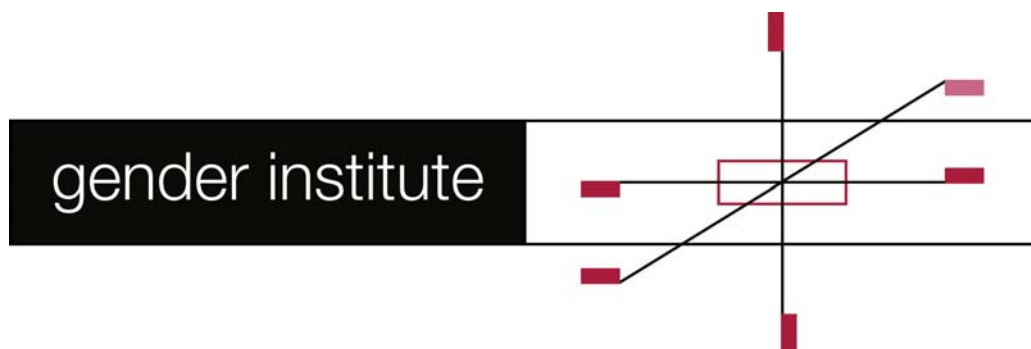


# Export-Processing Zones and Gendering the Resistance: “Women’s Strike” in Antalya Free Zone in Turkey

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# **Export-Processing Zones and Gendering the Resistance: “Women’s Strike” in Antalya Free Zone in Turkey**

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## **Abbreviations:**

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis  
CLC: Canadian Labour Congress  
DTM: Devlet Ticaret Mustesarligi [Undersecretariat of the (Turkish) Prime Ministry for Foreign Trade  
EPZ: Export-Processing Zone  
ETUC: European Trade Union Confederation  
FMC: Freneisus Medical Care  
FZ: Free Zone  
ICEFTU: International Confederation of Free Trade Unions  
ICEM: International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions  
ILO: International Labour Organisation  
MNC: Multinational Corporation  
NIDL: New International Division of Labour  
Petrol-Is: Union of Petroleum, Chemical and Rubber Workers of Turkey  
WPP-framework: Women and the Politics of Place framework

## **Abstract:**

This research is an attempt to gain an insight into the women's mobilisation and labour movements in Export-Processing Zones (EPZs). It addresses questions around feminisation of labour and changing forms of resistance within global capitalism by means of a case study. Taking the Novamed strike which occurred at the Antalya Free Zone in Turkey as an empirical entry point, the analysis highlights a gap in the literature on feminisation of labour and EPZs. The fact that the predominantly female strikers at Novamed were supported by feminists and women's groups in Turkey as well as by their formal representative, the workers' union, gave rise to forms of politics, i.e. body politics, which are arguably different from conventional class-based movements.

The research is based on a critical reading of existing literature on feminisation of labour and labour movements in EPZs in relation to the analysis of information derived from primary sources on the strike period. The empirical research is based on the critical discourse analysis of media items, official documents, declarations/correspondences that came about during the fifteen-month-long strike period. Interviews conducted with people involved in the movement formed another basis for empirical analysis.

Relying on the Women and the Politics of Place (WPP) framework, informed by poststructuralist conceptualisation of power, discourse and the body, the research seeks to understand opportunities and tensions arising from coalition between class-based and gender-based politics. The analysis of multiple forms and sites of resistance during the strike aims at extending and gendering the conceptualisation of the resistance within global capitalism. This study, in arguing that resistance is shaped within existing power relations, provides an empirically grounded definition for what I will call "feminisation of resistance".

## **Acknowledgements:**

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*“New theorising on resistance, not simply of the worker-subject, is urgently required, and it should go beyond conventional dichotomies of individual and collective actions, personal and social resistance, and non-political and political confronting behaviour.” (Ngai 2005: 194)*

## INTRODUCTION

The “first”<sup>1</sup> strike in a Turkish free zone (FZ)<sup>2</sup> was launched in September 2006 by 85 women workers protesting against the poor and gendered working conditions at Novamed, a medical equipment manufacturing factory owned by a German based MNC. Along with low wages and poor health and safety regulations, the strikers rebelled against direct interventions to their bodies; the scheduling of pregnancy periods by the employer being the most striking example of such interventions. A significant feature of the resistance was the role played by women’s and feminist groups who co-operated with the union – the strikers’ formal representative– in making the voices of the workers heard. The fifteen-months-long bargaining process resulted in certain improvements in the workers’ working conditions and in the signing of a collective agreement between the employer and the union. Taking the strike as an empirical entry point, this research contributes to the analysis of the feminisation of labour, a salient feature of globalisation (Acker 2004:35), with particular focus on labour mobilisation and resistance in EPZs.

Feminists have been criticising mainstream studies of globalisation for taking globalisation as a linear, inevitable process (Bergeron 2001; Marchand and Runyan 2000; Salzinger 2004:57) and revealed the centrality of gender relations in global processes (Acker 2004:19). The fact that the workers ended the strike with material gains, casts doubt on the “*globalocentric*” (Bergeron 2001:983) belief that the interest of global capital dominates the nature of the relationship between capital and labour (Rosa 1994:95). As Bergeron (2001:998) argues, discourses on globalisation can be challenged by recognising that the power of global capital is open to contestation. In this sense, global capitalism constrains conventional forms of workers’ mobilisation while *paradoxically enabling* other

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<sup>1</sup> Although the strike in Novamed was presented as the first strike in a FZ in Turkey by the union and the media there is evidence of a previous strike in Izmir FZ. This strike lasted only from April 2005 to May 2005 and did not get as much media attention as the Novamed case. Although union representatives acknowledged that the Novamed case was the second strike in an FZ (Petrol-Is 2008:15), the media kept representing the strike as the first strike in EPZs.

<sup>2</sup> Free-Zone (FZ) is the legal name for an Export-Processing Zone (EPZs) in Turkey. As elaborated in the literature review, what ILO (2003) refers to as EPZs might take different forms or names such as free-trade zones, special economic zones, bonded warehouses, free ports and maquiladoras. By FZs, I refer to the legal regulation in Turkey and I use EPZs as a common name for such special zones.

forms of resistance (Bandy 2004a:412). However, how these opportunities and constraints are marked by gender relations remains an under-explored area of study.

Hence, the main enquiry of this study is based upon features of workers' mobilisation and resistance within the global economy and on the ways in which these processes are gendered. With the examination of a particular case study, this research seeks to understand i) how gendered processes, salient in the organisation of labour in EPZs, are reflected in the organisation of mobilisation and resistance; ii) what kind of opportunities and tensions emerge from the coalition between class-based and non-class-based – i.e. gender-based – politics; iii) how this analysis contributes to theories on power and resistance. I argue that the critical analysis of the strike period not only reveals changing forms of workers' mobilisation within the global economy (Collins 2003:165; Marchand 2002:115) but is also suggestive of developing an empirically grounded and *gendered definition* for multiple forms of *resistances* (Mendez 2005:63).

The research is based on the analysis of primary sources on the strike period (news clippings, articles, leaflets, interviews) and on an interpretation of the literature on feminisation of labour and EPZs. My theoretical framework is informed by Foucault's (1976:92-102) conceptualisation of power and resistance and Ngai's (2005:191-196) interpretation of 'multisided resistance', together with the Women and the Politics of Place framework (Harcourt and Escobar 2005). Such approaches conceptualise power not only in dominant structures but also in resistance (Harcourt 2005:45; Foucault 1976:101) and identify the body as the main site for resistance.

The first chapter critically assesses different perspectives through which resistance within the global economy is theorised in relation to feminisation of labour in EPZs. It addresses the theoretical gap between daily forms of resistances and collective action, and discusses the possibility of a framework to analyse 'resistance' as a whole. The analytical choices and ethical problems related to the methods used for analysis are detailed in the second chapter. The third chapter critically discusses the findings of the research in light of the literature. Drawing on several aspects of the strike, such as its social context, the different discourses used to frame claims, changing forms of politics and unequal gender relations inherent in these 'transformations', I conclude by conceptualising 'feminisation of resistance' based on my empirical research and discuss possibilities for further research.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

### **LINKING BODILY RESISTANCES TO COLLECTIVE ACTIONS IN EPZs**

#### **1.1 Scope and Purpose of the Review:**

As presented in the introduction, the research, although confined to the critical analysis of a case study, addresses broader theoretical debates regarding globalisation, the feminisation of employment and resistance in EPZs. ‘Feminisation of work’ is not only characterised by increasing female participation in the labour force but also by changes in job structures, marked by an increase in low-paid, casual and impermanent positions in the organisation of work (Beneria 2003:92). Acknowledging different forms of feminisation of employment in different sectors such as care (Ehrenrich and Horschild: 2004), services (Sassen 1998), sex tourism (Perrons 2004:112-117) and agriculture (Barrientos and Perrons 1999), the focus of enquiry in this study is on manufacture in EPZs, seen as distinctive loci to scrutinise various aspects of feminisation of labour (Pearson 1998:184). After briefly reviewing the links between globalisation, EPZs and feminisation of labour, a critical analysis of different approaches to labour mobilisation and resistance in EPZs highlights gaps in the literature. The review ends by discussing the most suitable analytical methods to address the case in question.

#### **1.2 Globalisation and EPZs:**

ILO (2008:1-2) defines EPZs as “*industrial zones with special incentives to attract foreign investors, in which imported materials undergo some degree of processing before being (re)exported again*”. Despite this general definition, EPZs can take various forms.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, no matter how different they are from each other even within the same country, there is a causal link between *the recent increase of special economic zones and the expansion of multinational enterprises* (Lee 2005:4).

EPZs are mostly associated with low wages, poor working conditions, low rates of unionisation and labour activism (Carty 2006:215; ILO 2008:3-4). Given their diversity, the need for up-to-date data and comparative research on working conditions is needed rather than making generalisations on EPZs (Tiano 1994:4-5). While the proliferation of EPZs

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<sup>3</sup> The report also draws attention to existence of EPZs in post-industrial countries and changing forms of EPZs where skilled labour is needed for the high-tech production (ILO 2008:2). For the purpose of this study, however, I use the stereotypical definition of EPZs as quoted above..

around the world (ILO 2008:2)<sup>4</sup> increase their relevance for globalisation studies at macro level, ethnographic research has captured gendered forms of working conditions. Overrepresentation of women workers in EPZs compared to the rest of the formal economy (ILO 2008:5), and gender based assumptions on recruitment/working patterns made this form of industrialisation a common theme of the literature on the feminisation of labour (Pearson 1998; Marchand 2002; Salzinger 2004:56).

### **1.3 Perspectives on Feminisation of Labour, Resistance and Labour Movements in EPZs**

#### **1.3.1 Marxist-Feminist Perspective:**

Notwithstanding the increasing number of EPZs in both the developing and the developed world, the literature on this area of research originated in Latin America and South East Asia (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Elson and Pearson 1981; Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983). This literature indicates that *young, unmarried women* in the Third World are preferred as EPZ workers, as they are a cheap, docile and manipulable labour force with high levels of productivity (Soni-Sinha 2006:336).<sup>5</sup> From a Marxist-feminist perspective, the literature draws attention to women's working conditions in EPZs which reinforce conventional gender roles (Elson and Pearson 1981: 100; Mies 1986:136). The focus is on their double subordination as workers within the New International Division of Labour<sup>6</sup> and as daughters and wives within households (Pearson and Elson 1981; Mies 1986; Tiano 1994:44-45).<sup>7</sup> This approach has been criticised for undermining the complexity of global processes (Acker 2004:21) and for overgeneralising the subordination of women in EPZs (Tiano 1994:4). Stereotypical representation of female factory workers underpinned the monolithic category of third world women (Mohanty 1991; Sani-Sinha 2006:338) and denied their agency (Pearson 1998:180).

