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Zelal Özdemir
Asuman Özgür Keysan

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Converging/Diverging Frames: A Case of Islamist Women's CSOs in Turkey

Zelal Özdemir*

Asuman Özgür Keysan*

This study examines the case of two Islamist women's CSOs, AKDER and the BKP, whose agency transformed under the combined impact of the removal of the headscarf ban and the increasing authoritarian gender climate in Turkey. Based on data garnered from interviews conducted in 2012 and 2018, it seeks to understand the frames of gender, gender equality, motherhood and work-life balance that are conceptualised by these two CSOs through the employment of a critical frame analysis. In so doing it endeavours to understand and compare the change and continuity in the issue framing of these two CSOs as regards to the feminist movement in Turkey from 2012 to 2018. It argues that in the new gender climate in Turkey, while the BKP has maintained its position with regards to the frames of gender equality, motherhood and the work-life balance, AKDER's current issue framing is more in tune with the religio-conservative worldview promoted by the ruling regime in Turkey, demonstrating a clear retreat from its position in 2012.

Anahtar Kelimeler: issue framing, gender equality, AKDER, BKP, post-headscarf era

Benzeşen/Farklaşan Çerçeveler: Türkiye'deki İslamcı Kadın STK'lar Örneği

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de başörtüsü yasağının kaldırılması ve artan otoriter toplumsal cinsiyet ikliminin etkisinden sonra eylemlilikleri dönüşüme uğrayan iki İslamcı kadın STK'sı olan AKDER ve BKP'ye odaklanmaktadır. 2012 ve 2018 yıllarında yapılan derinlemesine görüşmelere dayanarak, bu iki STK tarafından kullanılan cinsiyet, cinsiyet eşitliği, annelik ve iş-yaşam dengesi kavramlarını eleştirel çerçeve analizi kullanarak anlamayı hedeflemektedir. Bunu yaparken, bu iki STK'nun değişim ve sürekliliğini karşılaştırmalı olarak kavramaya çalışan bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki yeni toplumsal cinsiyet ikliminde BKP'nin 2012-2018 yılları arasında feminist çerçevelerle uyum içindeki konumunu korurken, AKDER'in 2012 yılındaki durumundan farklılaşarak Türkiye'deki iktidar rejiminin teşvik ettiği dindar muhafazakar dünya görüşü ile oldukça uyumlu hale dönüştüğünü ileri sürmektedir.

Keywords: konu çerçeveleme, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, AKDER, BKP başörtüsü sonrası dönem

Giriş

As a dynamic movement, the trajectory of Islamist women's activism in Turkey changed in particular following the removal of the headscarf ban, which had been working as a bonding agent uniting many divergent communities within the women's movement. In addition to this are the rising authoritarian gender policies in the country, which have led to further divergences and divisions within the women's movement. With a view to providing an understanding of the issue frames of Islamist women's activist groups, the present study focuses on two prominent Islamist women's Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Turkey; namely AKDER (Women's Rights Organisation against Discrimination) and the BKP (Capital City Women's Platform Association).

The two organizations have differed since their inceptions in terms of their goals, visions, membership profiles and causes. AKDER was founded to fight the headscarf ban, while the BKP was influenced by the feminist path, being founded as an explicit criticism of the patriarchy in religious texts and society in general, even though both were against the headscarf ban. Despite their differences, they stood in solidarity both with

*Dr, Middle East Technical University, Centre for Black Sea and Central Asia, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6839-8903>, zelal@metu.edu.tr. Yazı Gönderim Tarihi: 20.03.2020, Yazı Kabul Tarihi: 12.10.2020

*Dr, Middle East Technical University, Gender and Women's Studies, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5377-2114>, akeysan@metu.edu.tr, Yazı Gönderim Tarihi: 20.03.2020, Yazı Kabul Tarihi: 12.10.2020

each other, and with the women's movement in Turkey in 2012. The increasing engagement of Islamist women in the women's movement supported the relative congruence between the two in terms of issue framing. However, by 2018 the suppression of feminist frames and accentuation of the conservative gender ideology had started to be observed, manifesting especially in the gender equality versus gender justice debate, and promoted not only by the ruling regime, but also by some of Islamist women's CSOs under rising authoritarian gender climate in Turkey. This era requires a reassessment of the narratives and positioning of the Islamist women's CSOs that sit at the intersection of the civil societal realm, the political sphere and the women's movement in Turkey (Özgür Keysan and Özdemir 2020).

