Review of International Studies (2019), page 1 of 20
doi:10.1017/S026021051900024X

RIS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Contesting global gender equality norms: the case of Turkey

Marella Bodur Ün*

Political Science and International Relations, Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey
*Corresponding author: Email: marbodur@gmail.com

(Received 16 November 2018; revised 16 June 2019; accepted 18 June 2019)

Abstract

Over the past two decades, constructivist International Relations (IR) scholars have produced substantial knowledge on the diffusion and adoption of global norms, emphasising the role of Western norm entrepreneurs in constructing and promoting new norms to passive, generally non-Western, norm takers. An emergent literature on norm dynamics unsettles this narrative of linear progress, highlighting the agency of diverse actors, including the agency of non-Western norm entrepreneurs, in normative change. This article contributes to this recent norm research by exploring the normative agency of local actors in the Turkish context, who have actively engaged in normative contestation over the meaning of gender equality. More specifically, the article reveals the crucial role of a pro-government, conservative women's organisation in subverting global gender equality norms and in promoting a local norm of 'gender justice' as an alternative. The article furthers research on norm contestation by analysing the discursive strategies and justifications local norm makers have adopted in the Turkish context upon encountering norms that challenged their normative beliefs and practices. Finally, the article critically engages with postsecular feminism, highlighting the agency of a religiously informed, conservative women's organisation as a non-Western norm entrepreneur.

Keywords: Norm Contestation; Non-Western Norm Entrepreneurs; Postsecular Feminism; Gender Equality; Gender Justice; Turkey

Introduction

Despite the rich constructivist International Relations (IR) literature on norm dynamics, research rarely focuses on cross-cultural norm contestation and resistance. A few recent studies have corrected this oversight, examining the processes of norm contestation and resistance in global, regional, and local contexts.[1] These studies have highlighted the creative agency of diverse actors,

[1]See Antje Wiener, 'Contested compliance: Interventions on the normative structure of world politics', *European Journal of International Relations*, 10:2 (2004), pp. 189–234; Amitav Acharya, 'How ideas spread: Whose norms matter? Norm localization and institutional change in Asian Regionalism', *International Organization*, 58:2 (2004), pp. 239–75; David Capie, 'Localization as resistance: the contested diffusion of small arms norms in Southeast Asia', *Security Dialogue*, 39:6 (2008), pp. 637–58; Amitav Acharya, 'Norm subsidiarity and regional orders: Sovereignty, regionalism, and rule-making in the Third World', *International Studies Quarterly*, 55 (2011), pp. 95–123; Aaron P. Boesenecker and Leslie Vinjamuri, 'Lost in translation? Civil society, faith-based organizations and the negotiation of international norms', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 5:3 (2011), pp. 345–65; Nicole Deitelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann, 'Things We Lost in the Fire: How Different Types of Contestation Affect the Validity of International Norms', PRIF Working Papers, No. 18 (Frankfurt am Main, 2013); Susanne Zwingel, 'How do norms travel? Theorizing international women's rights in transnational perspective', *International Studies Quarterly*, 56:1 (2012), pp. 115–29; Mona Lena Krook and Jacqui True, 'Rethinking the life cycles of international norms: the United Nations and the global promotion of gender equality',

© British International Studies Association 2019.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

including the agency of non-Western actors, in 'localizing',[2] 'vernacularizing',[3] 'translating',[4] and 'resisting'[5] global norms. Much of the literature on norm dynamics, norm localisers, or translators include civil society organisations, social movement activists, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and human rights groups rather than pro-government organisations. This article contributes to the emerging literature on norm contestation and resistance by exploring the normative agency of a local actor in the Turkish context, who has contested the global norm of gender equality, advancing an alternative, local norm of 'gender justice'.

Since its foundation in 1923, the Turkish Republic introduced many legal reforms to promote gender equality. Over the last two decades in particular, the collaborative efforts of a range of institutions and actors, including a vibrant women's movement, resulted in the adoption of women-friendly legislation in the form of a new civil code, criminal code, and a law on preventing violence against women. Despite the adoption of women-friendly legislation, gender inequality still persists. Turkey ranked 130th out of 149 countries in the *Global Gender Gap Report* in 2018.[6] Forty per cent of women in Turkey have suffered physical violence at the hands of their partners.[7] Women's labour force participation rate remained low at 36.1 per cent compared to 77.5 per cent of men in 2018.[8] A majority of women work in the informal economy with low incomes and without social protection. Women are still underrepresented in the Turkish Parliament. While Turkey witnessed a substantial (13 per cent) increase in the number of women legislators over the past decade, the percentage of women parliamentarians has never exceeded 18 per cent, remaining below the worldwide average of 24.3 per cent.[9]

The Turkish case is interesting for exploring processes of norm contestation as, since the early 2010s, both the government and pro-government women's organisations have framed the debates on gender equality, excluding the women's movement from the process. This article explores the crucial role of KADEM (*Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği* [Women and Democracy Foundation]), a pro-government, conservative women's organisation, in promoting the norm of 'gender justice' as an alternative to the norm of gender equality, by drawing from Islamic sources. KADEM's religion-based norm of 'gender justice' clashes with global gender equality regime as it originates outside the liberal tradition and devalues policies such as equal opportunities and positive discrimination. KADEM's strategic reframing of 'gender' points to 'the natural differences' between women and men, ignoring the oppressive and hierarchical power relations between them. Discursive interventions of KADEM support pro-family conservative discourses and policies of

European Journal of International Relations, 18:1 (2012), pp. 103–27; Gregorio Bettizza and Filippo Dionigi, 'How do religious norms diffuse? Institutional translation and international change in a post-secular world society', *European Journal of International Relations*, 21:3 (2015), pp. 621–46; Alan Bloomfield, 'Norm antipreneurs and theorizing resistance to normative change', *Review of International Studies*, 42 (2016), pp. 310–33; Alan Bloomfield and Shirley V. Scott (eds), *Norm Antipreneurs and the Politics of Resistance to Global Normative Change* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[2]Acharya 'How ideas spread'.

[3]Sally E. Merry, 'Transnational human rights and local activism: Mapping the middle', *American Anthropologist*, 108:1 (2006), pp. 38–51; Peggy Levitt and Sally Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: Local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States', *Global Networks*, 9:4 (2009), pp. 441–61.

[4]Zwingel, 'How do norms travel?'; Bettizza and Dionigi, 'How do religious norms diffuse?'; Boesenecker and Vinjamuri, 'Lost in translation?'; Marit T. Ostebo, 'Translations of gender equality among rural Arsi Oromo in Ethiopia', *Development and Change*, 46:3 (2015), pp. 442–63.

[5]Bloomfield, 'Norm antipreneurs'; Bloomfield and Scott, *Norm Antipreneurs*; Rochelle Terman, 'Rewarding Resistance: Theorizing Defiance to International Norms', Center for International Security & Cooperation (Stanford University, 2017).

[6]World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2018*, available at: {http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf} accessed 4 June 2019.

[7]Institute of Population Studies, *Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey* (2014), p. 7, available at: {http://www.hips.hacettepe.edu.tr/ingilizceozetraporweb.pdf} accessed 24 November 2015.

[8]*Global Gender Gap Report*, p. 277.

