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Conservative Women's Organizations and their Approaches to the Women's Rights from the Third Wave Feminist Perspective [1]

Üçüncü Dalga Feminizm Çerçevesinde İslâmcı Kadın Örgütlenmesi ve Kadın Haklarına Yaklaşımları

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Abstract

This study focuses on Islamist women's organizations as civil society actors. Although this research is based on a comprehensive field study covering all women's organizations and activists in Eskişehir, only the data gathered from interviews at Islamist women's organizations were analyzed for this study. The study investigates the position of Islamic women's organizations in women's movements in terms of their advocacy of women's rights and their stance against patriarchal domination in line with their understanding of the female body. The discourse of women's rights advocated in Islamist women's organizations is established concerning Islam. The discourse criticizes gender equality as a universal value and replaces it with gender justice because Islamist women believe that Western Feminism does not cover the reality of Muslim women. In line with the Islamic narration of creation, Islamist women advocate the distribution of justice according to the vital religious notion of created/given natural characteristics (fîtra) of the sexes. In addition, they do not see their bodies as their own but as God's trust and are thus against abortion. Therefore, within the women's movement in Turkey, tension is growing between secular women and Islamist women, between gender equality and gender justice, causing division rather than solidarity among women.

Keywords: *Women's movement, third-wave feminism, Islamist women's organizations*

Öz

Bu çalışmada bir sivil toplum aktörü olarak İslâmcı kadın örgütlerini irdelemekteyiz. Araştırma, Eskişehir'deki tüm kadın örgütlerini kapsayan geniş kapsamlı bir saha çalışmasına yaslanmaktadır ancak bu makalede sadece İslâmcı kadın örgütlerindeki görüşmelerin verileri analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmada İslâmcı kadın örgütlerinin kadın hakları savunusu ve beden kavrayışları dolayısıyla kadın bedeni üzerindeki patriarkal tahakküme yönelik duruşlarıyla kadın hareketi içerisindeki konumları irdelenmştir. İslâmcı kadın örgütlerinde savunulan kadın hakları söylemi, İslâm dini referansıyla kurulmakta ve evrensel değer olarak toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği eleştirilerek yerine toplumsal cinsiyet adaleti yerleştirilmeye çalışılmaktadır. Batı Feminizminin Müslüman kadın gerçekliğini kapsamadığı ve İslâm'ın yaradılış öğretisi gereği, cinslerin fıtrî özelliklerine göre adalet dağıtımı savunulnmaktadır. İlaveten, kadınlar bedenlerine kendilerine ait olarak görmemekte ve İslâmî bakışla 'emanet' beden algısı nedeniyle kürtaj karşıtı oldukları görülmektedir. Böylelikle, Türkiye'deki kadın hareketi içerisinde seküler kadınlar ile İslâmcı kadınlar arasında toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ile toplumsal cinsiyet adaleti arasında önemli bir gerilim üretilmekte; kadınlar arasında dayanışmadan ziyade bölünmelere ve ayrışmalara yol açtığı görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *kadın hareketi, üçüncü dalga feminizm, İslamcı kadın örgütleri.*

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Introduction

During the 1980s in Turkey, while the Islamist political movements were on the rise, Islamist women became active within the movement, coming under the spotlight of the media, especially with their involvement in the "headscarf" protests at the universities. From the 1970s, the so-called salvation novels ("*hidayet romanları*") of the Islamist movement called women to Islamic awakening, and such political Islamic propaganda found an audience among the young female college students in the late 1980s. Although the novels of this period recommended women to cover their hair and withdraw to the private sphere, the young college women did not withdraw from the social life and began their struggle for existence in the public sphere with their Islamic identity through their headscarf protests. In the 1990s, the electoral victories of the *Welfare Party* (*Refah Partisi*) in the local elections of the big cities like Istanbul and Ankara, as well as the growth of the Islamist business owners with their increasing capital and conservative-oriented hotels, the fashion industry, and media, allowed political Islam and Islamic lifestyle to become visible for the public. By the 1990s, there was a proliferation of the number of Islamist women and, with also the help of the success of political Islam, they began to organize around the headscarf - rights activism and came to be known as women's movements.

"Woman" is an essential subject for the political struggle of Turkish political Islam for a couple of reasons. Islam regulates women's place, rights, and functions within a society because gender relations and the institution of family are important for raising the youth by the Islamic principles, a role that is central in the foundation and sustaining of Islamic society. Furthermore, within Turkey's specific historical context, the secularist principles of the modern Republican era, which aimed to establish a new ethos for the public sphere and the women's identity, have conflicted with Islamic values. In this context, the women who adopt the values of the modern Republic are considered modern and secular, while those who oppose the official ideology of the Republic are defined as anti-secular and reactionary. Thus the identity adopted by (or imposed on) women automatically makes them part of Turkey's ideological divide between Kemalist or Islamist camps, thus determining their level of access or restriction to the public sphere.

Similar to the modernist project of the Republican era, which regarded the women as the carriers of the contemporary Western values and defined for them the ideal type of clothing, set of behaviors and attitudes, the Islamic[2] movements gave women an ideological mission for creating an alternative Islamic order to the Kemalist and Western perspectives of modernity. Thus women have left their mark on the rise and publicization of political Islam in Turkey. While the Third Wave feminist movement criticized traditional feminism's white, middle-class, and Western composition, inspired by the post-modern and post-colonial theories, the various women's identities politicized the discrimination they faced in the social sphere. Such a trend is reflected in the Turkish women's movement in the form of divisions based on beliefs and ethnic belongings. As the Islamist women approached the women's rights issues with Islamic reference points, their conservative discourse aimed at promoting

traditional gender roles and their clear rejection of gender equality led to tensions and conflicts in their relationship with the secular and modern women. This study examines the civic engagement of the Islamist women in Eskişehir within the above-described political context. We aim to understand the position of Islamist women's organizations within the broader women's movement in Turkey. In this research, we aim to seek answers to the following questions:
-What motivates Muslim women to engage in civic engagement?
- What kind of activities are carried out to empower women and the development of women's rights in society?
-What do the concepts of gender equality and justice mean to them?
- Regarding their understanding of the body, how do they approach the issue of abortion?

The article first discusses the main premises of the Western Third Wave and Islamic feminist movements. Then, it examines the rise of political activism among Islamist women in the 1980s. Afterwards, we analyze the civic engagement of Islamist women and how their activism was regarded in society. In the last section, we present our research findings and provide commentary on them.

Third Wave Feminist Movement

In parallel to the criticism of modernism in the Western world, using the methods of post-structuralism and post-colonialism, the third-wave feminism deconstructed the essentialist notion that regarded womanhood as a homogenous experience of the excluded and oppressed. Thanks to the impact of the post-modern and multiculturalist approaches with their emphasis on the politics of difference, the feminist theory became more specific about differing women's experiences, and the variations between women based on their race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation became critical (Donovan, 2019:349). The movement emphasizes the arbitrariness of the categories of modernity such as inclusion, justice and universality, arguing that these categories function similar way to the imagined natures of the men and women, masking the power relationships and exclusion zones in the society. It questions the validity of the social organization based on the patriarchal gender differences, which are naturalized as the "order of things" and concealed with the illusion of universality. The movement also criticizes what it regards as the strategies of oppression and exclusion within the social organization, serving in the interests of the ruling classes (Ebert, 1991:888).

