishing intersectional solidarities aligns harmoniously with episodic divisions of the feminist movement. In fact, it provides a conceptual lexicon to initiate difficult dialogues necessary for the accomplishment of successful solidarities (Bailey 2009). If solidarity is conceptualized as a dynamic process requiring collaboration both within coalitions and “homes,” and if intersectionality is seen as a means of unraveling the conflicts among women that have historically impeded solidarity building, then the application of intersectional tools can be regarded as an indispensable component of building effective solidarities (Bailey 2009).

The challenges and promises of establishing intersectional feminist solidarity are evident in the example of the Women’s March organized against Trump’s presidential inauguration in 2017. Although the march was seen as a success in building worldwide feminist solidarity, it suffered from problems related to intersectionality. Emejulu (2018) highlights the dominant voice of white, middle-class, second-wave feminism in such movements, stating that “from the earliest days of women’s suffrage in the nineteenth century, to the Women’s March in the twenty-first century – a ‘call to sisterhood’ is usually made by and for white, middle-class women” (271). In fact, the initial solidarity acts by both the U.S. and U.K. March organizers silenced the

voices of marginalized women. However, after facing criticisms, organizers took steps to transform the solidarity into a more inclusive one. The London March revised its guiding principles with a new focus on intersectional feminist solidarity while organizers of the march in the U.S. expanded the leadership and policy programs to include the interests of a wider range of women based on race, class, sexuality, disability, and legal status (Emejulu 2018). In that sense, we can argue that organizers employed what Tormos (2017) referred to as “intersectional consciousness,” resulting in a change of policies and organizational structures toward becoming more inclusive and intersectional.

On the other hand, the Global Women’s Strike succeeded in establishing an intersectional feminist solidarity from the very beginning. The strike, organized by the founders of Feminism for 99 Percent on March 8, 2017, had anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist solidarity politics at its center (A. Davis et al. 2017). In that sense, the strike had more of an intersectional and grassroots character, establishing connections between resistance against exploitative capitalism, gender discrimination, and racial bias. It was rooted in the experiences of the most vulnerable populations, especially women of color in the global north and south (A. Davis et al. 2017). Among these differing forms of feminist solidarities, Emejulu (2018) argues that feminists need to challenge exclusionary politics ingrained within their activism, emphasizing that intersectional feminist solidarity cannot be passively assumed but requires relentless advocacy and tangible actions, both at the individual and collective levels (Emejulu 2018). The complexities surrounding intersectional feminist solidarity underscore the ongoing struggle to overcome entrenched biases and exclusions within feminist movements. While initiatives like the Women’s March signify progress towards inclusivity, they also serve as reminders of the continual need for vigilance and activism in the pursuit of genuine intersectional solidarity.

Similar to these two cases of intersectional feminist solidarity, the feminist activism against Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention carried out through online and offline campaigns, stands as a significant act of intersectional feminist solidarity, resonating not only within Turkey but also transnationally. The Istanbul Convention, also known as the Council of Europe Convention, is one of the most comprehensive documents advocating for “a zero-tolerance policy” toward preventing and combatting gender-based violence, holding signatory nations accountable for implementing measures in this regard (Eslen-Ziya 2022, 1738). Although Turkey was one of the first signatories of the convention in 2011, a decade later, upon President Erdoğan’s denouncement of the convention for posing a threat to Turkish society, familial relations, and youth, particularly in its support to LGBTQI+ communities, Turkey withdrew from the agreement on July 1, 2021 (Dinçer 2023).

During ten years when the convention was in effect, more than 15,000 women lost their lives to femicides (Eslen-Ziya 2022). The government was already criticized by various feminist circles for not effectively implementing the requirements of the convention. However, the decision to withdraw has caused widespread outrage among millions of women, as it stripped away one of the most crucial and fundamental legal protections against gender-based violence (Cayli Messina 2022).

This resistance started a wave of online and offline intersectional feminist solidarities, as countless women united on social media platforms under the hashtag #istanbulsozlesmesiyasatir (#istanbulconventionsaveslives) (Cayli Messina 2022). Simultaneously, women took to the streets all around Turkey with their placards saying, “We will not give up on the Istanbul Convention!” (Evrensel 2021). Digital feminist counterpublics formed around the issue launched online campaigns with this hashtag while various feminist groups started street demonstrations all around Turkey. These grassroots efforts also received transnational feminist support with solidarity messages from countries like Spain and Sweden, as well as from international organizations such as the European Women’s Lobby and Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) (“İstanbul Sözleşmesi Kararına Karşı Ulus-Aşırı Dayanışma” 2021). The continuum of feminist activism through online and offline spaces brought together individual feminists, feminist groups, and LGBTQI+ communities from Turkey and beyond, fostering intersectional feminist solidarity. At its core was a shared commitment to resisting the loss of one of the most critical documents in the struggle against gender-based violence, where the Istanbul Convention saved lives.

All in all, the discourse on feminist solidarity has evolved significantly while being propelled by the need to recognize an intersectional framework. The integration of intersectionality into the discourse has proven instrumental, highlighting the need to recognize diverse positionalities and power imbalances within feminist movements. The intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and geographical location, all emerged as crucial considerations in the search for inclusive and transformative solidarities. Despite the complexities and challenges of building intersectional feminist solidarities, its transformative potential lies in a commitment to foster alliances across differences while addressing the inequalities and injustices faced by women. As this chapter reveals, as we navigate the intricate web of intersecting power imbalances, the commitment to this nuanced understanding of transformative feminist solidarity serves as a guideway for a more inclusive and intersectional future.

5.6 Feminist Solidarity as Continuum: The Case of Susma Bitsin

“For me, solidarity is two people sharing what they need and what someone else needs. It is instinctively thinking not about yourself but about the other side. When that happens, I think it is solidarity. You do not need to experience the same things, you can also empathize, or I don’t know. You can do it by thinking about them. Whatever you can do. It can be something very simple. Even with a word, you can communicate with that person and show solidarity with that person. That’s how I define solidarity.” (Merve)

One of my interviewees, Merve, provided a profound perspective on solidarity that resonates with Sandra Bartky’s (2002) concepts of “emotional infection” and “fellow-feeling.” She emphasized the importance of considering each other’s experiences and finding a common ground for solidarity, aligning with Bartky’s idea that solidarity involves actively working to eliminate the misery of others rather than merely sharing their circumstances. In my fieldwork, these notions of empathizing with other’s miseries and being emotionally infected with the power of feminist struggle have emerged as a significant affective force driving feminist solidarity practices, particularly in the field of cultural production.

One prominent manifestation of feminist solidarity in response to the #MeToo movement in Turkey is the formation of the Susma Bitsin Platform. This independent feminist solidarity network actively works towards ending every form of gender-based violence and stands as one of the solid outcomes of Turkey’s #MeToo moment. Operating both online and offline, the platform continues to play a significant role in feminist activism carried out against sexual harassment and assault in the fields of film, television, and theater. Being organized on feminist principles of collective decision-making with a non-hierarchical flexible structure, this platform has turned into an important feminist solidarity network in Turkey with the participation of more than 300 members working and studying in the field of cinema, television, and theater. Its formation was deeply inspired by the courage of two young women; actress Elit İşcan, and a 19-year-old costume assistant in a TV series, who disclosed their experience of sexual harassment publicly through social media. Certainly, awareness and awakening brought by the #MeToo Movement affected these women to take action and speak out. The “emotional infection,” as Bartky (2002) noted, experienced by feminists in the field played a pivotal role in the platform’s formation. Members expressed that they felt “being pushed by the back” to take a position in

response to these recent disclosures, exemplifying a fellow-feeling aimed at sharing and ending each other's miseries.

This feeling of 'being pushed by the back' can be further analyzed through Clare Hemming's concept of affective dissonance. Hemmings (2012) points to an epistemological and ontological discrepancy between one's sense of self and the way the world judges that self, resulting in affective dissonance on the part of the subject. Paradoxically, this dissonance has the potential to forge affective solidarity networks. My interviewee Hande expressed her experience of affective dissonance in the film industry's approach to and handling sexual harassment over the years. Reflecting on the period before #MeToo, she recalled incidents about Weinstein's abuses dating back to 2000 when Brad Pitt confronted Weinstein for harassing Gwyneth Paltrow (Miller 2017). Expressing her astonishment at the industry's silence on that matter, she highlighted the prevalent issue of silence within the sector, even recalling notorious cases of violence against women in Turkey's cinema since the 1960s, such as Yılmaz Güney's case. However, she admitted that, until the #MeToo movement, she never expected women to openly address these issues publicly. For a long time, she was aware of this "eerie" feeling, coupled with her frustration about the industry's silence regarding the cases of sexual harassment and violence. This affective dissonance brought her critical questioning and an alternative worldview. The wave of women speaking out about their experiences, fueled by women's experiences of affective dissonance, led women to get involved in the solidarity network of the Susma Bitsin Platform. This platform is organized around the shared feelings of frustration and disappointment with the prevailing silences and injustices concerning sexual harassment in the film industry. Following the platform's call for an initial meeting to discuss women's feelings of dissonance about recent disclosures, approximately 150 women responded, sowing the seeds of an affective solidarity platform.

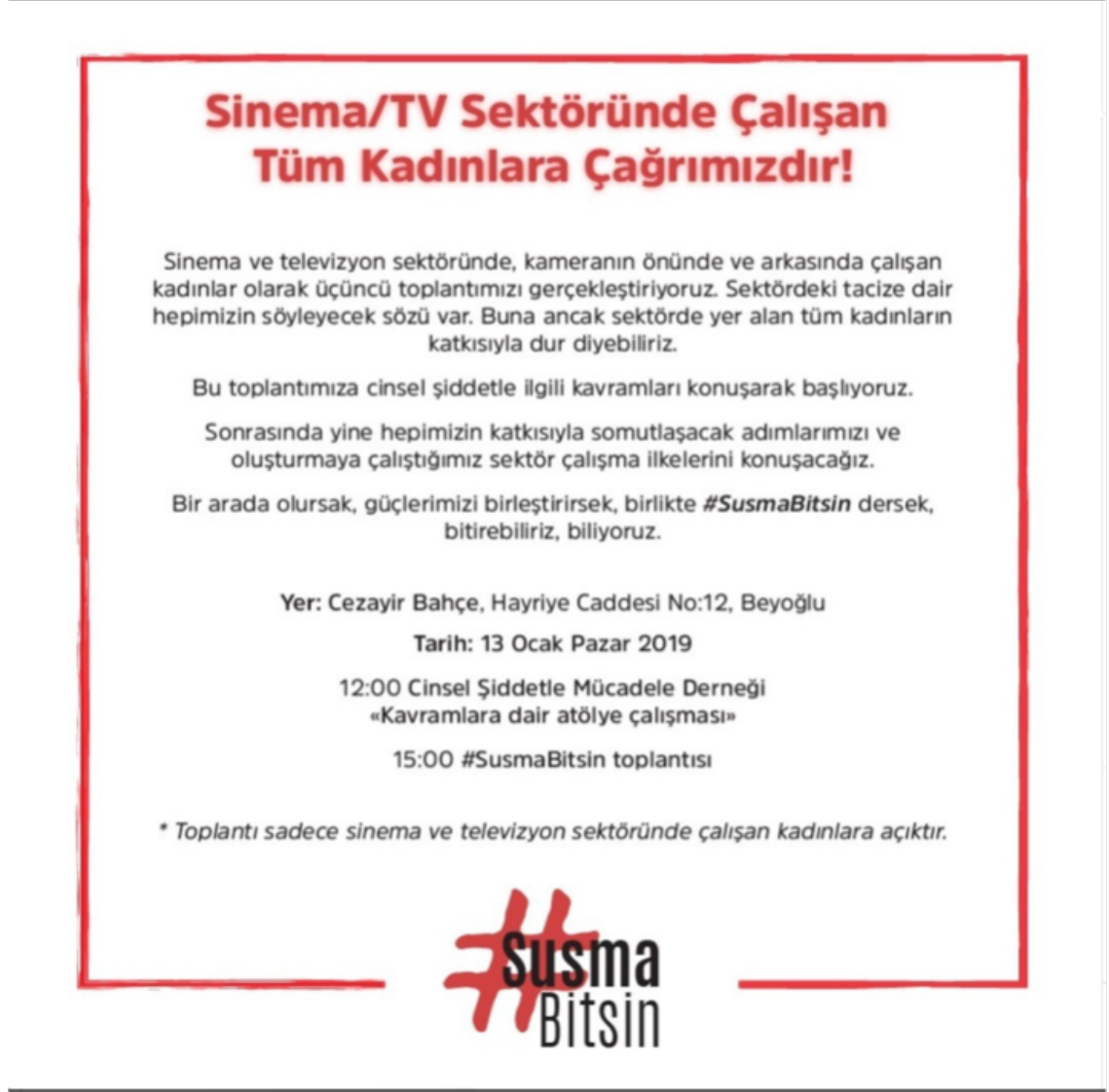
In the following section, I analyze the solidarity practices of the Susma Bitsin Platform, which expanded across multiple levels through the continuum of online and offline domains. Also, different aspects of solidarity intersected in different contexts, allowing us to see the concept of solidarity as a continuum. Hence, I examine these practices on two distinct levels: on the level of solidarity with survivors and among platform members, and on the level of solidarity with organizations and platforms active in the fields of cinema, television, and theater.

5.6.1 Searching for Intersectionality: Overcoming Blind-spots and Eliminating Exclusions

Since its inception, Susma Bitsin has actively tried to establish an intersectional common ground for its feminist solidarity politics. Susma Bitsin characterizes itself as a women-only platform, welcoming the participation of women working and studying in the film, television, and theater industries. In an interview conducted in its initial years, Susma Bitsin explained the reasons for not including men in the platform. They mentioned that, during closed meetings, participants often shared personal and sensitive experiences and they were at a point where they “poured out their souls,” hence the presence of men might compromise the sense of safety and comfort required for such disclosures. However, they acknowledge that this is a possibility in the future (Aytaç 2019). Despite the platform’s concerns for intersectional feminist politics, leaving out men from this solidarity was a tactical choice for fostering trust and feelings of safety within the group.

The pursuit of an intersectional framework is most evident in the digital activist practices of the platform. This intersectionality is particularly visible in two types of social media posts: invitations to closed meetings, and solidarity messages with survivors of sexual harassment. A closer look at the calls for closed meetings made through the platform’s social media accounts reveals the evolution towards a more intersectional common ground for solidarity among its members. In the first Instagram post on December 30, 2018, the platform invited all women working both behind the scenes and in front of the camera in the film and television industries to join their closed meetings (See Figure 5.1). This inclusive approach encompassed women from various ranks in the sector, from producers to production assistants, from well-known actresses to early-career ones. However, it was not until the end of 2019 that the group decided to explicitly include the theater industry in its social media posts, realizing its previous exclusions in this struggle. Even with this expanded scope, the platform still fell short of being fully intersectional, as it was leaving out the students studying in these fields, who had not yet entered professional life and occupied the most precarious positions.

Figure 5.1 The first Instagram post of the Susma Bitsin Platform to call out to women



In another Instagram post dated November 29, 2020, the platform reflected a more inclusive stance. The post read: “As women who have worked, continue to work, do internships and study in the field of cinema, television, and theater, we continue our online meetings” (See Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 The Instagram post of the Susma Bitsin Platform and its inclusive call for closed meetings

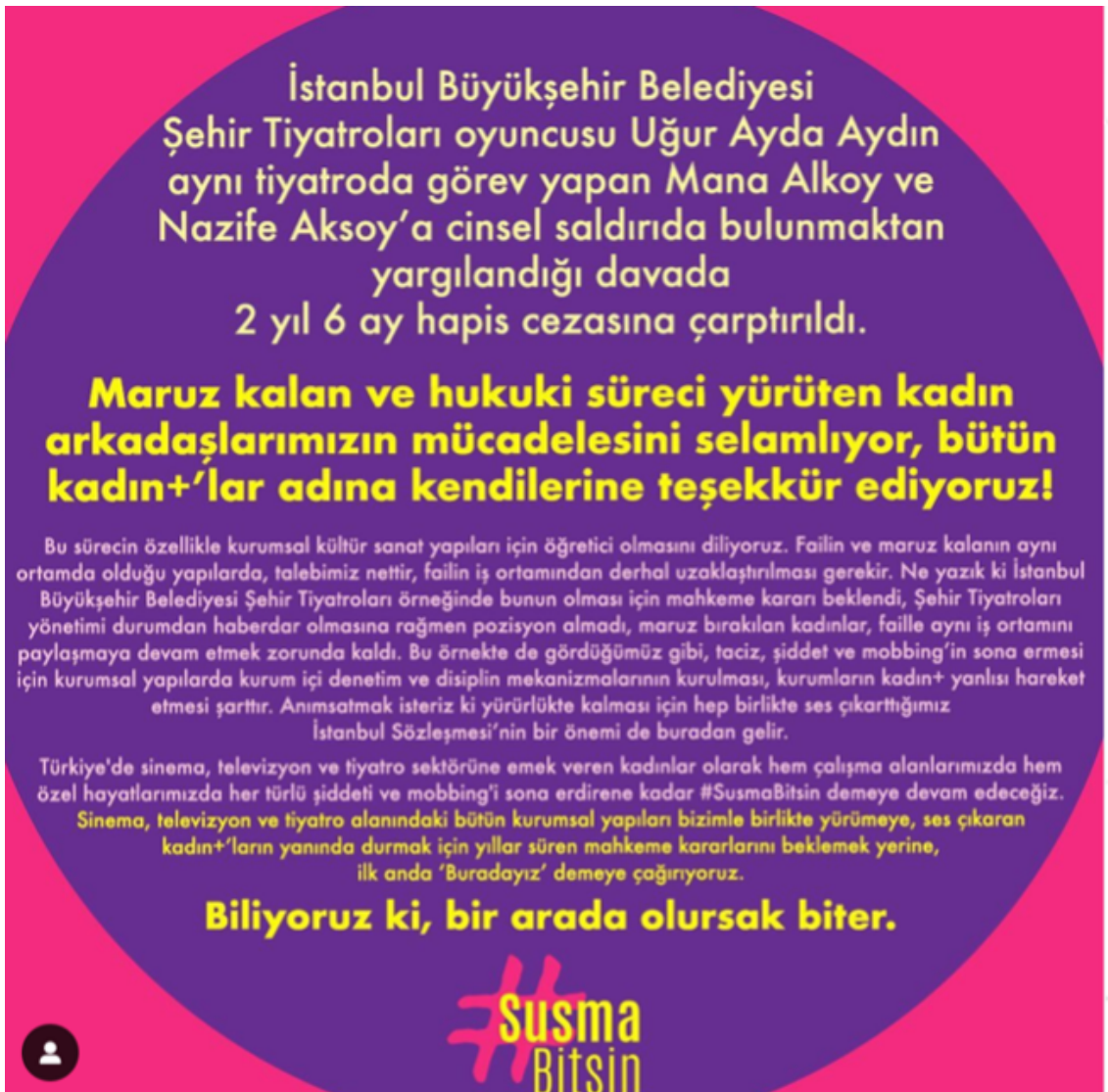


This gradual realization of the exclusions and subsequent efforts to eliminate them while striving to include diverse voices align with Jodi Dean's concept of "reflective solidarity." This analysis shows that Susma Bitsin's openness created a space for accountability, fostering awareness of its exclusions and the need to take responsibility for addressing them. As a result, the platform took action to create the collective "we" Dean (1996) emphasized. This is not to say that reflective solidarity practices always succeed in including all marginalized voices and experiences but they provide a window into deliberate exclusions and blind spots. In Susma Bitsin's case, this reflective window led to critical questionings that contributed to the development of a more intersectional feminist solidarity network it sought to create.