[9]Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Women in National Parliaments', available at: {http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm} accessed 30 May 2019.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

the government, reinforcing the traditional gender roles and, thus, rendering the existing women-friendly legislation ineffective.

The analysis of the Turkish case reveals the necessity to examine domestic sociocultural and political contexts and the roles and identities of local norm translators or norm makers involved in the processes of norm contestation. In Turkey, over the past decade, gender policies have not been developed through public debate and grassroots struggle as the government has excluded different voices from the policymaking process. In line with its conservative populist discourses and policies since 2011,[10] the ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party [*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*]) has marginalised civil society organisations, including secular women's organisations and feminist NGOs, which have been increasingly critical of AKP's gender politics. Having close links with the ruling party, KADEM has assumed an influential role in contesting global gender equality norms and legitimising AKP's conservative gender policies and discourses. The Turkish case points to the importance of power dynamics at play in determining whose voices to be heard during norm translation and contestation processes.

Based on an analysis of primary sources, including reports, periodicals, press releases and public statements of independent women's organisations and KADEM, and official pronouncements of political authorities,[11] this article reveals the ways in which gender equality has been framed in Turkey. The first part of the article reviews the emerging literature on cross-cultural normative negotiation and contestation. The second part briefly discusses global gender equality norms and postsecular feminist interventions into the study of religious women's agency, bringing together insights from cross-cultural norm contestation research in IR and feminist scholarship. These two parts situate this article in the literature on norm contestation and in the broader literature on gender and politics. The third part provides an overview of gender politics in Turkey since its foundation. It also points to the independent women's groups and organisations that adopted a view of gender equality norms in line with international conventions. The last section analyses the way global gender norms have been filtered through the Turkish context since AKP's rise to power in 2002. More specifically, it explores the discourses, strategies, and justifications employed by KADEM to promote its local norm of 'gender justice', actively challenging the global norm of gender equality.

Norm translation and contestation

Global norms are defined as 'ideas of varying degrees of abstraction and specification with respect to fundamental values, organizing principles or standardized procedures that resonate across many states and global actors, having gained support in multiple forums including official policies, laws, treaties or agreements'.[12] Over the past two decades, constructivist IR scholars have produced substantial knowledge on the emergence, diffusion, and adoption of global norms.[13] The first wave of scholarship emphasised the role of transnational actors and international

[10]See Murat Somer, 'Understanding Turkey's democratic breakdown: Old vs. new and indigenous vs. global authoritarianism', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16:4 (2016), pp. 481–503; Berk Esen and Şebnem Gümüşçü, 'Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey', *Third World Quarterly*, 37:9 (2016), pp. 1581–606.

[11]The analysis of public statements of political elites focuses mainly on the period between 2011 and 2017. AKP's conservative stance on women's status has become more evident since the early 2010s when the former prime minister questioned gender equality, arguing that women and men are different, yet they complement one another. Thus, this study focuses on the discourses and strategies of the party leadership starting with the party's third term in government (2011–15).

[12]Krook and True, 'Rethinking', pp. 103–04.

[13]See, among others, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics and political change', *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 887–917; Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink (eds), *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Acharya 'How ideas spread'; Zwingel, 'How do norms travel?'; Krook and True, 'Rethinking'; Bettizza and Dionigi, 'How do religious norms diffuse?'; Alexander Betts and Phil Orchard (eds), *Implementation and*

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

organisations as 'norm entrepreneurs', who construct global norms and try to persuade states to adopt and incorporate them in their political structures and policies.[14] This early literature also developed certain concepts and models such as the 'norm life cycle'[15] and 'boomerang'[16] to describe the process.

More recent scholarship has highlighted the 'contested' and 'dynamic' nature of norms,[17] placing greater emphasis on the processes of norm localisation and/or translation involving contestation, reconstruction, and resistance.[18] The earlier literature is criticised for its focus on a top-down process (norms travelling from the global to the local),[19] for 'eclipsing agency' and 'power relations central to processes of diffusing norms',[20] for downplaying the domestic context and the crucial role of local and regional actors,[21] and for emphasising the role of Western norm makers in promoting new norms to passive, generally non-Western, norm takers, overlooking 'non-Western normative agency'.[22] Recent studies on cross-cultural normative contestation, thus, have unsettled the narrative of linear progress (norms emerging from the West and travelling to the Rest), highlighting the agency of diverse actors, including the agency of non-Western norm entrepreneurs, in normative change.

Norm localisation research points to the crucial role of 'active localisers' in reinterpreting global norms to make them congruent with domestic norms, identities, and institutions.[23] Norm translation encompasses both norm localisation and 'de-localisation', a process by which local norms created and espoused by non-Western actors diffuse and may become global.[24] Norm contestation, which refers to the conflicts and deliberations around the meanings of norms,[25] occurs both within the same normative community[26] and between different normative belief systems.[27] Norm translation research focuses on inter-cultural encounters between actors situated in different normative contexts and, thus, examines norm contestation between different normative frameworks.[28] More specifically, norm translation involves a complex and dynamic 'process of normative transmission between differently situated international actors, whose principles originate from diverse cultural and ethical backgrounds, whether religious, secular, national, ethnic or

World Politics: How International Norms Change Practice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Bloomfield and Scott, *Norm Antipreneurs*.

[14]Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*.

[15]Finnemore and Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics'.

[16]Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*.

[17]Wiener, 'Contested compliance'; Antje Weiner, *A Theory of Contestation* (Berlin: Springer, 2014); Acharya, 'How ideas spread'; Zwingel, 'How do norms travel?'; Krook and True, 'Rethinking'.

[18]See, among others, Acharya 'How ideas spread'; Capie, 'Localization'; Zwingel, 'How do norms travel?'; Levitt and Merry, 'Vernacularization'; Boesenecker and Vinjamuri, 'Lost in translation?'; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 'Things We Lost in the Fire'; Bettizza and Dionigi, 'How do religious norms diffuse?'; Ostebo, 'Translations of gender equality'; Bloomfield, 'Norm antipreneurs'; Bloomfield and Scott, *Norm Antipreneurs*; Terman, 'Rewarding Resistance'.

[19]Susanne Zwingel, 'From intergovernmental negotiations to (sub)national change: a transnational perspective on the impact of CEDAW', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7:3 (2005), pp. 400–24; Zwingel, 'How do norms travel?'; Bettizza and Dionigi, 'How do religious norms diffuse?'.

[20]Bernd Bucher, 'Acting abstractions: Metaphors, narrative structures, and the eclipse of agency', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20:3 (2014), pp. 742–65.

[21]Andrew P. Cortell and James W. Davis Jr, 'Understanding the domestic impact of international norms: a research agenda', *International Studies Review*, 2:1 (2000), pp. 65–87; Jeffrey Checkel, 'Norms, institutions, and national identity in contemporary Europe', *International Studies Quarterly*, 43:1 (1999), pp. 83–114; Boesenecker and Vinjamuri, 'Lost in translation?'; Capie, 'Localization'.

[22]Acharya, 'Norm subsidiarity'; Boesenecker and Vinjamuri, 'Lost in translation?'; Bettizza and Dionigi, 'How do religious norms diffuse?'.

[23]Acharya 'How ideas spread', pp. 241, 244.