Since the emphasis was on domination, resistance and mobilisation remained as less explored notions in these accounts on EPZs. The assumption was that precarious

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<sup>4</sup> "It is estimated that there are currently around 3,500 EPZs throughout the world, operating in around 130 countries and territories and employing around 66 million people." (ILO 2008:2)

<sup>5</sup> See also Elson and Pearson 1981:93; Mies 1986:117; Tiano 1994:44

<sup>6</sup> The New International Division of Labour (NILD) refers to the division of production process by multinational corporations among their plants in different countries of the world. Accordingly, since the beginning of 1960's, low-skilled and labour-intensive jobs have been moved to third world countries adopting export-oriented industrialisation strategies; while the *control over management and technology* was held from headquarters located in the first world (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983:6; Kim 1992:221).

<sup>7</sup> Despite this negative image of EPZs, there are also accounts women's empowerment from paid work in EPZs and since wages in EPZs are higher when compared to informal sector and paid employment itself brings some level of freedom from family. (see for instance Grossman 1979:13 quoted in Perrons 2004:199; Kabeer and Mahmood 2004)

employment records of women and their double burden as workers and housewives leave them with neither the time nor the opportunities to get organized for better working conditions (Tiano 1994:40). There is evidence that earlier works on EPZs and female employment recognise the need for an alternative organisation of collective action to confront the challenges of mobilising women (Elson and Pearson 1981:104-106; Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983:57-59), and acknowledge instances of resistance (ibid.44-47). However, these studies seeking for a structural solution, neglect daily *oppositional tactics* (Ong 1997:77) of workers; thus tend to reify women's uniform docility in the face of MNCs (Tiano 1994:3).

### **1.3.2 Docile Bodies and Bodily Resistance**

Young third-world women, assumed to be '*biologically*' suited to assembly line jobs, have also been studied from post-structuralist perspectives (Ong 1987; Salzinger 2003; Ngai 2005; Wright 2006). Despite the homogenous discourse on docility that operates at macro level, ethnographic works influenced by a post-structuralist formation of the subject display various disciplinary regimes at micro level (Foucault: 1980:106). Informed by Foucault's insights on power, discourse and body; this literature shows that gendered discipline and control over bodily movements in EPZ factories, actively construct docile (female) bodies (Foucault 1975:137-138) in the actual workplace (Salzinger 2003:14) rather than employing ready-made ones.

Analysing the formation of docile subjects as a productive effect of power paves the way for the recognition of multiple forms of resistance. For Foucault, resistance is not exterior to relations of power and multiple points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network (1976:96). His analysis of power and resistance focuses on *techniques and tactics of domination that depend upon bodies* (1980:102-104). Ethnographic evidence shows that resistance manifests itself through '*oppositional tactics*' (Ong 1997:77) embedded in workers' bodies. Similarly, the resistance in various forms such as accounts of bodily pain and screams (Ngai 2005:166) or the claim of being taken by supernatural spirits (Ong 1987:204) are qualified in post-structuralist approaches to feminisation of labour in EPZs. Although there is evidence that these instances disrupt the functionality of work management (ibid. 201), they are labelled within dominant discourses as instances of women's emotional instability rather than as a labour movement.

Foucault's conceptualisation of resistance has been instrumental in revealing the failures and inconsistencies in the creation of docile bodies<sup>8</sup>, yet it has also been highly critiqued for foreclosing the conceptual possibility for organised resistance (Dreyfus 1983:206-207). In this sense, Ngai's conceptualisation of 'multisided resistance' (2005:193-196) provides an extension of Foucault's understanding of resistance and allows us to go beyond the dichotomy of bodily resistance and collective action without romanticising the latter as the only form of challenging the established order. In analysing the resistance at Novamed, the literature on bodily resistance and the concept of 'multisided resistance' is highly instrumental but not sufficient in understanding distinctive features of labour mobilisation and oppositional tactics.

### 1.3.3 Labour Mobilisation in EPZs:

Rosa argues that several accounts of resistance in EPZs remains undocumented (1994:75) when female passivity is taken for granted and the definition of resistance on the shop-floor is confined to unionisation (Ward 1990:15). Although there is evidence that female docility in EPZs is not persistent (Kim 1992:235), women's mobilisations are mostly perceived as *scattered acts of resistances* (Ong 1997:81) and are discursively pushed outside the realm of resistance. The precarious and spontaneous nature of female resistance was emphasised with epithets such as '*underground struggles*' (ibid.83), '*wild cat strikes*' or '*sympathy strikes*' (Rosa 1994:86).

By the same token, recent studies on labour mobilisation in EPZs have mostly analysed collective action and unionisation movements (Bandy 2004a; Carty 2006; Knights and Wells 2007).<sup>9</sup> Through particular case analysis, this literature raises questions on strategies of '*combating the power of global capital over workers' interests*' in EPZs (Carty 2003:3) while refraining from radical confrontational politics that will result in loss of jobs.<sup>10</sup> These studies emphasise the increasing role of non-state actors (Carty 2006:215), of

<sup>8</sup> see Salzinger 2003:151; Ngai 2005:15

<sup>9</sup> All three studies (Carty 2006; Bandy 2004a; Knight and Well 2007) analysed labour mobilisation in Kukdong factory, a Korean subcontractor of Nike that operates in a Mexican maquiladora. The strike, which took place in Kukdong in 2001, lasted 9 months. Having secured transnational support from international labour activists and university students from the US, the strike ended with significant increase in workers' wages and the recognition of workers' in-house union. Similar to Novamed, women made up 85% of the workforce in Kukdong and the verbal and physical abuse that they were subjected to, formed the basis for the mobilisation (Bandy 2004b:318). However, none of these studies retained a gender perspective to analyse the movement and apparently international campaigning was not centred on gendered claims. See <http://henningcenter.berkeley.edu/gateway/kukdong.html> and Bandy (2004b)

<sup>10</sup> The literature highlights examples where riots and protests in EPZs ended up with multinational factories in EPZs closing down (e.g. Kim 1992) or refraining from further investment.

transnational advocacy networks and coalition building among class and non-class based movements (Carty 2003:4; Bandy 2004a:416) *in striking a fairer balance between global capital and workers' rights* (Carty 2006:229). They provide insightful tools to analyse the *trajectory of the conflict* and *strategical framings of issues* (Knight and Wells 2007:98) at *local, national and international levels* (Carty 2006:216).

Despite the recognition of the diminishing role of unions as primary actors of labour movements, studying the resistance in EPZs through unionisation and coalition building remained as the main paradigm. However, unequal power relations among actors in coalitions are not widely discussed in studies which are very much focused on the crucial role of advocacy networks (Bandy 2004a:421). Similarly, the gender blindness of such analyses provides an “*incomplete picture of power and resistance in the global system*” (Mendez 2002:139). Mendez’s (2005) analysis of MEC – an autonomous women’s organisation comprised of unemployed and employed women in Nicaragua – addresses this gap in the EPZs and resistance literature.<sup>11</sup> While revealing changing forms of mobilisation and resistance in women’s initiatives cutting across *the public/private divide* to address the needs of women working in EPZs in Nicaragua (Mendez 2005:129), Mendez discusses difficulties faced by MEC in raising feminist concerns within transnational labour movements (2005:137).

Similarly, emphasising unionism as the only strategy to improve workers’ material conditions in Latin America diminished the attention paid to working women’s concerns such as *sexual harassment, gender discrimination* and *pregnancy testing*. (Bandy 2004a:422). On the other hand, in-house unions or autonomous women’s organisations provide genuine participation and higher levels of empowerment for their members (Rosa 1994:88-89). However, drawbacks of autonomous organisations lie in lower material gains coupled with the risk of marginalisation in the transnational coalition politics (Colgan and Ledwith 2002:14), as in the case of MEC. Within this frame, coalition building among gender-based and class-based movements gains relevance, while problems arising from power differences among these groups persist.

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<sup>11</sup> Maria Elena Cuadra (MEC) is named after a domestic worker who was killed by a drunk driver (Mendez 2005:4). It was founded by former members of a women’s committee of a trade union in Nicaragua. Mendez (ibid. 59) argues that the political practices of MEC dealing with impacts of global re-structuring on women, complicates “*binaries between NGO vs. social movement, women vs. labour organisation, strategic vs. practical gender interests, public vs. private, globalisation from above or below.*” As an autonomous institution, MEC exemplifies a gendered form of mobilisation to resist and accommodate global restructuring (ibid. 3).

#### 1.4 Conclusions and an Alternative Framework?

The increasing role of EPZs within the global economy and their relevance with regards to literature on the feminisation of labour makes them an important site for locating multiple resistance strategies of women workers within the global economy. Notwithstanding instances of resistance in EPZs that remained mostly under-recorded, this review identifies two diverse frameworks to deal with the resistance and labour movements in EPZs. On the one hand, post-structuralist feminist ethnographies reveal forms of resistance registered upon the body and contest that these accounts are excluded from the conventional realm of 'politics'. On the other hand, the literature on collective action in EPZs focuses on political opportunities generated by grassroots activism and transnational networking; yet does not address questions related to power relations within advocacy networks and fails to recognise forms of resistance other than collective action.

*Analytical attention to multiple sites and forms of resistance in EPZs* (Ngai 2005) calls for recognising the body as a political site and for integrating the *missing dimension of gender* into the conceptualisation of resistance (Mendez 2005:63). Therefore, the literature review underpins the theoretical necessity of adding the postmodern feminist framework on discourse/knowledge/power and difference (Sani-Sinha 2006:338) into the analysis of 'labour movements' in EPZs. Having discussed where the research question lies within the existing literature, I now turn to the discussion of Women and the Politics of Place (WPP)<sup>12</sup> as a plausible framework to bridge the theoretical gap between bodily resistance and collective action in addressing the question of resistance.

The WPP framework is based on the analysis of local (place-based) movements in order to understand the continuing role of women in shaping politics within global restructuring (Escobar and Harcourt 2005:8). For Gibson-Graham (2005:130): "*WPP is a project of narrating and theorising a globally emergent form of localised politics, [...] with the goal of bringing this politics into a new stage of being.*" It draws on the shared conviction that *alternatives to patriarchal neo-liberal globalisation* are already taking place around the world and their analysis is a political act of recognition (ibid.132; Alvarez 2005:248).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, analysing global re-structuring requires that greater attention is paid to *spatial strategies deployed by workers* (Savage and Wills 2004:5).

WPP challenges *globalocentric* narratives (Bergeron 2001:983) that render placed-based struggles and women's particular forms of politics centred around the body invisible

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<sup>12</sup> see Escobar and Harcourt 2002; 2005

<sup>13</sup> Also see Mendez (2002:140).

(Escobar and Harcourt 2005:5).<sup>14</sup> Harcourt's (2005:32-33) definition of body politics informed by Foucault's analysis, takes the body as *a fluid site of power and political contestation* where '*all strategies of control and resistance are registered*' (2002:29). Concurrently, body politics reclaim the body as *an entry point for* [feminist] *political engagement* (Harcourt 2005:32), opening up a space for *fleshly experience* in politics (2002:292-293). Within this framework, the research cuts across the public/private, macro/micro, local/global divide by analysing how body-politics were negotiated during the strike period at Novamed.