Working from the premise that the removal of the headscarf ban, combined with the increasing authoritarian gender climate in Turkey, affected the agency of Islamist women's CSOs, this study aims to re-examine how the frames of gender, gender equality, motherhood and work-life balance are conceptualized by these two CSOs through critical frame analysis method. The interviews, conducted in 2012 and 2018 with 9 members from AKDER and 10 members from the BKP, enabled us to track the change and continuities not only in the frames articulated by the organisations under study, but also in their membership profiles, activities and roles in the women's movement in Turkey. The analysis of the frames offers a ground for comparing the two cases, and helps to analyse the strategic use of frames (Bacchi 2009). It is suggested in this study that different sorts of framings and positionalities are possible under different circumstances. While positionality reminds us that "our identities are always relationally shaped within hierarchies of power" (Sorells 2016, 85), framing, according to Mona Baker (2006, 106) is "an active strategy that implies agency and by means of which we consciously participate in the construction of reality". Frames are dynamic and contested, acquiring different meanings in different spatiotemporal contexts (Dombos *et al.* 2012, 4). "They travel through space and time and in this process their meanings are stretched, shrunk and bent" (Lombardo *et al.* 2009). In the present study, we analyse how these two CSOs frame women's issues, and identify the language, concepts and categories they have used under the altered gender climate in Turkey.

Islamist Women's Activism in Turkey: Challenges and Opportunities

The rise of the Islamist women's movement has begun with the rebirth of the Islamist movement in Turkey during the 1980s (Acar 1991, 280–281). Throughout the 1980s, the political conjuncture and the rise of the feminist oppositionary stance, the situation of headscarved women, who had been barred from the public space, entered the public sphere (Arat 2005, 15). The Islamist women's movement maintained a public presence in the mid- and late-1980s through its campaigns to lift the ban on the headscarf in state institutions as well as state schools and universities. However, the alternative arguments put forward by the movement regarding the role and status of women (Marshall 2008, 225–227) led to the formation of a rift between Islamist and secular women. Since the 1990s, the Islamic movement, contesting the Republican interpretations of secularism, "has served as a venue for the politicization of women" (Diner and Toktaş 2010, 50–51). Subsequently, Islamist women who had no influence in any feminist groups in 1980s began to create feminist claims and started to get organized in 1990s (Bora and Günal 2002, 8). These women have begun to interrogate the traditional role attributed to women by their male partners in the Islamist movement as they have become highly educated professionals (Çayır 2000; Marshall 2005; Aslan Akman 2013). In particular following the resurgence of the women's movement after the Beijing International Women's Conference (1995) and the Habitat II Conference (1996), several CSOs platforms and coalitions were established by Islamist women (Özçetin 2009, 111–112).

After 1997 military memorandum, the conflict between Islamism and secularism revived with the government decision to ban the wearing of headscarves in public institutions, such as universities and public offices.¹ The rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) – an Islam-oriented political party that came to power in 2002 – invigorated the debate of secularism versus Islam, and the headscarf ban in universities and public offices continued to be the most prominent topic of this contestation. Remarkably, the ban increased the visibility of the pious Muslim women, who organized in various CSOs to struggle against the ban on headscarf, and the issue thus became a point of unity for Islamist women who opposed the ban, while also inciting the secular/religious divide.