[24]Bettizza and Dionigi, 'How do religious norms diffuse?', pp. 623–4; Zwingel, 'How do norms travel?'.

[25]Wiener, 'Contested compliance', p. 219.

[26]Wiener, 'Contested compliance'.

[27]Acharya, 'Norm subsidiarity'; Bettizza and Dionigi, 'How do religious norms diffuse?'.

[28]Bettizza and Dionigi, 'How do religious norms diffuse?', p. 624.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

cultural'.[29] Nicole Dietelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann identify two types of norm contestation.[30] While 'applicatory contestation' refers to the debates and conflicts regarding 'the application of a norm',[31] 'justificatory contestation' challenges norm's validity, questioning its meaning and legitimacy.[32] Justificatory contestation occurs between actors from different normative communities[33] since such actors often have incompatible understandings and positions on values, beliefs, rules, and principles. If a norm's moral validity is questioned through justificatory contestation/discourses, non-compliance with the norm would increase, leading to norm weakening or even norm decay.[34]

Emphasising the dialogical processes of norm negotiation between actors embedded in different normative contexts,[35] norm translation literature not only opens up more terrain for the exploration of cross-cultural norm contestation but also allows for the possibility of locally constructed, and subsequently delocalised, norms. It allows us to explore non-Western actors not only as norm 'localizers'[36] or 'vernacularizers'[37] but also as active norm entrepreneurs, who try 'to internationalize norms beyond their cultural and local context'.[38]

Four insights from the literature on norm translation and contestation are relevant for examining the adoption of gender equality norms. The first is that norms are always 'contested' and subject to continuous negotiation and redefinition. The second is that global norms enter a context where they must compete with local norms. The translation of global norms into local contexts may produce diverse meanings, interpretations, and practices as well as contestations. The third is that local agents, as norm translators or as active norm makers, have a crucial role in the process. The fourth is that norm diffusion and translation do not proceed in one direction as norms travel not only from the global to the local and from the West to the Rest, but also from the local and non-Western contexts to the global arena. It is, therefore, important to consider normative agency of non-Western actors who contest Western (liberal) norms, advancing alternative local norms. As 'intermediaries', norm translators play a crucial role to help translate 'ideas from the global arena down and from local arenas up'.[39] This article builds on and contributes to the recent norm research by exploring the discursive strategies and justifications adopted by local norm entrepreneurs in Turkey upon encountering norms that clashed with their normative frameworks. The analysis reveals the creative normative agency of pro-government KADEM, which employs discursive strategies such as devaluation, reframing, and bending in the process of justificatory contestation of global gender equality norms.

Global gender equality norms, postsecular feminism, and the agency of 'non-Western' conservative women

Since the early 1980s, a variety of actors including regional and international organisations, women's movements, and transnational NGOs, have helped to construct gender equality as a global norm. The designation of 1976–85 as the United Nations (UN) Decade for Women and four women's conferences held between 1975 and 1995 raised global awareness of oppression of women, resulting in the development of global norms of gender equality. The components of

[29]Ibid., p. 623.
[30]Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 'Things We Lost in the Fire'.
[31]Ibid., p. 5.
[32]Ibid., pp. 1, 5.
[33]Bloomfield, 'Norm antipreneurs', p. 319.
[34]Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 'Things We Lost in the Fire'.
[35]Zwingel, 'How do norms travel?'; Bettizza and Dionigi, 'How do religious norms diffuse?'.
[36]Acharya 'How ideas spread'.
[37]Merry, 'Transnational human rights'; Levitt and Merry, 'Vernacularization'.
[38]Bettizza and Dionigi, 'How do religious norms diffuse?', p. 630.
[39]Merry, 'Transnational human rights', p. 38.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

'global gender equality regime'[40] include 'formal principles, norms, legal instruments and monitoring mechanisms';[41] compliance of states who signed and ratified treaties and platforms of action regarding gender equality; and an emerging global understanding on the value of gender equality.[42] Gender equality is embodied in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. States that are party to CEDAW are required to ensure gender equality in every sphere of life by enacting or modifying domestic legislation to harmonise with the articles of the Convention. As Susanne Zwingel argues '[t]he normative triad enshrined in CEDAW is elimination of discrimination against women, achievement of gender equality, and state responsibility.'[43]

At the same time, gender equality remains a contested concept. Feminist scholarship has identified three different visions of gender equality: equality as sameness, equality as difference or reversal, and the vision of transformation or displacement.[44] The first vision does not challenge the male norm or patriarchal values but merely seeks 'inclusion' of women in all spheres of life as women are entitled to the rights enjoyed by men. The vision of 'equality as difference' proposes to reverse the hegemonic male norms and reconstruct the political to ensure that women are recognised in their differences from men and the 'transformative' vision of gender equality suggests problematising and transforming all established gender norms and standards and thus moving beyond the dilemma of equality versus difference.[45] Other scholars have pointed to the problem of defining gender equality without taking into account differences and unequal power relations among women based on their class, sexuality, age, religious affiliation, and ethnic or racial location.[46] Contemporary feminist scholarship has recognised intersecting differences among women and has developed work on 'intersectionality',[47] which focuses on both the differences between and within groups and helps scholars not only to avoid essentialising differences[48] but also to understand the ways in which multiple intersecting identities shape political actors and institutions and the relationships between them.[49]

Feminist intersectional theorising has opened up a space within feminist scholarship, where feminists of different persuasions have rethought the 'dilemma' of women's active participation

[40]Nükhet Kardam, 'The emerging global gender equality regime from neoliberal and constructivist perspectives in international relations', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6:1 (2004), pp. 85–109.

[41]Ibid., p. 92.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Zwingel, 'How do norms travel?', p. 117.

[44]See, for example, Nancy Fraser, 'From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a "postsocialist" age', in *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 11–39; Judith Squires, *Gender in Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), pp. 115–39; Sylvia Walby, 'Gender mainstreaming: Productive tensions in theory and practice', *Social Politics*, 12:3 (2005), pp. 321–43; Mieke Verloo and Emanuela Lombardo, 'Contested gender equality and policy variety in Europe: Introducing a critical frame analysis approach', in Mieke Verloo (ed.), *Multiple Meanings of Gender Equality* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), pp. 21–49.

[45]Squires, *Gender in Political Theory*, pp. 115–39; Verloo and Lombardo, 'Contested gender equality', pp. 23–4.

[46]See bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1984); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses', in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (eds), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 51–80.

[47]Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43:6 (1991), pp. 1241–99. Also see Ange-Marie Hancock, 'When multiplication doesn't equal quick addition: Examining intersectionality as a research paradigm', *Perspectives on Politics*, 5:1 (2007), pp. 63–79; Julia S. Jordan-Zachery, 'Am I a black woman or a woman who is black? A few thoughts on the meaning of intersectionality', *Politics and Gender*, 3:2 (2007), pp. 254–63; Evelyn M. Simien, 'Doing intersectionality research: From conceptual issues to practical examples', *Politics and Gender*, 3:2 (2007), pp. 264–71.

[48]Jordan-Zachery, 'Am I a black woman', pp. 256–7; Simien, 'Doing intersectionality research', p. 265.