While *body-politics* within the WPP framework informs my analysis on emerging discourses and practices of resistance during the strike, tensions posed by this framework should be acknowledged. Its explicit focus on women's experiences rather than gender relations (Escobar and Harcourt 2005:2) suggests an uncritical celebration of resistance and essentialises women's bodies as 'natural' sites for body politics. On the other hand, associating women with the place implies reproducing gendered power relations where woman is equated with local and man with global.<sup>15</sup> To negotiate these tensions, 'gender' is taken as the key analytical category to analyse local manifestation of global processes, not because the strikers are women, but because gender relations characterise the ways in which they were incorporated into the labour market (Salzinger 2004:56) as well as into the mobilisation process.

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<sup>14</sup> For Escobar and Harcourt (2005:4-5), WPP challenges globalocentric narratives where main agents of transformation are theorised as "big actors" in the global economy such as markets, corporations, big governments in the North. On the other hand, this framework also challenges equally globalocentric idea that confronting globalisation can only happen through *global types of politics* (ibid.).

<sup>15</sup> see Freeman 2001

## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Feminist critiques of objectivity acknowledged that no research is independent of researchers' subjectivity (Harding 1993; Finlay 2002). Therefore being reflexive about one's interests and biases in research and accounting for one's methods are considered as part of a researcher's work (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:118-119). With this aim, this section discusses characteristics of my research methodology: i) the choice of case study analysis ii) methods for data-gathering and discourse analysis as a research tool iii) ethical issues concerning "representation" and the ways in which they are negotiated.

### 2.1 Case study as the Research Strategy:

Case studies are seen as appropriate methodology when dealing with complex, contemporary social phenomena (Yin 1994:3-8). EPZs are a contemporary feature of the global economy (ILO 2003:10) and they are recent and relatively unfamiliar phenomenon in Turkey.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, an extended case study<sup>17</sup> approach has been considered appropriate to analyse the strike in Antalya Free Zone in Turkey. As the literature review has revealed, analysing particular cases is a common strategy for studying labour mobilisation in EPZs (Kim 1992; Bandy 2004a; Cathy 2006). Theoretically, focusing on a case at the local level provides opportunities to extend "*an ethnographic moment embedded in ongoing and complex processes*" into global relations (Acker 2004:22). Hence, this research aims at providing a gendered definition for resistance at the very local level, yet at drawing attention to a general change in the relations of global capital to labour.

Although case studies are criticised as weak strategies to support existing theories due to the fact that they provide little basis for generalisation (Yin 1994:10), they are seen as the ideal research strategy to cast doubt on theoretical claims (Polletta and Amenta 2001:310). Accordingly, while I discuss certain features of resistance in EPZs through a single case, I do not suggest a theoretical position to generalise; but an extension of previous perspectives on resistance and labour movements in EPZs and an opening for further research on gendered analysis of labour movements.

The choice of this particular case for analysis stems from personal reasons as well as my theoretical interests. I acknowledge that the choice of the topic as well as methods of

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<sup>16</sup> The history of Free Zones is briefly explained in 3.1.1

<sup>17</sup> Among different definitions of case studies, Mitchell's (2000:169) definition explains general features of my research project as a case study: "'case study refers to [...] the documentation of some particular phenomenon or set of events which has been assembled with the explicit end in view of drawing theoretical conclusions from it."

analysis are influenced – if not determined – by where I situate myself as a feminist from a non-western context, being exposed to a highly westernised education and writing for an academic audience in the UK.

## **2.2 Production of Data<sup>18</sup> and Discourse Analysis**

Place-based strategy is concerned with the “how” of resistance movements (Osterweil 2005:181). The methods and sources in this research are chosen to answer how an arguably particular form of resistance emerged in Antalya Free Zone in Turkey; more concretely how and by whom issues are strategically framed.

Petrol-Is, the union recognised as workers’ official representative, has recently published a book that brings news items on the strike (in national and local newspapers), periodicals, internet together with its own declarations and official correspondences during the strike period. This book has been an invaluable source for locating changes in discourses over time. I also draw on materials that are not included in the book, such as leaflets, internet pages, official documents, pictures and a documentary on the strike. Primarily, the booklet published by Women’s Platform has allowed me to compare the union’s perspective with that of the platform.<sup>19</sup>

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with union representatives, and feminists who worked in the solidarity platform during the strike period<sup>20</sup>, in order to investigate how personal experiences and written documents construct one another and locate when they differ from each other. Interviewees were reached through the snowball sampling method and in each setting; I easily gained access to people and materials as a young academic from an internationally known institution. All interviews were conducted in Turkish – and taped – wherever convenient for the interviewees (public spaces, union offices, over the phone<sup>21</sup>) and each lasted about an hour.<sup>22</sup> They were based on open-ended

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<sup>18</sup> The term ‘data production’ is chosen over ‘data collection’. While the latter implies that facts are out there to be observed or collected, the former refers to processes through which, both the knowing subject, i.e the researcher and ‘data’, are socially constructed (Holland and Ramazanoglu 2002: 154).

<sup>19</sup> The fact that Women’s Platform published a twelve-paged booklet, whereas the union published a 256-paged book hints at the unequal power relations among the coalition partners as further discussed in 3.2.3

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 1 for demographic information of interviewees.

I have been collecting newspaper clippings on the strike since February 2008. My main reason for doing interviews was that news items that I could reach on the internet were not comprehensive enough and I felt that personal experiences were missing from the narratives. Interestingly, it was the interviewees who provided the book (from the union) and the leaflet and the documentary (from Feryal) which became my primary sources for analysis along with the interviews themselves.

<sup>21</sup> All interviews are conducted from March to April 2008; 4 months after the strikers’ return to the factory.

<sup>22</sup> With all the interviewees, I first made a phone call of 10-15 minutes and/or sent e-mails to explain them who I am; my purpose in conducting this research, what kind of questions they should expect. In fact, I tried to

questions so as to reveal the different discourses portraying the strike period. Several common themes were pursued in the interviews, including the involvement of different actors in the strike, their relation to workers, their experiences of networking and coalition building and their evaluation of outcomes. Considering the close link between experience and discourse (Scott 1992:32-33), rather than distinguishing personal narratives from what was on paper, I analyse interviews in the relation to other materials.<sup>23</sup>

Several methods for data production aims at revealing the multiplicity of discourses used to portray the strike. It has been argued that selecting a range of methods is useful to maximise input in feminist research (Maynard and Purnis 1994:3). However, using several sources by no means aims at generating *a unitary picture of “truth”* (ibid. 4), especially in a project concerned with the making of meaning (Gill 1996: 147) in a social movement. Based on the statement that *“truths are negotiated, not discovered”* (Miller 2001:345), this research draws on critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an interpretative strategy. In line with the premises and objectives of this research, the term “critical” refers to *“having distance to the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and a focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research”* (Wodak: 2001a:9).

For Foucault, discourse marks the possibility for resistance (1975:27; 1980:93) as well as the will to power. By rejecting the demarcation between dominant and subjugated discourses, he argues that discourse as much as an effect and instrument of power can also *expose and render power fragile* (1976:101). Hall interprets “discourse” as *“rules and practices that provide a group of meaningful statements”* about *“a particular topic in a particular historical moment”* (2003:44). By looking at how different discourses interact and are negotiated in local settings, discourse analysis provides a strong strategy for the analysis of power at both micro and macro levels (Foucault 1975:26). Various discourse analysis strategies, prominent in analysing media and/or gender issues (Wodak 2001a:3), are centred on the common premise that discourse and social realities are mutually constitutive (Gill 1996:141). From this vein, feminists have used CDA to reveal how *“gender relations of power are (re)produced, contested and negotiated in the representation of social practices”* (Lazar 2005:11).

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make it clear that the interview will not be based on questions and answers; rather I was interested in their version of the story, in their involvement in the strike. All interviewees consented that their statements will be used in this research. They were all helpful, open to share information although with some of them (Ayse and Melis) who had limited time, I had less chance to probe the discussion.

<sup>23</sup> Although my initial aim was to contrast divergent perspectives on the strike, having analysed the intertwining of different discourses, the focus of the research shifted towards social construction of the resistance and changing forms of doing politics during the strike.

Although some have been sceptical about CDA as a postmodern research strategy depoliticising feminist concerns (Wolf 1996:6; Gill 1995:182), CDA is considered a political act interlinking power to knowledge (Miller 2001:345; Lazar 2005:6). In this research, CDA employed to investigate the framing of resistance at Novamed by different actors involved in the strike, opens up *new ways of thinking about change* (Scott 1992:38) in the realm of politics and at level of institutions (i.e. trade unions). Such analyses, however, do not provide a space outside of power relations, considering that research practices operate within the same power/knowledge mechanisms (Dreyfus 1983:203-204). Rather, the analysis of resistance refers back to the analysis of power (Foucault 1983:211). In this sense, analysing discourses is instrumental in this research in recognising that neither the resistance nor its analysis designates a power evasive space where the mechanisms of domination are overcome (Abu-Lughod 1990:42; Harcourt 2005:45).

### **2.3 Representing “others”:**

Acknowledging ethical aspects of methodological issues discussed above, this section focuses on challenges posed by representing people/institutions/texts. Representation is a contradictory yet inescapable aspect of the feminist theory and practice (Alcoff 1995; Wolf 1996:2-3). Therefore, researchers are expected to account for their *potentially exploitative* relations to the researched (England 1994:82-85) and for their ultimate power over the research text, mostly written for an academic audience rather than for the researched themselves (Holland and Ramazanoglu 2002:114).

Power differences stemming from different race/gender/class positions between researchers and researched (Wolf 1996:2) were less significant in this particular research endeavour considering that three of my interviewees were feminists coming from similar backgrounds to mine and sharing similar values. Although I considered myself an insider as a feminist and native Turkish speaker; interviewing people involved in the Novamed-issue forced me to reconsider my position as an academic, as opposed to that of an activist. Unlike the friendly conversation that I had with two feminist activists, the interviews with people from the union were more formal and differences between interviewer and the interviewed were more apparent.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, interviewing the branch head of the union and the union representative over the phone was more challenging due to lack of face-to-face contact but also due to the lack of a common language (i.e.

To reduce the risk of *colonising voices of others* (England 1994:81), I drew on Mosse's insight that objectivity is "*maximising the capacity of actors to object what is said about them*" (2004:ix). I e-mailed the interviewees in July 2008<sup>25</sup> to thank them for their contribution and to inform them about the evolvement of the research, briefly summarising my arguments, and asked for feedback. I also asked their opinion about disclosure of people's and organisations' names.<sup>26</sup> Based on two replies that I received and my reflections on research ethics, I use pseudonyms for some interviewees – lacking their written consent – while disclosing the names of those who consented and of organisations (as they are already public). Because my interviewees belong to certain organisations and groups, there is the risk of generalising personal narratives as institutional stances. To negotiate this, I circulated a summary of my findings through the interviewees in institutional settings that will potentially benefit from, contribute to or contest my findings. By this means, I met three other feminists working on the Novamed strike. Together, we are thinking about ways of reaching non-academic audiences through popular joint publications and other possible means.

Despite my endeavour to produce data from different perspectives, I should also account for "silences in the research", such as the voices of the employer and the strikers. Firstly, the employer's voice was not sought, due to the assumption that the powerful position of the employer would not provide insights for the analysis of resistance (Alcoff 1995:99).<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the research focusing on representations of the strike risks silencing the individual experiences of strikers and fails to answer questions regarding women's empowerment through resistance. Despite the danger of erasing workers' voices, this was a conscious decision to keep research inquiry focused on the issue of negotiation over discourses and political space.<sup>28</sup>

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feminism). In these cases, I had to intervene more during the interview and re-formulate my questions when I felt inadequate in expressing myself.

<sup>25</sup> Three months after the interviews were conducted.