One of the pioneers of the third-wave feminist movement, black feminism, maintains how black women experience oppression, violence, and discrimination in different forms and intensities than the other groups (Collins, 2000; Analdua, 2002). The theory of intersectionality states that although all women experience oppression mainly due to their gender, every structural inequality resulting from other aspects of the social life exerts additional pressure on women (Ritzer, 2001:481). It emphasizes that the oppression mechanisms, which Collins (2000:228) describes as a "matrix of domination," manifest themselves in the spheres of race, class, gender and sexuality, the very spheres of oppression upon which the modern American nation is built upon.

The feminist studies, which use post-colonial theory as a framework, stress how colonialism affects gender relations and the functional role of the discourse of "white men protecting the brown women from the brown men" for the imperialists to achieve their goals in the colonial settings (Spivak, 1994). These studies criticize the representation and representation politics of gender relations in Western cultural products such as media, cinema, and literature. For them, the roles of indigenous women and female sexuality are fields of conflict between the Western imperialists and exploited indigenous cultures. Hence the traditions of veiling, polygamy, child marriage and *sati* are points of conflict between the colonizing "Western culture," and different colonized third world cultures. In these cultural conflicts, the cultural and religious rituals and other life practices of the natives are portrayed by the Western colonial powers as the proofs of the "reactionary and barbaric" nature of the third world cultures, as opposed to the progressive culture of the West. Because of this understanding, "the figure of colonized woman became a representation of the oppressiveness of the entire 'cultural tradition' of the colony. (Narayan, 1997:17).

The queer theory, which originated from the third-wave feminist movement, criticizes the use of gender as an analytical category. It argues that the concept of gender produces binary oppositions between the categories of men and women, assuming that these identities are final and homogenous. According to Butler, the main problem with traditional feminism is that while escaping from biological determinism, it falls into the trap of cultural essentialism. The studies that focus on "women" as the main subject produces new exclusion zones, paradoxically hindering the original goal of expanding the scope of feminism's claims of broader representation. Emphasizing the need to rethink the ontological construction of the gender identities radically, Butler questions what we call the internal traits in ourselves, namely gender, and argues that the concepts of gender, sexuality, desire, and genders are discursively (2004:30) constructed.

Islamist Feminism

Islamic feminism represents one of the types of the feminist movement that emerged in connection with postcolonialist feminism within the broader third-wave framework. Especially in the late 1980s, Islamic feminism started to develop in the Muslim-dominated areas, adopting Western feminism's discourse on women's issues while distinguishing itself from the rest of the movement by taking Islamic values as reference points. These women's movements, which came into existence in connection with the modernization processes in the Muslim majority countries (and the third world in general), have often interacted and articulated with the anti-colonial/anti-imperialist and nationalist ideologies in their specific countries. Therefore as Mir-Hosseini (2006:639) states, because feminism is regarded as a colonial project, which needed to be resisted according to the anti-colonialist and nationalist discourses in most of the third-world countries, Muslim women often had to choose between their beliefs and gender consciousness. Consequently, they could not benefit from the democratic and liberal ideologies' criticism of the patriarchy within their cultures and religion. Such a situation limited the development of

women's movements in the Islamic lands; the Muslim women, who were stuck between different ideologies and/or modernity and tradition, had difficulty developing an independent and autonomous discourse on women's rights.

Although the term Islamic feminism is widely used in the international literature and by Muslim women intellectuals, researchers, and activities, the usage of the term often leads to controversy and criticism, as many criticize the term because it has West-centric or orientalist discourse and it does not reflect the locality and diversity of the discourses about the women's rights issues in the Muslim lands. The interest in the gender and women's rights discourse of feminism increased among the conservative women's rights advocates and the Islamic feminists mostly educated upper-class Muslim women in the countries governed by Islamic law. Political Islam, which started to rise significantly in the Middle East in the second half of the 20th century and was supported by state policies, was one of the most critical factors for such an increase in interest. However, as Mir-Hosseini (2010) states, it was not the egalitarian gender discourse of political Islam that led to this interest, but instead its' 'return to sharia' discourse, which emphasized the pre-modern patriarchal gender concepts of the traditional Islam. A return to pre-modern interpretations of sharia meant the elimination of various laws that gave women an advantage but were not enforceable in Islam. This led to a backlash, criticism, and growing activism among Muslim women, eventually developing what is now defined as Islamic feminism. Therefore, Mir-Hosseini (2010) underlines that Islamic feminism, which emerged as a paradoxical consequence of the rise of political Islam, developed, in a sense, as the 'unwanted child of political Islam.' Questioning the relations between Islamic belief, patriarchy and feminism and tracing gender prejudices in traditional Islamic law, Islamic feminism, at this point, directs its criticisms to Islamic discourse, which combines Islam and Sharia with patriarchy and claims that patriarchy is divinely necessary (Mir-Hosseini, 2006). Islamic Feminism, does not see the sexist-male-dominated interpretations of traditional Islam and the Qur'anic verses on which it is based, as legitimate. Advocating for reading the Qur'an from a woman's perspective, Islamic feminism argues that Allah is just and does not create men and women superior to each other. It is based on a fundamental view that the Qur'an conveys essentially egalitarian messages. In other words, according to Islamic feminism, the inequality between men and women arising from gender hierarchy does not originate from the real Islamic belief but is based on the male-dominated Islamic understandings and social organizations. As Zahra Ali (2014, 16) puts it, Islamic feminism is built on the thesis that equality is at the heart of the religion of Islam and that the revelation of the Qur'an is the guarantee of women's rights works.

Despite such basic common beliefs, the manifestations of Islamic feminism in Muslim-majority lands have followed different courses in different countries, depending on the historical background and trajectories, especially the specific conditions and experiences related to their modernization history. As will be discussed in the next section, Islamic women's organization in Turkey has followed a unique course with the social and political history of modernization in Turkey. And

such trajectory has been shaped by the country's tense relationship with the Islamic identity, which the modern Turkish state tried to keep out of the public sphere.

Headscarf Protests in Turkey in the 1980s

During the 1980s, the global scale developments and the crisis of modernism in Turkey led to legitimacy problems for the nation-state policies in the country. Until this period, the religious and ethnic identities, which the modern state tried to keep within the confines of the private sphere for their assumed potential for hindering national identity, began to demand a political inclusion by gaining publicity and representation in the public sphere (Alankuş Kural, 1997: 5). After the September 12 military coup (1980), with the implementation of the neoliberal policies, the country's integration into global capitalism accelerated, and while the leftist groups were suppressed, political Islam started to rise by adopting identity politics and becoming the platform for the demands for status and political participation for the individuals and groups, which had remained in the economic-cultural periphery (Göle, 2008; İlyasoğlu, 1994; Saktanber, 2020a). Although with the start of the multi-party election system, there had been attempts by Islamic groups to form a political party by extending their religious sects and other community organizations into the political Party, the first Islamic Party came into reality with the establishment of the *National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi*, MNP) under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan in 1970. The Party based its political propaganda on the anti-Western, conservative-nationalist discourse and, during the late 1980s, under the new name of *Welfare Party* (RP, *Refah Partisi*), it became an important actor in the Turkish political life (Bora, 2017: 468).