[49]Hancock, 'When multiplication doesn't equal quick addition', p. 67.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

in religious movements.[50] Criticising the depictions of religious women either as passive 'victims' of oppressive, male-dominated religious institutions or as agents of 'resistance' to patriarchal religious norms and/or Western imperialism, studies on religious women's agency have exposed the limitations of 'colonial/Orientalist',[51] 'liberal', and 'secular' biases underpinning much feminist theorising.[52] Drawing on the feminist poststructural critique of agency[53] and inspired particularly by Saba Mahmood's ethnographic study of the women's mosque movement in Cairo, the 'post-secular turn' in feminism has contested the humanist conception of agency as linked to autonomy and resistance, criticising feminist scholarship for ignoring 'other modalities of agency whose meaning and effect are not captured within the logic of subversion and resignification of hegemonic terms of discourse'.[54] In other words, by reducing religious women's agency to either 'subordination' or 'resistance', most feminist accounts have overlooked the agency of non-resistant or compliant, pious women, 'who may be socially, ethically, or politically indifferent to the goal of opposing hegemonic norms'.[55]

While providing a critical corrective to the scholarship that often portrayed Muslim women as 'devoid of agency', Mahmood's work is criticised for giving insufficient attention to the socio-economic background of pious Muslim women,[56] for drawing a sharp distinction between (Islamic) religiosity and (Western) secularity and, thus, falling into the trap of cultural authenticity.[57] Most importantly, Mahmood is criticised for overlooking 'the larger political meanings'[58] and implications of Muslim women's practices, by privileging women's pious subjectivity over others[59] (most notably religious women's political subjectivity) and by ignoring the historical contexts of particular religious movements and their effects on women's agency. It is necessary to historicise and contextualise the relationship between gender and religion, recognising the many power structures, which intersect together in different ways to inform and shape historically specific gender identities and relations of power as well as resistances. Over the past three decades, the converging political projects of neoliberalism, conservatism, authoritarianism, nationalism and populism in different national contexts have posed serious challenges to gender equality norms. Contra Mahmood (who downplays religious women's political subjectivity), religiously informed conservative women have been actively involved in these political projects, circulating narratives and adopting strategies to counter feminist claims for gender equality.

Turkey provides a perfect case to explore such dynamics and intricacies of the contestation of gender equality norms. AKP's rise and consolidation of power have provided a group of

[50]See, for example, Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Sarah Bracke, 'Author(iz)ing agency: Feminist scholars making sense of women's involvement in religious "fundamentalist" movements', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 10:3 (2003), pp. 335–46; Sirma Bilge, 'Beyond subordination vs. resistance: an intersectional approach to the agency of veiled Muslim women', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31:1 (2010), pp. 9–28; Orit Avishai, '"Doing religion" in a secular world: Women in conservative religions and the question of agency', *Gender and Society*, 22:4 (2008), pp. 409–33.

[51]Marnia Lazreg, 'Decolonizing feminism', in *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 6–19; Mohanty, 'Under Western eyes'.

[52]Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005); Rosi Braidotti, 'In spite of the times: the postsecular turn in feminism', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25:6 (2008), pp. 1–24; Sarah Bracke, 'Conjugating the modern/religious, conceptualizing female religious agency', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25:6 (2008), pp. 51–67; Bilge, 'Beyond subordination vs. resistance'; Avishai, 'Doing religion'.

[53]Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[54]Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 153. Also see Braidotti, 'In spite of the times'; Bracke, 'Conjugating the modern/religious'; Avishai, 'Doing religion'.

[55]Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 9.

[56]Ibid., p. 33.

[57]Aamir R. Mufti, 'Part 1: Why I am not a postsecularist', *boundary 2*, 40:1 (2013), pp. 7–19.

[58]Bruce Robbins, 'Part 1: Why I am not a postsecularist', *boundary 2*, 40:1 (2013), p. 62.

[59]Sindre Bangstad, 'Saba Mahmood and anthropological feminism after virtue', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28:3 (2011), pp. 28–54.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

religiously oriented and politically motivated Islamist[60] women with considerable visibility and power. Access to government institutions, public projects and funding, and the media has provided them with resources to generate discourses in line with AKP's conservative gender politics. These educated, politically active, professional women, who have acquired positions of prominence within AKP circles, have established women's organisations and monopolised the public sphere, marginalising secular women's groups and feminist NGOs.[61] As the right to be included and to be heard/silenced in the public sphere is connected to matters of power,[62] it is, currently, only the voices of these pro-government conservative women's organisations that are heard in the public sphere during the translation of gender equality norms. Power positions and organisational capacity of different actors, depending on their access to policymakers and material resources, affects the strategies they adopt in norm translation processes.[63] Gender and politics scholars have analysed the ways various state and non-state translators have 'shrunk', 'fixed', 'stretched' and 'bent' the meaning of gender equality in different countries across different policy areas.[64] Employing different discursive strategies such as stretching and bending, local actors transform the meaning of gender equality, often to achieve certain political goals. This article addresses such strategies and normative contestation over the meaning of gender equality in Turkey, where KADEM's efforts to promote 'gender justice', appropriating the concept of gender, serve the objectives of conservative political elites.

Translations of gender equality in Turkey (1923–2010)

Following the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the Republican elites initiated a project of modernisation/Westernisation. Emancipation of women was a 'symbolic pawn' that the Republican elites used in their attempts to break away from the Ottoman-Islamic institutions, laws, and customs.[65] The new secular education system (1924) recognised equal rights to education for both boys and girls. The clothing reform of 1925 discouraged use of the veil. Outlawing polygamy, the new civil code (1926) gave equal rights to spouses regarding custody of children and divorce. Women gained their political rights in 1934. Symbolising the new Republic, unveiled and educated women were expected to practice their professions in the public sphere without neglecting their responsibilities in the private sphere as mothers and wives.[66] Thus, while the Republican reforms eliminated sexual segregation and improved women's status, they did not challenge patriarchal relations in the private realm of the family.

[60]The term 'Muslim' is different from 'Islamist' in the sense that the former 'expresses a religious identity' while the latter implies 'a political consciousness and social action'. See Nilüfer Göle, 'Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: the making of elites and counter-elites', *Middle East Journal*, 51:1 (1997), p. 47.

[61]Islamist women have established various women's organisations since the 1990s. While some organised Islamist women support and legitimise AKP's conservative gender politics, others challenge AKP's discourses and policies not only on women but also on different issue areas. See Hürcan Aslı Aksoy, 'Invigorating democracy in Turkey: the agency of organized Islamist women', *Politics & Gender*, 11 (2015), pp. 146–70.

[62]See, for example, Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy', in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 109–42; Seyla Benhabib, 'Models of public space: Hannah Arendt, the liberal tradition, and Jürgen Habermas', in Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 73–98.

[63]Anouka Van Eerdewijk and Conny Roggeband, 'Gender equality norm diffusion and actor constellations: a first exploration', in Anna van der Vleuten, Anouka van Eerdewijk, and Conny Roggeband (eds), *Gender Equality Norms in Regional Governance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 42–64.

[64]Emanuela Lombardo, Petra Meier, and Mieke Verloo, 'Stretching and bending gender equality: a discursive approach', in Emanuela Lombardo, Petra Meier, and Mieke Verloo (eds), *The Discursive Politics of Gender Equality: Stretching, Bending and Policymaking* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 1–18.