The headscarf ban was initially abandoned at universities. In the General Election in 2011, a campaign was launched under the banner "No Candidates with Headscarves, No Vote", in a drive to ensure the "representation of headscarf-wearing women in Parliament". This compelled political parties to put forward headscarved women for electable positions (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014, 58). The demand for the

headscarved women in Parliament was met in 2013 after two years of campaigning,² which was considered a milestone for Islamist women, as it demonstrated the right of Islamist women “to exist in the Turkish public sphere” (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014, 94)

Although the demands of headscarved women in Turkey had been met, a backlash against women's rights and gender equality was observed because of the reduced impact of the EU and the AKP's alignment with democracy. In other words, the lifting of the headscarf ban “went hand in hand with gender policies that reinforced conservatism at the expense of Kemalist and feminist gains” (Özcan 2019, 63). After 2011 in particular, the AKP began to pursue authoritarianism in its gender policies, taking a conservative and moral attitude towards the female body, advancing the notion of a “strong family” and holding position against feminism. To illustrate, the government sought to control women's bodies in different ways by embracing conservative and morality-based attitudes towards the female body. First, government representatives suggested that women should have at least three children in 2008, and then condemned women who laughed out loud in public in 2014. It then sought to impose limitations on abortion and Caesarean sections in May 2012, making changes to the Bill of Reproductive Health (Radikal, 2012).

The idea of a “strong family” has long been promoted by the AKP government. As a clear evidence of this agenda, the name of the Ministry of Women and Family was changed with the Ministry of Family and Social Policy in 2011 and in 2018, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy was merged with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, becoming the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services. The removal of “woman” from the name of the Ministry and substitution with “family” provided a strong indication of the approach of the government to women's issues. The restriction of women within the family unit and the identification of women with motherhood reinvigorated authoritarian gender norms, while the hostility shown toward feminism, and the denial of the equality of women and men was further confirmation of the authoritarian gender tendencies of the government.

The exclusionary attitude toward some CSOs, and particularly women's organisations who are critical of the government, also reflects the authoritarian stance of the AKP government. In such ways, the support provided to women's organisations by the AKP has been limited, and it can be seen to have instrumentalised women's organisations to legitimise its policies (Coşar and Yücesan-Özdemir 2012, 298; Coşar and Onbaşı 2008, 326). The AKP's policies have resulted in a “marginalization of voices that do not ascribe to the AKP's conservative ideology”, and the establishment its own women's CSOs (Doyle 2017, 11–12). In this sense, growth has been witnessed in a “counter-[feminist] movement of pro-family civil society organisations” that are dependent on the state (Negron-Gonzales 2016, 208), among which can be counted the Women and Democracy Association (KADEM). KADEM was established with the help of the AKP, and promote the idea of “gender justice” by holding the approach of complementarity of sexes and acknowledging of the natural distinctions between women and men with regard to Islam over “gender equality” (Yılmaz 2015, 112).

KADEM, with the strong support it receives from the AKP cadres, “massively expanded both the number of its branches and its sphere of activity geographically” (Koyuncu and Özman 2019, 729). As KADEM strengthened institutionally and politically, it started to dominate and monopolize Islamist women's activism in Turkey. Many Islamist women's organizations, including AKDER, began to operate within the orbit of KADEM, almost at the expense of their institutional independence. Hence, as important as the re-alignment that occurred between the government and women's CSOs, as Koyuncu and Özman (2019) indicate, has been the re-alignment of Islamist women CSOs that has taken place.

This paper aims to unravel how this current debate on gender justice versus gender equality, as well as the re-positioning among Islamist women's activism under the rising authoritarian gender climate, translate into the way Islamist women's CSOs frame issues. We believe this debate has the capacity not only to reproduce a duality between the rights-based and faith-based approaches to gender relations, i.e. secular feminists and Islamist women (Simge and Göker 2017, 273), but also among Islamist women (see Aydındağ 2019). This interest in Islamist CSOs as a case study topic is further supported by the current tendencies in literature to highlight the sharp divide between them.

Whereas some Islamist CSOs have lost their autonomy from the state, have reproduced the patriarchal gender order in close cooperation with the regime, and have been contributing to the success of the AKP by “redefining women's rights mainly from the conservative perspective and valuing women as mothers” (Özcan 2017, 173), there are also others who have been struggling to retain their autonomy and who criticize the

approach of gender justice (see Koyuncu and Özman, 2019). It is thus necessary to identify the varieties and divergences between Islamist CSOs through an analysis of two particular cases.