The Islamist political orientation that developed within the conservative political movement in the 1950s in Turkey expressed its political vision mostly through its criticism of the Westernization and degeneration in the name of protection of women and family. During the 1950s and 1960s, through their press and media organs, the conservative movement clarified the "Islamic" criteria for the desirable lifestyle and disseminated them by publicizing the Islamic female identity (Topçu, 2009:21; Çayır, 2008). The male activists, who regarded themselves as the defenders of political Islam, supported the protests of the headscarved women, as they regarded the struggle for "freedom of wearing a headscarf" at the universities ~~itself~~ as a concrete demonstration of the exclusion of Islamic identity from the political arena (Çakır, 2000a).
While the headscarf was not a prominent theme in Islamic publications in the 1970s, in the next decade, Islamist women's magazines started to create the veiled woman as an alternative "image,", especially against a western-secular lifestyle (Köse, 2011: 802). The headscarf entered the mainstream political imagination in the late 1970s and became an essential part of the political agenda of the Islamist movement in Turkey (Aktaş, 2006).

During the 1980s, protest activities such as marches, silent protests and hunger strikers for the legalization of wearing headscarves at the universities, in conjunction with the rise of political Islam in the country, not only made the conflict between secular and Islamist viewpoints more visible in the public

sphere but also increased its intensity. The headscarf protests of the late 1980s left their mark on the period; Islamist women have assumed the role of both the symbol and carrier of resistance against the policies, which they regarded as contrary to religion. The Islamist movement has also succeeded in bringing religion into the public sphere. In his study of salvation novels in the context of Islamism and Islamic movements, Çayır shows how Islamist politics constructed the female body by metaphorically comparing the woman to the motherland and the headscarf to the flag (2008:76).

The headscarf, or more politically "veil" issue, has become one of debated subjects in Turkish politics. A debate has ensued on whether it is a manifestation of religious freedom linked to individual rights or it is the symbol of the political agenda of the Islamic circles to violate the public impartiality (Ayata and Tütüncü, 2008). Conservative women in protests neither used the rebellious language of feminism's "body politics" concept nor did they use the liberal motto "my individual decision is nobody's business." They defend their struggle for rights and freedoms in the context of freedom of religion and conscience by saying, naturally, "I cover myself," which is a command of the religion of Islam (Şefkatli Tuksal, 2007: 64). However, with the military intervention on February 28, 1997, as a result of the public authority's perception of rebellion against the secular state, the coalition government, of which the Islamist RP was a part, was dissolved, and wearing headscarf was banned in the public and higher education institutions.

The pioneering studies on the headscarf protests demonstrated that the participants in the protests were mostly university students or educated women from the middle or lower-middle class, who lived in the big cities and wanted to benefit from the opportunities of modernity (Göle, 1994; İlyasoğlu, 1994; Yılmaz, 2015). These studies also pointed out that, in parallel with the development of political Islam not only in Turkey but also in the Middle East, women's access to the public space with their religious identities is a matter of power struggle, distribution of public resources, and vertical mobility aspirations of the Islamic segment of the society.

Organization and Subjectification of Islamist Women

As the public visibility of the Islamist women increased with their heavily publicized protests for the right to wear a headscarf at the universities in the late 1980s, the Islamist women became a subject of interest for the social scientists by the early 1990s (Saktanber, 2004). During the same period, different women groups such as feminists, secularists, conservatives, Muslims, Kurds, socialists, lesbians, and queers organized around multiple identities with growing political activism. In the liberal environment of the 1990s, the concepts like women's rights, civil rights, democracy, citizenship, inclusion, representation, justice, freedom, and equality were openly discussed in the public sphere, and the dominant religion, race, and gender of the nation-state were questioned (Alkan& Çakır, 2009: 252). Relatively liberal environment of the country and the weakening of the hegemony of nation-state politics in its specific sociology and with the effect of the opening up dynamics to global markets, the differences started to become clear; Kurdish movement and

political Islam, coded as "separatist" and "reactionaryist". It also led to fierce arguments and ruptures within the women's movement. Within the context of the weakening of the hegemony of the nation-state, the country's relatively liberal environment, the country's unique social structure, and the dynamics of its opening to global economic markets, the differences between the women's rights movements became clear: the Kurdish movement and political Islam were blamed for "separatism" and "reactionism", leading to fierce debates and divisions between the movements (Bora and Günal, 2014: 8; Sancar, 2014: 303). The Kurdish and Islamist women's emphasis on identity politics in their comprehensive criticism of the understanding of "modernizing tutelage" led to tensions among different women's movements (Sancar 2014: 303). Thus, multiple women's identities have made their differences open to the public by causing significant divisions within the women's movement in Turkey.

The Islamist women, who had a partially "militant" discourse in the 1980s, began to form social spaces to express themselves in the 1990s. Their discourse began to prioritize what they regarded as innate and natural (*fıtrî*) women's sensibilities and aimed to protect the heritage of the traditional knowledge of the women (Aktaş, 2004: 835). The civic activism of the Islamist movement skyrocketed after 1994; they established new solidarity networks through various organizations like foundations, associations, clubs or platforms. *Gökkuşağı Women's Platform* in Istanbul, *Çınar Women's Platform* in Bursa and *Başkent Women's Platform* had many sub-components with their own structure. While these Islamist organizations are largely based on women's initiatives and motivated by the sense of victimhood over the headscarf issue, as we have observed in our fieldwork, there is no autonomous Islamist women's non-governmental organization operating in the small and medium-sized cities.

In addition to civic activism, the 1990s also witnessed Islamist women's subjectification through self-reflexivity. Through their novels, magazines, research, and columns, Islamist women intellectuals, especially those from the literary circles, criticized the insensitivity of Islamist men towards the headscarf discrimination and their ease with modern life and global capitalism without considering the faith-related symbols. The urban, educated, professional and middle-class Islamist women opened up a discussion about the positions of women in Islam, modernism, feminism, marriage, and the Islamic lifestyle. Among themselves, they also questioned whether women could participate in the collective worship with men, or shall women work as religious leaders or become prime ministers in the context of Islamic traditions (Diner and Toktaş, 2010: 51-52). Instead of "headscarf" protests at the front gate of the university campuses, the Islamic women actors aimed to make their voices heard through new non-governmental organizations and platforms. While in the 1980s, whether the voice of women itself was haram or not was discussed among the Islamist circles, in the next decade, Muslim women began to express their problems with their own voices and words (Çayır, 2008:126).

The young, female headscarf activists, who could not attend higher education institutions due to the prohibition, took part in the establishment of the "Women's Commissions" of the Welfare Party, reaching the households in the peripheries of

the big cities, making them politically active as members of the Party. Through their political activism, they played an important role in the Party's great electoral victory in the 1994 local elections (Arat, 2005). In the words of Eraslan (2004:824), "in 1995, 18.000 women organizers worked as a giant dynamo [for the Welfare Party] in Istanbul." Although the Welfare Party proved to be an important school for conservative women, not a single woman was nominated by the Party as a candidate for the parliamentary elections; none became a municipality leader or a member of the municipal councils until the Party was abolished (Çakır, 2000b). The Islamist women hit a blind wall within the Party.