In addition to solidarity among members, the platform simultaneously emphasized

solidarity with survivors of gender-based violence and discrimination through its social media messages. From the outset, the platform made it clear that they stand side-by-side with women and LGBTQI+ people. In these posts, survivors' cases are detailed, followed by concluding solidarity messages such as “We will speak up until all forms of violence against women and LGBTQI+ people on our sets, stages, and studios are ended.” Notably, in an Instagram post on September 23, 2021, expressing solidarity with Nazife Aksoy's case, where she won the lawsuit against the perpetrator Uğur Arda Aydın, the platform used “women+” and invited all the institutions in the film, television, and theater industry to stand in solidarity with women+ who do not stay silent against all forms of gender-based violence and mobbing (See Figure 5.3). However, the platform rarely chose to use “women+” in the following posts, instead consistently delivered a clear message of standing in solidarity with all women and LGBTQI+ people in their struggle.

Figure 5.3 Instagram post of the Susma Bitsin Platform using “women+”



Considering these feminist activist practices along the continuum of online and offline spheres, I argue that the attempts of the Susma Bitsin Platform to create an inclusive space for solidarity with subjects marginalized through the intersections of gender, class, and sexual orientation as well as via the hierarchical structure of the industry is a unique aspect of the platform. However, despite its search for inclusivity, Susma Bitsin Platform also strategically chooses to create exclusions when standing in solidarity with organizations, platforms, and groups outside the industry. The platform is a sector-specific solidarity network and collaborates particularly with organizations from its own field. This strategic choice stems from the lessons feminists have learned from their experiences. Regarding this strategic decision, Şehkar explained:

“The reason for this choice lies in the unique characteristics inherent in each field as it is challenging for us to be familiar with the varying dynamics of different fields. If we include other fields, this would also prevent us from developing necessary support mechanisms to struggle against sexual harassment in our own field.”

This necessity to exclude other fields also became more obvious during the peak of Turkey’s #Metoo movement when a series of perpetrators from the field of literature was disclosed online. In response to the flood of survivors sharing their sexual harassment stories online, an e-mail account uykularinkacsin@gmail.com was created to collect women’s stories. Although opening such an account was an initial reaction to create a mechanism to stand in solidarity with the survivors, as the address received more than 300 emails in a very short time, a group of women who managed the account found themselves at an impasse. Their solution was to categorize e-mails and direct them to groups or platforms active in their relevant fields. With these concerns in mind, Susma Bitsin limited its scope of work and solidarity practices to the industries they knew the best.

5.6.2 Solidarity Campaigns with the Survivors

The Susma Bitsin Platform demonstrated its commitment to supporting survivors of sexual harassment by launching effective digital campaigns in response to public disclosures. These campaigns, often initiated in the form of hashtags and press releases, were disseminated across various social media platforms, including Instagram and Twitter. The digital feminist counterpublic the platform created aimed to amplify the visibility of each case and express solidarity with survivors through the power of

hashtags. In this way, the platform was able to open the “parallel discursive arenas” Fraser (1990) underlined, releasing the counter-narratives to the mainstream interpretations of sexual harassment and assault. In this discursive space, each campaign typically revolved around a specific hashtag, often incorporating the name of the survivor followed by a message of support. For instance, the hashtags such as #ElitİşcanınYanındayız (#WeStoodByElitİşcan) or #İlayArıkanınYanındayız (#WeStoodByİlayArıkan) were utilized to form digital feminist counterpublics in support of survivors to convey solidarity messages with them. In that sense, these hashtags served not only to raise awareness about the issue of sexual harassment but also to deliver messages of solidarity and defiance against the sexist system that perpetuates such behavior (See Figure 5.4.).

Figure 5.4 Instagram posts of the Susma Bitsin Platform supporting Elit İşcan and İlay Arıkan



Particularly, Elit İşcan’s case has been one of the most influential online solidarity campaigns Susma Bitsin has carried out. Susma Bitsin actively utilized its Instagram and Twitter accounts to support Elit İşcan, with a significant portion of its posts dedicated to her case where out of its 185 Instagram posts, 13 were created in support of Elit İşcan as of September 2024. Additionally, the platform shared two awareness-raising videos on Instagram, garnering over 9000 views, to not only show solidarity with Elit İşcan but also to raise awareness about sexual harassment, mobbing, misogyny, and other forms of violence in the industry. Digital feminist counterpublics formed on Twitter both posted original tweets in support of the case and amplified its visibility by retweeting solidarity messages from individuals and organizations supporting the cause, reaching an even wider audience. In addition to digital feminist counterpublics, the platform also organized offline solidarity cam-

paigns in support of Elit İscan. While inviting women to support Elit's case through social media posts, the members of the platform at the same time attended every trial physically, showing tangible support for her throughout the legal process. In the aftermath of these trials, they prepared press releases and shared them with the mainstream media. As this analysis reveals, feminist activist practices employed along the continuum of online and offline spheres have been effective in fostering effective feminist solidarity networks, which in turn played a crucial role in empowering the feminist struggle against sexual harassment.

Not only the continuum of solidarity spanning online and offline spheres but also its intersections with the continuum of solidarity between survivors and the Susma Bitsin Platform is also an important aspect this study reveals. Elit İscan's case is exemplary of how these continuums intersect. Elit, despite ultimately losing the case, remained an active member of the platform and continued to stand in solidarity with other survivors who shared their traumatic experiences within the platform or publicly. My interviewee Yeliz described Elit as one of the "heroines of this story," emphasizing her unwavering support for survivors both through digital activism and physical presence, despite facing her own trauma. The online and offline activism carried out by Susma Bitsin, alongside İscan's personal efforts, transformed Elit İscan's case into a symbol of the #MeToo movement in Turkey in the field of cultural production.

Following the final decision of the case, Susma Bitsin posted a tweet capturing the moment when the perpetrator, Efecan Şenolsun, burst into tears upon his acquittal (See Figure 5.5.). The tweet posted by Susma Bitsin, stating "We are familiar with men crying in their suits" reflected a sentiment of frustration and defiance towards the sentence reductions granted to perpetrators, especially when they wear suits during court proceedings. This tweet, along with subsequent posts and tweets from the platform, conveyed a message of anger and resistance against the sexist justice system. The platform members, experiencing affective dissonance, turned such frustration into an affective solidarity surrounding Elit.

Figure 5.5 Susma Bitsin's Tweet in support of Elit İşcan after the acquittal of Efcan Şenolsun



The frustration that arose from Elit's struggle stemmed not only from the legal response and public reactions but also from the defense put forth by Şenolsun's lawyer, Nail Gönenli. Drawing parallels with Anita Hill's case, Elit İşcan faced criticism and victim-blaming where some individuals trivialized her allegations, suggesting that she was making too much of a kiss, or blamed her for potentially tarnishing the career of an "innocent" young man who may have acted out of drunkenness. Gönenli's defense statement, implying that non-consensual acts such as kissing were acceptable within the context of acting (Çelik 2021), perpetuated misogynistic stereotypes and minimized the severity of harassment experienced by Elit İşcan. Because Elit was taking part in similar scenes, a non-consensual kiss should not be a problem for her.

Through Elit's case, I argue that while it is important to focus on continuums of solidarity fostered through online and offline strategies as an empowering feminist activist practice, it is equally vital to acknowledge the continuums of oppressive and marginalizing patterns that perpetrate violence against women. When we become aware of these intersecting continuums of patterns, it also becomes possible to see the ruptures. Elit İşcan's case, stemming from a non-consensual kiss, serves as a

rupture, disrupting the continuums of victim-blaming narratives and trivialization of survivors' experiences. This rupture has opened what Papacharissi and Trevey (2018) refer to as “a window of opportunity,” inspiring many more women to stand in solidarity under the hashtag #susmabitsin. By refusing to accept harassment as “normal” or “excusable” behavior, Elit İşcan empowered many other women to demand accountability and challenge the prevailing culture of silence surrounding sexual harassment within the industry. I argue that these cracks are the places where the seeds of change can grow.

Increasing the visibility of the cases by standing in solidarity with people not only in front of the screen but also behind the scenes has also been an effective strategy of the platform. Susma Bitsin claims to support women's struggles from all levels of the sector and hence proposes a clear intersectional framework for its activism. However, it is usually women behind the scenes working in more precarious positions that need support the most. Although #MeToo started with celebrity figures, it is now possible to talk about the struggle of women not only in front of the camera but also behind the scenes via online activism as well as the years-long feminist awareness-raising created about sexual harassment. My interviewee Ceylan noted:

“Elit İşcan was a quite famous person due to being an actress with national and international nominations, hence the visibility of her case and the impact it created was quite expected. Similarly, Nazife was in a kind of privileged position. And yet, İlay Arıkan's case, a film editor who works behind the scenes, also received significant support and gained visibility via the online and offline acts of solidarity carried out by both syndicates and the Susma Bitsin Platform.”

In İlay's case, she first applied to Sinema TV Sendikası and then was directed to the Susma Bitsin Platform. After her contacts with both platforms, an effective online campaign was started in support of her. The digital feminist counterpublics created on social media started to utilize Instagram and Twitter to stand in solidarity with İlay from the very beginning of her case through the final decision. Susma Bitsin members also stood in solidarity with İlay not only through the digital feminist counterpublics created but also through their physical support such as by attending trials, preparing press releases, and providing the care she needed. In an interview, İlay emphasized the importance of being called by Elit İşcan during her trial which gave her the power to struggle (Gökırmaklı 2021). My interviewee Ada emphasized that it was usually women who had gone through the same trial processes usually attended the trials for support. In this way, women with similar experiences come together and share their own experiences, which then turns into an empowering

solidarity network for everyone involved. This continuum of online and offline support mechanisms created by Susma Bitsin has been one of the most distinguishing aspects of the solidarity network created by Susma Bitsin. By combining social media campaigns with physical presence at trials, the platform has built a powerful network of intersectional feminist solidarity that offered both virtual and real-world support to survivors of sexual harassment.

However, although the platform claims an intersectional approach that is open to all women from all positions in the sector to provide the support they need, the issue of whose voice is being heard has sparked discussions among the members, reflecting the complexities of navigating intersectionality. My interviewee Merve emphasized that in some of the closed meetings she attended and in the WhatsApp group, there were some arguments about how to decide on which case to support and what were the criteria for deciding to carry out a social media campaign for that particular case. Additionally, Susma Bitsin members not only experienced conflicts about giving priority to which case but also were confused about what to do with the perpetrators who were close friends of the members. Figen said:

“Although ‘women’s statement is essential’ has been the motto of the group, when a perpetrator, a close friend of some group members, was disclosed, this was a complicated issue for many, and not everyone reacted the same way. Hence, this led to conflicts among the group members. Yet, in Susma Bitsin, people know that they will not be judged in this group and it is through dialogue that the problems can be solved, and I believe, this is a unique aspect of the platform.”

Similar to Figen, Ayça underlined:

“Susma Bitsin is not a conflict-free group. There were some serious cases actually. However, these conflicts could quickly be overcome because Susma Bitsin is a very transparent, honest, and open space. The problems are discussed, talked about, and then resolved.”

As emphasized by Figen and Ayça, Susma Bitsin is certainly not a conflict-free group and yet through the non-judgmental, transparent, and democratic space it aims to create, people are able to openly express their ideas. In this way, it creates an empowering space for its members to speak up to end sexual harassment, misogyny, mobbing, and any form of gender-based violence, disrupting the continuum of patterns that oppress and marginalize women.

5.6.3 Fostering Solidarities with Organizations and Platforms

Susma Bitsin Platform co-creates and collectivizes feminist knowledge through experience sharing and one of the most important ways to share experiences is through collaborations established with organizations and groups within the industry. The platform acts in solidarity with two prominent syndicates: Oyuncular Sendikası (Actor's Union of Turkey) and Sinema TV Sendikası (Union of Cinema and Television). It also collaborates with platforms that emerged after #Metoo, including Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu (Women in Performing Arts), and Sahne Sanatları Öğrencileri Dayanışma Platformu (Solidarity of Performing Arts Students). Importantly, women from these organizations also participate as members of the Susma Bitsin Platform, fostering what Özge terms “an organic bond” among these entities. She notes:

“I call this relationship ‘forming bridges.’ Without such bridges, Susma Bitsin would need to initiate contact with syndicates or groups, invite them to collaborate, wait for their response, and then establish the collaboration. This would take a long time. But by working hand-in-hand, both the platform and the syndicates mobilize efficiently without the need for intermediators. Women working on both sides quickly form the necessary connections and this increases the impact of our activism.”

All my interviewees emphasized the importance of this alliance in organizing online and offline solidarity actions and providing support mechanisms. Yeliz resembled this relationship to “a marriage of the syndicate and the platform.” The “marriage” of different entities of the industry, which I described as the continuum of solidarity practices among different entities of the industry, turns out to be an empowering mechanism in the struggle against sexual harassment and assault. What's more, this continuum of solidarity also intersects with the continuum of online and offline activist practices carried out by all parties, which also enhances the impact of the struggle against sexual harassment.

One example of this multilayered continuum is the solidarity formed with Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu, a platform organized in the field of theater and founded by women some of whom are also a member of the Susma Bitsin Platform. Although Susma Bitsin included the field of theater in its struggle against harassment after a while, the group realized that power dynamics within theater were also very different from film industry. Women feeling this difference felt the need to found their own solidarity group and formed Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu as a solidarity network involving women working and studying in the field of theater. As the dy-

namics of this field were more complicated, some of the members started to question their involvement in the Susma Bitsin Platform. This questioning intensified during the disclosure of a renowned stage actor by an anonymous survivor on social media, leading to resignations from the institution. After this incident, Merve expressed her concern as follows:

“At some point, I started to think that being a part of Susma Bitsin was a mistake, It was as if we, women involved in the theater industry, were smothering Susma Bitsin’s world in smoke, over tea! After this feeling, I decided to be more active in Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu and distanced myself from Susma Bitsin.”

Nevertheless, both platforms continued to stand in solidarity when needed, demonstrating the effectiveness of the bridges built between them.

As I emphasized before, Susma Bitsin has a unique intersectional organizational structure that is open to all women working and studying in the cinema, television, and theater industries, providing them with multiple entry and engagement points. Simultaneously, it welcomes all the stakeholders of the industry under its umbrella, facilitating the immediate organization of online and offline activist practices against sexual harassment and any kind of rights violations. This flexibility addresses a significant challenge faced by institutional structures like syndicates, which must adhere to stringent procedures and legal constraints. Since a syndicate is bound by its legislation, it has to follow the procedures before it can post anything on social media or take action in any case of sexual harassment. Both Yeliz and Ceylan emphasized that the syndicates are defending workers’ rights and in order for these institutions to mobilize in a case, both the perpetrator and the survivor must be syndicate members. My interviewees underlined that the condition for becoming a member of the syndicate is to pay the membership fee. Yet, even collecting this symbolic amount from its members could sometimes be difficult. Also, syndicates face bureaucratic hurdles, requiring consultation with lawyers and adherence to legal procedures before making a public statement. Only after these procedures are complete, they can post a message on social media or give a press release to stand in solidarity with the survivor. These constraints often lead to criticisms for their perceived inaction in harassment or violence cases. Regarding these criticisms, Yeliz expressed:

“The solidarity among Susma Bitsin, Oyuncular Sendikası, and Sinema TV Sendikası serves as a vital complementary support mechanism, filling

the gaps created by bureaucratic impediments. When syndicates face challenges in providing immediate offline or online reactions, they turn to Susma Bitsin for support.”

Unlike the bureaucratic obstacles of unions, Susma Bitsin, as an independent platform, can immediately respond to the cases to increase their visibility and react against injustices experienced by the survivors. This continuum of online and offline collaboration among different parties of the industry has been an empowering solidarity practice for all. Ceylan emphasized the importance of this support mechanism by pointing out that the two entities complement each other very well, compensating for the inadequacies of each entity. Similarly, Yeliz also underlined:

“Susma Bitsin Platform could understand the limits and strengths of being a syndicate and acted as a complementary party in many instances. This has led both Oyuncular Sendikası and Sinema TV Sendikası to improve their failings with regard to mobilizing and providing support to survivors of sexual harassment.”

As a result of these interactions, syndicates started to improve their failings by establishing new struggle mechanisms within their own bodies. Hence, another empowering aspect of this solidarity was the establishment of gender units, drafting gender policy documents or publishing institutional gender manifestos. A solid example of this improvement is the women’s studies unit established within the body of Oyuncular Sendikası. The syndicate also drafted a policy document titled “Policy on Combatting Violence and Harassment against Women,” which serves as vital support mechanisms for the survivors of sexual harassment.

Susma Bitsin also turns to the syndicates when they need a more institutional response to survivor’s cases. Since Susma Bitsin lacks a legal presence and power to impose legal or disciplinary sanctions for the perpetrators, the group consults the syndicates to provide support for the survivors. Syndicates can take solid action within their own body regarding sexual harassment cases. What’s more, syndicates, as legal entities, can request to intervene in the survivors’ lawsuits, which creates an empowering support mechanism for the survivors as well. Therefore, the presence of a syndicate in a courtroom along with Susma Bitsin members makes survivors feel strong and supported while the digital activism carried out on social media by Susma Bitsin increases the visibility of the case, forming alternative discursive spaces which are not easy for a syndicate to open. Considering this complementary form of feminist activism, I argue that this continuum of solidarity among different

actors in the field is empowering not only for each party involved but also for the collective struggle against sexual harassment in general.