[65]Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Women and the Turkish state: Political actors or symbolic pawns?', in Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (eds), *Woman-Nation-State* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 126–49.

[66]Nilüfer Göle, 'The gendered nature of the public sphere', *Public Culture*, 10:1 (1997), p. 63.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

The women's movement that emerged in the mid-1980s challenged the sexist practices and codes of society and made public women's oppression despite the egalitarian discourse of the state.[67] Throughout the late 1980 and 1990s, through several campaigns and protests, the movement made such 'private' issues as domestic violence against women and sexual harassment public.[68] In 1985, Turkey ratified CEDAW albeit with certain reservations, regarding the articles that concern the equality of men and women in the context of marriage and family. While there is no evidence that women's groups pushed the government to ratify CEDAW, their protests drew public attention to women's inequality and increased awareness about CEDAW.[69] Women activists organised a nationwide petition campaign urging the state to implement CEDAW, demanding amendments to discriminatory laws.[70] As a result of protests of women's groups, Article 438 of the Criminal Code, relating to rape and reducing the sentence when the victim was a sex worker, was abolished in 1990. Making direct reference to CEDAW, the Constitutional Court annulled Article 159 of the Civil Code, allowing women to work without their husbands' permission (1990), and Articles 441 and 440 of the Criminal Code, decriminalising adultery both for men (1996) and women (1998). In 1998, a law against violence in the family, influenced by CEDAW, was passed.[71]

After the European Union's (EU) decision to recognise Turkey's candidacy for full membership in 1999, most debates around gender equality in Turkey took place in relation to the Europeanisation process. The urgency to make the legislation of Turkey harmonise with the Acquis Communautaire of the EU provided an opportunity space, which women's groups used to press for gender equality legislation.[72] In 1999, Turkey withdrew its reservations to CEDAW and adopted a new civil code (2001), which established full equality between spouses in the family.[73] In 2004, a new criminal code was passed, which included more than thirty amendments to protect women's bodily integrity.[74]

Access to higher education and ability to speak foreign languages (such as English and French) had provided a group of women with resources to mobilise feminist activism and generate discourses with reference to CEDAW, the EU norms, and the human rights framework. The majority of these women were professionals with university degrees (such as academics, journalists, translators, and doctors) and some of them had received their postgraduate degrees in North America or Europe.[75] These local norm translators, who had 'one foot in the transnational

[67]Şirin Tekeli, 'Emergence of the new feminist movement in Turkey', in Drude Dahlerup (ed.), *The New Women's Movement* (London: Sage, 1986), pp. 179–99; Yeşim Arat, 'Toward a democratic society: the women's movement in Turkey in the 1980s', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 17:2–3 (1994), pp. 241–8.

[68]Tekeli, 'Emergence of the new feminist movement'; Nükhet Sirman, 'Feminism in Turkey: a short history', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 3:1 (1989), pp. 1–34; Arat, 'Toward a democratic society'; Yeşim Arat, 'Feminists, Islamists, and political change in Turkey', *Political Psychology*, 19:1 (1998), pp. 117–31; Marella Bodur and Susan Franceschet, 'Movements, states and empowerment: Women's mobilization in Chile and Turkey', in Jane Parpart, Shirin Rai, and Kathleen Staudt (eds), *Rethinking Empowerment: Gender and Development in a Global/Local World* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 112–32.

[69]Feride Acar, 'Country papers: Turkey', in Marilou McPhedran, Susan Bazilli, Moana Erickson, and Andrew Byrnes (eds), *The First CEDAW Impact Study: Final Report*, 203–14 (Toronto: Centre for Feminist Research, York University, 2000), p. 205.

[70]Sirman, 'Feminism in Turkey', p. 16.

[71]'Ailenin korunmasına dair kanun [On the protection of the family]', The Law No. 4320, *Official Gazette*, No. 23233 (17 January 1998), pp. 15–16.

[72]Women's Platform on the Turkish Criminal Code, 'AB için sorumluluklarınızı yerine getirin', *Bianet* (26 August 2004), available at: {http://bianet.org/bianet/kadin/41442-ab-icin-sorumluluklarinizi-yerine-getirin} accessed 25 January 2016; Ela Anıl, Canan Arın, Ayşe Berktay Hacımirzaoğlu, Mehveş Bingöllü, and Pınar İlkkaracan, *The New Legal Status of Women in Turkey* (İstanbul: WWHR-New Ways, 2002); 'Kadın bakış açısından Türk Ceza Kanunu', *Bianet* (7 November 2003), available at: {http://m.bianet.org/biamag/kadin/26093-kadin-bakis-acisindan-turk-ceza-kanunu} accessed 12 October 2018.

[73]'Medeni Kanun 75 yıl sonra değişti', *Hürriyet* (23 November 2001), available at: {http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/medeni-kanun-75-yil-sonra-degisti-382828602001} accessed 7 February 2016.

[74]'Türk Ceza Kanunu [Turkish Criminal Code]', The Law No. 5237, *Official Gazette*, No. 25611 (26 September 2004), available at: {http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2004/10/20041012.htm} accessed 3 October 2018.

[75]Tekeli, 'Emergence of the new feminist movement', p. 197.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

community and one at home',[76] played a critical role to help translate the global gender equality norms into the Turkish context throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. As norm translators they were engaged in making the general public and especially women aware of Turkey's responsibilities and obligations under CEDAW. As Acar's report revealed, well-known women's NGOs with international ties, such as the Association for Support of Women Candidates (KA-DER), the Flying Broom, the Purple Roof Foundation, and Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR), exhibit greater knowledge and awareness of CEDAW.[77] These organisations carry out activities (such as public education advocacy, advocacy to increase political participation of women) directed towards the implementation of CEDAW.

While translating gender equality norms into the Turkish context, women's groups challenged the official Republican rhetoric of gender equality, arguing that women's oppression in the private sphere and sexist social codes and norms rendered equality in the public sphere meaningless.[78] Socialist and radical feminists in Turkey understand equality as related to women's autonomy, bodily integrity, choices and rights and support positive discrimination towards women to ensure gender equality.[79] While radical feminists have promoted the vision of 'equality as difference', socialist feminists have advocated a 'transformative vision of gender equality'.[80]

The diffusion of global gender equality norms and the Europeanisation process in the 1990s and early 2000s strengthened an already vibrant women's movement, leading activists to monitor and pressure the Turkish state to fully implement regional and international commitments made to gender equality. The rise of conservative and populist discourses over the past decade, however, created a distance between independent women's organisations and the government.

From 'gender equality' to 'gender justice': Gender politics, KADEM and normative shift under AKP

Established in 2001, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) defined itself as a 'conservative democratic' party. After winning a parliamentary majority in the November 2002 elections, the AKP government maintained Turkey's pro-Western stance and introduced a series of 'harmonisation law packages' to meet the Copenhagen criteria for accession to the EU.[81] During its first two terms AKP governments (2002–11) introduced several legislative reforms that improved the status of women. In 2004, parliament passed a new criminal code, which criminalised marital rape and introduced measures to prevent perpetrators of honour killings from

[76]Merry, 'Transnational human rights', p. 42.

[77]Acar, 'Country papers: Turkey'.

[78]Bodur and Franceschet, 'Movements, states and empowerment'.