<sup>26</sup> Only two of them (Feryal and Necla) replied. Their responses were encouraging for me, agreeing with me rather than contesting my position. They also gave consent for disclosing their names.

<sup>27</sup> Another reason was the difficulties in accessing employer's representatives.

During the strike, limited public commentary by the employer except few instances of denial and "*plethora of ignorance*" proves its powerful position to invalidate certain knowledges (Sedgwick 1990:8).

<sup>28</sup> I was more interested in emerging subjectivities of workers during the strike period and the changes in their self-perceptions at the beginning of my research. However, I abandoned my initial thoughts firstly because revealing the changing subjectivities of the workers would require a longer fieldwork than the time available for my research. Secondly, conducting in-depth interviews with workers themselves, who are working at least forty-eight hour a week in the factory bears ethical problems. In other words, I could only conduct interviews on Sundays during their leisure time. This kind of research I presume would not only generate superficial data but also representational issues and would definitely alter the focus of my research questions.

Representing texts is equally political as representing people (Spivak 1993:190). It requires the accountability and transparency of the interpreter. Working with empirical data collected in Turkish and analysing them in English for an English-speaking audience, posed a further representational challenge for my analysis. My translation/interpretations of the narratives of resistance in media, interviews and official documents are supported by references to primary sources and by explanatory footnotes when necessary. Given the reduced access of English-speaking readers to primary sources, predominantly in Turkish, I attached two examples of news items in English and briefly explained the type of media sources that I used for analysis.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.4 What kind of knowledge?

The research methodology is structured around the dilemma of claiming a valid knowledge of the ways in which gendered power relations operate and refraining from the position of the “*knowing feminist*” (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:61). The choice of methods and interpretations are partial to and not independent from my subjectivity (ibid.116). Without claiming *right or wrong*, but with explicit methodological/ethical choices (Wodak 2001b:65), I rely on an ‘*interpretative, critical and partial*’ (Haraway 1988:589) explanation of a labour movement. Refuting a relativist approach, partiality means making one’s claims through politics of location (ibid.). I am aware that my biases towards “feminist” discourses on the resistance against those of male dominated unions pose a challenge to my deconstructive perspective. I also acknowledge that the usage of certain concepts such as “women”, “feminist” and “patriarchy” can be slippery.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Appendix 2-3-4

<sup>30</sup> While the category of women is taken for granted in the discussion, it is worth acknowledging that labels such as “women’s groups” serve as umbrella terms to indicate both feminists and other women’s groups in the platform, rather than an essentialist female identity. Meanwhile, the term ‘feminist’ chosen to qualify certain political claims and practices might create tensions considering that not everyone in the platform and among workers call themselves feminists.

### **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:**

Having elaborated on different insights on resistance and feminisation of employment in EPZs and having reflected on the methodological tools used for analysis, this section critically analyses the resistance movement in question from a feminist politics of place perspective. Taking into consideration the interconnection of power, body and discourse, the analysis provides a grounded conceptualisation of labour mobilisation and resistance within global capitalism.

#### **3.1 Contextualising the Novamed Strike**

##### **3.1.1 Free Zones (FZs) and the Feminisation of Employment (?) in Turkey**

Within the WPP-framework, it is of strategic importance to scrutinise how global meanings are localised (Alvarez 2005:252): An extended case study method such as this especially requires studying social movements in their political and economic contexts (Burawoy 2000: 26). Although trends show that EPZs are global phenomena (ILO 2008), their regulation and economic scope differ vastly from one country to another; as do meanings attached to them (Lee 2005).

The current regulation on FZs in Turkey, which ensures significant advantages to investors, entered into force in 1985 and replaced previous unsuccessful legal attempts to form EPZs (Organ 2006:131). Consequently, the first FZs were established in 1987 in Mersin and Antalya<sup>31</sup>, where the Novamed strike took place. Establishment of FZs was a clear sign that Turkey has adopted an export-based economy, replacing its previous inward-oriented industrialisation strategies (which were prevalent between 1949 and 1979) (ibid.128). Although employment has been increasing over the years (DTM March 2008), employment opportunities created by FZs did not live up to expectations on their founding and remained lower than those in many other countries with similar special zones (Organ 2006:136-137)<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Information taken from Undersecretariat of the Prime Ministry for Foreign Trade (DTM) [http://www.zucder.org.tr/docs/serbest\\_bolgeler.pdf](http://www.zucder.org.tr/docs/serbest_bolgeler.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Currently, there are twenty free zones in Turkey employing 50000 people (DTM June 2008). The number makes 0.25% of the total non-agricultural labour force in Turkey. While this rate is very low compared to other countries with FTZs (Organ 2006:136-137), it is also rare that EPZs represent a large percentage of the total employment (ILO 2008:5)

On the other hand, the high concentration of women workers in MNCs operating in EPZs – as found, for example, in South-East Asia and Latin America – did not take place in Turkey (Narlı 2000).<sup>33</sup> Instead, female labour force participation in the country has been steadily decreasing since the 1990s (Toksoz 2007:v) and women are overrepresented in the informal sector (ibid.35). Consequently, strikers at Novamed are by no means representative of the female population in Turkey, where only 26.6%<sup>34</sup> of women belong to the labour force.<sup>35</sup> However, the fact that female employment in Turkey is amongst the lowest among OECD and EU countries and only 15% of working women are employed in the industrial sector (ibid.28) and very small numbers in FZs, does not reduce the theoretical importance of the Novamed strike. On the contrary, I argue that the resistance at Novamed, albeit small, has altered *the notion of doing politics* (Mendez 2005: 70) by enabling national and transnational coalitions among different women's groups and labour unions. Feminist discourses broadened the scope of the resistance at Novamed beyond the FZs, by linking it to other forms of exploitation of female labour and female bodies in paid and unpaid work. However, it would be misleading to suggest that the incorporation of feminist discourses and body politics is free from tensions and gendered power relations.

Comparative research has shown that forms of resistance in EPZs in different parts of the world have been influenced (if not determined) by several factors; including national legal frameworks (Rosa 1994:75), different management techniques within the factory (Salzinger 2003:32) and domestic and transnational support mechanisms (Carty 2006: 223-334). The analysis hereby suggests that each of these factors has influenced the emergence and evolution of the strike at Novamed. In fact, until the Novamed strike, the unions have been almost absent in FZs, initially due to a temporary provision in the 1985 Law on Free Zones,<sup>36</sup> that restricted most union activities in FZs and banned the right to strike during the first ten years following the establishment of the zone. In 2002, amendments to the law regulating FZs within the EU alignment package abolished legal restrictions on labour mobilisation in FZs<sup>37</sup>, paving the way for the emergence of resistance at Novamed.

From a *globalocentric* perspective (Bergeron 2001: 983), the strike at Novamed, in which 85 workers took part may be considered insignificant for the workings of global

<sup>33</sup> Note that there is a lack of gender segregated data for employment structure in FZs

<sup>34</sup> As of May 2008 (taken from TurkStat) <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/Gosterge.do?metod=IlgiliGosterge&id=3570>

<sup>35</sup> The majority of working women are employed in the informal sector mostly in agriculture, whereas those within the formal employment mostly work in service sector (Toksoz 2007:28).

<sup>36</sup> Temporary article 1 of Law on Free Zones;

3218 sayılı Serbest Bölgeler Kanunu, R.G Tarih:15/6/1985 Sayı:18785

<sup>37</sup> document by DTM, "Free Zones in the Process of EU Membership" available online at: <http://www.dtm.gov.tr/dtmadmin/upload/EAD/TanitimKoordinasyonDb/AB.doc>

capital. However, Ostenweil rightly suggests that a *more holistic globality* relies on the recognition of the quality of oppositional politics rather than nominal figures (2005:185-186). Similarly, Mendez (2002:131) has argued that in new forms of resistance and mobilisation, force stems from information, not from numbers. The Novamed strike, accomplished by a minority of workers in the factory, does not only qualify this position, but also proves the role of non-state actors as alternative sources of information for struggle (Carty 2006:315).

### **3.1.2 The Strike and its actors:**

Since 2000, the Novamed factory in Antalya FZ produces haemodialysis bloodline systems as a subsidiary of Fresenius Medical Care (FMC), a German based MNC, the world's largest provider of dialysis products and services.<sup>38</sup> Novamed employs 320 workers, of which only 15 are men: All workers employed in the production line are women.<sup>39</sup> In 2005, factory workers (led by two male workers with previous unionisation experience) applied to Petrol-Is<sup>40</sup> to improve their working conditions.<sup>41</sup> In September 2006, 85 workers at Novamed were forced to go on strike, due to the employer's refusal to recognise the union as the representative of workers and to come to a collective agreement with the union.

At the outset of the strike, most of the workers had no in-depth knowledge about unions or social rights. As Ong argues, rather than *opposing capital as an abstract entity* (1997:72), opposition to local workings of global capital is very much shaped by individual experiences and workers' *attempts to live within the industrial system without losing one's sense of human dignity* (ibid.77). Similarly at Novamed, the main reasons for women to join the union were their poor working, health and safety conditions, and harassment by their superiors in the workplace. Assembly workers were subject to disciplinary techniques cross-cutting the public and private divide, similar to experiences of women in EPZs in different

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<sup>38</sup> Information taken from international correspondences of Petrol-Is in Petrol-Is (2008: 246-248) and cross-checked in companies' website. Accordingly, Fresenius Group operates around 100 countries in the world and employs around 114000 people.

[http://www.fresenius.se/internet/fag/com/faginpub.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/At+a+glance+FSE+07\\_08/\\$FILE/AeB+2007\\_08\\_englisch.pdf](http://www.fresenius.se/internet/fag/com/faginpub.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/At+a+glance+FSE+07_08/$FILE/AeB+2007_08_englisch.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> From an interview with by Necla (Cagri (115) in Petrol-Is 2008: 169)

In line with the literature indicating the multinational employers' preference for young women in assembly line jobs (Mies 1988:117; Mendez 2002:124; Ngai 2005:50), Novamed's women workers were mostly young (married or unmarried). Most of them had high school degrees but no previous work experiences and preferred to work for international factory over service sector jobs due to higher wages and provision of social security.

<sup>40</sup> Petrol-Is is the biggest union in Turkey in petroleum, chemical and rubber sectors representing 35% of workers employed in these sectors.

Source: Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security at [http://www.csgeb.gov.tr/article.php?article\\_id=475](http://www.csgeb.gov.tr/article.php?article_id=475)

<sup>41</sup> Booklet by Women's Platform (December 2007:3)

parts of the globe.<sup>42</sup> The employer's permission was required to get married; the time workers spent in the toilet was monitored; and pregnancy schedules were introduced in order to prevent several women on the same line from simultaneously taking maternity leave.<sup>43</sup> Those who did not comply with these rules were insulted by supervisors and eventually forced to quit their jobs.<sup>44</sup>

After 15 months of resistance by initially 85 workers, the strike ended with the recognition of workers' right to collective agreement. It turned out to be a victory both on the part of the union and The Women's Platform for Solidarity with Novamed Strikers<sup>45</sup>, founded in September 2007 by the coalition of 27 women's organisations around the country.<sup>46</sup> During this period, occasional reports on the strike reached local and national newspapers. My research shows that the active involvement of women's and feminist groups from September 2007 onwards, quantitatively increased the publicity of the strike, particularly in the mainstream media. Furthermore, women's activism has shifted the portrayal of the strike from a strike by workers to a 'women's strike' by incorporating body politics into workers' claims.