Existing with Differences in the Public Space

Religious/conservative women had already been active in the foundations and associations in the period before the 1990s, but their activities were limited to small circles and did not have much impact. They became aware of the power of having a platform in the public sphere during the liberal environment of the 1990s (Şişman, 2000:118). However, at this point, we should also stress that the recognition of the power of the women's movement was largely thanks to public campaigns of the women's movements similar to the Second Wave feminists, who were mostly from the leftist movements under authoritarian conditions after the military coup, on September 12, 1980 (Kardam and Ecevit, 2014: 89; Tekeli, 1993:33). By the 1990s, the popularity of women as a subject matter in the print media paved the way for Islamist women organizations (Çaha, 2013; Çaha, 1996).

Although Islamist women used feminism as an intellectual source, Islam was the main source behind the construction of Muslim women's identity and its difference from other identities. They argued, ontologically and epistemologically, that Islam does not propose a social hierarchy that puts women into secondary status. According to a concept of *Tawhid*, that is, the unity of the universe, men and women are created by Allah from the same essence, different but equal. They are siblings from the same ancestry, from the same parents. This position of equality does not mean that there were no differences between genders (Aktaş, 1991a; Şişman, 2016). The reason for the existing sexism in the Islamic states, which oppresses, excludes and exploits women, is not because of the religion of Islam, but due to the male-dominated theological interpretation (*tafsir*) and dominant patriarchal social practices, which moved away from the essence of Islam over the course of centuries (Aktaş, 1991b; Şişman, 2016). Thus, while the headscarf was a symbol and cultural expression of an ideological conflict in the 1980s, a new identity debate took place in the 1990s. The politicization of Islam now enabled the imagination of new Muslim morality, aesthetics, and actors in the new era (Göle, 2013:29). As opposed to the experiences of the religious women before the 1970s, there is now a new generation of women, who have left their parents behind in terms of space and consciousness, in their search for a unique Islamic identity without relying on symbolic"family" or "home" (Köse, 2014:220). As identity politics took effect, anti-egalitarian "difference" occupied an important place in the political/philosophical thought of Islamist women. Analyzing the women's condition from the context of modern/traditional dilemma, Aktaş (1992) argues

that the "homelessness of modernity" cripples women and that tradition offers women a living space within which they can experience and develop their own differences. To fix the gender roles in the rapidly changing world, traditional Islam used the concept of *fitrat* or created/natural characteristics and dispositions. The *fitrat* is conceptualized in the sense of specially created biology; it regulates the relationship between ideology and gender roles, which are based on binary oppositions and accepted as self-evident (Edis et.al. Bix, 2005:140). Against the concept of gender, which breaks the relationship between biology and social relationships, the Islamists used the notion of religious *fitrat*. *Tawhid* that is, the understanding of divine unity, imposes the role of complementarity between men and women and ascribes fixed gender roles and responsibilities due to inherent characteristics.

This understanding formed the basis of differentiation between secular feminists and Islamist women. The questions with regard the equality and differentiation, or when to prioritize between these two values, created tensions between two groups in their discussions about women's rights issues (Yılmaz, 2003:12). While Islamist women expressed their desire for equality through their right demands for accessing positions in the public space while wearing their headscarves in the 1980s and 1990s, they emphasized the natural characteristics of *fıtrat* such as motherhood and the position of women in the traditional family. The struggle of Islamist women for having access to the public sphere with a certain status complicates their understanding of the women's role in the private sphere, especially with their emphasis on the sacredness of motherhood. At this point, Yılmaz (2013:12) states that Islamist women's emphasis on their difference in the public sphere re-establishes the sexist norms by creating separate public spaces for women and men. Gülnur Acar Savran also claims that transferring women's roles from the private sphere to the public sphere cannot transform the public sphere alone. Accordingly, with the new conservative policies, when we take the concepts such as "compassion, care, solidarity, responsibility, and relationality from the closed door of the private sphere, which is considered the part of women's world and includes them in the noisy world of the public sphere, there will surely be a crack within the walls of 'gender contract' between the private and public sphere. However, for her, it is doubtful that a new definition of the public sphere, which does not include the perspective of the concrete transformation of the family, parenthood, and domestic labor, would practically change women's lives (2001:36). In other words, Acar Savran argues that women's experiences in the public sphere can be "empowering" and "liberating" for women only if they can transform the private sphere as well.

The problems of Islamist women became so obvious over time that the production of a new discourse was deemed necessary (Çakıl Dincer, 2021). Since 2010, as a result of the widespread debates that present the headscarf as a part of the gender issue, the discourse of gender justice has become a part of the political agenda to defend women's rights. As a result of the nearly twenty-year rule of the Islamic movement in the country, the hybridity policies, accompanied by populist policies, are replaced by the discourse of authentic/native and Islamic

culture, art, science, and technology production. In such a political environment, Islamist women criticize both modernism's "standardization" ethos and feminism's "Western" undertones, producing authentic/local women's rights perspectives from the post-modernist and post-colonial theories that are based on the criticism of modernism and the West (Albayrak, 2008).

A New Anti-Equality Discourse: Gender Justice

Portraying feminism roughly as a struggle of women to be equal with men, to be like men, the women who advocated instead for social gender justice criticize the feminists for trying to achieve equality in legal and social terms even though such equality would lead to masculinization of women and distorting their female identity (Aydın-Yılmaz, 2015: 109). Demircan-Çakar (2015) discusses the necessity of gender justice on the following arguments:

i) Because the habitus of men and women are completely different, their perceptions and conceptions and justice are also different,
ii) Although the theory of equality was first based on the concept of justice, today, the term justice denotes a concept far beyond the theory of equality. Fair distribution based on absolute equality may not be fair and just enough for the disadvantaged groups,
iii) Since gender cannot be considered independently of social life and religion, an approach to justice based on *fıtrat* is necessary.[3]

The proponents of the concepts such as "justice over equality" or "equivalence" which are put forward under the concept of "*fıtrat*", claim that their conceptualization, based on biological determinism, would not create a hierarchy in the social division of labor. They argue that the expectations for women and men in business life differ, and to take a more active and effective role in business life, necessary legal arrangements, such as flexible working hours and training programs, are necessary for women to meet the expectations. In this regard, their concrete policy suggestions in the name of the concept of justice for women are similar to feminism's call for positive discrimination. Çakıl-Dinçer (2017: 106) states that the main difference between the equality of feminism and the justice discourses of Islamist women is in their aims. Accordingly, the egalitarian understanding of feminism supports taking positive discriminatory measures to eliminate inequalities arising from gender differences and ensure equality in the whole social, economic and cultural structure. However, crucially, Çakıl-Dinçer argues, regarding these policies as main aims may lead to gender discrimination and risk its perpetuation. The recent calls for women to work part-time, the rewarding of childbearing and legal regulations for child-care fees are carried out with the discourse of establishing a more fair life for women.