[79]Gülnur Savran and Nesrin Tura, 'Kader söylediklerini yapabilir mi?', *Pazartesi*, 27 (1997), pp. 10–11.

[80]There were also other groups of women, who advocated competing visions of gender equality throughout the 1990s. Women wearing the *türban* (headscarf) stressed the *different*, feminine nature of women, but also demanded to take part in all spheres of life on an *equal* basis with other actors. Arguing that they were faced with the double oppression of gender and ethnicity, Kurdish women's groups called on Turkish feminists, women's organisations, and state agencies to adopt an intersectional approach in their struggles for gender equality. See Göle, *The Forbidden Modern*; Bodur and Franceschet, 'Movements, states and empowerment'; Marella Bodur, 'Modernity, Social Movements and Democracy: Feminist Movements in post-1980 Turkey' (unpublished PhD thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, 2005); Handan Çağlayan, *Analar, Yoldaşlar, Tanrıçalar: Kürt Hareketinde Kadınlar ve Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşumu* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2007); Çağla Diner and Şule Toktaş, 'Waves of feminism in Turkey: Kemalist, Islamist and Kurdish women's movements in an era of globalization', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 12:1 (2010), pp. 41–57.

[81]The reform packages, among other changes, lifted the ban on Kurdish-language broadcasting and publishing, abolished the death penalty, introduced a new civil code, and revised the Anti-Terror law as well as the Criminal Code. See Meltem Müftüler-Baç, 'Turkey's political reforms and the impact of the European Union', *South European Society and Politics*, 10:1 (2005), pp. 16–30.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

receiving reduced sentences.[82] During the same year, Article 10 of the Constitution was revised to state that men and women are equal and the state is responsible for ensuring the implementation of their equal rights. The Labour Law of 2003 ensured gender equality at work, establishing measures to support and protect female employees in the labour market.[83] The new law had provisions concerning job security in the case of childbirth and protection from harassment at the workplace. In 2009, the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (KEFEK) was founded in parliament to promote gender equality. The government signed the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) in 2011 and adopted a law on violence against women in 2012.[84] In 2010, the Higher Education Board allowed female students to wear headscarves in universities[85] and the ban on covered women working in state institutions was lifted by the government in 2013.[86]

Despite these progressive pieces of legislation, AKP's discourses and actions reflected the party's conservative stance on women's issues. Several studies reveal that since its electoral victory in 2002, AKP has adopted discourses and policies that comprise a mixture of neoliberalism, nationalism, religious conservatism, and authoritarianism, meanwhile reinforcing conservative gender norms and reproducing gender inequalities.[87] For instance, during the adoption of the 2004 criminal code, a proposal to recriminalise adultery was inserted at the last minute in the reform package by the AKP government to 'protect the unity of the family'.[88] Under much domestic, regional, and international pressure,[89] the government withdrew its proposal.[90] Similarly, when women's organisations campaigned for the adoption of a legal quota system in the Constitution, the government opposed gender quotas, referring to them as 'preferential

[82]'Türk Ceza Kanunu [Turkish Criminal Code]', The Law No. 5237, *Official Gazette* (26 September 2004), available at: {http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/main.aspx?home=http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2004/10/20041012.htm&main=http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2004/10/20041012.htm} accessed 1 February 2016.

[83]'İş Kanunu [Labour Law]', The Law No. 4857, *Official Gazette* (10 June 2003), available at: {http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2003/06/20030610.htm} accessed 1 February 2016.

[84]'Ailenin korunması ve kadına karşı şiddetin önlenmesine dair kanun [Law to protect family and prevent violence against women]', The Law No. 6284, *Official Gazette* (8 March 2012), available at: {http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2012/03/20120320-16.htm} accessed 7 February 2016.

[85]Berivan Tapan and Semra Pelek, 'Headscarf ban at universities softened', *Bianet* (6 October 2010), available at: {http://m.bianet.org/bianet/freedom-of-expression/125248-headscarf-ban-at-universities-softened} accessed 7 February 2016.

[86]Sebnem Arsu and Dan Bilefsky, 'Turkey lifts longtime ban on head scarves in state offices', *New York Times* (8 October 2013), available at: {https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/09/world/europe/turkey-lifts-ban-on-head-scarves-in-state-offices.html} accessed 7 February 2016.

[87]See, for example, Simten Coşar and Metin Yeğenoğlu, 'New grounds for patriarchy in Turkey? Gender policy in the age of AKP', *South European Society and Politics*, 16:4 (2011), pp. 555–73; Yeşim Arat, 'Religion, politics and gender equality in Turkey: Implications of a democratic paradox?', *Third World Quarterly*, 31:6 (2010), pp. 869–84; Feride Acar and Gülbanu Altunok, 'The "politics of intimate" at the intersection of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism in contemporary Turkey', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 41 (2013), pp. 14–23; Umut Korkut and Hande Eslen-Ziya, 'The discursive governance of population politics: the evolution of a pro-birth regime in Turkey', *Social Politics*, 23:4 (2016), pp. 555–75; Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Locating the politics of gender: Patriarchy, neo-liberal governance and violence in Turkey', *Research and Policy on Turkey*, 1:2 (2016), pp. 103–18; Dilek Cindoğlu and Didem Unal, 'Gender and sexuality in the authoritative discursive strategies of "New Turkey"', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 24:1 (2017), pp. 39–54.

[88]Helena Smith, 'Turkey split by plan to criminalise adultery', *The Guardian* (5 September 2004), available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/sep/06/turkey.helenasmith} accessed 8 February 2016.

[89]Selma Acuner, 'Yasayla flörtü de yasaklıyorlar!', interview by Neşe Düzel, *Radikal* (6 September 2004); Yıldırım Türker, 'Zina', *Radikal 2* (5 September 2004); 'Hukuk devletinde zina suç sayılamaz', *Bianet* (27 August 2004), available at: {http://bianet.org/kadin/medya/41631-hukuk-devletinde-zina-suc-sayilamaz} accessed 10 February 2016.

[90]'Turkey signals U-turn on adultery', *BBC News* (14 September 2004), available at: {http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3654650.stm} accessed 25 January 2016; 'Women's rights, Turkish style', *New York Times* (12 September 2004), available at: {https://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/12/opinion/womens-rights-turkish-style.html} accessed 25 January 2016.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

treatment' towards women, which would discriminate against men. For the government, gender quotas were 'undemocratic and unfair', a threat to gender equality and 'an insult to women'.[91]

AKP's conservative stance on women's rights has become more evident since the early 2010s. There has been a tendency to legitimise traditional gender roles, referring to 'inherent differences' between men and women. In 2010, the former prime minister stated that he did not 'believe in the equality of men and women', arguing that men and women are different in nature, complementing one another.[92] On different occasions, the political leadership employed similar discourses on gender equality and aimed to regulate women's bodies, behaviour, and sexuality, emphasising traditional values such as chastity and casting women as guardians of the community's moral order. For instance, complaining about 'moral corruption' in Turkey, the then deputy prime minister urged women to behave modestly, stating that 'Woman will not laugh in public. She will not be inviting in her attitudes and will protect her chasteness.'[93]