### **3.1.3 From Workers' Rights to Body Politics:**

This section argues that the framing of the movement as a "women's strike", with its distinctive features of mobilisation and resistance, is an outcome of a gradual evolvement of discourses from class-based politics to women's human rights and eventually to body-politics. In this sense, one can suggest that strikers were constructed – through discourse – initially as workers, then as women workers whose human rights were denied and ultimately as women workers with particular problems and political claims on the basis of their sex. Neither do these different discourses exclude each other, nor does this study suggest that one aspect of these emerging subjectivities is more genuine than others. Rather, I am interested in the techniques through which different aspects of identity are crystallised and used to reformulate strikers' demands.

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<sup>42</sup> See for instance (Ong: 1987; Rosa 1994; Ngai 2005; Mendez 2006).

<sup>43</sup> In Ayse's words: "If you want to get pregnant, you talk to the employer supervisor) and sign up for the schedule. When your turn comes, they tell you that you have two months to get pregnant. If you fail to do so, you lose your chance for until next round." It is worth acknowledging that most of these treatments were ended with the entry of the union or after the strike because the employer embracing a strategy of denying all the accusations had to improve working conditions. (from interview with Ayse)

<sup>44</sup> *Evrensel* (12/11/2006 in *Petrol-Is* 2008:17).

<sup>45</sup> Referred as "Women's Platform" hereafter

<sup>46</sup> from the booklet by Women's Platform (December 2007:7).

The media coverage reveals that during the first five months of the strike both the union and the media relied on the language of conventional class politics “*built on the back of an exploited, male-dominated manufacturing workforce, [...] whose labouring was the key constituent of masculine identity and whose common interests seemed clear*” (McDowell 2008:23). Between September 2006 and March 2007, discourses on ‘fraternity’ and workers’ dignity dominated news of the strike published in leftist newspapers. Including the few instances where national newspapers reported on the strike, the word ‘woman’ was rarely mentioned and the focus was on public declarations by (male) union leaders. Consequently, (women) workers themselves were rarely featured in the news.<sup>47</sup> Within this period, strikers were usually referred to as ‘*Workers of Novamed Strike*’<sup>48</sup> and the slogans were written as ‘*Long Live Workers’ Resistance at Novamed*’ or ‘*The Victory Belongs to Resisting Proletarian*’.<sup>49</sup>

Although declarations by the union, albeit rarely, mentioned that almost all of the strikers were women, no link was made between the kind of exploitation that workers were subject to and the fact that they were ‘women workers’. The declaration of the Union on 10/10/2006<sup>50</sup> protests the employer’s interventions into workers’ private lives and pregnancy schedules imposed by the employer with no direct reference to the fact that they are women workers. On the other hand, the last paragraph of the declaration on 12/11/2006<sup>51</sup> states that almost all the strikers are “ladies”<sup>52</sup> without mentioning the kind of maltreatment they experienced.

Starting from February 2007, the disciplinary techniques that workers were subjected to in the factory were formulated as a violation of women’s human rights rather than framing the issue merely as the denial of workers’ rights to collective bargaining.<sup>53</sup> March 8<sup>th</sup> 2007 – International Women’s Day – was a turning point for crystallisation of these claims *involving efforts within areas of life considered to be ‘private’* (Freidman 1995:20). For the first time, women workers were pictured in the national media and the

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<sup>47</sup> See for instance *Evrensel* (10/11/2006 and 12/11/2006 in Petrol-Is 2008:12; 17) *Korfez* (11/11/2006 and 20/11/2006 in Petrol-Is 2008:13-14; 20); *Radikal* and *Sabah* (13/11/2006 in Petrol-Is 2008:19)

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Declaration by Petrol-Is 10/10/2006 (in Petrol-Is 2008: 11), other examples include ‘our worker friends’ in *Korfez* (11/11/2006 in ibid. 14) “workers in Novamed’in), in *Evrensel* (12/11/2006 in ibid. 17) [all translations are mine]

<sup>49</sup> taken from Declaration by Petrol-Is Union 12/11/2006 (Petrol-Is 2008:18)

<sup>50</sup> Petrol-Is 2008:10

<sup>51</sup> ibid.16

<sup>52</sup> The declaration ironically refrains from using the word ‘woman’ rather chooses the Turkish word ‘bayan’ which refers to a personal titles such as Miss, Mrs, Lady in English.

<sup>53</sup> Declaration of the union on 01/02/2007 (Petrol-Is 2008:25)

focus was on their gendered experiences.<sup>54</sup> Hence, Petrol-Is Woman's magazine attended public demonstrations for Women's Day and slogans such as "*Women's human rights are violated at Novamed*" and "*As women workers, we are struggling to claim our dignity, our body and our freedom of association*" clearly combined the human rights framework with claims upon the body.<sup>55</sup> However, such attempts were not widely reflected in the media. Consequently, attempts to activate feminist politics to support the resistance at Novamed were not widely heard and the union returned to class-based politics. A human rights framework was also instrumental in mobilising transnational solidarity networks. Petrol-Is made complaints to ETUC and ICEFTU on the basis of violation of human rights by FCM<sup>56</sup>. However, the emphasis was again on the violation of rights to collective bargaining rather than the gender-specific experiences of women workers.<sup>57</sup>

By the time feminist groups and women's networks became actively involved in the strike, the anniversary of the strike was approaching and the employer was far from compromising.<sup>58</sup> The union's political capabilities were exhausted despite the visit by the General Secretary of ICEM promising international support<sup>59</sup>. Within this picture, I argue that body politics provided a fresh political agenda and paved the way for the activation of more efficient transnational support. Demonstrations to raise public awareness of the strike were intensified from September 2007 and were kept up until the end of the strike. The political slogans dealt with claims for equal pay, bodily integrity and women's dignity<sup>60</sup> along with the right to equal bargaining and demands for wage increases. Gender was

<sup>54</sup> Evrensel (04/03/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008:26) and Hurriyet (25/03/2007 in ibid.32)

<sup>55</sup> *Petrol-Is Kadin* [Petrol-Is Woman] (issue 23: 9 in Petrol-Is 2008: 142). Petrol-Is Kadin is the bimonthly women's magazine of the union. Petrol-Is is the only union in Turkish with a magazine published exclusively for women (Toksoz 2007: 95). In the interview, head of the branch stated that the magazine is for the wives of male members as well as female members who make almost 10% of all members. According to Necla A., the editor of the magazine and a feminist activist:

*"These are little but important steps considering that, women's issues are rarely on the agenda of the unions in Turkey. Since the start of women's magazine, Petrol-Is has become more responsive to issues related to gender inequality."*

<sup>56</sup> From Declaration by Petrol Is 11/04/2007. (Petrol-Is 2008: 33)

<sup>57</sup> ibid. In this declaration, Petrol-Is based its complaints on the article 21 of the Universal of Human Rights Declaration and on the European Social Charter.

<sup>58</sup> from interview with Ali and Melis

<sup>59</sup> Birgun (04/08/2007:1 in Petrol-Is 2008:49)

<sup>60</sup> Some examples from slogans that were pictured in the media:

"Equal Pay for Equal Work" Radikal (03/09/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008: 51); "Workers in Novamed reclaim their dignity" Evrensel (16/09/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008: 54); "Women resist against male domination and capitalism" Cumhuriyet (27/09/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008: 68); "End the exploitation of labour and bodies. We are the ones to decide when to give birth" Birgun (28/09/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008: 72) ; "Our labour and our body is ours" Birgun (17/10/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008: 82)

recognised as the main axis of domination; and bodily experiences of “women workers” were emphasised rather than the exploitation of an “*abstract worker*”.<sup>61</sup>

This section showed that during the first year of the strike, there was a gradual change from purely class-based politics to body politics; and that Petrol-Is’s women’s magazine was already instrumental in reshaping dominant discourses about the strike. This means that ethnographical evidence for gendering the resistance in the Novamed strike already existed before the active involvement of women’s groups into the movement. In fact, what constitute a “feminised resistance” can be traced back to communal/individual strategies adopted by women workers against the factory discipline, during the mobilisation process.

### **3.2 Women’s Strike/Extending the Definition of Resistance**

Based on Foucault’s suggestion on the *plurality of resistances* within relations of power (1976:95-96),<sup>62</sup> this section provides a closer look at meanings attached to organising women as *both women and workers* (Mendez 2005: 5). Considering that social movements are not *power free forces* (ibid.63), analysing discourses and political practices during the strike informs *gender-aware conceptualisations of resistance* (ibid.). On the other hand, it highlights the complexity of power relations that *romanticising the resistance* (Abu-Lughod 1991: 42) at Novamed would arguably conceal.

#### **3.2.1 Women’s Mobilisation: Patriarchy, Bodily Resistance and Collective Action:**

High turn over rates among female workers in EPZs has been another factor -along with other particularities of organising women workers- that slows down the mobilisation process (Kim 1992:227). Similarly, at Novamed, harsh working conditions in the factory resulted in high turnover rates. Moreover, individualising tactics and discourses of work discipline starting with *placing the body on the line* (Ngai 2005:81) were extended outside the workplace: Workers already banned from talking to each other on the line, were not allowed to socialise in factory shuttles while commuting from home to work. They were also advised not to invite guests on weekdays. These factors initially rendered mobilisation of women more difficult. However, shared experiences fostered their solidarity once they came

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<sup>61</sup> From Women’s Platform’s brochure (December 2007; 5)

<sup>62</sup> As elaborated in 1.3.2

together.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, Rosa (1994:86) argues that similar managerial techniques aiming at *individualising* (Foucault 1976:184) each worker, inspired women in EPZs to rebel.

The dominance of notions of ‘private’ and ‘home’ in the mobilisation process underpins my conceptualisation of “feminised resistance”. Home as *an ambivalent site* regarding *justice and equality for women* (Escobar and Harcourt 2002:10) played a crucial role in their mobilisation at Novamed. On the one hand, ‘home’ allowed women a space to gather outside the factory discipline. Unlike men, who usually come together in public spaces, women mobilised each other through home visits.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, gender relations within the household were a determining factor for women’s mobilisation.

The literature has shown instances where the collaboration of employers with husbands (Salzinger 2003:94) and parents (Ong 1987:175) in monitoring female bodies extends the loci of surveillance to outside workplace. A similar instance of male control over female bodies was assumed in the mobilisation process at Novamed. The fact that the consent of male figures at ‘home’ (husbands, fathers, sons, fiancées, lovers) was sought for women workers to join the union<sup>65</sup> proves that resistance was initiated within patriarchal power relations. In fact, despite the support of their families in general, for some women, joining the strike itself was a struggle against husbands and/or families.<sup>66</sup> Labour militancy was definitely not seen appropriate for women who were characterised as docile and expected to be content in a full-time job with social security.<sup>67</sup>

The instances of bodily resistance by union members during the mobilisation process show that collective action went hand in hand with resistance strategies adopted by women against the oppressive forces they confront daily (Ong 1987:221) at the workplace. They also hint at *multisided tactics of resistance* countering plurality of power relations (Ngai 2005:195). Monitoring the time spent in the toilet by asking written reports was one of the disciplinary techniques of control over female bodies. Rather than protesting it directly, women started to write detailed explanations to annoy their supervisors by narrating their bodily needs while having periods or diseases.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, to protest the dismissal of two

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<sup>63</sup> from interview with Necla A, (*Cagri* issue: 115 in Petrol-Is 2008: 170)

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> from the interview with Ali A. General secretary of Petrol-Is publicly stated the necessity to adopt a particular strategy to include women members into unions: “This strategy involves mobilization of workers with their families considering that the consent of her family is a crucial factor for a woman to join the union.” (Kadin 23:6 in Petrol-Is 2008: 139). See also Evrensel (26/09/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008: 63).