Method and Cases

This study uses a case study approach and a critical frame analysis method. The case study approach involves “a detailed examination of a single example” and “produces a type of context dependent knowledge” (Flyvbjerg 2006, 220-221). It includes “more detail, richness, completeness, and variance – that is, depth – for the unit of study” (Flyvbjerg 2011, 301; see Creswell 2014; Yin 2014). The main criticism directed at the case study approach is the non-generalisability of the research findings to other cases and to other populations (Bryman 2008, 55), however the key aim in this study is to make “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin 2009, 13). Through a critical frame analysis, as a part of a discourse analysis, we seek further to identify the interpretive and conceptual meanings (discourses) that produce particular understandings of issues and events (Bacchi 2009, 22). Triandafyllidou and Fotiou (1998, 2) suggest that a “frame analysis is concerned with the negotiation and (re)construction of reality by social/political actors through the use of symbolic tools”, and following this tradition, much of the material analysed comes from interviews.

While a case study approach provides us with the opportunity to make a detailed analysis in which the complexity and variety within Islamist women's activism can be fully revealed, the critical frame analysis approach provides a framework for the exploration of the meaning-making processes of Islamist women activists, as well as the patterns and themes they employed to weave coherent frames related to women's issues in Turkey.

Our case study data is sourced from 19 in-depth interviews with Islamist women activists from two organisations located in Ankara and Istanbul in Turkey – 9 from AKDER and 10 from the BKP. The interviews were held in 2012 and 2018, with nine respondents from AKDER and ten from the BKP. Each interview took between 1 and 2 hours, and was structured to obtain demographic details; the respondents' history of activism; women's issues and problems; general questions about Turkey, including the main issues facing Turkish women, the Kurdish issue, the headscarf debate, the abortion campaign etc.; and the organizational structure of the CSOs. To support this data, documentation in the form of written sources and website materials produced by the women's groups were gathered.

The BKP and AKDER were established in 1995 and 1999, respectively. AKDER was founded to protest the headscarf ban implemented in 1997, with the founders being students who had been expelled from educational institutions and professionals who were denied employment because of their choice to wear a headscarf (AKDER n.d.). The BKP, on the other hand, was established to “disseminate alternative views as well as theoretical and practical solutions so as to develop the ideological, political, legal, social and economic existence of women in Turkey” (BKP n.d.). As an additional goal, they sought to address the problems faced by pious Muslim women stemming from established religious institutions and secularism that endorses patriarchy (BKP n.d.). Aside from struggling against the headscarf ban, both groups sought to raise awareness of all forms of social discrimination, with particular focus on the legal, economic, social and political empowerment of women (AKDER n.d.1). Both the BKP and AKDER joined the Penal Code and Civil Code Platforms that advocated change in the related legislation, and had a role in the Shadow reports of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). They regularly engaged in discussions with secular women regarding women's issues, although at certain times the headscarf ban has come up as a controversial issue.³ Unlike AKDER, the BKP focused on a broader range of issues by putting its support behind campaigns and protests against other forms of discrimination, rather than fighting only against the headscarf ban (Aslan Akman 2008, 85).

In 2018, while the BKP had retained both its advocacy and its autonomous position, AKDER has started to lose its independence, reducing the role of women's CSOs in advocacy. The latter today functions predominantly as a charity, albeit offering suggestions to the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services and some other state institutions regarding women's and family issues. That is to say, their activities are limited to social help and assistance. Coming to 2018, none of AKDER's activities were aimed directly at women's advocacy, while the BKP continued to be part of women's movement campaigns, emphasising their focus on women's rights rather than charitable works (Nurten 2018).⁴ They published their own public notices to raise public interest in politically sensitive issues. Currently, their organizational web page carries a condemnation of

the arrest and detainment of İlknur Üstün, who is a women's rights activist, for attending a meeting representing a Women's Coalition (BKP August 2017). They have also condemned the hate crimes against refugees and impunity for crimes against women (BKP July 2017), and monitor not only the 28 February coup d'état tribunals⁵, but also those involving child abuse. For the latter, they publish press releases, attend the trials and guide the victim's families, and have made numerous project applications with particular focus on female migrants and child abuse, but have to date been unsuccessful.