AKP questioned the legitimacy of the norm of gender equality not only through discursive tactics but also by initiating laws and policies antithetical to the norm. AKP politicians circulated the narrative that declining birth rates, reproductive rights of women, and the devaluation of motherhood threaten the stability of the family, which in turn threaten the nation's future.[94] Thus, AKP governments' policies have increasingly aimed to control women's labour power and regulate women's control over their bodies in order to ensure the reproduction of the national community. Despite high birth rates, viewing women's reproductive rights as a matter of public morality as well as national duty, the former prime minister Erdoğan publicly encouraged women to have at least three children.[95] The government also attempted to ban abortion, which has been legal since 1983, and to limit Caesarean sections.[96] Faced with intense domestic and international protests and criticisms, the government shelved its plan to outlaw abortion.[97] A new law, however, passed in 2012, prohibited C-sections except in medical emergencies.[98] The opposition to reproductive rights and abortion and the pro-natalist and nationalist discourses have reinforced traditional gender roles and sacredness of the family. Pro-family discourses have also legitimised government's neoliberal welfare approach, which is premised on women's caregiver position in the family.[99]

[91]'AKP'de kadına kota yok', *Milliyet* (5 January 2004), available at: {http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2004/01/05/siyaset/siy04.html} accessed 25 January 2016.

[92]'Yaratılışımız farklı bayan!', *Birgün Daily* (17 October 2010), available at: {https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/yaratilisimiz-farkli-bayan-55553.html} accessed 7 February 2016.

[93]'Women should not laugh in public, Turkish deputy PM says', *Hürriyet Daily News* (29 July 2014), available at: {http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/women-should-not-laugh-in-public-turkish-deputy-pm-says--69732} accessed 7 February 2016.

[94]Korkut and Eslen-Ziya, 'The discursive governance of population politics'.

[95]'Turkish PM Erdoğan reiterates his call for three children', *Hürriyet Daily News* (3 January 2013), available at: {http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-pm-erdogan-reiterates-his-call-for-three-children-38235} accessed 3 October 2018.

[96]Sebnem Arsu, 'Premier of Turkey seeks limits on abortions', *New York Times* (29 May 2012), available at: {http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/30/world/europe/turkish-premier-calls-for-more-abortion-restrictions.html} accessed 1 February 2018.

[97]While abortion remains legal, several reports revealed that the procedure was no longer performed by the public hospitals as funds for the procedure were cut. See Pınar Trembley, 'Turkish laws fail to protect women's right to choose', *Al-Monitor* (14 March 2014), available at: {https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/03/turkish-womens-right-to-choose-law-fails.html} accessed 25 January 2016.

[98]Elif Shafak, 'This silence hurts Turkish women', *The Guardian* (15 July 2012), available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/15/turkey-caesarian-ban-silence-hurts-womrn} accessed 7 February 2016; Constanze Letsch, 'Turkish doctors face fines for elective caesareans', *The Guardian* (13 July 2012), available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/13/turkish-doctors-fines-elective-caesareans?newsfeed=true} accessed 7 February 2016.

[99]Berna Yazıcı, 'The return to the family: Welfare, state, and politics of the family in Turkey', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 85:1 (2012), pp. 103–40; Saniye Dedeoğlu, 'Equality, protection or discrimination: Gender equality policies in Turkey', *Social Politics*, 19:2 (2012), pp. 269–90; Acar and Altunok, 'The "politics of intimate"'; Ayşe Buğra, 'Revisiting the Wollstonecraft dilemma in the context of conservative liberalism: the case of female employment in Turkey', *Social Politics*, 21:1 (2014), pp. 148–66.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

In 2011, the former prime minister announced the new Ministry of Family and Social Policies, which replaced the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs, saying that 'We are a conservative democratic party. The family is important to us.'[100] Independent women's groups and organisations argued that the change constituted a breach of international agreements signed by Turkey and of the Acquis Communautaire of the EU. For women activists, the government fell short of the responsibility to ensure gender equality, viewing women as part of the family rather than as individuals with rights, and encouraging maternal roles for women.[101] Indeed, the former Minister of Health commented that motherhood is the only acceptable career for women.[102]

Viewing women who 'reject motherhood' as 'incomplete', President Erdoğan criticised feminists for 'not accept[ing] the concept of motherhood'.[103] Feminists were depicted as far removed from Islam, 'not belong[ing] to our civilization, our belief, our religion'.[104] Thus, the global norm of gender equality, embedded in a different normative order and promoted by Western norm entrepreneurs and adopted by feminist groups and independent women's organisations in Turkey, was recast as a threat to Turkish religious and national values, to the stability and strength of the family and, thus, to the future of the nation.

Conservative women's organisations as norm entrepreneurs: KADEM and 'gender justice'

During its third term in office (2011–15) the ruling AKP's populist tendencies became more evident as the party adopted discourses that further deepened the Islamist-secularist divide, depicting the political arena as a battleground between the 'true' representative of the ordinary people (AKP) and the 'corrupt' secular elites.[105] Presenting itself as giving voice to the religious masses unrepresented by the secular Kemalist establishment, AKP has increasingly constructed a societal divide between the religious, 'moral' AKP supporters and the non-religious, and potentially 'immoral', others (for example, leftists, feminists, minorities, environmentalists), often cast as enemies of the nation.[106] In line with its populist discourses, AKP has regulated the contestation over ideas and norms in the public sphere through newly created pro-government organisations.[107] Marginalising independent women's organisations, which have been critical of its conservative gender politics, AKP has supported pro-government women's organisations such as Women and Democracy Organisation (KADEM), Women's Rights Organisation against Discrimination (AK-DER), and Women Health Workers Association for Solidarity (KASAD-D). For instance, in 2014, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy announced that KADEM, AKDER, and KASAD-D were the three NGOs to send representatives to a committee that would designate Turkey's nominees for GREVIO – an independent body of experts that

[100]Burçin Belge, 'Women policies erased from political agenda', *Bianet* (9 June 2011), available at: {http://bianet.org/bianet/women/130607-women-policies-erased-from-political-agenda} accessed 26 January 2016.

[101]Women's Platform for Equality Mechanisms (WPEM), 'We Protest the Annulment of the Ministry Responsible for Women!' (21 June 2011), available at: {http://www.wwhr.org/news.php?detay=68} accessed 12 March 2012.

[102]'Mothers' only career should be motherhood, Turkish Health Minister says', *Hürriyet Daily News* (1 January 2015), available at: {http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/mothers-only-career-should-be-motherhood-turkish-health-minister-says-76360} accessed 28 April 2017.

[103]'Turkey's Erdogan says childless women are "incomplete"', *Aljazeera.com* (6 June 2016), available at: {https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/turkey-erdogan-childless-women-incomplete-160606042442710.html} accessed 17 July 2018.

[104]'Erdoğan'dan feministlere: Ya senin bizim dinimizle medeniyetimizle ilgin yok ki', *Diken* (17 February 2015), available at: {http://www.diken.com.tr/erdogandan-feministlere-ya-senin-bizim-dinimizle-medeniyetimizle-ilgin-yok-ki/} accessed 18 July 2018.

[105]See Somer, 'Understanding Turkey's democratic breakdown'; Esen and Gümüşçü, 'Rising competitive authoritarianism'; Bilge Yabancı, 'Populism as the problem child of democracy: the AKP's enduring appeal and use of meso-level actors', *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16:4 (2016), pp. 591–617.