Gender equality indicators in Turkey show that there are significant inequalities in all areas of social life. However, Islamist women portray feminism's defence of equality as if "sameness" is actually meant and argue instead for the concept of justice, which is used to reject equality. However, contemporary feminism's defence of equality is not based on the argument of "sameness"; it criticizes the liberal democratic theory's abstract (uniforming) concept of

citizenship for centering on the experiences and sensibilities of men and constructing "rational" male subject as the universal norm (Berktay, 2017:15). The Third Wave feminist movement convincingly argued that there is no homogenous group of women by drawing attention not only to the differences between women and men but also to multiple female identities. Rather than idealistic and abstract "identical" individuals, the third-wave feminists emphasize the existence of different groups and individuals, and such emphasis is noteworthy, not only because it corrects the traditional liberal approach but also for its political call for pluralist democracy, which would take individual and group differences and ensure their representation in the political system (Berktay, 2017:15). Although Islamist women emphasize the differences in their identities based on faith and follow post-colonial theory in their visibility in the public sphere, they display an essentialist approach by seeking the solution to all kinds of women's problems in religion. Instead of demanding equal citizenship rights, and criticizing feminists, they find solutions in absolute and uniform religious discourses.

Methodology

In this article, we define the concept of women's organization in its broadest sense and aim to reach all organizations, women actors, and women's branches of the organizations, which define themselves as part of the women's movement and/or deal with women's issues, as well as senior business executives, public officials and freelancers dealing with women's issues, regardless of their political stance, organizational structure and number of members. We used the qualitative method in our research and interviewed 48 women from 42 organizations that meet the above-mentioned criteria. We conducted the field research between September 2015 and September 2017. The interview places and frequency are determined by the participants. We often used the areas where the participant's organization operates and recorded the audio tapes of the interviews with consent. Afterwards, we descriptively and systematically deciphered, analyzed, and interpreted the interviews. While conducting the interviews, we ensured that the process between the researchers and the participants was sharing and dynamic and used feminist methodology to sustain mutual interaction and experience sharing during the process. Although we interviewed 48 women in the study, only interviews with representatives/members of the women's branches of mixed Islamist organizations (9) were considered for this article's purposes. Since there was no independent association, foundation, union or platform established by religious-conservative women in Eskişehir at the time of the research, we interviewed the women in mixed organizations.

One of the nine women we interviewed works in a professional organization in the religious/conservative environment, three in Eskişehir branches of charity/solidarity foundations emphasizing religious values operating throughout Turkey, two in associations established for purposes such as mutual aid and solidarity in Eskişehir, and two are in senior management positions in the business environment. To preserve the anonymity of the respondents, we renamed them when using excerpts from the interviews.

Findings and Interpretation: Objectives and the Fields of Activity

In the late 1980s, Islamist women did not establish independent women's associations in cities outside the metropolitan areas but tended to organize women's branches within umbrella organizations such as Islamic associations and foundations. The working women, who had experienced discrimination due to their headscarves in their university years or during their career, established their own alternative public spaces and sought social support by joining these organizations. In our fieldwork, we observed that there are also organizations that operate under the names such as women's associations and foundations without judicial personality (not legally recognized by the state as a foundation or association) but function like women-only branches of the various organizations. In this way, even though women appear in the public sphere, the tradition of Islamic culture, which separates men and women, continues; the religious identities of men and women are preserved and reinforced by clearly separating them in their activities.

In the interviews, the women themselves expressed the primary goal of the organizations as "*working for the sake of Allah*." While the *diversity and identity politics* of the third-wave feminist movement became widespread as a unifying factor in women's organization, the second-wave feminist movement's organization style around a general female identity is observed through the slogan of "sisterhood strengthens," which emphasizes the commonalities in the women's experiences. As Walby (2011) argued, the third-wave feminist movements regard the particular belief identity as the unifying factor rather than the universal female identity. Within the peculiar historical context of Turkey, the concept of sisterhood has either been on a very fragile ground or has never been established due to the hegemonic power of the Westernized and modern female identity of the modern Republic. In Islamic women's organizations, the discourses such as "working for the sake of Allah" or "religious fraternity" function as an essential ideological mortar and enables the solidarity of women with different characteristics such as education, class, age, and occupation. In this regard, "working for the sake of Allah" enables the construction of "passive networks" among Islamic women, making it possible to build a collective identity (Bayat, 2007:81).

The participant women are active in Islamic organizations, between 40 and 50 years old. The average age is 48. Except for one woman, they are all university graduates; one has two university degrees. Their occupational profile is as the following: a pharmacist (1), an executive secretary (1), a manager in a public institution (2), a housewife (1), and teachers (4). All participants are married and have children; two women have three children, six women with two children, and one woman with one child. The participants' parents are mostly primary school and secondary school graduates, except one whose father is a university graduate. Their parents are predominantly of rural origin; only one of the participants has parents who were born in the city. Except for one participant, who is a housewife, they all now live in the cities. While women with higher incomes get help with household chores, those with lower incomes do the housework themselves. All the participants, except the one who is a housewife (1), stated that their choice

of spouse was their own decision and their spouses' education was equivalent to their own. Women working in Islamic organizations are mostly urban and middle-class women who have a profession, have higher education and have their own income.

The Islamist women's organizations included in this face an important, two-dimensional dependency problem: First, they are administratively dependent on the mixed umbrella organization since they do not establish their own organizations, and second, they are dependent on the umbrella organization's management in operating because they do not have their own income and budget. As the women's organizations do not have their own income or special budgets, they ask for the support of the "benevolent brother" from the management of the umbrella organization or local businessmen. Because the Islamic women's organizations we studied view the cooperation, charitable works, and contribution to the "*education, socialization or scientific development*" of women as their primary objectives, their activities are limited to those related to the domestic role of women or aim to improve their knowledge about the religion. The activities they carry out include Arabic and Qur'an courses, communication with children and adolescents, and courses on elegance and etiquette, sewing, and reading-writing. Although the participants express the goal of raising and strengthening the status of women both in the family and in the society, their activities are designed to improve the image of religious women as good mothers and wives and thus seemingly strengthen and reproduce the traditional gender roles in the society.

The Cause of the Women's Problem

For the Islamist women's organizations, the cause of women's problems is rooted in women's lack of education. They define education as a wide range of activities and skill sets acquired from family to higher education institutions, including socialization and formal education processes. They state that the education system as a whole oppresses the girls, women's identity is not liberated, and therefore women's problems arise. They also state that these problems are intensified two-fold when it comes to the headscarf. They claim that women are not happy because they do not receive an adequate education, they remain in secondary status, and they have an identity problems. However, as can be seen from the excerpts below, some of the participants also emphasized that the women are oppressed outside of the sphere of education, they face hardships because of a lack of liberation, problems in the traditions, and the justice system:

> I think [the root cause of women's problems] is not being able to express their own personality. I mean, I don't think women are happy. It may sound like a very radical idea, but I can't imagine that ninety per cent of women are happy. Maybe ten per cent is happy. (Busra)
>
> …women should be given more say. This is our structure, this traditional structure if we think about Turkey. Our traditional structure does not allow this. (Kübra)
>
> There is an identity problem. I mean, seeing women as a sexual commodity. That's the biggest problem, it applies to all [all women]." (Ummugulsum)

> What can you do with the law? There is a great problem with the justice system. A person can rape a girl, then kill her, then wear a tie, and gets a reduction in the sentence for good behavior… (Kevser)

The solution to women's problems is seen in the expansion of women's educational opportunities.