Another important act of solidarity is between Susma Bitsin and student platforms, particularly Sahne Sanatları Öğrencileri Dayanışma Platformu, formed by students studying performing arts. The awareness-raising and experience-sharing in Susma Bitsin's closed meetings spurred students to organize, form their own platforms, and implement their own projects. In my conversation with Ada, she described how students, previously organized through WhatsApp groups to stand in solidarity with Boğaziçi University's resistance against the appointed rectorate, started to question their own fields after their involvement with Susma Bitsin Platform and the online disclosure of a renowned stage actor from the field of theater. Ada expressed her disillusionment with this case as she believed that the institution was a unique place where every student studying theater would want to join. Hence, another instance of affective dissonance experienced by students triggered critical reflections on theater pedagogy, leading to the formation of an affective solidarity network among students. After their questionings, these students initially decided to hold awareness-raising meetings on the issues of gender, intimacy direction, and border violations in performing arts education, which they realized that they did not know much about.

These interconnected practices of solidarity were like spiderwebs where one act of solidarity seamlessly transitioned into another, showcasing solidarity as a continuum. The students' solidarity groups in performing arts also created their own solidarity networks with different stakeholders in the field. Sahne Sanatları Öğrencileri Dayanışma Platformu collaborated with Oyuncular Sendikası for educational purposes and received some financial support while the syndicate contacted Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu to provide necessary training for the group. Yeliz called the syndicate's solidarity with the students as her "honorary struggle" as she believed in the importance of creating awareness among performing arts students on the issues of gender equality and sexual harassment, and particularly on the issue of intimacy direction and border violation in theater pedagogy. In order to work on these issues, syndicate members participated in a training on intimacy direction organized by Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu. Yeliz mentioned that her aim was to establish principles on these issues applicable to all fields of performing arts. In addition to these solidarity practices, Oyuncular Sendikası made the student platform a partner to the syndicate and bought them a Zoom account for their meetings. Then, this multi-layered solidarity network evolved into a student project titled "Border Violation in Performing Arts Pedagogy." Regarding the course of the project, Ada said:

“Our initial awareness-raising meetings were aimed at learning more about gender equality, sexual harassment, and border violations in performing arts. Therefore, we also contacted Susma Bitsin to suggest some people to give these trainings. And we invited Ebru Nihan Celkan and Efsun Sertoğlu upon Susma Bitsin’s recommendation. Ebru and Efsun volunteered to give these seminars, as an act of solidarity. We learned a lot during these meetings.”

At the end of the project, the students published a manifesto on their social media accounts with the hashtag #sahnehemiz (#thetheatreisours). This manifesto emphasized the importance of creating a safe and gender-equal stage and education for everyone, rooted in student’s consent and open communication. Ada highlighted that these meetings triggered gender-related reflections among many students, drawing them into the platform. Together, they collaboratively crafted their demands into a manifesto, aiming to increase its visibility via social media activism and by participating in physical meetings.

Aside from these acts of solidarity among different entities of the industry, the Susma Bitsin Platform also participated in solidarity campaigns organized by the initiative #FreeÇiğdemMater, which was established upon the arrest of one of the founding members of the Susma Bitsin Platform. Mater was sentenced to 18 years for a movie she did not shoot about the Gezi Park Protests (Bianet 2022) and this injustice resonated with many platforms within and outside the film industry. Susma Bitsin not only joined various online campaigns, such as “#2000gün1yıl için #SesÇıkar” (#SpeakOut for #2000days1year), aimed at raising awareness about the wrongful imprisonment of Çiğdem Mater’s and other Gezi Park Protest prisoners, Mücella Yapıcı and Mine Özerden but also became a part of the justice vigils carried out in support of all detainees of the Gezi Park Protests, advocating for the freedom of every individual unjustly imprisoned (See Figure 5.6). These online and offline solidarity campaigns were important in revealing the intersectional character of the platform. The platform carried out campaigns on a continuum that spans online and offline spaces but also extended its solidarity to survivors of state violence. They have become a part of a greater solidarity network that stood in solidarity with the survivors whom the justice system failed in another way. The continuums of online and offline activism intersected with the continuums of different forms of injustices people face, and all these patterns then intersected under the umbrella of feminist solidarity, aiming to speak out for all.

In this chapter, I analyzed the intersecting continuums of solidarity, taking place at different levels in different contexts. I argued that one form of solidarity intersects with other forms in different contexts, or operates simultaneously on multiple

levels, showcasing solidarity as intersecting continuums. Susma Bitsin's formation as a solidarity network with survivors of sexual harassment is not only influenced by Bartky's concept of "emotional infection" but also by Hemmings' notion of "affective dissonance," which contributes to the formation of "affective solidarities." Via the continuous attempts to become aware of its blind spots through the lens of Dean's reflective solidarity, Susma Bitsin Platform engages in critical self-reflection and acknowledges its limitations, striving to evolve and become more responsive to intersectional feminist politics. This reflective and intersectional stance underscores a commitment to inclusivity, yet, at the expense of some strategic exclusions.

Figure 5.6 Campaigns organized in support of Çiğdem Mater and other Gezi Movement prisoners



Additionally, solidarity practices as intersecting continuums taking place on different levels and among different constituents of the film, television, and theater industries have been empowering not only for survivors of sexual harassment, for members of the platform, and for various entities of the field but also for the struggle against sexual harassment in general. Yeliz resembled this continuum of solidarity among women to "a deep state," where women immediately organize in response to injustices through their "deep feminist solidarity networks." She views these deep networks as akin to the suffragettes of the first wave, considering them exceptionally significant. She also added that she is fascinated by the collective power of these women and the potentialities of feminist solidarity when activists "flare up the Twitter." She describes the process by saying:

"When there is a case, someone sends an e-mail and we say, 'Come on girls, let's the blow it!' and then we put Twitter into ablaze. I like that

very much. It is not me personally, but this horizontal and collective effort that feels so good. That's why we said, solidarity plays the leading role, so we took the road."

Solidarity played the leading role, so I followed. Ultimately, this deep network of feminist solidarity mobilized swiftly in response to injustices, demonstrating the collective power of feminist activism. In the next chapter, I will be analyzing how this intersectional feminist solidarity network has played a critical role in the struggle against sexual harassment and in supporting the survivors through the supporting mechanisms it has developed through the continuum of online and offline spaces.

6. PERSONAL AS POLITICAL AND DIGITAL: ONLINE DISCLOSURES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Turkey's #MeToo movement, as was the case globally, became most visible when women collectively called out their experiences of sexual harassment by harnessing the power of the digital. After the disclosure of Hasan Ali Toptaş on Twitter by multiple survivors, which was then followed by disclosures of more perpetrators from different fields, the issue of disclosing experiences of sexual harassment online has re-entered feminist conversations as a controversial topic. Subsequently, different feminist groups organized online meetings to deliberate on the efficacy of disclosing perpetrators as a feminist strategy for pursuing informal justice. I attended as many of these meetings as possible, eventually leading me to dedicate one of my chapters to this subject. In this chapter, I conceptualize women's online disclosures as a kind of tipping moment in the struggle against sexual harassment in Turkey. I argue that by disclosing their stories online, survivors of sexual harassment shattered the continuum of silence.

Sara Ahmed (2017) identifies these breaking moments experienced in life as "feminist snap" where feminists reject the established power dynamics to express their dissent. Feminists snap because they are not willing to put up with something that bothers them anymore, something that accumulated over time, "an accumulated effect" of what they resisted (Ahmed 2017, 199). Hence, snap represents a singular moment within a broader narrative of being influenced by the challenges one encounters over time. In this context, feminist history is characterized by the voices of "snappy women," whose sharp and forceful speech serves as a means of asserting resistance and demanding recognition (Ahmed, 2017). Ahmed (2017) herself identifies her leave of academia as a feminist snap, driven by the insurmountable obstacles and lack of support in her struggle against sexual harassment within university settings. This feminist protest was snapping by saying that she would not be a part of an institution that does not handle the problem of sexual harassment seriously.

When feminists reach a breaking point and can no longer endure, the snap serves

as a catalyst for bringing underlying issues to the surface, transforming abstract grievances into tangible realities that demand immediate attention. As Ahmed (2017) argues, this moment of snap represents a refusal to patiently endure unjust situations, instead calling for collective impatience and urgent action to address systemic inequalities. Ahmed (2017) perceives feminist snap as a method for disseminating knowledge and challenging existing understandings, allowing it to raise awareness and challenge the status quo. She posits that “if pressure is an action, snap is a reaction,” reflecting the urgency and necessity of feminist resistance (Ahmed 2017, 189). In this chapter, I frame disclosures of sexual harassment as instances of feminist snaps, characterized by sharp sounds, sudden breaks, and affective breaking points. I reveal how disclosures as feminist snaps reflect women’s collective impatience with injustices and inequalities perpetuated by systems that have long failed women’s demands for an equal and just world, creating the ruptures in the continuums of silencing narratives and marginalizing systems.

To achieve this, I start with an examination of the continuum of feminist practices of consciousness-raising and speak-outs from the second-wave into the online platforms. An analysis of the call-out culture created by survivors reveals the dual nature of disclosures as both an empowering feminist tool and a potential source of vulnerability. The discussion then shifts towards online disclosures as manifestations of survivors’ pursuit of informal justice, driven by the impunity surrounding sexual violence and the absence of adequate formal and informal support mechanisms. Highlighting the potentials and pitfalls associated with perceiving these disclosures as digilante feminist practices as framed by Emma Jane (2016; 2017), the chapter underscores the importance of developing extensive support systems that address the multifaceted oppressive structures as the experience of sexual harassment lies at the intersection of many power dynamics such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, able-bodiedness, and geographical location. After introducing the discussions in the Turkish context with a detailed discussion on the importance of the feminist principle “woman’s statement is essential,” the chapter concludes with an analysis of the support mechanisms fostered by the Susma Bitsin Platform in solidarity with survivors of sexual harassment.

6.1 Feminists Rethorizing the Personal as Political and Digital

With the consciousness-raising groups initiated by Kathie Sarachild (1978) as well as the theorization of the personal as political by Carol Hanish (1970), feminists of

the second wave started to unveil women's experiences of sexual violence along a continuum, ranging from unwelcome sexual advances to major forms such as rape (Kelly 1988). The collective exchange of experiences challenged the assumption that sexual violence was primarily physical and committed by strangers. Instead, these women's gatherings in consciousness-raising meetings revealed that both minor and major forms of sexual violence were predominantly perpetrated by husbands, partners, or family members, making these experiences disturbingly common, legally permissible, and often unavoidable for many women (Loney-Howes 2019). Through collective sharing, the systematic and institutionalized nature of women's subordination came to light, exposing deeper structural inequalities that position women as inferior to men (Loney-Howes 2019).

Consciousness-raising meetings have also played a pivotal role in empowering women to speak out publicly about their experiences of sexual harassment. According to Alcoff (2018), via speak-outs, women were able to break the silence surrounding sexual harassment, shedding light on the personal consequences of these experiences. By calling out perpetrators, women effectively raised awareness within society. Alcoff (2018) underlined that speaking out also served to highlight the deeply personal and inherently political nature of sexual harassment. Such violence was not merely isolated incidents but rather a consequence of underlying unequal gender patterns. The collective efforts of consciousness-raising sessions and speak-outs have been instrumental in not only revealing the pervasive nature of sexual harassment but also in challenging societal perceptions and addressing the underlying structural inequalities that perpetuated gender-based violence.

The legacy of consciousness-raising groups and the conceptualization of the personal as political has transcended physical spaces and found new expressions on online platforms. Today, intimate stories are curated into hashtags, fostering a sense of belonging for women within a broader feminist community, significantly wider than ones back in the 1970s (Rentschler and Thrift 2015). This digital realm has demonstrably transformed feminist activism, particularly by amplifying the voices of marginalized groups and fostering global solidarity. Social media now serves as the primary platform for feminist consciousness-raising (Martin and Valenti 2012; Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019). Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2019) argue that digital media provides women with the opportunity to engage in mass-scale consciousness-raising through a single hashtag. As I also reveal in this chapter, these contemporary digital efforts, coupled with women's online disclosures of their experiences of sexual harassment, represent a reinterpretation of the feminist motto "personal is political," into "personal is political and digital." In this digital age, the intersection of personal narratives with online activism has become a powerful force

for social change toward a violence-free and gender-equal world, demonstrating the enduring relevance and adaptability of feminist principles in the digital era.

The interplay between personal narratives, political activism, and digital platforms has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of feminist discourse and advocacy by empowering women to speak out against systemic inequalities and oppression. Utilizing the power of the internet, women are raising their voices individually and collectively to address sexual harassment and various forms of violence they endure. This surge in digital activism challenges sexual harassment narratives and underscores its pervasive global presence. According to Loney-Howes et al. (2021), digital campaigns tackling sexual harassment are rooted in a rich history of feminist activism that emphasizes the interconnectedness between online and offline efforts. They highlight how movements like #MeToo build on earlier strategies and rationales, exemplified by the visibility of hashtags such as #BeenRapedNeverReported, #WhyIStayed #Ibelieveher and #YesAllWomen on Twitter prior to #MeToo's curation (Loney-Howes 2019). These earlier hashtags successfully brought the issue of sexual harassment to the forefront of public discourse, paving the way for the even greater impact of the #MeToo movement.

The #MeToo movement was not a singular event but rather the culmination of decades-long feminist activism, significantly amplified through the transformative power of social media. Although women have been courageously speaking out against sexual harassment since the 1970s, utilizing speak-outs as an effective tool to denaturalize the sexist systems, the emergence of the #MeToo moment marked a seismic shift. It brought forth an unprecedented wave of narratives surrounding sexual harassment, underscoring the magnitude of the problem. Through this movement, millions of women worldwide started to disclose their very personal experiences in the digital public sphere, fostering a sense of solidarity and awareness-raising on a global scale that was never seen before. This collective sharing not only exposed the pervasive realities of sexism and discrimination faced by women but also highlighted the systemic nature of their oppression and the structural inequalities they endure. As noted by Fileborn and Loney-Howes (2019), the #MeToo movement served as “a watershed moment for survivors to speak out and be heard” (11), marking a pivotal moment in the ongoing struggle for gender equality and justice.

The emergence of the #MeToo hashtag on Twitter also marked a pivotal shift in how stories of sexual harassment were shared and acknowledged. It represented a departure from individualized narratives to a collective sharing of experiences, fostering a sense of solidarity among survivors. This collective sharing not only alleviated feelings of isolation but also provided a safer space for women to reclaim their voices

and narratives (Gleeson and Turner 2019). The anonymity offered by digital platforms like Twitter played a significant role in creating a safe space for survivors to disclose their experiences of sexual harassment and assault. Chandra (2020) highlights the importance of anonymity in allowing survivors to break their silence and connect with a supportive community, legitimizing their emotions and experiences rather than delegitimizing them by “a demand for rationality that trauma cannot always deliver” (104). Anonymous narratives provided women the ground to “name the experience, to understand it for what it was; to regain a sense of empowerment; to create solidarities of empathy; and to keep the focus on the stories and the system that produced them, rather than on individuals.” (Chandra 2020, 104). In this evolving digital landscape, social media platforms have become the new arenas for consciousness-raising, and politicizing women’s experiences of sexual harassment on a global scale. As survivors continue to speak out and demand accountability, social media platforms stand out as powerful tools for driving social change and promoting gender equality.

Despite the potential of online platforms to amplify voices and foster solidarity when women disclose their experiences of sexual harassment, the shift from face-to-face to online consciousness-raising and speak-outs has introduced significant risks and challenges. While face-to-face groups offered a sense of safety and accountability, online spaces exposed survivors to a mixed audience, leaving their stories vulnerable to potential backlash, including victim-blaming, shaming, and trolling (Gleeson and Turner 2019). This vulnerability is exacerbated by the already existing “structural disbelief” surrounding women’s accounts of harassment and assault, which increases the risk of discrediting and abuse when taken to online spaces (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019). What’s more, these systems of discrediting women’s narratives do not affect women equally. According to Loney-Howes et al. (2021), the phenomenon of disbelieving and attributing blame to victims for the violence they endure is intertwined with intersecting systems of oppression related to gender, race, social class, ethnicity, religion, immigration status, disability, body weight, age, sexuality, and other factors. That’s to say, although there has historically been a tendency to disbelieve the majority of victims, certain individuals’ disclosures are met with heightened skepticism and culpability compared to others (Loney-Howes et al. 2021). Consequently, while the broader culture of victim-blaming discourages survivors of sexual harassment from speaking out about their own experiences, marginalized women face heightened skepticism and blame, perpetuating a cycle of silence and alienation around the issue of sexual harassment and abuse (Gallagher et al. 2019).

Despite the increased visibility of sexual harassment cases, Linda Alcoff (2018) underlines the persistence of gendered patterns, with online platforms often mirroring

offline dynamics of discrediting accusers (Alcoff 2018, 1). In line with Alcoff, I also argue that there is a continuum between offline and online worlds that perpetuate patterns of stigmatization and disbelief towards survivors. By acknowledging the continuums of marginalizing patterns existing between offline and online spaces, we are able to identify the ruptures, or what Ahmed (2017) refers to as “feminist snaps,” which not only resist but also transform these silencing narratives. Alcoff (2018) describes the dual nature of social media, serving both as a tool for empowering “whistleblowers” and as a platform for the “virtual stoning of victims” (1). This tension between appreciation and stigmatization of discourses around sexual harassment can be transformed into a collective solidarity narrative collaboratively woven by women’s experiences that expose and challenge sexual harassment as a system of oppression. To achieve this, feminist politics needs to navigate along the continuum of online and offline spheres, ensuring a feeling of safety for the survivors to make their experiences political and digital while at the same time initiating support mechanisms against this long practice of victim-blaming. In the following sections, I explore the feminist efforts to develop safe and empowering support mechanisms for struggling against sexual harassment.