For the selection of interviewees, we first contacted a key member from each organisation and employed snowball technique to recruit more respondents. Within AKDER and the BKP, we spoke to women from a range of social backgrounds, of varying age, with mixed political experience, with diverse trajectories into women's rights activism and civil society, with diverse positions within their respective groups (such as the president, executive committee member and volunteers), from different professions, including medicine, accountancy and psychology. The respondents from AKDER were those whose activity in the Islamist movement stemmed from the unjust treatment they had received over the headscarf ban while attending university. Only three women from the BKP were active in a CSO, including trade unions, before becoming members of the BKP. Regarding their position in the organisation, we spoke to the president of each of the women's CSOs, and at least one representative of the executive committee in a decision-making position. The respondents were mostly educated professionals from middle-class backgrounds. In the 2012 sampling, while almost all of the women from AKDER were young, with a high proportion in their 20s and 30s, the women from the BKP tended to be in their late 40s. In 2018, the women from AKDER were around the age of 40, and those from the BKP were in their 50s.

Membership numbers of the organizations were similar in 2012 (AKDER 180; BKP 160), and women from two women's CSOs highlighted that after the lifting of headscarf ban, the number of active members diminished as most of the members were able to return to full-time work. Both organisations operate in a single city (the BKP in Ankara and AKDER in Istanbul), and both are open to national/international funding sources. The membership profile of the two organisations differs. Whereas the BKP has a more polyphonic structure, with members harbouring different political opinions, as underlined by all the respondents, AKDER has a more homogenous composition. They also differ in terms of their identity definition. While there are women in BKP who define themselves as feminists, none of the AKDER membership sympathizes with feminism or self-identifies as feminist. Moreover, whereas the BKP's income comes from membership fees, AKDER obtains donations as well as membership fees.

In the research process, we were keen to form non-hierarchical and reciprocal relationships with our respondents to ensure openness and transparency, and to avoid taking a traditional approach to research that emphasises "objectivity, efficiency, separateness and distance" (Reinharz 1992, 24; Ackerly and True 2010). Despite some obstacles against forming a totally equal relationship with the respondents, we remained considerate to feminist research ethics in the interview process by introducing ourselves and our research, asking their consent to be part of this project via an ethics form, guaranteeing confidentiality of the data and anonymising their names.

Deconstruction and Re-Construction of Feminist Frames

Conceptualizing themselves as legitimate representatives of women's interests, both AKDER and the BKP engage in issues in the domain of feminist organisations. This section of the paper explores these issues to understand their framing of the concepts of gender and gender equality, motherhood and work-life balance, which surfaced as the most important issues during the interviews.

In 2012 and 2018, both AKDER and BKP underlined the importance and recognition of the concept of *gender* in their organisations. Perihan (2012) from AKDER stated, "I care very much about the concept of gender, as there is no single womanhood nor single manhood on the world. These are the concepts that are created through politics and economy." In a similar vein, Begüm (2012) from the BKP explains the difference between sex and gender in order to point out the social constitution of gender.

While in 2012 both CSOs displayed similar constructivist understandings of gender, by 2018 we started to see changes in how they framed the concept. Whereas the BKP maintained its comprehension of the concept from 2012 to 2018, in AKDER, a clear shift was noted in the meaning attached to gender. Drifting away from understanding gender as a social construction, AKDER, by 2018, had started to differentiate between womanhood and manhood only on biological grounds.

This shift in the framing of the concept directly translates into their understanding of *gender equality*. While in 2012, almost all of the interviewees underscored the importance of gender equality, by 2018, a clear shift away from the feminist understanding of equality had come to be observed in the conservative concept of gender complementarity. In the words of Perihan from AKDER in 2012:

“Some people take the easy way out by stating that God created man and woman differently, so there cannot be equality. This idea is not appropriate. There is equality because God recognises man and woman in equally in the first place, and says supremacy comes through devotion (*taqwa*), not biology.”