<sup>66</sup> from interview with Novamed workers (Kadin issue 21 November 2006: 11 in Petrol-Is 2008: 134)

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* one of the workers: “I never talk about the strike at home. They do not understand me. They think that as a woman having a job with social security, I should not ask for more, let alone going on to strike. They do not understand that I want to live with dignity.”

<sup>68</sup> *Hurriyet* 25/03/2007 in (Petrol-Is 2008: 32)

workers for joining the union, assembly workers refused eating lunch offered in the factory.<sup>69</sup> These instances show that the struggles that women had to go through to mobilise in the workplace blurs the distinction between individual/bodily resistance and collective action and offer insights for defining “feminisation of resistance”.

### **3.2.2 Women’s Strike: Changing Discourses and Techniques of Resistance**

This section further scrutinises several significant aspects of “women’s strike” *cutting across public and private divide* (Mendez 2002: 129) and elaborates on the multiple ways in which the resistance is feminised. The discussion is based on the continuation of women’s reproductive burden during the strike, the strike’s long duration, the discourses and practices of campaigning that are suggestive of altering the notion of “politics”, and transnational support mechanisms. Although the gendered character of the resistance was already there before the active campaigning of Women’s Platform, my analysis shows that only after the articulation of some claims in terms of body politics, the concept of “women’s strike” – widely used to refer to the resistance at Novamed – was qualified.

#### **a) Strike and Home:**

Women’s experiences during the resistance revealed the fact that they were striking not only as workers but also as women. Not working in the factory did clearly not exempt them from their daily chores at household. In this sense, one aspect of ‘women’s strike’ refers to the continuation of women’s “second shift” during the strike, most of time carried to the site where the strike took place. For example, children spending the night with their mothers who are on the post to watch the strike rendered women’s reproductive burden visible. This showed that the gendered division of labour at households was not altered during the strike period due to the fact that they still had the responsibilities of day-to-day motherhood to take care of.<sup>70</sup> In fact, in some instances women’s traditional role in caring and reproductive labour was reinforced.

The media portrayed strikers as ‘good mothers’ spending their “time off” from work with their children, referring to the time where they are striking<sup>71</sup>. Such images based on “vulnerable workers” and “good mothers” clearly contradict with images of women working in EPZs who were presented as immoral subjects constituting a danger against family

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<sup>69</sup> from interview with workers in Novamed in *Dayanisma* (September 2007: 21 in Petrol-Is 2008: 161)

<sup>70</sup> From the booklet of “Women’s Platform” (December 2007:12). Despite this observation that generally holds true, there is also evidence that striking women were empowered in their household relations. This point requires further investigation.

<sup>71</sup> see Radikal (16/09/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008:52-53)

values, elsewhere (Salzinger 2003:39; Ong 1987:182). On the contrary, discourses around family values and solidarity were fostered during the strike<sup>72</sup> together with the image of supporting husband/father.<sup>73</sup>

### **b) Resisting like ‘woman’ vs. New Category of Workers?**

Explanations concerning the long duration of the strike without strikers giving up the cause relied on what is called in the literature the ‘new category of worker thesis’ (Tiano 1990:210). Referring to maquiladora<sup>74</sup> workers, this thesis argues that women constitute a new type of worker, not working out of necessity and therefore able to afford unemployment (ibid.).<sup>75</sup> However, this argument is refuted where feminisation of employment coincides with increase in male unemployment (Beneria 2003:92); decrease in wages (Tiano 1990: 223) or where young female workers are primary cash contributors in the family (Ong: 1987:107). Therefore given the heterogeneity of women workers at Novamed, the reliance on husbands’ and parents’ income only partially holds true to explain the drawn-out strike at Novamed.<sup>76</sup>

Although “the new category of worker” argument holds true only for some of the strikers, it does not dismiss one common point made by interviewees on the stubborn character attributed to womankind: *“It is very difficult to convince women to join the union at first, yet once women believe in something, they never give up.”*<sup>77</sup> As in the mobilisation process, women had to be stubborn not only against the employer but also within the household when husbands wanted their wives to end the strike or criticised them for not being as militant as men.<sup>78</sup>

On the one hand, the fact that the striking women succeeded in sustaining their resistance for 15 months with only few people (including the men who initiated the mobilisation)<sup>79</sup> giving up, was glorified by the media.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, the lack of

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<sup>72</sup> As an unintended consequence of the strike, in the absence of employers’ control and pregnancy schedule, many women took advantage of this period to get married and have children. (from interviews with Feryal, Ayse and Ali)

<sup>73</sup> See Evrensel (06/08/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008:50)

<sup>74</sup> name given to EPZs in US-Mexico border (ILO 2003:1)

<sup>75</sup> taken from interview with Necla A.:

“They are mostly single women, they go to strike because they are women but also they can hold on longer, because they are not expected to head the family.”

<sup>76</sup> As mentioned by Ali A. women workers in Novamed were “a heterogeneous group including single female household heads.”

<sup>77</sup> As formulated by Necla A.

<sup>78</sup> from interview with Feryal S.

<sup>79</sup> Although Ayse acknowledges the legitimate reasons some people had to give up and return to work, she states: ‘Men are more likely to break the strike than women.’

interest from the part of the employer for such an extended period of time draws attention to another aspect whereby the resistance is feminised. In this sense, the claims of strikers were not taken seriously and denied by the employer<sup>81</sup> who publicly stated that “*the strike is not based on strong (legitimate) reasons and demands*”.<sup>82</sup>

### c) Women’s coalition: Gendering the Politics

Given the employer’s indifference to women’s resistance and their refusal to meet the union representatives, the re-articulation of workers’ demands from a feminist perspective through refreshed political practices, I argue, highly influenced the outcomes of the Novamed strike. While the literature on feminisation of labour and EPZs discusses mechanisms through which the body becomes an *embodied site of exploitation and accumulation* (Wright 2006:13), this section focuses on how the body is resignified as an embodied site of collective action.

Feminists were interested in the strike not only because it involved women, but also because the nature of exploitation at Novamed embodied their feminist motto: “Do not touch my body, my labour, my identity”.<sup>83</sup> What was distinctive about the Novamed strike for women’s movement in Turkey is that it brought not only feminists but different women’s groups together and enabled an unusual coalition between women’s and working class movements in Turkey.

Although the union’s main concerns – strikers’ right to be unionised and their right to better wages – were maintained in the declaration of the Women’s Platform one year into the strike, the focus of protests was on women’s bodies and identities. Employer’s interventions on individual women’s bodies were publicised and heavily protested. Because the disciplinary power in the factory targeted (women’s) bodies (Foucault 1975:136-139) which were exploited and *marginalised* through *dominant practices and discourses* (Escobar and Harcourt 2002:10); the counter-discourse of resistance for gender justice at Novamed was also centred on the body (Escobar and Harcourt 2005:9).<sup>84</sup> Based on

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<sup>80</sup> Examples from headlines in national newspapers;

‘A year long women’s strike in the Free Zone’ (Radikal 16/09/2007:1 in Petrol-Is 2008:54)

‘Women against bosses’ *Birgun* (17/09/2007:1 in Petrol-Is 2008:55)

‘Women, let’s go to strike’ *Cumhuriyet* (07/10/2007: 2 in Petrol-Is 2008:78)

<sup>81</sup> Radikal (16/09/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008:53)

<sup>82</sup> quoted from the Director General of FCM, Turkey (Referans 27/11/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008:85)

<sup>83</sup> common point made in interviews with Feryal, Melis and Necla

<sup>84</sup> It was also no surprise that counter-strategies of the employer utilise female bodies by making workers that did not go on strike wear t-shirts written ‘I love Novamed’ to show up during public demonstrations for the first year of the strike.

women's bodily experiences in the workplace (and beyond), the declaration's main themes included health and safety, free exercise of reproductive rights, bodily integrity and dignity. First, the employer's method of prohibiting female workers from wearing protective masks in order to prevent them from chatting was protested, due to its detrimental effects on women's health. The second and third themes in the declaration were related to pregnancy schedules and reporting time spent in the toilet.<sup>85</sup> It is noteworthy that concerns about low wages and the right to unionise were mentioned in the declaration only after these primary bodily claims.<sup>86</sup>

Similar to activities of MEC in Nicaragua, main slogans of the Women's Platform intended to "*publicise the private [...] fostering gender solidarity and consciousness.*" (Bandy and Mendez 2006:141).<sup>87</sup> Politicising the body by making it a site for resistance, challenges *ideological and historical processes* that exclude *bodily experiences and activities from political discourse*. (Escobar and Harcourt 2002:10). By altering the *conceptualisation of who are legitimised political subjects* (Mendez 2002:140), such interventions carves out a space to pursue particular political ends, as in the Novamed case. The fact that the declaration of the Women's Platform was entirely quoted within Petrol-Is's own declaration on 26/09/2007<sup>88</sup> reveals the possibility of transforming discourses within male-dominated institutions such as trade unions, where *hegemonic strategies of resistance are close to outsiders* (Colgan and Ledwith 2002:10).

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to attribute a homogenous character to politics pursued by the Women's Platform. The fact that the solidarity platform involved women from radical/social feminist groups, independent women's organisations, political parties and unions<sup>89</sup> gave rise to a *strategic sisterhood* recognising *a whole range of different feminist/women's identities* without claiming a *unified feminist voice against global capital* (Bergeron 2001:1000). The diversity of slogans used in campaigning reflects diverse feminist concerns and reveals the inherent link between the women's resistance at Novamed and other forms of exploitation and marginalisation of women's bodies. The slogans clearly

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From interview with Melis: "When we went to Antalya to visit the strikers, four workers from the factory came out with 'I love Novamed' t-shirts. While we were shouting 'Long Live Women's Resistance', half embarrassed, four were walking around as in a fashion show.

<sup>85</sup> See 3.1.2 and 3.2.1

Petrol-Is 2008:66;226

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* 65-66

<sup>87</sup> Necla and Feryal mentioned MEC in Nicaragua as an exemplary form of doing feminist politics in EPZs

<sup>88</sup> Petrol-Is 2008:65-66

<sup>89</sup> from the booklet by Women's Platform (December 2007:5)

referred to degradation of women's labour in agriculture and in the informal sector.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, issues related to gendered division of labour within the household, violence against women and gendered use of public space were raised along with slogans in Kurdish.<sup>91 92</sup>

Evidence has shown that the activities of the Women's Platform did not only "gender" the content of political claims, but also altered the ways in which these claims are pursued. To break the ignorant but powerful silence of the employer (Segdwick 1990:8), the Women's Platform primarily aimed at raising public awareness and at *mobilising shame* to generate a public *response to [women] workers' grievances*. (Carty 2006:228). *Naming and shaming* has been identified as an effective technique to mobilise transnational networks (ibid.) as elaborated in the next section. Along with public demonstrations and campaigning through media; (trans)national networking, petitioning, showing documentaries and organising exhibitions<sup>93</sup>, "a new type of politics" that escapes and extends the scope of *traditional organisational forms* emerged (Osterweil 2005:178-179).

It is noteworthy that contours of legitimate political claims were meticulously drawn in the petition sent to the Turkish Parliament. Demands were centred on positive discrimination, equal pay for work of equal value; rights to social security and unionisation rather than women's fleshly experiences of the factory discipline such as pregnancy schedules as we have seen in the street campaigning.<sup>94</sup> Similar declarations were also faxed to the headquarters of FCM in Istanbul as part of a nation-wide simultaneous faxing campaign.<sup>95</sup> Although less radical in demands, lobbying and use of technology show changing ways of engaging in collective political action (Carty 2006:223) where less physical militancy but more information sharing gets relevance.