6.2 Interconnectedness of Healing and Collective Action: Burke’s “Container”

Tarana Burke’s grassroots activism, predating the online phenomenon of #MeToo, was rooted in the principle of “empowerment through empathy” and “reliance on support and solidarity.” Contrary to the misconception that #MeToo is about taking down powerful men, Burke emphasized the main purpose of the movement as to support survivors of sexual violence in their healing journeys (Burke 2017a). #MeToo was not just a hashtag but a powerful tool for connecting with others and standing in solidarity with survivors on their paths to healing (Murray 2017). However, Burke was concerned about the lack of a structured framework to handle the millions of disclosures prompted by #MeToo. She pointed out the necessity for a “container” to guide survivors through the process of disclosing their experiences and to provide support in navigating the aftermath of disclosure. The question she posed “What do you do after you put #MeToo?” (Synder and Lopez 2017) highlighted the ongoing need to address the challenges survivors face beyond the initial act of disclosures. This question serves as a critical point of reflection for the future of the movement. It underscores the importance of not only amplifying voices but also providing extensive and effective support systems for survivors. As #MeToo

continues to evolve, there is a need to prioritize creating spaces where survivors feel empowered to share their stories and receive the necessary support and resources to heal and advocate for change. Burke's emphasis on empathy, support, and solidarity remains fundamental to the movement's ethos, reminding us of the collective responsibility to uplift and empower survivors beyond mere acknowledgment of their experiences in online spaces.

In her efforts to create a supportive space for survivors and broaden the focus of the #MeToo movement, Burke advocated for the establishment of mechanisms to build the necessary "container" for healing and action. She emphasized the importance of shifting the movement's narrow focus from solely targeting perpetrators to encompassing the broader goals of healing and collective action (Rowe 2019). Burke coined the term "healing as action," emphasizing that healing involves community support and collective efforts (Rowe 2019). With the contribution of the power of social media which gave people a place to say they are not alone, in this "unique historical moment" with the sustained worldwide response, Burke invited people to think about action in a broader sense, as "collective" and "individual things" done to end sexual violence (Rowe 2019). One of Burke's recent initiatives, the digital platform "Me Too. Act Too.," exemplifies her commitment to facilitating collective action. This crowd-sourced entity provides survivors, advocates, and allies with the opportunity to collaborate toward creating a world free of violence (Rockett 2020). Burke's answer to the question "What is next for #MeToo?" is "We are next," underscoring the importance of active engagement of people in this moment to achieve collective healing and meaningful change (Rockett 2020). By emphasizing the interconnectedness of healing and action, Burke encourages individuals to not only share their stories but also to actively participate in efforts to address and prevent sexual harassment and violence. Her initiatives demonstrate a holistic approach to the #MeToo movement, prioritizing both individual healing and collective action as essential components of creating a safer and more supportive environment for survivors.

Despite Burke's focus on radical community care and healing, the mainstream #MeToo movement focused on powerful men such as Harvey Weinstein, particularly in its initial stages. Also, in its manifestations in the rest of the world, media attention was given to the allegations held against men in power positions. Although the majority of women tweeting #MeToo on Twitter were emphasizing solidarities and focusing on survivor stories and unjust systems, the publicity gained by the movement predominantly centered the attention on perpetrators rather than the survivors. This focus on punishment resonated with the concept of "carceral feminism," which relies on state intervention and incarceration as solutions to sexual

harassment and assault (Page and Arcy 2020). Jane Fonda’s call for the incarceration of all perpetrators in response to the Weinstein case reflected an indication of “a common public feeling of anger translated into calls for state protection and control” (Lober 2018). However, women of color have long been pointing to the failure of state-based punitive systems to address gender-based violence adequately, highlighting the racist project behind such forms of justice-seeking (Lober 2018). Therefore, grassroots activists such as Tarana Burke as well as others involved in the #MeToo movement tried to change this direction towards restorative justice, healing as action, and solidarity. They aimed to expose the systemic inequalities and oppressions underlying gender-based violence while advocating for a more inclusive approach to collective healing. The future of the #MeToo movement lies in striking a balance between transforming unequal systems and supporting survivors’ healing journeys. This necessitates developing inclusive systems, policies, and procedures that encourage community support for both survivors and the broader community. Achieving this will be a critical factor in determining the future of this hashtag and will show whether this unprecedented “moment” can turn into an intersectional “movement” aiming toward structural change and collective healing. Ultimately, the success of the #MeToo movement in achieving lasting impact will hinge on its ability to transition from raising awareness to implementing tangible changes in workplaces, communities, and societal structures. It must continue to prioritize the voices and needs of survivors while challenging and dismantling systems of oppression that perpetuate sexual harassment.

6.3 Creating a Call-Out Culture: Online Disclosures of Sexual Harassment

Outing the perpetrators has long been a strategy in feminist activism, evident in practices such as naming and shaming in women’s magazines, consciousness-raising groups, and even on bathroom walls (Salter 2013). However, the transition of these speak-outs into the digital realm marked a significant shift in how feminists addressed issues of gender-based violence. The emergence of the online world has changed the pace and reach of these tactics, providing survivors with arenas to challenge the prevailing social, cultural, and legal narratives surrounding sexual harassment (Fileborn 2017). Social networking platforms, blogging sites, online communities, and video and image-sharing platforms have all become crucial arenas for carrying out vigilante strategies for struggling against sexual harassment and assault (Powell 2015). According to O’Neill (2018), the online spaces created “collec-

tive counter-narratives” where women sought justice for their experiences of sexual harassment informally (55). Consequently, feminists have increasingly utilized the power of digital spaces to amplify their voices and expose sexism, harassment, and misogyny, creating an online call-out culture (Jane 2017; Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019). With the promises offered by the online platforms, women felt empowered to publicly disclose their experiences of sexual harassment and reveal the identities of perpetrators. In this chapter, I frame online disclosures as “feminist snaps” (Ahmed 2017), representing women’s breaking points in response to the impunity of sexual violence, and argue that these practices served as a direct response to the pervasive nature of sexual harassment, aiming to hold the perpetrators accountable and challenge systems of power that enable such behavior.

The advent of online platforms has revolutionized the way survivors of sexual harassment disclose their experiences, providing them with a unique space to articulate their needs, establish solidarity networks, and access resources and information for awareness-raising purposes (O’Neill, 2018). Analyzing survivor motivations for online disclosures on platforms like Reddit, O’Neill (2018) identified three key factors: the need for a supportive community, seeking advice, and the desire to tell one’s story. In the online realm, survivors often sought counseling and support they were unable to find in their offline lives. They utilized the anonymous space offered by platforms like Reddit to share their experiences without the fear of exposure or victim-blaming (O’Neill 2018). These online spaces served as supportive communities, mitigating the feelings of loneliness experienced by survivors and providing a safe haven for sharing vulnerabilities.

Online tools transcended their role as mere technologies for women seeking justice, instead, they brought about the emergence of new meanings and practices of justice (Powell 2015). According to Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2019), when survivors called out their perpetrators in online spaces, it fostered solidarity with others for a common purpose, consequently cultivating collective action. Online feminist platforms such as the Everyday Sexism Project and Hollaback have served as early venues where survivors of sexual harassment and assault sought informal justice, partially fulfilling their needs for justice (Salter 2013; Powell 2015; Fileborn 2014). These platforms provided spaces where survivors could share their experiences, garner support, and collectively address the issue of sexual harassment. Through collective action, survivors have found empowerment and validation, challenging societal norms and demanding accountability from perpetrators. Thus, online platforms have become instrumental in redefining and democratizing notions of justice, allowing survivors to assert their agency and advocate for change in ways that were previously inaccessible.

The increasing number of online disclosures in recent years reflects women's dissatisfaction with the inadequacies of formal justice systems. When traditional judicial mechanisms fail to deliver accountability, women often turn to informal avenues for justice in their pursuit of a more equitable and just society. In the absence of accountability from the institutions, women increasingly resort to online platforms to voice their experiences and demand recognition. In this context, online disclosures serve as a means for survivors to pressurize both formal and informal legal systems to become fairer and more responsive to their needs. Given the pervasive impunity experienced by survivors of sexual harassment across various domains, from jurisprudence to workplaces, women feel compelled to amplify their voices against the perpetrators in power positions in online platforms, creating the call-out culture mentioned by Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2019). As highlighted by Yüce (2021), as jurisprudence turns a blind eye to violence against women and LGBTQI+ people, the disclosure mechanism serves as a means to informally punish perpetrators and alert others to their actions. This process fosters solidarity among survivors and feminist activists, creating a collective voice against impunity and injustice. However, Yüce (2021) also discusses how defamation cases filed around the world against women who disclose their perpetrators aim to silence the collective voice of survivors, particularly within the solidarity networks formed around the #MeToo movement. These lawsuits are perceived as attempts to regress to the pre-#MeToo era, hindering the progress toward justice and accountability (Yüce 2021). Despite the backlash against survivors' narratives, their efforts to hold perpetrators accountable, both online and through legal avenues, contribute to challenging systems of impunity and advancing the fight for justice and accountability.

The phenomenon of online disclosures in response to sexual harassment and assault reveals a complex interplay between formal justice systems, survivor experiences, and feminist activism. These disclosures serve not only to punish perpetrators and warn others but also to challenge systemic failures within legal frameworks. Despite facing legal challenges such as defamation lawsuits, the power of online disclosures lies in their ability to amplify survivors' voices and foster collective action. However, it is also crucial to recognize the importance of both formal and informal justice mechanisms in addressing sexual harassment, while also ensuring the protection and empowerment of survivors within digital spaces.

6.3.1 Online Disclosures as a Search for Informal Justice

When disclosure becomes a tool of struggle to give voice to survivors of violence and their experiences, feminist disclosure emerges as a potent yet perilous instrument in the ongoing efforts against the patriarchal structure of truth-making that conceals the perpetrators and justifies male violence (Saner 2021). According to Riggs (2021), disclosure is not merely “an act of sharing information with others” but also the first vital step towards the recovery journey of the survivors. Survivors of sexual harassment often choose to disclose their experiences when they believe that this will make them feel better, provide the needed support, and lead to justice (Ahrens et al. 2007). The concept of justice for survivors encompasses several key elements: a meaningful contribution to the formal justice system, a voice to share their experiences in their own words, validation and support for their accounts, and accountability for the perpetrators’ actions (Fileborn 2017). Additionally, the public reactions to disclosures of sexual harassment on digital platforms have a significant impact on the survivors. Positive reactions, such as emotional support, belief in the survivor’s account, tangible aid, and access to information, can contribute to the psychological and emotional healing of the survivors (Ullman 1999). Positive responses also help survivors to connect with others with similar experiences, fostering a sense of solidarity and awareness (Riggs 2021). On the other hand, negative reactions, such as attaching stigmas, denial of women’s experiences, and blaming the victim, often serve to further silencing the survivors (Ahrens 2006).

In the healing journey of the survivors of sexual harassment, seeking recourse through formal justice institutions is often not the initial reaction. Despite the recent legal and procedural reforms, survivors are generally reluctant to disclose their experiences to official institutions and professionals such as police or medical staff while informal support networks such as close friends and family are more likely to be trusted by the survivors to disclose (Ullman and Filipas 2001). Drawing on data from Australian surveys on sexual violence victimization, Daly (2011) underlines the limited success of formal justice processes in addressing sexual assault cases. Out of 100 reported cases, only 20 percent progress beyond the police and prosecution stages to reach court adjudication. Among these, 3.5 percent proceed to trial and result in convictions, while 8.5 percent of cases either end in acquittals or are withdrawn. This means that 88.5 out of 100 Australian victims of sexual assault who report to the police are unable to progress their case due to dismissal, withdrawal, or acquittal during court proceedings. Consequently, almost nine out of 10 sexual assault cases do not receive formal legal redress (Daly 2011). These numbers are more or less the same in various parts of the world (Fileborn 2017; Rennison 2002).

The discrepancy between the number of reported cases and those that receive formal legal redress underscores the systemic challenges and barriers survivors face within the formal justice system. This reality highlights the importance of acknowledging and addressing the limitations of formal legal processes while also ensuring that survivors have access to alternative avenues of support, validation, and healing.

Alongside the lack of institutional response, survivors of harassment also face societal pressures and prejudices within their immediate circles, which impede their pursuit of justice. Atay, Telli, and Erdemir (2022) highlight how the survivors may not receive the expected support from their immediate environment and instead, encounter blaming and shaming. This lack of support is particularly evident for women harassed by men in power positions such as bosses at work or teachers at school, who may fear repercussions such as dismissal or academic failure. Moreover, the social standing of the perpetrator can further complicate matters, adding another layer of obstruction to the process (Atay, Telli, and Erdemir 2022). Consequently, these experiences erode women's trust in both institutions and the justice system, exacerbating the challenge survivors face in seeking redress for injustices they have endured.

This dissatisfaction stemming from the inadequacy of formal justice systems and the lack of social and institutional responses to survivors of sexual harassment can be addressed through innovative mechanisms. In response to the impunity surrounding sexual violence, disclosures by survivors can be viewed as a quest for their own forms of justice. Powell (2015) characterizes women's informal justice-seeking practices as endeavors outside the realm of state institutions, aimed at addressing harm. These practices, according to Powell (2015), arise from a formal justice system that continues to deprive individuals of the opportunities to participate, express opinions, exert control, and seek validation and vindication. While public disclosures may not directly hold perpetrators accountable, the pursuit of informal justice in sexual harassment cases contributes to holding society, its culture, and its institutions accountable for their failure to support victims (Powell 2015). By sharing their experiences and seeking support and validation from their communities, survivors assert their agency and challenge the societal norms and attitudes that perpetuate sexual harassment.

Similar to Powell (2015), Daly (2011) identifies innovative justice responses as mechanisms that enhance the accountability and accessibility of both the legal and social responses to sexual harassment, prioritizing survivors' participation, validation, and vindication as well as offender accountability. However, these responses do not diminish the importance of conventional mechanisms such as criminal courts

or reporting to the police. Women's online disclosures of sexual harassment can be considered as an alternative form of justice-seeking that harnesses the power of the digital to demand validation, accountability, redress, and solidarity. Acknowledging that disclosures often serve as a last resort for survivors, acting as informal justice practices in response to the impunity of sexual harassment, it is also crucial to recognize the ongoing importance of pursuing formal justice mechanisms alongside their alternatives. Daly (2011) emphasizes the importance of viewing conventional and innovative justice responses not as competing alternatives, but rather as complementary components along a continuum. She emphasizes the necessity of mobilizing justice alternatives, advocating for a range of pathways rather than relying on a singular approach.

Additionally, Henry, Flynn, and Powell (2015) highlight that alternative forms of justice extend beyond the scope of criminal law, encompassing various avenues such as "online and offline activism, consciousness-raising efforts, truth and reconciliation commissions, civil remedies, memorials, and other commemorative practices, as well as expressions through film, art and literature" (6-7). These alternative pathways not only address the individualized needs of sexual harassment survivors but also aim to meet broader societal and collective justice expectations to differing extents (Henry, Flynn, and Powell 2015). Recognizing the complementary nature of formal and alternative justice mechanisms enables society to better address the multifaceted needs of survivors and advance broader justice goals. While formal justice systems play a critical role in holding perpetrators accountable and providing legal remedies, alternative approaches offer survivors additional avenues for healing, empowerment, and community support. By embracing a comprehensive approach that encompasses both formal and alternative justice mechanisms, society can foster a more inclusive and responsive system that prioritizes survivors' voices, experiences, and rights.

6.3.2 Online Disclosures as Diligantism: A Double-edged Sword

Loney-Howes (2019) describes using social media to disclose personal experiences of sexual harassment as "a double-edged sword" (28). On the one hand, there is the possibility of establishing connections and solidarity with other survivors via speaking out, thereby finding support and validation in their experiences. On the other, this openness also exposes survivors to the risk of public blaming and shaming, adding another layer of trauma to the already difficult experiences. Similarly, Yalcinoz-Ucan and Eslen-Ziya (2023) underline the empowering and uniting potential of disclosures on digital platforms which can serve as avenues for survivors to

raise their voices and create “counterpublics of solidarity” (8). Nevertheless, they also highlight the existence of “digital vulnerabilities,” wherein survivors may lose control over their narratives and become targets of online backlash (Yalcinoz-Ucan and Eslen-Ziya 2023, 8).

The vast reach of social media presents both opportunities and challenges for survivors seeking justice and support. While these platforms offer unprecedented visibility and amplification of survivor voices, they also expose survivors to potential harm and exploitation. This duality underscores the importance of developing balanced support mechanisms that address the complexities of online disclosures. Emma Jane (2017) discusses the need for balanced support mechanisms to support survivors of sexual harassment over the concept of “digilantism.” According to Jane (2017), digilantism refers to the politically motivated actions outside governmental institutions in response to online gender-based violence, aiming to hold perpetrators accountable when institutional mechanisms are perceived as lacking or insufficient. These actions can range from blogging, establishing websites, and hashtag activism, to more confrontational strategies such as naming and shaming the perpetrators online, or contacting employers or family members to demand accountability (Jane 2017). In essence, digilantism represents a form of online activism that seeks to address the shortcomings of traditional justice systems in combating sexual violence.

Feminist digilantes, by outing their perpetrators of sexual harassment in the public domain of social media, seek to raise awareness about this pervasive issue and demand accountability from those responsible. They utilize the power of social media not only to bring sexual harassment to the agenda but also to demand consequences on the perpetrators such as affecting their employment or social standing. According to Jane (2016), the act of disclosure not only empowers survivors by providing a sense of agency and solidarity with others who have experienced similar traumas but also serves as a catalyst for broader political projects, shedding light on sexual harassment that may have been neglected or mishandled by authorities. While some survivors choose to keep perpetrators anonymous, Jane (2017) suggests that publicly outing them can prompt others to take action against the attackers. However, this approach comes with increased risks for both the digilantes and the perpetrators. Digilantism, aiming to deliver informal justice, may inadvertently exacerbate cyberattacks and backlash, as the chaotic and rapid nature of social media platforms can make outcomes unpredictable and difficult to control for the initiating activists (Jane 2017). In essence, while feminist digilantism offers a powerful means of addressing online harassment and violence, its implementation raises ethical concerns and highlights the need for careful consideration of its potential consequences.

To exemplify the potential and risks of digilante feminist practices, Jane (2017) shares the story of a young Australian woman who experienced slut-shaming on Facebook and received support from an advocacy group named “Sexual Violence Won’t Be Silenced.” The digilantism carried out by the group has been successful in raising awareness among the public and increasing mainstream media attention, ultimately leading to the arrest and sentencing of the perpetrator. The police response to a report of cyber violence, though something unusual, was an indicator of how efficient feminist digilantism could be to initiate a formal response to cyber sexual harassment (Jane 2017). However, it is vital to continue to emphasize the need for wider structural interventions that combine informal and formal justice mechanisms. Jane (2017; 2016) also warns against the risks of wrongful accusations, disproportionate punishment, loss of faith in the justice system, and the perpetuation of extrajudicial cultures online. Recognizing the thin line between activism and vengeance, Jane (2017) advocates for self-reflexivity to ensure that digilante practices remain grounded in justice rather than revenge.