Perihan's response to the meaning of gender equality is that it is “realised before God”. This is equality conceived primarily in religious terms, which is a different understanding of either formal or substantive equality held by feminists of different persuasions. Albeit in a religious frame, Perihan still uses the term equality and tries to avoid the biological understanding of equality. Yet, in the 2018 interviews, almost all of the respondents from AKDER stated that the concept of gender equality did not fit their positioning: “Of course, for us, justice precedes equality” (Yasemin 2018). AKDER reformulates the feminist definition of the concept of gender equality, replacing it with gender justice. In doing so, they framed the narrative of equality as a hegemonic narrative that is not in confluence with “the religious or cultural traditions in Turkey”, but rather something that is imposed by the West (Yasemin 2018).

The suggestion that equality and sameness mean the same thing has long been contested among feminist scholars and activists, continuing into the present day. This kind of understanding has produced a dichotomy between “equality” and “difference” and constructs them as opposing terms (Scott 1988). The discursive shift that is noticeable in the AKDER interviews reignites this intense debate on “equality versus difference”, and reflects an attempt to equate “equality” with “sameness” while attending to the political context in which this issue has become prominent. As Diner (2018) puts it: “One of the most important conduits that the AKP leadership uses to create and disseminate its discourse on gender in line with their religious and conservative worldview is civil society organisations.” With its place in the gender justice vs. gender equality debate, AKDER is located among the conveners of this new gender discourse of the ruling regime. As such, it reframes gender and gender equality in a way that resonates not only culturally, but also politically with the ruling regime.

In contrast to this narration of gender equality by AKDER, Berrin Sönmez, one of the founding members of the BKP, wrote in a November 2018 news article that comprehending and presenting equality and justice as substituting concepts was clear evidence of the desire to sustain the hegemonic patriarchy beneath (Gazete Duvar, November 2018). In a similar vein, Aysun from the BKP contends as follows:

“Woman and man are not the same. No people are the same in that regard. When we say equality between man and woman, we do not refer to sameness but being equal in term of rights. We are talking about a right-based equality.”

Another important issue that surfaced during the field research was *motherhood*. Although motherhood has been among the key categories of contestation between feminists and Islamists, the findings of the field research found the issue to be a source of conflict between the two CSOs in 2018.

Derived from the biological understanding of femininity, AKDER underscores the importance of motherhood as the defining feature of, femininity while the BKP embraces a more critical stance towards this maternal understanding, but without denying the importance of motherhood. In the words of Ayşe (2018) from the BKP: “We do not have problems with the emphasis on motherhood. We are all mothers. That said, I criticise such claims as ‘women who reject motherhood are incomplete’.” To a certain extent, Ayşe's approach could be seen as a criticism of the glorification of motherhood and its equation with womanhood, as reinforced by the AKP government(s) (Çelik 2014, 5). More concretely, President Erdoğan has often spoken publicly against equality between men and women, and his support of complementarity between the two sexes (Kandiyoti 2011).

The meaning attached to motherhood also factors in the way in which these two CSOs frame the work-life balance issue. At the heart of AKDER's debates regarding the most pressing problem among women in Turkey lies in the tension arising out of the tension between motherhood and work. Pinar (2018) from AKDER

contents:

“Women have too many responsibilities, too much burden. We are primarily mothers. It is in our nature. However, we are also working. For the last 15 years in particular, more and more women have been participating in the labour force. When I look around, I see lots of women overwhelmed by the responsibilities of work and family.”

AKDER’s understanding is grounded in the belief that women should be the main caregivers, and should put their children’s needs above their own, which is referred to as “the ideology of intensive motherhood” by Sharon Hays (1996, 9). AKDER employs the gender justice vs. gender equality debate to ease this tension between work and family. Regulations should comply with the *fitrat*⁶ of woman, being her essential role in society and the family as mothers and wives, requiring not equality but justice. This means obtaining “the right to work part-time with a full-time salary” (Göknur 2018).