The Understanding of Feminism

Although the fact that the feminist movement became visible to the public in the second half of the 1980s influenced all segments of the women's rights movement in Turkey, feminism is still not a readily embraced identity for many segments with the fear of appearing marginal and radical. Participants describe their subjective identity as *Muslim, religious or conservative*. Although Islamist women implement a quasi-feminist analysis in their questioning of women's identity and patriarchy in Islam, they regard feminism as a movement produced for the problems of Western women and therefore reject it (Ramazanoğlu, 2004; Aktaş, 2004). Indeed, in our fieldwork, although some of the participants read about feminism, we often encounter frequent criticisms of the movement. The argument, which constitutes the basis of Islamist feminism, is expressed by the participants without an actual reference to Islamist feminism: "*The religion of Islam is essentially egalitarian but the women have secondary status in the Muslim countries because of the patriarchal characteristics of the dominant culture and its male interpretation of Islam.*" The participants question and criticize men's interpretation (*tafsir*) and comment about women's place in Islam. There is a prevailing opinion that *tafsir* written from a woman's point of view would improve women's place in social life. They see changing the patriarchal interpretations and practices of Islam as a solution, in a very similar way to the writings of Islamic intellectual women. Some of the participants express this thought as the following:

> I do not think that the religion practised is the true religion dictated in the Qur'an. The religion we live in is not different from other religions in terms of women's perceptions. Religion is dominated by men, and men prevent women from reading the Qur'an. They found a hadith saying, 'Do not teach a woman to read and write'. But there is also the hadith of our Prophet that 'learning is a must for both men and women.' Men seized the religion in a similar way that they seized power. For example, they prevented women from entering mosques for centuries. You cannot come across a woman who specializes in *fiqh* and *tafsir*. Men decide for me. For example, when I'm on my period, they tell me what to do and what not to do. We shouldn't believe everything we hear about religion. There are different interpretations. We have to make our interpretations of the issues. Women should see their place in the Qur'an with their own eyes (Büşra)
>
> We have some comments about the problems when it comes to women's rights. Like you, I started researching because I felt uncomfortable about the subject. I have looked at the most recent *ilmihal* (Islamic form of the catechism). The *ilmihal* was rearranged in consultation with a woman who was an expert in *tafsir*, to look at religious issues, especially about women, from the point of view of women. This is a significant development. (Medina)

> Look at Islam, why is it giving the image that it puts women into secondary status? Several men took over Islam and forced the ulama to issue *fatwa*s accordingly. While having fun with female concubines, they did not educate the woman. So they exploited them. It's that simple. Europe has done this too. Unfortunately, women could not protect their own values and knowledge. (Kevser)

The reason for women's distant stance toward feminism is their belief-based political identity. Just as in the headscarf protests, the Islamist women often state the dictum 'I cover myself according to my faith' and emphasize the worship of Allah as the criteria of being a Muslim woman. They criticize feminism because they perceive it as a revolt against the worship of Allah. After all, it questions the traditional roles and responsibilities in the private sphere.

> I do not consider myself a feminist. But I agree with many of the ideas of feminists. But feminists have specific ideas about women's rights. I regard this as a human right, as a right of Allah's servants (*kul*). Therefore, I am not saying we are superior to men like feminists. I say I am the same as men, I say I am equal. I say I am human. You are human, I am human too. Allah made you (men) wear men's clothes, made me wear women's clothes. I did not choose it, and you did not choose it either. Therefore, neither of us are superiors or inferiors. Allah saw fit for me to play such a role. (Büşra)
>
> We view [feminism] negatively. [Why?] As we have said, the voices of men and women should come to the fore in certain places and situations. But these feminists do not know the boundaries. They jump on everything; they say they are everywhere. I think you should sometimes take a step back, do not be everywhere... So when you say we are equals, when you try to have a say where we have weaknesses, you are on the path to making wrong decisions... So I am not saying it because I claim to know feminism in full detail. Feminism creates a perception that I have the right to have a say about everything, whether I know the matter or not. This is feminism, which is told to us. I take it negatively. Men and women should have a say only when it is necessary. (Kübra)
>
> I was very curious about feminism through a friend of mine; I was curious [about the movement] because of her views. And I read a little bit. They define the problems very nicely… They are very brave too… admirable. I think we have differences in the part of the solution. For example, what that friend of mine said was: 'I am giving birth to a child biologically, but why does it only concern me what happens afterwards? Why do I always have to take care of the baby... Why do I have to do everything to raise the baby." This is where we grow apart. Because, in my opinion, based on our beliefs, according to the environment I believe in, we think it is a gift to raise a child, to take part in his/her growing up, and achieve beauty in his/her spiritual word. We believe. We believe that this is what is commanded to do." (Medina)

As stated by the participants, the ascribed wisdom of motherhood and the abstract reward it brings to women from an essentialist perspective reinforces the Muslim woman identity and provides them with spiritual satisfaction. To use the conceptualization provided by Yılmaz (2015), based on the requirements of the publicized feminine religiosity, motherhood becomes highly functional for

Muslim women to reach their existential goals; they get satisfaction from fulfilling the duties and responsibilities in worshipping Allah.

Gender Justice Discourse

Women who defend the gender justice discourse try to portray feminism roughly as a struggle to be equal with men, to be like men (Çakıl-Dinçer, 2017:103). They claim that the policies to ensure equality between men and women in terms of legal and social rights or to provide equal opportunities for women masculinize them, leading to certain positions and fractures in the female identity (Sare Aydın, 2015:109). For this reason, they demand regulations to protect the women's identity or fix gender roles based on socio-biology (Edis & Bix, 2005). As Savran (2001) points out, the increased visibility of women in the public sphere, which came as a result (or reward) of their important contribution to the political success of the Islamist movement, does not lead them to question their roles and responsibilities at home or the issues related to women's labor. On the contrary, using an essentialist line of thinking, they support fixed gender roles as they regard them as the outcome of women's natural disposition (*fıtrat*).

Although Islamic intellectual women criticized the modernization project of the Republican period for breaking it from tradition, they described the Civil Code (1926), and the right to political participation (1934) as "great gains" (Ramazanoğlu, 2004: 804). None of the women interviewed within the scope of the research complain about the reflections on the civil rights and the right of political participation granted by the Turkish Civil Code in their personal lives. They defend monogamy, women's right to divorce and their free will to choose their spouse, and women's right to political participation. As Demircan-Çakar (2015) argues, men and women would grasp the social reality around them and the concept of justice differently due to their different habitus; as a result of the female habitus established during the modern Republican period, the civic equality between spouses in the family, which has been guaranteed by law since 1926, is not criticized as a practice contrary to women's *fıtrat*, or Islamic view on women's status. Islamist women from the habitus provided by the Republican era, who had a mixed secular education, had a profession and the rights provided by the Civil Code for three generations, do not criticize their equal legal status in the family or the right to political participation. Although they argue that Islam as essentially egalitarian, considering the position of women in the Islamic world, it is obvious that the social reality of macro politics and that men and women can change their habitus based on the rights favoring the women. It is also possible to read the same thing in reverse: The equality and freedom comprehensions of men and women may narrow down if they are not provided with legal rights, equality and freedom in social life.