In line with the perspectives of Daly (2011) and Powell (2015), Jane (2017) also underscores the limitations of relying solely on informal justice through digilante practices, cautioning against the illusion perpetuated by media coverage that celebrates individualized, private responses to sexual harassment. This celebratory narrative may create the misconception that survivors can effectively address these issues alone, diverting attention from the need for collective action and systemic change. Jane (2016) further argues that while media support for survivors’ disclosures may appear empowering, it ultimately places the burden of combating harassment on survivors, neglecting the necessity for multi-faceted interventions involving governments, corporations, the judicial system, and social structures. Thus, while celebrating the bravery and technological competence of feminist digilantism, there is a risk of promoting a disempowering form of activism that fails to address the broader systemic issues underlying online gender-based violence in general and sexual harassment in particular.

Despite criticisms directed at online justice attempts, such as public naming and shaming of the perpetrators, suggesting a lack of fairness and proportionality (Salter 2013), Powell (2015) argues that these actions may not necessarily have dire and long-term consequences for the perpetrators. In fact, online disclosures might inadvertently result in a public support network for the perpetrator rather than condemnation (Powell 2015). Therefore, addressing the issue of sexual harassment requires interventions on multiple fronts. To enhance the effectiveness of digilante feminist practices, Jane (2016) emphasizes the importance of strong advocacy, political organizing, and collective efforts reminiscent of those utilized by second-wave femi-

nists. Additionally, support from states, corporations, and regulatory and policing authorities is vital to combat these pervasive forms of violence (Jane 2017). By mobilizing broader societal support and resources, feminist activists can work towards systemic changes that address the root causes of sexual violence and create safer digital environments for all. This multifaceted approach acknowledges the complexities of online justice attempts and emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts across various sectors to effectively combat sexual harassment in the digital sphere.

6.4 Who has the Power to Disclose Online?

While the widespread availability of digital communication technologies enabled survivors of sexual harassment to participate in the global #MeToo movement, it was a specific form of privilege that allowed for breaking the silence. Primarily, it was observed that the voices of white, middle-class, heterosexual, and American women were given the most visibility and credibility within the #MeToo movement (Loney-Howes 2019). Women of color, disabled women, migrant women, working-class women, elderly women, and members of the LGBTQI+ community were inadvertently overlooked, excluded, or marginalized by the #MeToo movement (Ison 2019; Kagal, Cowan, and Jawad 2019). A significant portion of media attention surrounding #MeToo and related developments centered on public disclosures of prominent women who were white cisgender women with socio-economic privilege such as Alisa Milano or Ashley Judd while black women like Leslie Jones or Lupita Nyong'o faced criticisms and attempts to discredit their accounts (Palmer et al. 2021). This hierarchy of survivor narratives was also ironically witnessed when Milano's #MeToo tweet gained immediate visibility while Burke's decades-long work with sexual harassment survivors on Myspace remained hidden until women of color raised their voices to acknowledge Burke's work (Loney-Howes et al. 2021). According to Loney-Howes et al. (2021), the initial invisibility of Burke's work and the work of numerous women of color activists is indicative of a "continued inability to witness intersectional efforts to address rape culture and sexual violence" (12).

Understanding the experiences of marginalized groups with violence and the political circumstances that define their existence remains excessively intricate for popular media outlets, social and legal institutions, and, significantly, mainstream feminism, as these experiences do not conveniently align with the discursive boundaries of the #MeToo movement (Loney-Howes 2019). According to Loney-Howes (2019), although nearly anyone can disclose their experiences online, #MeToo illustrates

that the visibility and audibility to a wider audience are still subject to the constraints of socially accepted guidelines dictating what can be expressed by whom, by the privilege of affluent, white women with significant social capital. Furthermore, Serisier (2018) notes that even with the increasing impact of disclosing experiences of sexual harassment, there are still particular narratives that are more accessible to articulate than others. Those who have traditionally been marginalized and deemed as incapable of being victimized or whose accounts have been distorted to be perceived as tales of love, revenge, or madness, still remain unheard (Serisier 2018). Despite the increasing impact of disclosing experiences of sexual harassment, many marginalized individuals continue to struggle to have their experiences heard and validated. Therefore, it is vital for the #MeToo movement and mainstream feminism to acknowledge and address these intersecting forms of privilege and oppression to create a more inclusive and equitable platform for survivors of all backgrounds to share their stories and seek justice.

In addition to the marginalization of certain voices within the movement, it is also important to recognize that not all survivors of sexual harassment have equal access to digital technologies. While many survivors of sexual harassment resort to online platforms to “snap” against the impunity of sexual violence, digital technologies are not accessible to all survivors, as the digital gender gap plays a significant role in this lack of accessibility (Fotopoulou 2016; Schradie 2018; McCaughey and Ayers 2003). This persistent digital gap influences and restricts who can access and participate in online justice platforms, as internet availability remains uneven across different socio-economic and age groups (Fileborn 2017). As Gjika and Marganski (2020) emphasize, there exists a certain privilege associated with being able to speak out online. Survivors of sexual harassment may differ in their ability to actively disclose their experiences online due to factors such as country location, socio-economic status, gender, race, and education (Gjika and Marganski 2020). Women around the world lack equal and standardized access to digital technologies, leading to varying levels of access rates. Consequently, those who do not have the means to access technology or social media platforms, or who possess limited technological skills, face significant challenges when attempting to disclose their experiences of sexual harassment online (Gjika and Marganski 2020).

According to Salter (2013), expertise and familiarity with social media platforms also play a critical role in the potential of social media to meet the justice needs of survivors of sexual harassment and violence. Typically, it is the voices of survivors with digital literacy and proficiency that are heard, while those lacking access to digital resources are deprived of this mechanism. In their study with survivors disclosing their experiences of gender-based violence online, Yalcinoz-Ucan and Eslen-Ziya

(2023) argue that making digital disclosures of sexual harassment and abuse is still not a viable option for women with fewer social and material resources not only in Turkey but also around the world, which limits digital feminist activism to women who are educated and socio-economically privileged. Additionally, Tillman et al. (2010) in their study analyzing barriers to disclosures by African American sexual assault survivors, emphasize the significance of various factors such as stereotypical portrayals of women as hyper-sexualized and cultural expectations that normalize the sexual assault of black women, contributing to the impunity of perpetrators. When these barriers of gender, race, and class inequalities are combined with disadvantaged socio-economic status including inadequate finances, limited healthcare coverage, and systemic discrimination, disclosing experiences of sexual harassment becomes as challenging as reaching out to formal justice mechanisms (Gjika and Marganski 2020).

In social media platforms, survivors of sexual harassment already face negative reactions and backlash similar to those experienced within formal justice institutions, demonstrating that even privileged survivors may not receive the support they seek (Yetener 2021). However, as the narratives of cisgender women's experiences of sexual harassment and assault continue to set the standards by which the authenticity of sexual violence is evaluated, this practice leads to the marginalization and even negation of the legitimacy of survivor accounts from LGBTQI+ communities and particularly transgender women (Serisier 2018). According to Palmer et al. (2021), trans people, people of color, and LGBTQI+ individuals are less likely to identify themselves as victims and disclose their experiences with the emergence of #MeToo, further contributing to their under-representation in the movement. This reluctance to disclose can be attributed to their precarious positions within society, which would likely receive greater backlash, marginalization, and victim-blaming (Palmer et al. 2021). The fact that disclosure is addressed to a patriarchal society through social media, and the unregulated, open-to-abuse nature of social media may not always provide the justice and empowerment that survivors expect, marginalized individuals suffer from this chaotic environment of the digital world more as the supportive mechanisms, which are already inadequate even for privileged survivors, are far from being designed to redress the harm faced by marginalized communities. As a result, survivors who occupy precarious positions at the intersections of gender, class, race, sexual orientation, age, or able-bodiedness, are more susceptible to isolation and face more severe forms of backlash. This exacerbates the challenges they face in seeking justice and support for their experiences of sexual harassment, highlighting the urgent need for more inclusive and responsive mechanisms within both online and offline spaces.

In the Turkish context, when sexual harassment disclosures were shared on social media in an untraceable flood of tweets during the peak of the #MeToo moment, these disclosures were made and followed only by a limited group of women who had the privilege of being online. According to Karaca (2020), in the days when dozens of tweets and articles were flowing on the screens, these disclosures were not an item on the agenda of working-class women. This points to the “limited universe of the disclosure movement,” which was experienced as a tremor on social media platforms (Karaca 2020). The fact that online disclosures did not resonate in the same way among working-class women does not diminish the significance of sexual harassment as an issue for them. However, it indicates that online disclosure is not a method preferred by working women, who are usually the most precarious sections of society, due to its high “cost.” (Karaca 2020). Karaca (2020) argues that unless disclosures are interwoven with effective solidarity networks and organizing efforts, this lack of engagement can result in different forms of violence and destruction for women from different walks of life. Without concrete organizing efforts, the potential impact of disclosures may be limited, particularly for marginalized and working-class women who may not have the same access to online platforms or the resources to engage in digital activism (Karaca 2020). That’s to say, solidarity networks and organizing efforts are crucial for ensuring that the voices and experiences of all women, especially those from marginalized communities, are heard and valued. Hence, through inclusive and intersectional organizing and solidarity efforts, it becomes possible to create meaningful change and address the systemic inequalities that perpetuate sexual harassment.

Similar to Karaca’s emphasis on concrete organizing efforts as a means to overcome the exclusionary character of online disclosures, Osmanağaoğlu (2022) underscores the importance of a process of disclosure that is built on feminist solidarity. She observes that women’s struggle against sexual harassment usually starts within their offline networks, where survivors share their experiences with the women they work with. In that sense, we can argue that the first steps of “feminist snaps” include confiding in women within one’s close circles. As women draw courage from each other, they begin to share their experiences more openly and organize collective resistance against violence. According to Osmanağaoğlu (2022), this solidarity is strengthened by the recognition that every story of violence told is a reflection of the experiences of oneself or women close to them. This shared understanding fosters a sense of solidarity and encourages other women to speak out. As a result, the strongholds of gender-based violence begin to fall in various settings such as parties, organizations, professional chambers, trade unions, offices, and factories (Osmanağaoğlu 2022). In this way, every woman, feminist or not, becomes stronger

and more resilient when she shares her experience of violence with another woman and feels her solidarity.

Survivors often hesitate to resort to legal mechanisms when they experience harassment and violence due to fear of not being heard or listened to. However, when a woman “snaps” on social media, survivors draw strength and courage from each other, realizing that they are not alone in their experiences. A woman who is alone in front of the court, the judge, the prosecutor or the system, can disclose what happened to her when she receives support from other women and when she is sure that she will not stand alone (Bilge Güler and Bayram 2020). The essence of the #MeToo movement lies in women hearing each other’s voices and building solidarity and connections between their stories. Hence, instead of advising women, setting boundaries for those who come forward, or questioning their credibility, it is crucial to refrain from distorting concepts such as “presumption of innocence” and “social media lynching” (Bilge Güler and Bayram 2020). Instead, it is necessary to decisively engage in the issue, to clearly take the side of women who come forward, and to stand in solidarity with them against possible violations of rights now and in the future. In the following section, I will analyze the feminist efforts to take the side of women who come forward in the Turkish context.

6.5 Disclosures of Sexual Harassment in Turkey: Women’s Statements are Essential

In the Turkish context, disclosing experiences of sexual harassment has been a significant concern since the feminist campaigns of the 1980s, during which feminists encouraged women to speak up about the violence they endured with slogans such as “Speak Out So That Everybody Hears.” These campaigns aimed to empower women to claim agency over their experiences, transforming them from passive witnesses of violence to active agents of solidarity with women who had similar experiences (Yetener 2021). Historically, one significant case of disclosing perpetrators occurred at the Confederation of Public Laborers’ Union (KESK). Unfortunately, according to Yetener (2021), these disclosures turned out to be disempowering practices for survivors due to the lack of a fair mechanism within KESK to protect women, leading to the questioning of women’s statements. However, this shocking incident served as a wake-up call and a learning opportunity for many civil society organizations, institutions, and political parties. Following this incident, feminists began to advocate for creating mechanisms that prioritize the protection of women by cen-

tering feminist politics around women's statements as the starting point of struggle. This approach soon evolved into the feminist principle that "a woman's statement is essential," highlighting the importance of believing and supporting survivors of sexual harassment from the outset (Yetener 2021).

According to Saner (2021), describing, naming, and defining experiences of sexual harassment pose significant challenges for women, making it crucial to assert that the right to decide on these issues belongs to women themselves. In response to the requirement for showing resistance and the burden of proof placed on women in legal cases of sexual harassment, feminists have long defended the principle that "the woman's statement is essential," which placed the burden of disproving onto the accused (Saner 2021). Osmanağaoğlu (2022) expressed that this principle had been an item on the agenda of the feminist movement in Turkey since the 1990s. For the first time in 1995, the United Socialist Party recognized gender-based violence as a disciplinary offense in its statutes (Osmanağaoğlu 2022). Osmanağaoğlu (2022) recounts encountering the concept of placing the burden of proof of innocence on men in cases of gender-based violence for the first time in 1999. During a conference held by the Freedom and Solidarity Party (Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Partisi), independent feminists proposed a motion on the struggle against sexual harassment, advocating for women's statements to be taken as the basis and for men to be obliged to prove their innocence (Osmanağaoğlu 2022). Although this motion did not become a resolution at the party's grand congress at the time, feminist determination led to the Socialist Democracy Party (Sosyalist Demokrasi Partisi), founded in 2002, adopting a comprehensive congress resolution on combating violence against women, which included the principle that "women's statement is essential" (Osmanağaoğlu 2022). Since then, this principle has been incorporated into numerous bylaws and directives aimed at combating sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

Hülya Gülbahar, a feminist activist lawyer, explained this statement as follows: when a woman is subjected to sexual harassment, assault, or discrimination, if she makes a statement, her statement should be taken as the basis for further investigation (Keskin et al. 2011). Since this statement has been harshly criticized, feminists needed to clarify the exact meaning of this assertion. According to Gülbahar, taking a woman's statement as essential does not automatically mean that her testimony is accepted as true. Rather, it means that the burden of proof lies with the perpetrators to convincingly refute the woman's statement. This principle does not advocate for extrajudicial punishment but rather emphasizes the need for standing by the woman until the perpetrator disproves the woman's statement (Keskin et al. 2011).

The oppression of women has historically been perpetuated through various societal constructs such as morality, marriage, motherhood, wifeness, sexuality, and even love (Şirin 2012). These constructs serve as barriers that often prevent women from voicing their experiences of violence. Most of the time, even though they are in the right, women frequently face societal pressures such as victim-blaming, shaming, or disbelieving when they speak about their experiences. In such situations, women may encounter challenges that make it difficult for them to prove their innocence, leading many to choose silence as a coping mechanism. Şirin (2012) argues that this is where the principle of “the woman’s statement is essential” comes into play. According to this principle, it is a requirement that those around the woman should support her until the incident is clarified, preventing the process from working against her and preventing her from being worn out (Şirin 2012). Additionally, Baytok (2021) provides valuable insights into the discussions surrounding recent disclosures on social media, particularly regarding the terms “essential” and “true.” She notes that these terms often appear to have switched places, leading to discourses about “lynching innocent men” as the truth value of women’s statements is debated (Baytok 2021). However, what is meant by the principle is that the woman’s statement constitutes a sufficient basis for investigation, evaluation, and discussion. What the feminist movement takes into account with the woman’s statement is not how the woman interprets or defines the incident, but the fact that violence is the result of the power relationship where women are subordinated in this hierarchy (Baytok 2021). Therefore, the principle that “woman’s statement is essential” means first recognizing that there is a power relationship and accepting the words of the oppressed as a starting point.

Today, one of the most prominent arenas where discussions about the principle of “woman’s statement is essential” are unfolding globally is within the context of social media disclosures, particularly through movements like #MeToo. I argue that these disclosures of sexual harassment represent what Ahmed (2017) terms “feminist snaps” where women no longer confine themselves to the dominant narratives of formal justice mechanisms and break their silence with “diligent practices” (Jane 2017) such as disclosing the perpetrators online. Through their statements, survivors start to build solidarity among women who would not come together otherwise. Platforms such as Susma Bitsin exemplify this form of feminist solidarity, which has grown stronger together through the disclosures of survivors on social media. The “feminist snaps” characterized by their sharp sounds and sudden breaks, have paved the way for a form of activism carried out along the continuum of online and offline domains where solidarity served as the cornerstone of this activism.

6.5.1 Feminist Snaps of Survivors and the “Container” Susma Bitsin Created

During the peak of online disclosures following Hasan Ali Toptağ’s case, feminists started an e-mail account to offer solidarity to survivors. One survivor using the pseudonym Leyla Salinger took to Twitter to urge women who had experienced sexual harassment and violence from powerful figures in literature, cinema, and other circles to share their stories via e-mail. She ended the tweet by saying “My dear women, you are never alone and you will never walk alone!” (*Bianet* 2020). The account `uykularinkacsin@gmail.com`, received an overwhelming response, with more than 300 e-mails flooding in from individuals including doctors, writers, academics, rappers, the influencers (*Bianet* 2020). This sheer volume of disclosures was a shock to the organizers of the account since they were unequipped with struggle mechanisms to deal with so many women disclosing their experiences of sexual harassment. In the meantime, some of Susma Bitsin members were also involved in this process. Then, the organizing group decided to categorize the messages based on different sectors as each sector had its own dynamics. They directed the messages to available support mechanisms within those fields such as syndicates or units dealing with these issues, which was unfortunately not enough. This incident revealed the lack of support mechanisms available for women to apply in case they face sexual harassment in their workplaces.

Susma Bitsin, as an independent feminist solidarity network, emerged as one of the first platforms of its kind, focusing on collective empowerment against sexual harassment and assault, particularly in the fields of cinema, television, and theater. As the platform members were not professionals in the field of sexual violence but only a group of women “pushed by the back” to take action against the injustices of their field, they had to develop a strategy to handle this situation. This moment was what Tarana Burke referred to as the lack of a “container” to process millions of people disclosing their experience of sexual harassment, without adequate supporting mechanisms (Synder and Lopez 2017). Susma Bitsin members also asked the question of what to do after putting #MeToo, after disclosing the experiences of sexual harassment, and started to frame policies to create that “container” by standing in solidarity with the survivors. An initial attempt was made to deal with the survivors’ emails. Hande told me that they were aware of the impossibility of handling this process on their own, hence they organized a meeting with the participation of lawyers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. With the support of the Psychiatrists Association, they developed a template e-mail to send to survivors, which provided the available contact information for emergency psychological and legal assistance.