The problem definition is a way of setting out a problem and “a judgement about the problematic situation”. It involves possible solutions, and also “highlights certain features and ignores others” (Mayer, Ajanovic and Sauer 2014, 253). Through addressing the right to engage in part-time work as the most pressing problem of women in Turkey, AKDER does not only set out the most pressing problem of women in Turkey as right to part-time working but also ignores other problems of women in Turkey including gender-based violence, discrimination etc. Presenting their problems within the mothers’ interest frames, AKDER maintains religio-conservative views about family dynamics and structures, and promotes conservative conceptualisations about the role of women not only in the family, but also in society.

In contrast to AKDER’s narrative, the BKP is concerned with the regulation of “part-time work”, with an objection grounded on the idea that by granting women the right to work part-time, the state is pulling women away from a working life (public space) and restricting them to the home (private space). The “solution” frames reveal striking differences between the organisations. Rather than the right to part-time work, almost all women from the BKP suggest that the state should take its responsibilities to support families by evoking the mechanisms of paternity leave, financial state support, etc. Aysun (2018) from the BKP underlined her worries about whether she would be able to return to work life after raising two children. Contrary to AKDER’s presentation of their demands for part-time work as being in the mother’s interest, all of the women from the BKP were highly critical of the glorification of motherhood and family. In referencing Islam Nurten (2018) from the BKP, the respondents from the group voiced strong opposition to the idea that “the family is sacred, the women’s role in the family is sacred and the main mission of women is to preserve the family”. Nurten provided details of the BKP’s plan to carry out research, and to deconstruct and replace this view with one in which women are not the only one taking responsibility in the family, and are thus able to work full-time.

AKDER in 2012 held a significantly critical position not only in terms of femininity, but also in defining the major problems faced by women in Turkey. While the promotion of a certain image of motherhood, in compliance with the traditional division of labour, was questioned and criticised, the respondents underlined the individuality of women. Moreover, the pressure on women who do not fit into the expected identity categories was listed among the most pressing problems among women.

In addition to the headscarf ban, gender-based discrimination, access to education, labour force participation and equality were identified as the leading problems faced by women in 2012 among the respondents from AKDER. Furthermore, all of the respondents from both organisations underscored that although the organisation had been established to mobilise against the headscarf ban, while engaged in that process, they started to “realise and fight not only discrimination emanating from the ban, but from being woman” (Göknur 2012). In the problem definition penned by AKDER in 2012, there is no mention of the right to work part-time, dwelling rather on the principle of equality. “My biggest dream for all women is for them to gain equality with men in every respect” (Serap 2012).

While in 2012 the frames that AKDER made use of were quite in tune with the feminist framing, in the post-headscarf era it has come to align with anti-feminist frames at the expense of women’s individual rights. Furthermore, they have levelled criticism at feminism for producing a homogenous image of women that ignores and devalues those who do not work. Serap (2018) from AKDER claims that “there is an imposition in the world, and Turkey has taken its share. A woman has to contribute to her family to be valued.” AKDER, in 2018, states that their aim is to raise awareness and to increase options for women by creating a social and

political climate that values stay-at-home mothering. According to AKDER, feminists are to be blamed for limiting the choices available to women and making mothers think that they have to be “superwomen” (Zeynep 2018) if they are to achieve balance between work and the family.

As a prominent Islamist women's CSO proclaiming these views, the two groups both play unique and critical roles in the construction of public meaning about motherhood and the role of women in the family and the workforce, while also defining the problems faced by women. Engaging in debates on the subject of motherhood enables AKDER to speak of the needs of religious women who are attempting to balance work and family life, while reinforcing the political messages of the ruling regime about what constitutes ideal mothering, legitimising also the division of labour within the family.

The BKP, on the other hand, remains at the outskirts of this debate, identifying the rising violence, the prevailing patriarchy and poverty as the most important problems faced by women in Turkey. They also mention “the retreat from the acquired rights of women” (Begüm 2018). Their critical position of gender policies and their discourse place the organisation in a disadvantaged position in efforts to shape government gender policies, unlike with AKDER. As Aysun (2018) from the BKP confides: “when we voice our criticisms of the prevailing policies and discourses pertaining to gender, we are accused of being opposed to Islamic and traditional values”. As such, we see AKDER in 2018 referencing issues using a religio-conservative language in line with the government, while the BKP articulates its narratives grounded in line with feminist frames. AKDER is a women's CSO in which women are the major actors and leaders, but not champions of equal rights. AKDER rather seeks to protect the role of women in motherhood and care giving within the confines of traditional division of labour (Gouws 2015). The BKP presents arguments that parallel feminism, but that also resonate with its social conservative base.