Parallel to the Islamic literature, the participants understand gender as a non-egalitarian concept, within which the roles and responsibilities of men and women are understood as essentially different due to their *fıtrat*.

> No, [men and women] are not equal. Not so much… The Creator created their bodies differently. A woman should not be a construction worker or

> carry a stone on her back. That is what I'm talking about. In terms of domestic work, the field of housework, by help you mean equailty, right? Can he do it? Yes, he can. The best cooks are men … I never want to go to the market. Before I got married, I told my husband, I said that I would never go to the market. do not want to do such hassle things, or other things, like repairing car. If he does these types of things, I would like to cook and clean my house. Life can be shared following your talent. (Hanife)

As it is emphasized in the quote above, the respondents justify the traditional gender roles by stating that men are rational due to their natural dispositions and should therefore handle technical tasks in the public sphere such as car repair, and women are emotional, and thus should be responsible for domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning in their private sphere. While the participants regard the differences between men and women to be complementing each other, they defend the hierarchical structure of the division of labor as it is thought to be structured by *fıtrat*. Islamist intellectuals defend such hierarchy through an essentialist approach, stating that Islamic justice by definition would not create inequalities. Yet, as in the saying "women cannot fight, war is men's work," which we will see in the following quote, the binary opposition between men and women is reproduced to distance women from state-related activities, leaving the public sphere to men, and directing women to their private sphere by identifying them with their supposed natural characteristics (*fıtrat*):

> Women and men are not equal … it is important from which dimension you look at the issue. I seek equality, recognition of being different, of being equal, all within justice. So, to me, justice covers all. But equality does not include justice. So there is a need to be just. A woman working in a construction business has nothing to do with equality. A woman cannot be as efficient as a man in the construction business. It is not correct to seek equality here. Justice must be sought here. If a woman is good at cleaning a house, a man may be good too. He might have the skillset. If a woman is better, she should still be treated equally. Men and women should have what they deserve... It is important from where you see the equality. The fact that a woman was created physically weak does not mean that she cannot read, receive an education, or have a good job. If there is war, women can't fight. War is man's work." (Kevser)

One participant summarized what she regards as gender justice with the following words: “You cannot put the same number of meatballs on your child’s and husband’s plate at dinner. Do a 6-year-old, and a grown man have the same needs as your husband? Does he have the same body? If I put three meatballs on the child, I put seven meatballs on my husband. The man works outside all day and comes home; the larger his body, the more tired he is. He needs more calories.” The distribution of justice is explained on the basis that it should be given in certain portions based on the natural dispositions of *fıtrat*. The traditional Islamic texts follow the ancient Greek philosophy in the understanding of gender (Edis and Bix, 2005), and we observed in our fieldwork that the Platonic understanding of "to give as much as they deserve" is still valid. While they defend the distribution of justice with an essentialist perspective, based on the needs of women and men, instead of the guarantees of laws and regulations, --except for

their criticism of modernism for excluding Islamist women-- they do not question the structural inequalities, which is vital for women's rights. Neither do they ever ask perhaps the most important question of the third-wave feminist movement: "Who does not deserve what and why?" Instead of questioning their disadvantageous position and barriers in accessing the resources, Islamist women advocate a sort of essentialist absolutism based on the natural dispositions as the Islamic doctrine imagines them. In other words, by suggesting justice instead of equality, they remain loyal to the religious essentialism that regards the biological differences between men and women as fundamental.

The gender justice discourse is also criticized for its cultural analysis, which is becoming popular across the world, for legitimizing the withdrawal of women's rights. As the woman's body was the image of the cultural project of modern Turkey, it became an important part of the political conflict. Thus, the gender discourses have always been politicized due to their connections to the modern state and its ideology (Berktay, 2017:13). The discourse of "I cover myself because of my faith" symbolizes the transition from a collective identity to an individual and political stance. While political Islam gave the women the mission of being a signifier of increasing visibility of political Islam and Islamization of the state, it did not fully include Islamist women in the political arena. While women in the Welfare Party, foundations, and associations played an important role in attracting votes by reaching the disadvantaged groups in the cities, they could not take part in the decision-making mechanisms. As Kandiyoti (1988) observed, gender justice discourse provides a patriarchal bargaining ground for Islamic women to find a space for themselves, to revitalize their cultural identity. "While as a political project, Islamism becomes a 'cultural' tool that connects and integrates the power and society and maintains this through women, a significant majority of women internalize this cultural role attributed to them" (Yılmaz, 2013:19). Demanding access to the public sphere and the right to political representation, Islamist women reiterate that justice, not equality and that their professional career does not mean a break from their traditional roles in the private sphere. By emphasizing the sanctity of the family and motherhood, they close themselves to the confines of the Islamist community, weakening the possible interaction and solidarity with other women's identities.

The Concept of Body in Islamist Women's Organizations

The biopolitical understanding of the female body and fertility is where the political and ideological separation is the most intense between women's organizations. The relationship of Islamist women with their bodies is established through religion, and since the worldly dimension of gender relations is based on the supposed natural dispositions (*fıtrat*), the religious women do not question the issues such as pregnancy, motherhood, abortion, and birth control.

Millett (2000) sees the patriarchal authority as the control mechanism for women's sexuality and fertility by men. Similar to Foucault's understanding of biopower, she argues that the control is political because the relationship between the sexes is based on power. Firestone (1993), on the other hand, finds the class analysis of classical Marxist theory inadequate and argues that the

material basis of women's oppression is not economic but biological. According to her, the reproductive function of women is the cause of the gender-based division of labor on which patriarchy, its governing ideology and gender discrimination are built. Natural reproductive differences between the sexes lead directly to the division of labor in the context of class, as well as to the women's forming a caste. In this claim, Firestone tries to draw attention to the causal link between the material biological basis and the ideology of male domination against women and argues that women should not only take back their own body control but should also take over all social institutions related to childbirth and upbringing (1993:22).

The Islamic feminist Mernissi (2015a) analyzes female sexuality in Islam through traditional texts and historical interpretations of Islam: in Freud, women are passive and therefore defined as masochistic; in Ghazali, on the other hand, the woman is active and the man and woman are two people working to give pleasure to each other. For the followers of Ghazali, because women are regarded as an active force, "woman's aggression is extroverted." Ghazali sees "civilization as a struggle to control the destructive, all-dominating power of women. Women should be controlled so that they do not hinder men from fulfilling their social and religious duties." Because, according to Ghazali, "society can only survive with institutions, which ensure the male dominance such as gender discrimination and polygamy" (Mernissi, 2015a:38). In both Western and Eastern cultures, where women's sexuality is understood as passive and active respectively, the women are described as the potential destroyer of the civilization and need to be controlled. Islam has accepted that both women and men have sexual motives and the right to sexual satisfaction. Eroticism is presented as both a taste from heaven and a divinely ordained necessity for procreation in earthly life. In Islam, orgasm is a pleasure peculiar to both men and women; it does not impose any guilt on either man or woman for having sexual pleasure, but for satisfaction and pleasure to be "legitimate," it must only take place within the framework of Islamic marriage. (İlkaracan, 2015:17). In her work on the issue of artificial virginity in Morocco, Mernissi (2015b) emphasizes the gender inequality in sexuality and points to patriarchal control over the female body. Various ways of prohibiting premarital sexual intercourse and pleasure for women, such as artificial chastity and female genital mutilation, are the control mechanisms that biopower exerts on the female body. Mechanisms aimed at the control of female sexuality and fertility are still the most potent means of maintaining the male-dominated system in most societies.