This approach aimed to offer practical support to survivors who had disclosed their experiences through the e-mail account. However, the overwhelming response of more than 300 disclosures revealed the need for designing a feminist politics that not only empowers survivors by standing in solidarity with them but also activates formal and informal mechanisms to struggle against sexual harassment, prioritizing women's statements as essential.

Elit İşcan's online statement of being sexually harassed by her cast-mate has been one of the most influential disclosure texts in the formation of the #MeToo movement in the cinema and television industry in Turkey. In her disclosure statement, Elit not only recounted the harassment she endured but also underlined the lack of response from the production team and the casting agency (See Figure 6.1). She also added that she was told to remain silent or forget about the incident as her statement was "questioned" by many. However, she emphasized her determination not to stay silent despite the potential risks and backlash, including victim-blaming, being discredited, or being cyberbullied. Her post garnered significant interaction, receiving up to 25.696 likes, and sparked the use of hashtags such as #SusmaBitsin and #TacizVarSesÇıkar (#ThereIsHarassmentSpeakOut) in support of her case. I also frame Elit's disclosure as her feminist snap, a sharp break with the silence surrounding sexual harassment in the movie industry. As the complaint mechanisms within the industry failed her, Elit used the power of social media not to keep silent. She was well aware that she would face backlash and be blamed for "lynching" or ruining a young actor's career. However, she was determined to raise her voice, ultimately sparking an empowering feminist solidarity surrounding her case.

At the time of this disclosure, Susma Bitsin Platform had not yet been established. However, women working in the industry were already experiencing the "affective dissonance" (Hemmings 2012), which would eventually evolve into an affective solidarity network called Susma Bitsin. Elit's case served as one of the triggering moments for the formation of the platform, providing crucial support to Elit throughout her legal battle, engaging in both online and offline activism to stand by her side.

Figure 6.1 Elit İşcan's disclosure of Efecan Şenolsun on Instagram



As formal and informal support mechanisms continued to fail women, Susma Bitsin emerged as a platform that stood by survivors who disclosed their perpetrators as a reaction to the impunity of sexual harassment online or offline. This perception has also been emphasized in my interviews, where disclosures were viewed as a feminist strategy born out of the absence of solid mechanisms to struggle against sexual harassment. Neither a survivor-focused legal system nor formal and informal structures that take women's statements as essential were perceived to exist. A recent survey published by Dissensus in collaboration with Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu found that 27 percent of the participants working in the performing arts industry identified disclosure as the most effective mechanism for addressing cases of sexual harassment, assault, and mobbing cases, comprising the highest percentage (Dissensus 2021). In the same research, when participants were asked the reasons why they did not report incidents of sexual harassment, 30 percent emphasized the lack of effective complaint mechanisms (Dissensus 2021). These numbers reveal the complex dynamics surrounding disclosing one's experiences of sexual harassment in the film, television, and theater industries. On the one hand, there is a lack of adequate and effective formal and informal support mechanisms for the survivors, pointing to the absence of the "container" Burke referred to for processing and supporting people disclosing their experiences of sexual harassment. This deficiency leaves survivors without the necessary resources and protection to navigate their disclosure journeys. On the other hand, there is an increasing number of people who find disclosures as an effective strategy to struggle against the impunity

of sexual harassment within the industry. Many see this as an empowering act, an affective breaking point, a feminist snap, where survivors refuse to remain silent and demand accountability. However, this empowerment comes with its own risks, as survivors are often subjected to further backlash and attacks due to increasing “digital vulnerabilities” (Yalcinoz-Ucan and Eslen-Ziya 2023).

In response to this lack, the Susma Bitsin Platform has implemented a survivor-focused approach to support individuals who choose to disclose their experiences of sexual harassment. Central to their approach is their feminist policy of taking women’s statements as essential, which prioritizes the autonomy and agency of survivors. Women who engage with the platform are given the freedom to decide whether or not to disclose their experiences, and the platform commits to standing by the survivors as long as they wish. When women choose to disclose, Susma Bitsin stands by the survivors and carries out online and offline activism on a continuum by taking these women’s statements as their starting point. Regarding the issue of women’s agency, Özge said:

“It is to a woman’s heart’s desire to disclose her experience! Either only in the closed meetings and never talk about it again, or in a public online disclosure. It is completely up to her. We, as a platform, never encourage women to take any steps but just tell them about their options. Make sure that we will stand by them.”

Similar to Özge, Hande also emphasized their principle of never speaking on behalf of the subject but allowing them to make informed decisions based on their own circumstances and preferences. She noted:

“We have ground rules as a platform. We do not tell anyone to disclose, we do not tell anyone to go to the police. We just listen, stand by them, and put all the options on the table. And I put it on the table to the deepest depth. That’s why I am not very popular with this thing. I always say what could happen to them because I think it’s a responsibility. I ask them, ‘Do your parents know about it?’ Because when you go to the police, they will know. You can guess what’s going to happen. I didn’t make this up myself. We learned it from the feminist movement. I put everything on the table, to let them know these things. It’s easy for me, I’ll just speak, you’ll have to deal with your parents.”

By providing survivors with a realistic understanding of the possible outcomes, Susma Bitsin aims to empower them to make choices that align with their indi-

vidual needs and goals. Ultimately, the platform strives to support survivors in a way that respects their autonomy and fosters their well-being, while also recognizing the broader societal and systemic barriers they may encounter.

Susma Bitsin adheres to the principle of not speaking on behalf of any survivor and refrains from publicly disclosing the identity of perpetrators unless the case goes public. This approach underscores the platform's commitment to respecting the autonomy and agency of survivors while also recognizing the legal and social complexities involved in such disclosures. In this regard, Şehkar emphasized that Susma Bitsin cannot serve as a spokesperson for survivors, highlighting the limitations of the platform as a non-legal entity. There were cases when survivors, via e-mails or in the meetings, demanded Susma Bitsin to publicly disclose the identity of the perpetrator for them, but the platform maintains that such actions could potentially leave Susma Bitsin and survivors legally and socially vulnerable. Duru underlined, "The group does not mention these issues to prevent women from disclosing but to make them reconsider the possible negative consequences of disclosures." Therefore, Susma Bitsin always recommends women consult a lawyer before they make a public disclosure. What's more, the platform never intervenes in the disclosure texts of the survivors, but they only give feedback.

The "container" Susma Bitsin aimed to create centers around the needs of the survivors, and the platform strives to design its support mechanisms in line with these needs. However, they are also cautious about the precarities the disclosures might result in, both for the survivors and for the platform itself. In the following section, I discuss how the individual opinions of members are brought together with the platform's collective approach towards disclosing as a feminist method.

6.5.2 Nuanced Understandings of Disclosures as a Feminist Method

Aside from Susma Bitsin's feminist politics of taking women's statements as essential and standing in solidarity with the survivors as long as the subjects demand, the members of the platform have different views about online disclosures. However, all of my interviews, with slight nuances, noted that they perceived disclosures as an important feminist method in the struggle against sexual harassment. For instance, Özge emphasized that disclosure was the last resort of a woman in a system that does not defend women's rights. She noted:

"The scandal created over disclosures where women were blamed for falsely accusing or lynching innocent men is a mean patriarchal tool.

Disclosing one's experience of sexual harassment is already a difficult and traumatizing experience that impacts the person psychologically and professionally. It also affects your familial and friendship relations. If a person decides to disclose, it is her last resort."

Survivors, depending on their needs, choose to disclose their perpetrators online or offline. Özge underlined the importance of respecting survivors' agency and decision-making processes and emphasized that supporting the survivors throughout these stages is a feminist politics Susma Bitsin also keenly adopted. Based on this understanding, Susma Bitsin stands in solidarity with women either in online platforms via social media posts or in offline domains through court hearings.

Ceylan, who is affiliated with syndicates, also perceived disclosure as an effective mechanism in the sector as she found the field of cinema and television more prone to cases of sexual harassment due to people working intensely for short periods for certain projects. Ceylan said:

"Since there are not many long-term employments, cinema sets are literally and figuratively places with many hidden corners. A perpetrator hiding in one corner of a movie set will move on to another as the project ends in a month or so. And will continue to harass other women."

As was revealed in the Dissensus (2021) survey, the field of performing arts lacks formal and informal support mechanisms for the survivors to struggle against sexual harassment. Ceylan emphasized that women speak out because there are minimal legal sanctions in the sector and many producers are turning a blind eye to the survivors. For Ceylan, disclosure is women's defense mechanism for not letting the perpetrator hide in the corners of another movie set.

This perspective aligns with the notion that disclosures serve not only to seek informal justice for individual survivors but also to protect others from experiencing similar harm at the hands of the same perpetrator. Ceylan also underlined that in the closed meetings, some of the survivors expressed regret for not having voiced their harassment stories earlier. They believed that if their experiences had been known, the perpetrators might have been prevented from harming other women. However, this empowered voice arrived when survivors started to "snap" with the power they felt through the solidarity networks established online and offline.

Some of my interviewees, despite acknowledging the reasons behind women's disclosures, believed that disclosure is not the most effective feminist method to struggle

against sexual harassment. For example, Ada found disclosures as a method women are forced to use, but she does not believe that it is a healthy method, highlighting the complicated aspects of the issue. She said:

“It is a very understandable method that leads to questioning in line with the principle that the woman’s statement is essential, which I find very justifiable. Yet I still think it is not the healthiest method. Personally, when I see something like this, rather than jumping to conclusions, I follow a process of questioning, reading, and observing what both sides say, if any, and if possible. I try to distance myself first and observe.”

Ada emphasized the need for a thorough and balanced approach to understand and address allegations of harassment. Despite her concerns, this line of thinking aligns with the feminist principle of “woman’s statement is essential,” which emphasizes the importance of treating women’s disclosures as credible starting points for investigation rather than definitive truths. Hence, Ada’s questioning voice is very much reflective of one of the founding principles of Susma Bitsin Platform, taking women’s statements as the starting point of feminist solidarity.

Similar to Ada, Asli’s perspective on disclosures reflects a deeper understanding of its significance in the context of feminist activism. While acknowledging the importance of disclosures as a means of raising awareness and initiating a process of investigation, Asli also emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to supporting survivors throughout their healing process. For Asli, disclosures should not be seen as an end in themselves but rather as the beginning of a healing journey for survivors. She noted:

“Creating a roadmap that outlines the steps to be taken to support the survivor and ensure that their needs are met is very important. This includes providing ongoing support and solidarity from networks of allies and advocates.”

However, she also warned against the potential backlash and disappointments when the disclosures do not result in any material consequences for the perpetrator or a solidarity network the subject desired. Hence, Asli expressed her understanding of disclosure as follows:

“For me, disclosing is a way of expressing that there is a problem here and we should be investigating it. But we should also be following up on

it, it is not just a moment of speaking out about your sexual harassment experience. That's just the beginning.”

Aslı's thinking resonates with Burke's notion of a “container” to support and stand in solidarity with the survivors in their healing journey. Similar to Burke's question of what to do after one puts #MeToo, Aslı emphasizes the need to develop ways to support the survivors after the disclosure. When disclosure is shared on social media, people in support of the survivor share this story on their individual accounts, but this does not release them of the burden to take responsibility to act against sexual harassment. For Aslı, online disclosures create such an illusion that people might fall into the trap of feel-good activism (Morozov 2009). In this context, the Susma Bitsin Platform serves to create the “container” women need to walk through their experiences of disclosing. By creating a supportive environment and standing in solidarity with survivors, Susma Bitsin helps to ensure that disclosures are not just isolated events but part of a larger process of healing and advocacy.

Merve also highlights the importance of Susma Bitsin's role in providing ongoing support and solidarity to survivors of sexual harassment. She said:

“As online disclosures make sexual harassment visible to a wider audience, Susma Bitsin stands in solidarity with the survivors, ensuring that the case is being followed, not letting it be forgotten in the fast pace of social media. By actively monitoring and following up on disclosed cases both online and offline, Susma Bitsin demonstrates a dedication to supporting survivors throughout their journey.”

For instance, in Elit İşcan and Nazife Aksoy's cases case, Susma Bitsin started online campaigns, posted solidarity messages with the survivors, and attended the trials until the cases were concluded. After the cases were finalized, these survivors continued to carry out activism under the roof of Susma Bitsin. As this case reveals, solidarity as a continuum intersects with the continuum of online and offline activist strategies, which in turn creates an empowering container for survivors of sexual harassment.

The floods of online disclosures of sexual harassment have played a crucial role in raising awareness and empowering survivors by giving many women the power to name sexual harassment. My interviewees emphasized that when they thought about past events, they were not able to name what happened to them as harassment back then, which has now changed. For example, Yeliz said:

“Recently, while I was talking with a friend about a past event where a journalist verbally harassed me, we both agreed that if this happened now, he would not be able to say those words to me. And I know, it is the power of #MeToo that made this awareness possible.”

Particularly, the online mass disclosures created awareness among the younger generations who are active on social media (Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2018). They are not only alert to what sexual harassment is and thus internalized it as a form of injustice, but they are also utilizing the immense visibility of digital platforms to raise their voice against it. This awareness has brought a change of mindset in the cinema, television, and theater industries where my subjects emphasized that on the sets their male colleagues feel the pressure of being disclosed and “losing sleep” referring to the feminist motto curated during the peak of #MeToo movement in Turkey to emphasize that women are not keeping silent anymore. My interviewees also underlined that some of the male crew now think twice before making sexist jokes in the sets where women from the Susma Bitsin network are involved. These changes, small but crucial, were possible because of the ruptures #MeToo has created in the intersecting continuums of marginalizing narratives and oppressive structures of the cultural production industry. They were possible because survivors of sexual harassment “snapped” against the systems that kept failing to address their justice claims, thus creating their own ruptures in the continuum of impunity surrounding sexual harassment.

6.5.3 Survivors’ Search for Informal Justice: How to Hold Perpetrators Accountable

Elit’s disclosure not only pushed Susma Bitsin members by the back but also urged various stakeholders within the film, television, and theater industries to take action. Following Elit’s disclosure, many more women felt empowered to share their experiences of sexual harassment and assault online. While survivors continued to receive both negative and positive reactions to their disclosures, the solidarity networks formed in response began to plant the seeds of change within the industry. The lack of formal and informal responses to Elit’s case started to change. This was evident in the case of designer Gamze K., who publicly disclosed her experiences of violence perpetrated by documentary film director Serhat Yüksekbağ on Twitter in 2019. Not surprisingly, Yüksekbağ denied her claims. After the incident, Gamze K. did not file a lawsuit as she stated that she did not have the strength and courage to fight against Yüksekbağ. However, she added that she regretted not taking the

case to court (Berna Güler 2022).

Three years later, Yüksekbağ participated in the İstanbul Film Festival with his documentary “Yeni Bir Dünya Doğuyor” (A New World is Rising). As Susma Bitsin and women in the industry alerted the festival committee and İKSV (Istanbul Culture and Art Foundation) about the disclosure made by Gamze K., the committee announced that they removed the documentary from the festival program. In its justification of this decision, the committee referred to the feminist principle of taking a woman’s statement as essential (Çelik 2022). The festival committee tweeted: “Reminding once again that we stand against violence against women in all areas of life, against the perpetrator and on the side of the survivor, we would like to inform you that we have removed the film from the National Documentary Competition and our program” (İstanbul Film Festivali 2022). Similar to most reactions of the perpetrators who deny the allegations, Yüksekbağ also called this decision a form of social lynching culture (Berna Güler 2022). In support of this decision, Susma Bitsin also released a statement, expressing their solidarity with the İstanbul Film Festival’s decision. In their statement, the platform stated they hoped that this stance would continue and extend to all cultural and artistic institutions in Turkey (See Figure 6.2). In its activism against sexual harassment, Susma Bitsin has been vocal in its support for the sanctions imposed on the perpetrators. It was highly supportive of institutions involved in cinema, television, and theater industries showing some reaction to the sufferings of women and basing their arguments on the feminist principle of “women’s statement is essential.”

Figure 6.2 Susma Bitsin’s post in support of İKSV’s decision to remove Yüksekbağ’s documentary from the festival program



Aside from Susma Bitsin's policy as a platform to support these kinds of changes, members of the platform also personally valued the steps taken in this regard. For instance, in the case of Hasan Ali Toptaş, the film producer Müge Büyüktalaş, and director Ali Aydın decided not to shoot the movie adaptation of Toptaş's book after he was disclosed on Twitter. With regard to this incident, Hande emphasized the importance of canceling the shooting of a movie that had secured its financial resources. She said:

“Not many people realized how important this move was but this was definitely something in our small community. They gave up on the movie that they had the money for. I want things like this to be more visible. Someone is taking some risks. It's not just about tweeting. The publishing house says I am not publishing this book. The producer says I am not shooting this movie. In the case of Ahmet Kural, Yapı Kredi canceled the advertising campaign within 12 hours of disclosures. However, it is not the same for Yapı Kredi to give up on Ahmet Kural as it is to give up on a movie in arthouse cinema in Turkey. But these actions are not visible. However, I am also okay with both as long as some action is taken”

Despite the importance of institutional reactions given to the disclosures, they are not sustainable until solid struggling mechanisms are introduced in the form of policy documents, action plans, or legislative amendments. As there is limited response from formal and informal institutions, survivors usually seek their own ways to impose sanctions. Susma Bitsin chooses to stand by the survivors in their decisions but does not have any power to impose sanctions on the perpetrators. Only through their collaborations with syndicates or other legal entities, do they demand action to be taken, however, in this case, the legislation of these formal institutions is binding for the kind of sanctions to be imposed. The syndicates also do not have the power to force the production to fire the perpetrator. Ceylan mentioned a case where a survivor asked the syndicate to send e-mails to its partners disclosing the perpetrator which they refused as it is not something the syndicate can legally and ethically do. She said, “The syndicate might inform the producers about the case, but it does not have any legal sanctions to be imposed on the perpetrator.”

Although this is a controversial issue within the Susma Bitsin Platform, some of my interviewees emphasized that they have their individual ways of imposing sanctions for the perpetrators. One of the sanctions imposed is canceling the perpetrators both online and offline. Some choose not to include the perpetrators in their own productions, or not to get involved in a project with the perpetrator while others expose them in their own social media accounts by posting disclosure texts of the

survivors or solidarity messages curated by Susma Bitsin Platform.