Conclusion

As Bacchi (2018) suggests, frames and problem definitions “are never exogenous to (outside of) social and political practices. Problems are *produced* as particular sorts of problems”. Attending to this requires “considering the meanings of concepts in terms of the specific projects to which they are attached”. Through the narratives of both AKDER and the BKP, it is expressed what it means to be a woman, an Islamist woman and a mother, based on their individual values and ideologies regarding gender roles, at the same time operating within the political contexts in which they must contend. In order to reflect on the dialogic relationship between context and frames, this study compares their framing and reframing of gender and gender equality, as well as their problem definitions, in 2012 and 2018.

In 2012, the BKP and AKDER converged in their approaches to gender, gender equality, feminism and the problems faced by women in Turkey. While emphasising the importance of gender equality, the way they framed women's issues, such as motherhood and work-life balance, not only resonated with each other, but also with the feminist line.

However, by 2018, the framing and problem definition of these two CSOs had come to demonstrate striking differences. Embracing an understanding rests on the biological gender differences between men and women, AKDER came to claim that women required specifically designed public policies to help them fulfil their traditional gender roles. This was considerably in tune with the ruling regime's advocacy of gender justice over gender equality, and contrasted AKDER's own framing in 2012. The suggested “solution” promotes the strengthening of the family as the main response to the “problems” constructed in the increasing authoritarian gender climate in 2018's Turkey. Even the concepts of gender and gender equality become futile because questions of gender equality are mostly trimmed down to statements about women who are naturally connected to the family. “In effect, women's policy disappears and is replaced by a discourse promoting policies designed to foster (mothers in) families with children” (Mayer *et al.* 2014, 256). After launching to mobilise people against the headscarf ban at its outset, AKDER's growing engagement with the feminist movement in the process resulted in a convergence between the tone of the demands of AKDER and its feminist ideas, and the articulation of a complex set of arguments beyond the headscarf issue. After the lifting of the headscarf ban, however, we can observe a clear retreat from the feminist frames adopted in 2012 that was manifested also in the changes of the membership profile and the activities in which it was engaged.

The BKP followed a different path to AKDER. From 2012 to 2018, it has continued to challenge the patriarchy, uses feminist frames and maintains an oppositional position vis-à-vis the patriarchal government

policies. Under the rising authoritarian gender climate in the country, the organisation maintains its critical stance in questioning and opposing the prevailing values and policies.

The opposing trajectories of these two Islamist CSOs shows that rather than religious identity, it is their position vis-à-vis patriarchy and feminism that shape their framing and problem definition. From the perspective of Arat (2016, 128), who says of Islamist women that “their criticism of patriarchal government policies or rhetoric serves as a test of their courage or commitment to gender rights”, we observe not only a divergence, but also a rift in the case of the BKP and AKDER.



¹When “Islam became more visible and powerful in the public and political realm, the state repressed it as a threat to secular order” (Turam 2008, 479). One of the consequences of this was the outlawing of the Welfare Party by the Constitutional Court in January 1998 after the February 28th coup d’etat.

²Despite the fact that judges, prosecutors, military and police officers were barred from the regulation at that moment, the headscarf ban was revoked for judges and prosecutors in 2015, for police officers in 2016 and for military officers in 2017.

³In CEDAW Civil Society Forum in 2003, a group of women from the BKP demanded the CEDAW Committee include the headscarf ban in their report (Kazete 2003).

⁴All of the respondents’ names used are pseudonyms.

⁵AKDER organized some events on February 28th coup d’etat for catching attention of the public to this matter and monitored tribunals of the coup. AKDER also formed a commission on 28 February, of which targets to bind up the wounds and rehabilitate the headscarved women who were displaced from their education and working life.

⁶The essence that all human beings obtained by the creation, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi. <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/fitrat>.

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