The fact that women's organizations are not independent of the political power and that they adopt the macro-political discourse of the authority results in their support of the political decisions and discourses of the power-holders towards women. While participants expressed flexible and more acceptable views on contraception, there was clear and obvious opposition to abortion. Except for the one woman who defines herself as a feminist, all participants support the anti-abortion statements that have come to the fore in the public discourse in recent years. These participants do not accept abortion as a woman's right "*even if the woman has been raped*" and defend the prohibition policy of the political

power. They adopt the view summarized in the statement of one participant: "*Except for the health-related reasons, arbitrary abortion should be banned*". Here, the anti-abortion language is the language of the traditional male-dominated Islamic collective identities of religious/conservative women. Unlike the secular defenders of women's rights, participants comprehend issues such as motherhood and abortion as an inviolable and indisputable part of their faith-based identities. And as opposed to the feminist discourse in the West, because the religious women see pregnancy as "a trust from Allah (*emanet*)" (Şişman, 2016), they do not regard it as a control mechanism over their body.

> Abortion is a very different matter. There is a human soul here. I am against the notion of saying that this body is mine, this child is mine, and the logic of whether I will abort or give birth is against me. Because when a child is 40 days old, she/he is 1 cm, but her/his arm and leg are all formed. This is killing a living being. It is forbidden to kill a living being in Islam. But of course, if there is a health problem, it is possible to have an abortion. Just like everyone goes out on the street protesting when an animal is killed, he is a living creature, it is against human rights. (Ummugulsum)

Foucault (2007) criticizes the studies, which regard sexuality as an impulse, and emphasizes the socially constructed nature of sexuality; through the concept of discourse, he highlights the link between societal macro-conceptualizations and social transformations. He views sexuality as a discourse, institutionally rooted social practices that are constructed to other discourses. Şişman (2016:104), while looking at population planning in modern societies from a Foucaultian perspective, argues that the criticisms developed by the feminist movement for the governance and control mechanisms of the female body raise existential problems due to the understanding of *Tawhid* in Islam. Accordingly, the feminist movement, with its aim of transforming the concept of social role, would bring consequences for the spiritual life of women; defending women's right to abortion would negatively affect their spiritual life and hinder their religious identities.

Millett (2000:43) states that masculine domination over women's lives, their sexuality, and fertility is a universal characteristic, and socialization processes such as education, literature, and religion are effective in reinforcing and internalising the patriarchal authority. Thus, the women's own "body image" cannot become independent of patriarchy; it is integrated into the discourse of the political authority, which criminalizes the opposition to abortion and does not give women the right to choose, and accepts the imagination of the political power regarding the female body.

Conclusion

The dressing codes of women in Turkey have been an important signifier for progressive or conservative projects. The political projects have long desired to regulate women's clothing, attitudes, behaviors, roles, and responsibilities in the public sphere. For this reason, women's dressing codes in the public sphere have become the symbol of the power struggle between secular and Islamic political discourses, and the issue of women has always been at the center of political discussions about secularism, Westernization, and tradition.

Within the women's movement in Turkey, significant differences emerged in the 1990s. As it is often argued in the literature, the conflicts did not allow the emergence of colorful harmony and richness within the movement; instead, mutual suspicions and conflicts became a more dominant pattern. In other words, during this period, the women's organizations had to struggle not only with the problems arising from the system but also with the problems, divisions, and limitations caused by the old issues such as Turkey's modernization history and the age-old traditional versus modern-progressive conflict. Moreover, the ongoing tensions between secular and religious identities, which found their political expression often through women's lifestyles and dress codes, further increased the divisions among women's organizations. In this context, we examined the civic motivations of the Islamist women's organizations and observed that their degree of commitment to embracing diversity and establishing solidarity among women is rather weak. Identity politics based on ethnic origins, religious orientations, or sexual preferences cannot establish a ground for unity and solidarity based on the experiences of "oppression, exclusion, and marginalization" underlined by post-colonial discourse. On the contrary, it seems to trigger re-separation, division, and conflict.

Islamist women's organizations have sought solidarity against the unjust treatment by the state that did not grant them rights and freedom in the public sphere. Their solidarity network included women with similar identities in political parties and/or mixed charity organizations with high religious orientations. The electoral success of political Islam contributed to the strengthening of religious/conservative women's organizations in the public sphere, especially by solving their problems such as project financing and accommodation. Distancing themselves from the Western modernization project and its secular understanding, they tried to popularize the women's rights discourse through the quasi-third-wave feminist slogan of gender justice. Arguing that the religion of Islam is ontologically egalitarian in its essence, but the existing social organizations are based on male interpretations, they emphasized the concept of justice instead of equality and *fitrat* instead of gender. Consequently, they created tension between equality and justice in the women's organizations' struggle for women's rights and aimed to demand social rights and justice while advocating for fixed gender roles. In addition, when it comes to body politics, understanding the body as "a trust of Allah" is decisive for Muslim women and is an integral part of the conservative macro-political discourse. While Islamist actors criticize feminism for being universalist and absolute, an understanding that centers around the natural dispositions (*fıtrat*) and embodies values and roles to the biology of men and women through sacred norms leads to another form of reductionism.

As seen in the example of the feminist movement in Turkey, in many Third-World countries, the women's mobilization for and becoming a signifier of polarization within the national independence and other movements limited the autonomous development of women's movements outside of male control. The different ideological allegiances of women's organizations are an obstacle to the formation of a different and independent women's identity from other political

organizations and the construction of independent women's politics. With third-wave feminism, the uniform, homogenous understanding of women is evolved into an understanding that emphasizes the differences, and such evolution has made the feminist movement more inclusive. Yet inclusiveness alone is not enough. To be also liberating, it is important and necessary to establish and build gender politics, and for this, there is a need to bring women with different ideological orientations together on common ground. Just as intersectionality theory points out, instead of seeking binary oppositions between the macro-political engagements of the different women's organizations, one shall seek intersections among the women from all social positions and pursue feminist or otherwise women-centered policies aiming to promote equality and justice for all women's identities.

Notes

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[2] In this study, we call the organizations and actors that adopt the Islamist rhetoric and follow the common political agenda of the political Islam "Islamist." Because, in our fieldwork, the interviewed women from the Islamic organizations sometimes defined themselves as "Muslim", "religious" or "conservative", we occasionally used these terms as well.

3 Demircan-Çakar, "Neden Toplumsal Cinsiyet Adaleti?" https://kadem.org.tr/neden-toplumsal-cinsiyet-adaleti/

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