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<sup>90</sup> One striking example was "*Burnt in Bursa, Drown in Ceylanpinar, Resisting in Novamed*" (Petrol-Is 2008:142), referring to the death of five women workers caused by a fire in a textile factory in Bursa and the drowning of nine Kurdish seasonal workers in a car accident while traveling in the back of a small van with 33 other workers. Both accidents revealed poor conditions under which women were employed.

<sup>91</sup> Examples entail: "End Gendered Division of Labour", "Household Labour, Raise Your Voice", "End the exploitation by Husband at Home and by the Boss in the Factory" "We claim streets at night" "Long Live Women's Liberty" [the original being in Kurdish]. (booklet by Women's Platform December 2007:9-11).

<sup>92</sup> Considering the political and military turmoil around the Kurdish issue in Turkey and the exclusion of Kurdish language from the official public space, the fact Women's Platform read its declaration for solidarity in both languages (ibid. 9-10) reveals the emergence of an alternative political space.

<sup>93</sup> A documentary where workers themselves spoke about their working experiences, was filmed in February 2006 by two feminists in Film Mor [Purple Film], an independent cooperative to support 'women's movies'. The documentary together with photos of the strike were exhibited in December 2007, Istanbul and remained open until a couple of days before the end of the strike (Birgun: 10/12/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008:99).

<sup>94</sup> Petrol-Is 2008:199

<sup>95</sup> Birgun (08/10/2007:1;6 in Petrol-Is 2008:79)

The fact that the Women's Platform took a less radical stance in the content of the petition when compared to the actual street protests implies that certain truth regimes are more validated over others. As actors negotiate the '*we*' of *the social movements*, different perspectives are also negotiated (Mendez 2006:62). Yet these negotiations are not free from unequal power relations. In this sense, analysing the resistance within existing power relations helps us to reflect back to mechanisms of power.

#### **d) Gendering the Transnational Space:**

The network component is an important dimension of all politics of place (Alvarez 2005:251) as they are *place-based yet transnationalised struggles* (Escobar and Harcourt 2005:13-14). Nevertheless, analysing women's labour movements such as the Novamed strike reveals that "*both national and transnational spaces are highly gendered terrains*" (Bandy and Mendez 2006:142). However, cases such as this one provide opportunities for slightly transforming the gendered terrain of politics both at national and transnational level. Having discussed the former in the previous section, this section focuses on the ways in which transnational space of labour activism was gendered in the last phase of the resistance in Novamed.

Since dealing with an MNC requires mobilisation beyond the national level (Kim 1992:236), retaining *a global perspective* is at the heart of *locally embedded struggles* (Carty 2006:226) as it is the case at Novamed. Transnational support had already been sought by Petrol-Is as early as November 2006 through their global confederation ICEM and ETUC<sup>96</sup>. The union received solidarity messages for the strike and was visited by representatives from international unions such as ICEM and ROGWU.<sup>97</sup> Although unions are more likely to find transnational allies than women's groups (Mendez 2002:137), what was new about the transnational support at Novamed after September 2007 was the predominance of women's representatives from international confederations. It has been perceived as an outcome of the coalition between the women's movement and the labour movement in Turkey.<sup>98</sup> Considering that women do not make up more than 1% of trade union governing bodies worldwide (Colgan and Ledwith 2002:1), Turkey being no exception to this (Toksoz 2007:94), raising women's voices from national and transnational

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<sup>96</sup> 11/11/2006 Declaration by Petrol-Is (Petrol-Is 2008:15)

<sup>97</sup> 19/05/2007 Declaration by Petrol-Is (Petrol-Is 2008:41)

<sup>98</sup> From interview with Melis

trade union confederations highlights an instance where the transnational space of trade unions is gendered.

Meanwhile, the intensification of transnational support was coupled with a substantive change in the content of the support. The evidence for this claim lies in the examination of discourses in transnational correspondences and networks where ‘the gender based exploitation’ of ‘women workers’ has become the main theme after September 2007.<sup>99</sup> For instance, in the letter from CLC to the employer, the emphasis is on marriage, pregnancy schedule and dignity along with the continuing reproductive burden of women.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, the letter by Petrol-Is sent to ICEM focuses on employer’s interventions to women’s private lives and imposed pregnancy schedules.<sup>101</sup> These instances reveal that the active participation of women did not only gender the transnational space but also transformed it by emphasising workers’ bodily experiences on the basis of gender.

### 3.3 Outcomes and Tensions:

*“WPP’s conception of women’s bodies as sites for resistance simultaneously constituted by places and discourses provides a promising and critical lens”* to analyse destabilising and transformative effects of women’s agency (Alvarez 2005:251). However, such transformations have their limitations, especially when women work within or cooperate with male dominated institutions. Taking language as a key site for feminist resistance and for construction of subjects (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1995:3), discourse analysis has been useful to locate instances where the mainstream political terrain is gendered. In this sense, gendering the resistance refers to the demonstration of the *political relevance of many sites* that are otherwise *excluded from the definition of the political* (Osterweil 2005:181). Nevertheless, the analysis acknowledges that places giving birth to embedded forms of resistances are also characterised by *unequal, oppressive power relations* and *ambivalences* (Escobar and Harcourt 2002:12). Thus, feminist critical discourse analysis aiming at demystifying power relations of a patriarchal social order (Lazar 2005:5) has been also instrumental in revealing tensions inherent in my conceptualisation of “feminisation of resistance”.

The coalition between diverse women’s groups and the union enabled ‘*distinct parties to mobilise around common concerns while preserving separate political and*

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<sup>99</sup> Petrol-Is Kadin (issue 25:11 in Petrol-Is 2008:148-149)

<sup>100</sup> Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) wrote a letter for FMC on 27/09/2007 (Petrol-Is 2008: 240)

<sup>101</sup> Petrol-Is 2008: 244 (Although the date is not marked considering the chronological order of the correspondences, the letter should be written in October 2007)

*organisational identities.*” (Arnold 1995:276-277 cited in Mendez 2005:116). However, a coalition does not alter *tensions within mobilising initiatives* that call for a closer investigation of unequal power relationships (Mendez 2002:139). Such tensions in the Novamed case, I argue, were apparent in the selective use of feminist discourses by the union and in the formal outcomes of the strike.<sup>102</sup> Foucault’s formulation of the discourse (1975:28-29) informs my discursive analysis in the sense that certain aspects of the strike are validated as proper ways to talk about it, while others are left aside at particular times.

The acknowledgement that “*women enter into labour force as gendered beings*” (Marchand 2002:110)<sup>103</sup> enabled the union to pursue distinctive strategies to mobilise women workers. However, these strategies tend to reproduce patriarchal gender relations rather than emphasising the link between the nature of women’s labour force participation, their unpaid labour within the household and women’s status in general (Ward 1990:6; Bandy and Mendez 2006:135; Pearson 1998:179). Instead, working conditions in EPZs and the inhuman treatment of employees were underscored, especially when addressing the wider public.<sup>104</sup> Although FZs represented as “state of exception”<sup>105</sup> were instrumental in drawing public attention; putting the blame on the “big boss” in the FZ reduced the opportunity for political strategies to link gender politics regarding workplace and domestic relations. (Pearson 1998:181-182; Colgan and Ledwith 2002:6). In other words, aiming at ending the strike having improved material conditions of women workers at Novamed, Women’s Platform had to reduce their radical politics. Instead, issue-based claims were preferred over too much focus on structural problems related to women’s employment or women’s status in general.<sup>106</sup>

The incorporation of body politics into the union’s political strategies hints at growing recognition of a “*‘new’ labouring subject constituted of multiple, intersecting axes of domination*” (Mendez 2002:125). Although the booklet published by Women’s Platform

<sup>102</sup> In the interview, Necla -editor of women’s magazine in Petrol-Is- acknowledged the existence of tensions but also drew attention to people like herself who are mediating such tensions. Yet, one should also consider to the fact that people like Necla are marginal within the union regarding their position in the decision making.

<sup>103</sup> Declaration by Petrol-Is 8-9/03/2007 (in Petrol-Is 2008: 29)

<sup>104</sup> In several public statements both by the union and Women’s Platform, FZs were protested ‘free exploitation zones’ where slave-like conditions of work dominate. See for instance Birgun 30/07/2007 (in Petrol-Is 2008: 46), Declaration by Women’s Platform (in ibid. 226). The union’s declarations (ibid. 3) acknowledged that what was important about the strike was that they were struggling against a big multinational.

<sup>105</sup> Expression borrowed from Agamben refers to “*a topographical structure that is neither outside nor inside*” of the juridical power (2005: 35) fit in the legal definition of FZs in Turkey.

<sup>106</sup> From interview with Melis;

“Our politics were far more radical than the union. We could say anything that we want in the street. However, we had to align our demands with those of the union. After all, the campaign was about raising the voice of women in Novamed and of the union as their representative, not the voice of women’s movement.”

assumes equality between the union and women's groups regarding the support provided,<sup>107</sup> the union (as workers' formal representative) has the privilege to decide on the issues brought onto the negotiation table.

When the strike was ended on its 448<sup>th</sup> day with the signing of a collective agreement valid for the next three years, it was represented by the media as "*the victory of resisting women*" and "*milestone for women's rights struggle in Turkey*"<sup>108</sup>. The union acknowledged that the main reasons for success were not conventional union politics, but the ways in which these were enriched by new – transnational and feminist– strategies.<sup>109</sup> Hence, the title of the union's book "The Novamed Strike: Women's Global Solidarity against Global Capital" – a motto of the resistance – proves the union's recognition of "*the importance of pluralist forms of alliances and coalition politics*" (Colgan and Ledwith 2002:20). Although body politics and feminism were of strategic use to the union (Lazar 2005:14), given that claims based on low wages are invalidated within globalisation discourse based on different *wage zones* (Perrons 2004:2), they were not formally reflected in the outcomes. In other words, the agreement mainly focused on the recognition of the union as the representative of workers, and a certain level of increase in wages.<sup>110</sup> In a sense, "*gender based concerns were silenced*" in the formal political space (Escobar and Harcourt 2002:9). Necla's statement that "*This is a collective bargaining agreement, you can raise certain concerns but not others*" hints at the structural factors behind asymmetrical gender relations rather than individual intentions (Lazar 2005:8).

The way in which feminists are incorporated into mobilisation process and the strategic, (rather than substantive) use of feminist campaigning can be related to the exclusion of women from decision making (Mendez 2002:128). In this sense, despite the incorporation of gendered discourses into political strategies, ultimately "men" sit at the negotiation table. In the Novamed-case, the only woman present at the negotiations was Ayse, who had become a union representative during the strike, and she apparently did not have many opportunities to voice her co-strikers' other concerns. On the upside, the strike

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<sup>107</sup> "...besides unions, there was there was another support group on their side. Women: from different ages and different ideologies..." from the booklet by Women's Platform (December 2007: 5)

<sup>108</sup> Turkish Daily News 19/12/2007 Examples from other headlines:

"The Victory is Women Workers' in Novamed" (Birgun 18/12/2007 in Petrol-Is 2008:105) "Women's Resistance has Beaten the Boss" (Gercek 18/12/2007 in ibid.106)

<sup>109</sup> Forward (Petrol-Is 2008: 3)

<sup>110</sup> Terms of the collective agreement are as the following: 3 years-long collective bargaining agreement initially provided 9% increase in wages and presume 5% increase at the end of the first year and 4% for the second and third years. Little improvements have been marked in the social benefits of workers such as small amount for child allowances (Petrol-Is 2008:115)

seems to have enabled striking women at Novamed to *develop self-confidence, awareness and solidarity with other women* (Rosa 1994: 74) (whom they did not even know before joining the union). They started to call themselves “woman” and embraced this as a collective identity.<sup>111</sup> The fact that two of Novamed’s woman workers have been employed in the board of directors of the union’s branch is a sign of (albeit small) changes towards the representation of women at decision-making levels. Their critiques for lack of women in the unions’ board have already received media-coverage.<sup>112</sup> While the resistance at Novamed *aimed at taking control of economic conditions*, further research is needed to investigate whether *it actually transformed women’s places* in the community and household relations (Bergeron 2001:999).