One of the most controversial topics was sparked when perpetrator lists were disseminated all over the world after the peak of the #MeToo movement. As Moria Donegan's "Shitty Media Men" list in the U.S (Grady 2018) and "Whisper Sheets" in India (Chandra 2020) led to opening lawsuits or facing threats for women who published them, Susma Bitsin avoids publishing such lists. However, Hande underlined that there is an unwritten list in women's heads who are involved in the platform. She said:

"One of the strategies some of Susma Bitsin members developed is that when the crew lists are formed, we initially consult each other on whether there is a name to be crossed out of the list. There is no formal talk about it but women know that that name is canceled without letting the perpetrator know the reason."

Although this is not a very common practice and very few women have the power to do this, preparing these visible or invisible perpetrator lists remains a strategy some of the feminists involved in the platform employ.

Additionally, Susma Bitsin, when attending the trials, finds it valuable to make the survivors feel empowered with the solidarity established in that courtroom. While supporting the survivors, members believe that their presence in these courts makes the perpetrators "lose their sleep." Özge remembers one of the court hearings Susma Bitsin attended. She said:

"The members of the platform sat down in a row and started to stare at the man. The man sitting there was an actor and one of the women sitting with Susma Bitsin was the best casting director in Turkey. All these things have such small and big meanings. From that moment on, the man knew that this woman was not going to put him on the casting list."

Some of my interviewees, who found canceling the perpetrators as an effective individual and collective strategy, underlined that women choose to impose these kinds of radical sanctions since both formal and informal support mechanisms fail them in their struggle against sexual harassment. According to Hande, as the survivors did not hear any sincere apology in any of the public disclosures, canceling the perpetrators seems to continue to be "an effective defense mechanism for the feminist movement." Özge also indicated that they did not see any case where an equal and

just support mechanism was established for the survivors. Hence, she said,

“Canceling the perpetrators turns out as a method that I believe in as much as I believe in the necessity of disclosures. It is almost the only sanction women have in cases of sexual harassment.”

Similarly, Ceylan emphasized that canceling the perpetrator after he is disclosed is a kind of woman’s own mechanism of judgment and punishment. She noted:

“I see it as a sanction. I see it as both personally and professionally preferring not to work with that person because I see that right in myself. The reason behind this is to protect myself and my team. I am someone who needs to make sure that my teammates are healthy and safe, that they can work together properly.”

On the other hand, there were also reservations from some of the members of the platform about the effectiveness of imposing sanctions on the perpetrators by canceling them. Figen underlined that she found these sanctions acting as informal justice platforms problematic. When a woman discloses her experience of sexual harassment, Susma Bitsin takes a woman’s statement as essential. And yet, as noted before, this is not to say that a woman’s statement is true. Figen noted:

“I agree upon the need to take woman’s statement as essential and yet, canceling the perpetrators also bears the risks of creating our own courts while dismissing formal judicial mechanisms forever.”

Similar to Jane’s (2016; 2017) discussion, Figen is cautious about the risks of ignoring the need for carrying out the struggle on multiple levels both through formal and informal institutions rather than placing the burden of struggle only on the shoulders of survivors.

Although some of my interviewees underlined their individual mechanisms to demand perpetrators face the consequences of their actions, it is also important to note that imposing sanctions such as canceling requires a certain socio-economic privilege. According to Figen, if women have this privilege, they can choose not to take part in important productions when a disclosure in the crew or cast happens. However, this does not apply to young and early-career female actresses or crews who might need the job to survive. In this regard, Figen said:

“When Meryl Streep or Nicole Kidman comes out on #MeToo, they inevitably gain power. But when a young woman working under precarious conditions comes out, she has to deal with severe depression, isolation, and negotiation.”

To overcome this privilege, Susma Bitsin created an intersectional space that would be empowering survivors from all ranks of the sector. According to Özge, intersectional solidarity plays a very empowering role for women who want to disclose their experiences of harassment. Susma Bitsin Platform welcomes women from all ranks of the sector including those in precarious positions such as interns, students or young, early-career professionals. That’s why, Özge believes that Susma Bitsin holds such a vital position in the field. She notes:

“It is much harder for women in precarious positions to disclose their experiences of sexual harassment. If these women want to disclose and are not part of a solidarity network, it is almost impossible for them to share their experiences. Susma Bitsin is open to every survivor and stands in solidarity with them on whatever decisions they make. It tries to provide every possible support they request from the platform.”

Both Susma Bitsin and the members I interviewed have developed mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. However, as disclosing online is somewhat a matter of privilege, imposing sanctions on the perpetrators also demands an advantageous position. Susma Bitsin, as a non-legal entity, does not have the power to impose formal sanctions, but it has the power of advocacy and solidarity to compel formal and informal institutions to take a stance against sexual harassment through the online and offline feminist activism they engage in.

6.5.4 Online Disclosures Leaving the Survivors Vulnerable

Public disclosures, both online and offline, have been appraised for their empowering effects on survivors with the support of feminist solidarity surrounding the subject. However, they have also exposed survivors to potential backlash and dire consequences. The aftermath of the #MeToo movement witnessed a surge in denials, victim blaming, and legal actions from perpetrators against women who bravely spoke out about their experiences of sexual harassment and assault (Yalcinoz-Ucan and Eslen-Ziya 2023). The perpetrators either denied women’s statements, gathered

a group of supporters attacking the survivors, or filed lawsuits for defamation (Yüce 2021). Although #MeToo was celebrated for fostering a sense of solidarity among survivors by not only alleviating feelings of isolation but also by providing a safer space via the anonymity digital spaces provided for survivors to disclose their experiences of sexual harassment and assault (Chandra 2020), this so-called safe domain brought risks for the survivors due to the uncontrollable nature of the digital world.

One of these cases was the disclosure of a renowned figure in the field of the theater by a survivor who disclosed her experience with a pseudonym on Twitter. In her tweet, the survivor called out to women that this disclosure would be their voice and make the perpetrators “lose their sleep.” Similar to Elit and many more survivors, she also acknowledged the challenges and backlash she would face upon this disclosure. Immediately after her disclosure, an outpouring of similar disclosures by other survivors, anonymous or in person, flooded Twitter. Prior to going public, the survivor also shared her experience with Susma Bitsin, prompting the platform to stand in solidarity with her. Susma Bitsin posted a solidarity message on its social media accounts with the hashtag #UykularınızKaçsın (#MayYouLoseSleep), emphasizing the need to create a violence and harassment-free education environment in the field of performing arts for women.

The disclosure sparked a heated debate within the theater community, particularly regarding the issue of intimacy direction in theatrical productions. In response, a group of theater students under the umbrella of Sahne Sanatları Öğrencileri Dayanışma Platformu (Solidarity of Performing Arts Students) launched a project titled “Sahne Sanatları Eğitiminde Sınır İhlali” (Border Violation in Performing Arts Education). In collaboration with Oyuncular Sendikası, the student platforms organized awareness meetings and trainings for students, aimed at addressing issues of boundary violations within performing arts education. At the end of the project, the student solidarity platform released a manifesto consisting of ten articles, accompanied by the hashtag #sahnehepimizin (#thestageisours), which was shared on their Instagram accounts. This disclosure case has been an important triggering moment that started various initiatives among theater students, prompting them to critically examine their pedagogy and practices. On this topic, Ada said:

“After this disclosure, I started to question the prevalent master-apprentice dynamics within theater education. I started to question whether such relationships could justify instances of sexual harassment and mobbing. I also started thinking about the absurdity of the notion that theater and performing arts could involve violations of one’s bodily autonomy which are inherent to its pedagogy. That’s how I got involved in this border violation project.”

As this anonymous disclosure turned into a “feminist snap” for theater students, it also prompted reactions within the industry itself. In response to the failure of their institutions to impose sanctions on the perpetrator, some of his co-workers initially tried to push the institution to take action against the perpetrator but were met with resistance. Frustrated by the lack of institutional accountability, they announced their resignation from the institution via Twitter. Their statement said: “We see that we have not been vigilant enough to prevent sexual harassment and assault at our institution, hence we accept our share of responsibility and apologize to our addressees.” Despite a lack of response from institutions, a group of people from the field held themselves accountable for the lack of mechanisms to protect and support the survivors. This acknowledgment of responsibility resonates with Jodi Dean’s (1996), concept of reflexive solidarity which emphasizes the importance of opening a space for accountability and addressing the blind spots within collective narratives. In this case, the blind spot acknowledged through this act of reflective solidarity is the absence of supportive mechanisms for survivors involved in the field of performing arts where the borders of the subjects are more prone to be violated since the body occupies a central space (Pelister 2022). By publicly acknowledging their own complicity and resigning in protest, these individuals not only held themselves accountable but also underlined the systemic failures that perpetuated sexual harassment within the industry. This reflective solidarity opens a space for dialogue and collective action aimed at addressing these shortcomings and fostering a safer and more equitable environment for all involved in the performing arts.

However, despite this network of solidarity created surrounding the survivor, she faced severe backlash following her disclosure. As a young woman in the early stages of her career, she is already standing at the intersection of many precarities economically, socially, and professionally. Perpetrators, especially those in positions of power, often exploit these vulnerabilities, as seen in this case. In response to the survivor’s disclosure, the perpetrator retaliated by disclosing her identity in a blog he created specifically to “recount” the story from his point of view. This blog received almost 80.000 viewers and the perpetrator deciphered very intimate details not only about the survivor but also about those who stood in solidarity with her. In ten pages, he tried to refute all the allegations directed towards him, employing familiar tactics such as framing the disclosure as a lynching campaign, a strategy commonly used by perpetrators disclosed for sexual harassment, as we have seen in the cases of Anita Hill, Elit İşcan and others.

Aside from online attacks, the perpetrator also took legal action against the survivor by filing a lawsuit for defamation, another common strategy employed by perpetrators to intimidate and silence survivors (Yüce 2021). This legal maneuver

compounded the challenges faced by the survivor, particularly as an early career young actress in an industry characterized by small, tight-knit communities and hierarchical power structures. On this topic, Ayça said:

“The acting community is a very small group and the hierarchical nature of this field leaves the young and early career women in a precarious position. Particularly in the television world, moguls like Harvey Weinstein rule the sector. Hence, if a female actress is labeled for her disclosures, it is very difficult for her to find a job in this sector again. I think this young woman may not have chosen to disclose her experience publicly, had she been aware of the repercussions she would go through.”

Although disclosures are seen as an empowering feminist method for women to make their voices heard in a world where formal and informal supporting mechanisms are inadequate or non-existent, this leaves the survivors in a vulnerable position both in the online and offline domains. However, the solidarity networks established around the survivors play a critical role in mitigating these repercussions. As one of my interviewees emphasized, “solidarity plays the leading role” in countering these backlashes, providing a supportive framework for women to resist and navigate the challenges they encounter, to help women continue to “hit the road” of resistance. As I reveal in this chapter, I argue that through the intersecting continuums of solidarity, Susma Bitsin developed an intersectional “container” to hold survivors after they disclose their experiences of sexual harassment and stood by them in their journeys towards healing through carrying out online and offline activism. This journey is interwoven with continuums of marginalizing narratives, continuums of backlash and precarities, and continuums of impunity of sexual harassment. However, these oppressive patterns revealed by these continuums are disrupted by the ruptures both the survivors and Susma Bitsin created, snapping the inefficient systems, demanding accountability, and pushing the industry and its stakeholders towards change.

7. CONCLUSION

The writing of this thesis was inspired by the emergence of the #MeToo movement and the way feminist activists creatively brought together the power of “streets” and “tweets” in their struggle against sexual harassment. The “feminist curiosity” Cynthia Enloe (2004) endowed me with in her talk at Sabancı University led me to ask new questions about women’s stories of sexual harassment and not to be satisfied with easy answers. I took Angela Davis’ (1999) advice and started “troubling” the origin stories of sexual harassment circulating offline and online. My journey brought me to the Susma Bitsin Platform, an independent feminist network, where, as one of my interviewees emphasized, “solidarity played the leading role.” The theme of solidarity also played a central role in this thesis. Feminist solidarity emerged as the binding concept that brought my analyses of continuums together, hence it is where the intersecting continuums are visible the most. Within the context of combating sexual harassment, solidarity represents a powerful force that transcends individual experiences and fosters a sense of community and mutual support.

In this research, I aimed to explore the transformative potentials of online and offline feminist strategies developed and imagined not only to support survivors by building solidarity networks but also to demand and bring about systemic changes within the highly sexist world of the cultural production industry. I analyzed the changing feminist practices and politics in the struggle against sexual harassment through the framework of intersecting continuums spanning online and offline spheres, following the emergence of the #MeToo movement in Turkey.

I adopted intersectional theory to examine the underlying power dynamics in both the online and offline struggles of the Susma Bitsin Platform against sexual harassment. Applying intersectional theory to the realm of online and offline feminist activism reveals itself as an insightful analytical tool for illuminating the diverse voices, experiences, and struggles that collectively shape the dynamic and multi-faceted landscape of the struggle against sexual harassment. It serves as a pivotal feminist theorization that proposes a reflective analysis of the exclusions within

feminist politics and practices. Initially, my aim was to explore digitally mediated feminist activism, and yet, throughout my fieldwork, I discovered that the realm of feminist activism is complex and multilayered, characterized by continuums of strategies and contexts. Therefore, I reframed my focus to include the continuums of online and offline feminist activism and their implications for feminist politics in the struggle against sexual harassment in the film, cinema, and theater industries. I introduced the concept of intersecting continuums to analyze this multifaceted landscape of engagement.

As I revealed in this thesis, feminist activist practices carried out in online and offline spheres are often complementary to each other, particularly in the struggle against sexual harassment. I frame this complementarity as an empowering dynamic for feminist activism. While online or offline spheres can be analyzed as distinct areas of feminist activism, I emphasize that these practices often coexist along a continuum where they merge into each other with varying degrees of involvement. This continuum is fluid, in constant flow, and defies clear-cut boundaries. At times, a hashtag campaign may evolve into mass street demonstrations or decades-long advocacy and lobbying efforts yield results when supported by widescale online campaigns. The level and extent of these interactions may differ, yet the struggles coexist along a continuum without prioritizing any particular form.

My conceptualization of continuum is grounded in the feminist theorization of Liz Kelly, Karen Boyle, and Cynthia Cockburn. Liz Kelly (1988) defines a continuum in two forms: one as a basic underlying character, and the other as a continuous series of elements and events passing into one another, hence cannot be readily distinguished. I rely on this definition when I use the term continuum. The continuum framework reveals the underlying patterns of the struggle against sexual harassment, showing that these patterns are continuous and merge into one another. Additionally, I emphasize that there are multiple continuums, echoing Karen Boyle's (2019) notion of "continuums in plural." In Cynthia Cockburn's (2004) formulation, the continuum of gender relations is the "linking thread," while, in my framework, the continuum of sexual harassment is the linking thread. Drawing inspiration from the framing of "crisis as a continuum" within the RESISTIRE project (Altınay et al. 2023), I argue that these multiple and multi-layered continuums intersect at certain times in certain contexts. Through the intersecting continuums framework, I demonstrate how individual acts of sexual harassment are deeply ingrained with broader oppressive systems of power.

The concept of continuum serves as a framework that enables us to see the underlying patterns of the sexual harassment struggle whereas intersecting continuums is

the concept that reminds us that there are multiple patterns intersecting at different times in different contexts. Through the lens of intersecting continuums, I uncover the intricate connections between online and offline feminist activist practices, building upon the continuums of past and present social justice movements and emphasizing the ongoing nature of the struggle against sexual harassment within broader historical and societal contexts. By “troubling” the origin stories of the #MeToo movement, I highlight the complex interplay between digital and physical realms in shaping contemporary feminist activism against sexual harassment. I analyze the continuums of gender-based violence across the physical and digital domains, along with the continuums of feminist strategies developed for combating sexual harassment, as well as the continuums of feminist solidarity networks, intersecting at individual and collective levels within and beyond cultural spheres. The intersecting continuums framework not only illuminates the intersections of underlying patterns of both domination and solidarity but also allows us to identify the ruptures in the sexual harassment struggle, where the possibility of transformation occurs.

One important finding revealed in this thesis is that perceiving online and offline activist spheres on a continuum and as complementary to each other is promising for contemporary feminist activism. As the issue of sexual harassment is multilayered, it needs to be fought on multiple fronts. Hence, when feminist activist strategies are brought together on a continuum with varying degrees of engagement and multiple entry points spanning online and offline spheres, the struggle against sexual harassment becomes more effective. As I have shown, these online and offline efforts culminated in a global struggle against sexual harassment, with varying emphases and priorities in different contexts. The #MeToo movement on a global scale along with its local reverberations such as #sendeanlat, #uykularınızkaçsın, and #susmabitsin in Turkey have empowered women to speak out against their experiences of sexual harassment and abuse. Feminist marches, advocacy and lobbying efforts, the reports drafted, and news pieces shared, all played a critical role in depicting the prevalence of sexual harassment within the industry and highlighting the necessity of developing mechanisms to prevent it.

The continuum of online and offline feminist efforts paved the way to an awakening not only among the general public but also among the members of the cultural production industry about the prevalent and internalized nature of sexual harassment. The Susma Bitsin Platform, organized in the fields of cinema, television, and theater, is a notable outcome of these decades-long offline and online feminist efforts, characterized by its unique structure that also integrates online and offline feminist activist practices in its sexual harassment struggle.

In establishing this solidarity network, Susma Bitsin creatively engaged in feminist activism along the continuum of online and offline spheres. They benefited the most from what technology offered to them. Hence, the pamphlets transformed into Instagram posts calling out for women to meet, while the mottos shared as hashtags proved effective in feminist advocacy and lobbying campaigns. The activist practices of the second wave evolved with the new tools of the digital world, playing a critical role in women's organizing and empowerment. Susma Bitsin initially organized offline closed meetings which functioned as the modern-day equivalent of consciousness-raising groups of the second wave. When the pandemic hit, they were quick to turn this precarity into an advantage. Harnessing the power of the digital world, they transitioned closed meetings to online spaces, thereby expanding the reach of consciousness-raising among a broader group of women experiencing sexual harassment in the cinema, television, and theater industries.

Online closed meetings not only served as crucial mechanisms for awareness-raising but also emerged as an innovative way to provide support and solidarity to survivors in digital spaces, ensuring that they feel heard, validated, and supported. When online spaces were insufficient to meet survivors' needs for physical support, Susma Bitsin members adapted their strategies. They organized collective actions, such as attending the trials of survivors not to let women "walk alone" in their struggle against sexual harassment. They also made efforts to find a friend to drop by the survivor's house after she shared her traumatic experience of harassment, demonstrating their commitment to providing tangible support beyond the digital realm. They also harnessed the power of humor through hashtag campaigns to criticize the irrational and unjust treatment of authoritarian regimes, as exemplified by the curation of the #jumptoend hashtag. On the other hand, they drew attention to the double standards of the film industry, where certain cases were deemed more visible than others as was exemplified by Elit İşcan's invitation to Kerem Bürsin to support her case as well.

As a solidarity platform, they were attentive to creating an inclusive and intersectional activist space. This attempt was visible in the evolution of the language used in their digital activism. Initially, the platform was open to women working in the film and television industry, but the members immediately realized their exclusions. As an act of reflective solidarity (Dean 1996), they tried to eliminate blind spots by including women from all levels working and studying not only in the film and television industry but also in the field of theater. They were also vocal about their commitment to supporting all women and LGBTQI+ in their struggle against sexual harassment, as well as their deliberate exclusions, such as including men in the platform or involving women from other sectors. This evolving language of inclu-

sivity and intersectionality was evident not only in their online campaigns but also along the continuum of feminist activist space they aimed to create.

Within the continuum of online and offline feminist activism, I frame Susma Bitsin as a digital feminist counterpublic. The platform, as a digital feminist counterpublic, opens “parallel discursive arenas,” (Fraser 1990), challenging the dominant narratives surrounding sexual harassment in the cinema, television, and theater industry. As Fraser exemplified through second-wave U.S. feminism, Susma Bitsin is expanding the discursive space with its new language to describe experiences of sexual harassment. Through this language, they emphasize the importance of feminist solidarity in the struggle against sexual harassment and demand a violence-free, equal, and intersectional workplace for all members of the sector. The digital counterpublics surrounding the cases of Elit İşcan, Nazife Aksoy, and others created an alternative discursive space where survivors could openly discuss their experiences and challenge the normalization of sexual harassment within the industry. Via effective social media campaigns, these counterpublics forced the institutions to adopt a zero-tolerance stance toward violence. Platform members questioned the existing policies of the institutions, reimagined these institutions as survivor-centered spaces, and pressured them to take action through the digital feminist counterpublics they cultivated. This thesis also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the continuums of social movements to develop stronger feminist politics in the ongoing struggle against sexual harassment. By adopting the intersecting continuums framework, I demonstrate that movements like #MeToo do not arise spontaneously but are intricately linked to both preceding and subsequent social justice movements. Thus, this framework encourages an understanding that extends beyond isolated incidents, emphasizing the ongoing nature of the struggle against sexual harassment and its connections to broader historical and societal contexts. The continuum framework elucidates the interconnectedness and progression of these movements, indicating that the sexual harassment struggle is deeply rooted in the knowledge, practices, and principles of the civil rights, anti-racist, feminist, and many more social movements.

As I reveal, if Diane Williams, Paulette Barnes, and Mechelle Vinson – all black women experiencing sexual harassment at the intersections of gender, race, and class – had not been involved in the anti-racism movement, and familiar with civil rights principles and procedures, they probably would not have stood up for their rights at the intersection of gender. Similarly, if Eleanor Holmes had not been involved in the civil rights movement, she probably would not have taken radical steps in EEOC to establish anti-harassment guidelines. If Lin Farley, Karen Sauvigne, and Susan Meyer had not been involved in the feminist movement, the term

“sexual harassment” would not have been coined. If the founding members of the Susma Bitsin Platform were not involved in the feminist movement, it would not be possible to talk about an independent feminist solidarity platform in the cultural production industry in Turkey. If some of the members were not also involved in unions, effective collaboration, which they define as “marriage,” would not be possible. These tide-turning feminist efforts not only shed light on the intersectionality of gender, race, and class for analysis of sexual harassment but also underscored the transformative potential of the continuums of various social movements, influencing the understanding of sexual harassment as a collective civil rights violation.

Similarly, I illustrate how intersecting continuums of feminist legacies play a crucial role in the formation of more inclusive and intersectional feminist politics and practices. If Anita Hill had not disrupted narratives of racial solidarity and race-over-gender priority, Tarana Burke’s grassroots activism would not have preceded the so-called online moment of #MeToo. If Burke had not ground her work upon the rich history of black feminist activism, the tipping moment of #MeToo when Alyssa Milano tweeted may not have arrived. If it were not for the ambitious feminist journalism of women reporters, Weinstein’s universe may still not have been shattered by the voices of women from all around the world. Likewise, if feminist campaigns in Turkey throughout the 1980s had not called for “pricking the needle,” the Sexual Harassment and Assault Units in more than 20 universities may not have been established. If feminists had not advocated for ending impunity of gender-based violence and pressurized the government to ratify the Istanbul Convention and enact Law No. 6284 On the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women, formal institutions as well as key stakeholders, may not have responded to the feminist demands to ensure violence-free working environments for everyone equally, with reference to these conventions and laws. If Elit İşcan had not made “too much out of a kiss” with the courage she drew from the global #MeToo movement, Turkey’s watershed movement may not have occurred. All these efforts collectively unveil the intersecting continuums that shape the #MeToo movement, reminding us that true progress against sexual harassment requires a holistic understanding of its roots, advocacy, and the power of collective voices.

This research also demonstrates the continuums of marginalizing narratives and oppressive structures spanning through the online and offline worlds. When survivors disclose instances of sexual harassment, they often face disbelief, victim-blaming, or trivialization of their experiences not only in the physical world but also in virtual spaces. During her case, Anita Hill was depicted as a lascivious black woman seeking to tarnish the reputation of a self-made black man, labeled as a “nymphomaniac” and a “lesbian” and portrayed as a furious and sexually unbalanced woman. Along

with these stereotypes, her testimony was trivialized, with some suggesting that she misunderstood Thomas' courting style. Three decades after Anita Hill's case, survivors who choose to speak out against their perpetrators in the digital realm still encounter similar narratives of trivialization, disbelief, and victim-blaming. When Elit İşcan disclosed her experience of sexual harassment, her testimony was questioned. Some suggested she was making too much of a kiss, while others blamed her for potentially tarnishing the career of an "innocent" young man who may have acted out of drunkenness. The defense lawyer's statement, implying that non-consensual acts such as kissing were acceptable within the context of acting, perpetuated misogynistic stereotypes and minimized the severity of harassment experienced by Elit İşcan.

Feminists employ a variety of strategies bringing together the online and offline struggle mechanisms to counter these discourses and structures. Hence, recognizing the continuums of these marginalizing narratives and oppressive structures emerges as an important point to consider when developing support mechanisms for the survivors. Solidarity practices are vital support mechanisms that Susma Bitsin develops. I analyzed the solidarity practices of the Susma Bitsin Platform, which extends across multiple levels through the continuum of online and offline domains. Also, different aspects of solidarity intersect in different contexts, allowing us to see the concept of solidarity as a continuum.

There are intersecting continuums of solidarity with survivors and among platform members, as well as on the level of solidarity with organizations and platforms active in the fields of cinema, television, and theater. Elit İşcan's case is exemplary of how these continuums intersect. Elit, despite ultimately losing the case, remained an active member of the platform and continued to stand in solidarity with other survivors who shared their traumatic experiences within the platform or publicly. The continuum of online and offline support mechanisms has been one of the most distinguishing aspects of the solidarity network created by Susma Bitsin. By combining social media campaigns with physical presence at trials, the platform has built a powerful network of intersectional feminist solidarity that offered both virtual and real-world support to survivors of sexual harassment.

The "marriage" of different entities of the industry serves as an empowering mechanism in the struggle against sexual harassment. What's more, this continuum of solidarity also intersects with the continuum of online and offline activist practices carried out by all parties, further enhancing the impact of the struggle against sexual harassment. An example of this multilayered continuum is the solidarity formed with Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu, a platform organized in the field of theater

and founded by women, some of whom are also members of the Susma Bitsin Platform. Although Susma Bitsin included the field of theater in its struggle against harassment after a while, the group realized that power dynamics within theater were also very different from film industry. Women feeling this difference felt the need to found their own solidarity group and formed Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu as a solidarity network involving women working and studying in the field of theater. The students' solidarity groups in performing arts also created their own solidarity networks with different stakeholders in the field. Sahne Sanatları Öğrencileri Dayanışma Platformu collaborated with Oyuncular Sendikası for educational purposes and received some financial support while the syndicate contacted Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu to provide necessary training for the group. These interconnected practices of solidarity resemble spiderwebs, where one act of solidarity seamlessly transitioned into another, showcasing solidarity as a continuum. Aside from solidarity practices among the entities of the industry, the Susma Bitsin Platform extended its solidarity to survivors of state violence. It became an integral part of a greater solidarity network that stood in solidarity with the survivors failed by the justice system, as demonstrated in the platform's solidarity with Çiğdem Mater and all Gezi prisoners. The continuums of online and offline activism intersected with the continuums of different forms of injustices people face, and all these patterns then intersected under the umbrella of feminist solidarity, aiming to speak out for all.

As online disclosures make sexual harassment visible to a wider audience, Susma Bitsin stands in solidarity with the survivors, ensuring that their cases are being followed, not letting them be forgotten in the fast pace of social media. By actively monitoring and following up on disclosed cases both online and offline, Susma Bitsin demonstrates a dedication to supporting survivors throughout their journey. After the disclosures, Susma Bitsin posts solidarity messages with the survivors and attends their trials as long as survivors demand. After the cases are finalized, some of the survivors continue to carry out activism under the roof of Susma Bitsin. Solidarity as a continuum intersects with the continuum of online and offline activist strategies which in turn creates an empowering feminist practice for survivors of sexual harassment.

Just as the #MeToo movement did not emerge overnight as a viral hashtag, the Susma Bitsin Platform is a culmination of decades-long feminist activist practices carried out in Turkey and beyond. Hence, the platform represents not only one end of the continuum of these activist practices but also a breaking point in the continuum of silencing structures and practices of sexual harassment in the cultural production industry. I frame Susma Bitsin as a breaking point, as a rupture, a

feminist snap against the decades-long silence surrounding sexual harassment in the cultural production industry. I argue that these practices serve as a direct response to the pervasive nature of sexual harassment, aiming to hold the perpetrators accountable and challenge the systems of power that enable such behavior.

The disclosures of survivors act as a rupture in the continuums of victim-blaming narratives and trivialization of survivors' experiences. By refusing to accept harassment as "normal" or "excusable" behavior, these survivors also empower many other women to demand accountability and challenge the prevailing culture of silence surrounding sexual harassment within the industry. These cracks are the places where the seeds of change can take root. Out of these ruptures, transformation may occur, or it may not. Yet, even the possibility of change is valuable. I argue that these cracks are the pathways to transformation, opening up many more continuums of solidarity practices.

Another important analysis of this research is the emergence of support mechanisms, creating the "container" to support the survivors in their struggle against sexual harassment. The #MeToo movement around the world and the Susma Bitsin Platform in Turkey, within the cultural production industry, revealed the absence of support mechanisms for survivors and the necessity to create a "container" to empower survivors of sexual harassment. During the height of Turkey's #MeToo movement, sparked by Hasan Ali Toptaş's disclosure on Twitter, followed by numerous survivors exposing their perpetrators across various fields, including academia, literature, law, and medicine, a group of women initially responded by forming an email account to make women feel that they were not alone. This was an important step in creating this container. However, when more than 300 women responded, this not only highlighted the prevalence of the issue but also the impossibility of dealing with this problem with the initiative of a group of women, which was much deeper than these women initially expected. As Susma Bitsin and other women decided to adapt their strategies by categorizing the emails and preparing a template for available support mechanisms to be sent to the survivors, they formed the earliest form of the container in the sexual harassment struggle. In response to this limited number of available mechanisms for survivors to apply, the Susma Bitsin Platform emerged as a "container," not only empowering its members through solidarity networks but also by devising strategies to create a supportive environment for survivors. The platform implemented a survivor-focused approach to support individuals who choose to disclose their experiences of sexual harassment. Central to their approach is their feminist policy of taking women's statements as essential, which prioritizes the autonomy and agency of survivors. As an intersectional feminist solidarity platform open to all members of the industry, along with its flexible structure, Susma Bitsin

provided survivors with multiple entry and engagement points. It was their decision to get involved and leave whenever they needed. This dynamic structure, reliant on the survivors' decisions and allowing them as much space as they prefer, represents an empowering aspect of the container Susma Bitsin created.

After its formation, Susma Bitsin drafted an anti-harassment and discrimination principles document, demonstrating a zero-tolerance policy towards not only sexual harassment but also any form of gender-based violence and discrimination. According to my interviewees, these principles are read aloud in the movie sets. Even if they are not, the mere existence of such a document serves as an important mechanism for the prevention of sexual harassment. In fact, the effects of such a policy were evident, as my interviewees emphasized that the male crew members tend to avoid making sexist jokes when they know that a Susma Bitsin member is involved in the crew. Hence, drafting such policy documents proves to be a crucial mechanism in the ongoing struggle against sexual harassment.

Closed meetings, serving as the new awareness-raising tools, also represent a crucial strategy of this survivor-focused container. These meetings emerged as significant collective empowerment and solidarity mechanisms among the members of the platform and the survivors of sexual harassment. These safe spaces built on feminist principles allowed women to share their experiences in a manner not possible in other settings, fostering a sense of solidarity and reassuring them that they were not alone and their experiences were not isolated incidents. Additionally, these meetings, when thematically organized, also function as educational platforms, providing members with opportunities to learn about new topics or deepen their knowledge on issues related to gender.

The continuum of online and offline solidarity campaigns with survivors was also an important part of the container. With the online campaigns, Susma Bitsin harnessed the power of the internet and increased the visibility of the cases. Through the digital feminist counterpublics, they opened alternative discursive spaces to discuss sexual harassment. They developed a new language to support and stand in solidarity with survivors. The case of Nazife Aksoy and the way Susma Bitsin pressurized İstanbul Municipality Theater to take action stands as an example of the power of online campaigns in support of the survivors. While the transformation ultimately depends on the political will of institutions to establish gender-sensitive policies, online feminist advocacy and lobbying are important mechanisms for supporting survivors. On the other hand, offline solidarity mechanisms, such as attending the trials of the survivors, are equally vital. This collective physical presence in courtrooms serves to reassure survivors that they are not alone in their journeys. The courtrooms emerge

as important platforms for feminist solidarity. Not only the solidarities established with the survivors but also solidarity among the different constituents of the sector is also an empowering aspect of the sexual harassment struggle. Solidarity with the survivors creates a community of healing as Burke mentioned. Survivors feel the support of a community and realize that what happened to them is part of a larger system that oppresses and marginalizes women. On the other hand, solidarity with different parties in the industry serves as an empowering support mechanism for survivors and the broader struggle against sexual harassment. Susma Bitsin, being a non-legal entity, lacks the power to impose formal or disciplinary sanctions for the perpetrators. They also cannot represent the survivors in a lawsuit, and their involvement in the cases has no formal impact on the course of the cases. However, when a legal entity such as a syndicate becomes involved in the case, not only do the survivors feel empowered but also the struggle gains another dimension on legal grounds. Additionally, the establishment of gender units and policy documents within formal institutions also serve as an important mechanism in the struggle against sexual harassment. The Women's Studies Unit within the body of Oyuncular Sendikası exemplifies changes within the formal institutions towards gender-sensitive politics in the cultural production field.

In addition to Susma Bitsin, the emergence of similar solidarity groups or platforms has also become an integral part of the container created after the #MeToo movement. For instance, Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu was organized to support women in the field of theater. Student solidarity platforms such as Sahne Sanatları Öğrencileri Dayanışma Platformu were established to raise awareness among performing arts students about the issues of gender equality, intimacy direction, and border violations in performing arts education, topics they realized that they did not know much about. Not only the establishment but also the continuum of solidarity networks among these platforms are also critical support mechanisms for survivors. For instance, Sahne Sanatları Öğrencileri Dayanışma Platformu collaborated with Oyuncular Sendikası to provide necessary trainings for the group. Trainings are essential tools for creating gender awareness and strengthening the sexual harassment struggle. In order to work on these issues, syndicate members participated in a training session on intimacy direction organized by Gösteri Sanatlarında Kadın Grubu. This multi-layered solidarity network eventually evolved into a student project titled "Border Violation in Performing Arts Pedagogy." At the end of the project, the students published a manifesto on their social media accounts with the hashtag #sahnehepimizin (#thestageisours), which emphasized the importance of creating a safe and gender-equal stage and education for everyone, rooted in student consent and open communication.

The intersecting continuums is the concept that reminds us that there are multiple patterns intersecting at different times in different contexts. Through this lens, we are able to see the patterns of domination and solidarity while also uncovering the blind spots within our narratives. Most importantly, it allows us to identify the ruptures. As this work reveals, ruptures are the cracks through which the possibility of change can flourish. The continuums of decades of feminist theorization, intersecting with the continuums of various human rights movements, the continuums of empowering reciprocity of online and offline feminist activism, and the continuums of emerging solidarity networks, all paved the way for the emergence of the #MeToo movement, creating a rupture in the mainstream narrative of sexual harassment, proposing many alternatives to the struggle.

Similar to the #MeToo movement, I also frame the Susma Bitsin Platform as a rupture in the silencing systems and marginalizing narratives surrounding sexual harassment. Through these ruptures, feminists started to design the container to hold the survivors and support them in their healing journey. These practices encompass a range of actions, from forming an email account and providing templates to survivors to guide them toward available support mechanisms, to advocating for the establishment of gender units established within syndicate bodies. At times, solidarity is demonstrated through online campaigns organized on platforms like Twitter, while at other times, it manifests in physical gatherings in courthouses, reminding the perpetrators, the jurisdiction, and the sexist world of cultural production that survivors will not walk their journeys alone. Each action undertaken by the Susma Bitsin Platform represents a rupture in the prevailing narratives of silence and oppression, signaling a shift towards empowerment and support for survivors of sexual harassment.

As we navigate through the ongoing #MeToo movement, the evolution of the container is still underway, with feminists diligently shaping it with survivor-centered politics and practices. It remains to be seen whether these mechanisms will prove effective and sustainable in supporting survivors holistically and whether they will catalyze the development of preventive policies aimed at creating a world free of sexual harassment. The sustainability of these feminist strategies and practices developed in the struggle against sexual harassment will undoubtedly be a fruitful area of analysis for further research. Additionally, although the #MeToo movement gained significant traction within the cultural production industry due to having unique characteristics, it also extended its influence into various other domains. Therefore, conducting a comparative study between the cultural production industry and other fields, such as academia, where the #MeToo movement has also been effective, presents a promising avenue for rich analytical exploration. Until then, by

harnessing the power of streets and tweets, troubling the origin stories of marginalizing narratives, building upon previous social movements, and contributing to future ones, feminist solidarity will continue to play the leading role.

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