Although it remains to be seen whether the strike empowered women in the long run, there is evidence that women’s resistance at Novamed not only brought workers material gains and experience but also paved the way for gendering class-based discourses and political practices through national and international coalition buildings. However, unequal power relations embedded in these processes reveal certain concerns while concealing others.

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<sup>111</sup> from interview with Ayse

<sup>112</sup> Petrol-Is 2008:152 (the name of the periodical that interviewed union representatives is not mentioned.)

## CONCLUSIONS:

This study, though modest in scale, has provided an empirically grounded analysis of changing forms of labour mobilisation in the global economy and introduced a gendered conceptualisation for resistance. A theoretical framework that combines the post-structuralist emphasis on discourse and the body with studies on contemporary labour movements in EPZs has been proven as adequate to explain the Novamed strike in Antalya FZ in Turkey; and the WPP framework has allowed me to discuss issues regarding labour relations together with body politics. Rather than claiming “the truth”, the analysis proposes “situated knowledges” (Haraway 1988:581) based on particular resources and methods; generated from a particular subjective position.

In light of the literature and the empirical analysis of the mobilisation, the findings hint at several ways in which resistance and labour mobilisation were feminised in the course of the strike. One striking form of feminised resistance is the way in which the borders between individual/bodily resistance and collective action are blurred. Another is the centrality of the body in the strategic framing of women workers’ demands. While body politics approach – in later phases of the movement – extended the notion of doing politics and the conceptualisation of the resistance; such an endeavour would not have been materialised if favourable conditions for *translating women’s exploitation into common awareness* (Xin 2008:518) were not present. Given the evidence that the employer “feminised” the resistance – in the sense of not taking it seriously – there was the risk that the movement would dwindle without material gains. In this sense, the coalition building between Women’s Platform and Petrol-Is provided opportunities to go beyond conventional forms of class-based politics and to raise claims which otherwise would have remained marginal.

In spite of the evidence that the labour movement’s political claims were gendered at both national and transnational levels, another aspect of feminised resistance that emerged from the Novamed-case is the observation that mobilisation strategies are shaped within patriarchal household relations. The consent of men being almost a prerequisite for

women's union membership and the continuation of women's reproductive burden during the strike period, revealed the link between home and workplace reflected in women's labour force participation and also in their mobilisation.

Civil societal actors have been increasing their influence in struggles over labour issues at national and international level. However, gendered tensions inherent in such coalitions form the ways in which the resistance is feminised. The strategic alliance between women's and labour movements in the Novamed case was marked by *gendered division of labour in activism* (Bandy and Mendez 2006:136) rather than equality in power relations. In other words, the role of public campaigning and street activism was assumed by the Women's Platform, whereas the union was pursuing its own goals, namely collective bargaining and increase in wages rather than gender equality. In this sense, this research contributes to an understanding of the ways in which women are incorporated into confrontational politics. However, these patterns are marked by unequal gender relations salient in the incorporation of women into the labour market.

Challenging the assumption that the local is always acted upon by global forces, "global" techniques of power – utilised for the management of "docile bodies" – can give rise to contestations (Salzinger 2004:57). The use of discourses displaying power relations which would otherwise remain concealed has been crucial in the framing of the contestation at Novamed (Foucault 1976:101). On the other hand, the resistance which confronts global patriarchy is formulated within existing patriarchal relations. Therefore, contesting gendered global processes do not evade unequal gender relations, yet carves out a space to contest them.

Based on these findings, I have used the concept of "feminisation of resistance" to open up a space where theoretical lenses provided by previous theories on power and resistance in EPZs can be extended. As Amenta and Polletta (2001:303) put it: "*New concepts may complement existing theories by filling the gaps in their claims*". In the same vein, Wodak (2001b:64) emphasises the relevance of introducing conceptual tools for *specific problems to be investigated* rather than relying on grand theories.

Revealing the resistance mechanisms behind a long strike period with relative success aims at contributing to further (comparative) research on forms of resistance in EPZs and on gendered analysis of labour movements. Besides its modest theoretical intervention, this study also contributes in a geographical sense by choosing an economic area – Turkey and the EU – which has so far received little attention in the literature on this

subject.<sup>113</sup> Mendez (2002:130) has argued that such research is important in making working conditions in EPZs visible. Given the narrowed scope of this research, further investigation is needed to address issues on women's empowerment through resistance, tensions between keeping the jobs and resisting domination of global capital (Mendez 2002: 135; Kim 1992: 234) and possible problems between "feminist goals" and women and men's actual needs and experiences.

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<http://216.239.59.104/search?q=cache:NRdm0ERZ6OMJ:www.foreigntrade.gov.tr/dtmdadmin/upload/SB/ABIliskilerDb/Mart2008.pdf+Undersecretariat+of+the+Prime+Ministry+for+Foreign+Trade+March+2008+Free+Zones&hl=tr&ct=clnk&cd=1> (March 2008)

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## Appendix 1

### Demographics of Interviewees:

Name/Pseudonym	Age	Education	Position
Ali	48	University Degree	Head of the Branch in Petrol-Is
Feryal Saygilgil	38	PhD Candidate in Sociology (Working on the Novamed Strike for her PhD thesis)	Researcher Sociologist Writer
Necla Akgokce	52	MA in Women's Studies	Editor of Petrol-Is Kadin – union's periodical for women. Responsible of all issues related to women within the union
Ayse	28	High-School Diploma	Worker at Novamed factory since 2000  Union's Representative in the Novamed factory
Melis	-	University Degree	Activist  Socialist-Feminist

<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=91756>

### **Novamed strike ends with agreement**

*Wednesday, December 19, 2007*

ANTALYA – Turkish Daily News

A strike at a multinational company that produces blood products for dialysis in the Antalya Free Zone came to an end yesterday after the company accepted the presence of the union and agreed to sign a three-year deal.

Some 81 workers, 79 of whom were women, were on strike at the German-Italian owned Novamed for 448 days since Sept. 26, 2006, in protest of the poor working conditions and the absence of a workers' union.

“Our aim was to prove that the union exists in this workplace, and we managed that,” said Mustafa Öztaşkın, president of the workers' union Petrol İş.

“We signed a three-year agreement that will be in affect as of Jan. 1. The wages will be increased by 9.2 percent of what they were when the strike started, and a raise of 5 percent will be applied for 2008 and 4 percent for the next two years. We have buried the past incidents and are looking to the future with hope,” Öztaşkın said.

The strike was the first to be held at enterprises located in free zones in Turkey. The 85 workers started the strike and 81 kept going until the very end. “This agreement has another significance,” said Öztaşkın, adding, “the number of strikers was 81 out of a total of 316 workers, which means they were not the majority. It was the first time in Turkey that a minority of workers went on strike and achieved their goals,” noting that it was also a milestone for the women's rights struggle in Turkey.

Union representative in the factory, Fatma Özüm, said they would go back to work on Jan. 2. “Our fight has resulted in success for women. We are all very happy,” she said.

<http://www.icem.org/en/71-Gender-Issues/2398-Broad-Turkish-Attention-Given-One-Year-Novamed-Strike>

24 September 2007 ICEM In Brief Turkey

### **Broad Turkish Attention Given One-Year Novamed Strike**

This week, on Wednesday, 26 September, 84 strikers in the Antalya Free Trade Zone of Turkey will mark one year on picket lines at Novamed, a pharmaceutical manufacturer, owned by Fresenius Medical Care of Germany. Eighty-two of the strikers are women.

The ICEM has continued to champion the cause of the strikers and the Turkish union Petrol-İş that organised this workplace, and stands by them. Judging from the inhumane treatment, it is easy to see why. Workers – mainly women – were forced to apply to management if they wished to marry. They were forbidden to talk to one another on the job. And they were forced to undergo breath tests following breaks to enforce a no-smoking ban.



Slogan on placard reads: : “We decide when we give birth”

Workers at Novamed freely elected Petrol-İş as their collective representative. Novamed managers did begin negotiations with the union and the workers in April 2006. But when talks broke down, managers quit the negotiations and began a harassment and intimidation campaign aimed at dislodging union support. On 26 September 2006, 84 workers expressed their discontent by striking.

The first anniversary of this just strike has gained a sizeable and significant voice inside Turkey. Through actions and a fortnight of constant press coverage, leading up to the one-year anniversary, civil society across Turkey is acutely aware of the Novamed strike. Handbilling, mass meetings among trade unions, NGOs, and Turkish women’s groups, as well as rolling actions in support of the strike have all happened.



In Istanbul, a coalition of trade unions, women's groups, and others have formed a "Women's Platform for Solidarity with Novamed Strikers," which has carried out a number of actions over the past two weeks. In the cities of Izmir and Adana, actions and forums in support of the strike have occurred.

A petition drive to the National Parliament has also started, aimed at mandating better work conditions for women, thanks to the courage of the Novamed strikers. Various actions for justice at Novamed are backed by all Turkish confederations, trade unions, and, increasingly, by civil society groups. And today and tomorrow, busloads of supporters will descend on Antalya for the one-year strike anniversary.



The ICEM called attention to the deplorable conditions that caused the strike from the outset. In May, the strike received firm commitment from the ICEM Executive Committee. Currently, a four-person ICEM Women's Committee is in the Antalya trade zone to support the strikers. They will join the strikers and Turkish activists in a forum, documentary film, and a social event on 25 September, and then accompany the strikers to the front of company offices on 26 September for a lively protest.

The delegation is headed by ICEM Women's Committee Chair Evgenia Esenina of Russian Oil and Gas Workers' Union (ROGWU), and includes Elena Petrovici of the Oil Workers' Union of Romania (PETROM), Ramona Parra of the Chemical, Textile, and Leathern Workers

## Appendix 4

### Information on Media Sources used for Analysis:

#### **Newspapers:**

Birgün: a left-oriented newspaper published since 2004

<http://www.birgun.net/index.php>

Cumhuriyet: a centre-left newspaper published since 1924

<http://www.cumhuriyet.com/eCumhuriyet/m/>

Evrensel: A socialist newspaper

[www.evrensel.net](http://www.evrensel.net)

Hürriyet: A mainstream newspaper published since 1948 currently owned by Doğan Group the biggest media group in Turkey

<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/home/>

Körfez: A local daily newspaper

Milliyet: A mainstream newspaper published since 1950 currently owned by Doğan Group.

[www.milliyet.com.tr](http://www.milliyet.com.tr)

Radikal: A social democratic newspaper published since 1996 by Doğan Group.

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

Referans: A business newspaper published since 2004 by Dogan Group.

<http://www.referansgazetesi.com/>

Sabah: A mainstream liberal newspaper published since 1985.

[www.sabah.com.tr](http://www.sabah.com.tr)

Turkish Daily News: The first newspaper in English in Turkey. It is published since 1961, owned by Doğan Group since 2000.

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

**Periodicals:**

Cağrı: A socialist monthly periodical

<http://www.ydicagri.org/index.html>

Dayanışma: A socialist magazine

Petrol-İş Kadın: bi-monthly women's magazine published by Petrol-İş

<http://www.petrol-is.org.tr/kadin/>

Ürün: A monthly socialist magazine published since 1999 by Turkish Communist Party.

<http://www.urundergisi.com/>