[106]Kandiyoti, 'Locating the politics of gender', p. 105; Yabancı, 'Populism', p. 9.

[107]Yabancı, 'Populism'; Jessica Leigh Doyle, 'State control of civil society organizations: the case of Turkey', *Democratization*, 24:2 (2017), pp. 244–64.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

would monitor the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. Independent women's organisations were excluded from the GREVIO candidate selection process. The Istanbul Convention Monitoring Platform, which included 85 women's and LGBTI organisations protested the committee established under the Ministry, arguing that it served 'to exclude women's and LGBTI organizations from the Istanbul Convention process, distort the content of the Convention and prevent its implementation'.[108] Due to the resistance of independent women's organisations and platforms, Feride Acar, an academic, a member of CEDAW committee, and a women's rights activist, was nominated as Turkey's GREVIO candidate.

Established in 2013, KADEM has close links with the ruling AKP and supports and legitimises the party's views on women's rights. President Erdoğan's daughter, one of the founders of the organisation, serves as vice president. KADEM's founding president was elected to parliament on the AKP ticket in June 2018 elections. KADEM organises 'Women and Justice summits' every two years, publishes an academic peer-reviewed journal, and convenes conferences, workshops, and seminars to produce and disseminate its alternative narrative on women's rights.[109] KADEM has promoted a vision of 'gender justice' as an alternative to the norm of gender equality, which has been long supported by women's rights activists and organisations.[110] KADEM has sought to demonstrate the problems with gender equality norm to highlight the need for a new norm. For instance, KADEM's founding president Sare Aydın Yılmaz has devalued the notion of equality arguing that the continued existence of women's oppression, despite the struggles for gender equality all around the world (through policies such as 'equal opportunities' and 'positive discrimination'), proves that the gender equality norm is not 'sufficient' to end women's oppression.[111] She has also justified the need for a new vision, emphasising that the concept of equality belongs with a different (that is, Western) normative belief system. According to Aydın Yılmaz:

> As a modern concept, equality provides standard monotypes [for women] grounded in Western culture by attempting to equalize women and men, whereas 'justice' points to a superior concept in which equality is inherent and refers to equity, balance, a higher understanding of fair treatment, and liabilities between men and women … The concept of women's rights developed in a specific region reflects the socio-cultural, political, and religious dynamics of that region.[112]

Aydın Yılmaz has presented the concept of equality not only as an *alien* construct, a Western *import*, which does not fit into non-Western normative contexts, but also as an *inferior* one, as it fails to acknowledge women's *fıtrat* (inherent qualities). The implication that Western feminists (and their 'imitators' in Turkey) cling to an 'inferior concept of equality' establishes a power relationship in favour of KADEM. As an active non-Western agent, KADEM in turn, has the power to construct 'a superior concept' of 'gender justice', which develops from local conditions and acknowledges the feminine qualities of women.

[108]Istanbul Convention Monitoring Platform, Press Release, 'Turkey's Women and LGBTI Organizations are Excluded from Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence' (29 December 2014), available at: {http://www.morcati.org.tr/tr/23-news/288-turkey-s-women-and-lgbti-organizations-are-excluded-from-council-of-europe-s-convention-on-preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence} accessed 13 November 2017.

[109]KADEM's visions and missions available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/kadem-hakkinda/} accessed 31 May 2019.

[110]See Sare Aydın Yılmaz, 'A new momentum: Gender justice in the women's movement', *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 13:4 (2015), pp. 107–15.

[111]Ibid., pp. 111–12, 115. See also Sare Aydın Yılmaz, 'Eşitlik üstü adalet', KADEM (n.d.), available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/star-gazetesi-acik-goruste-yayinlanan-esitlik-ustu-adalet-baslikli-yazi/} accessed 11 November 2016.

[112]Aydın Yılmaz, 'A new momentum', pp. 108–09.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

KADEM's discourses have further devalued the concept arguing that feminism's insistence on equality based on sameness places women in a disadvantageous position[113] and would ultimately lead to women's 'masculinisation' and then women's detachment from their 'female identity'.[114] Therefore,

> Instead of feminist discourse, which advocates discriminative policies between men and women, a complementary and holistic discourse must be created … for the establishment of social balance and harmony … women and men must be regarded as two equivalent entities with the same essence, complementing each other.[115]

The norm of gender justice is based on the belief that due to their different biological make up, women and men carry out different social functions, and this generates social balance and harmony in society rather than a state of 'rivalry between women and men'.[116] The relationships between men and women are understood in terms of *difference* and *complementarity* rather than *equality*.

The proposed norm of 'gender justice' is further justified by giving references to some verses of the Koran to demonstrate Islam's view towards women and men.[117] Islam 'considers women and men as parts of a whole that complement each other'.[118] Pointing to the different characteristics of women and men, gender justice:

> [A]cknowledges different liabilities between men and women attributed to society and culture, but also notes that there is no hierarchical superiority or inferiority between the sexes.[119]

Promoting 'a just and fair sharing of social gender roles between men and women', the norm of gender justice 'will not be unjust to men, while protecting women, and will bring about constructive practices in developing an order that prioritizes social welfare'.[120] For Aydın Yılmaz, the idea of gender equality prevents women and men from sharing gender roles in a 'fair' way, so in that sense equality may pave the way to injustice.

As the above discussion reveals, KADEM's norm of 'gender justice' differs radically from the visions of gender justice promoted by feminist scholars. For instance, Nancy Fraser's conception of gender justice incorporates claims for both socioeconomic redistribution and cultural recognition to remedy the problems of gender-based 'maldistribution' and 'misrecognition'.[121] KADEM's proposed norm addresses neither a rights-based agenda to ensure women's individual rights nor a distributive agenda that advocates social and economic rights for women. Furthermore, KADEM views the notion of gender equality as 'unjust' as it is 'discriminatory' towards men and, thus, advocates the norm of gender justice, based on Islam. The norm of gender justice legitimises the government's message on the 'complementary nature of men and

[113]KADEM, 'Women and Justice Summit Final Declaration' (n.d.), available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/uluslararasi-kadin-ve-adalet-zirvesi-sonuc-bildirisi/} accessed 12 October 2018. See also KADEM, 'Toplumsal cinsiyet adaleti kongresi sonuç bildirgesi' (6 March 2015), available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/toplumsal-cinsiyet-adaleti-kongresi-sonuc-bildirgesi/} accessed 14 October 2018.

[114]Aydın Yılmaz, 'A new momentum', pp. 110–11.

[115]Ibid., p. 112.

[116]KADEM, '8 Mart Dünya Kadınlar Günü Bildirisi' (n.d.), available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/8-mart-dunya-kadinlar-gunu-bildirisi-2/} accessed 14 October 2018.

[117]Aydın Yılmaz, 'A new momentum', pp. 112–14.

[118]Ibid., p. 112.

[119]Ibid., p. 113.

[120]Ibid., p. 115.

[121]See Fraser, 'From redistribution to recognition'; Nancy Fraser, 'Feminist politics in the age of recognition: a two-dimensional approach to gender justice', *Studies in Social Justice*, 1:1 (2007), pp. 23–34.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

women' and supports the president's statements. In a speech he delivered at the Women and Justice summit organised by KADEM, President Erdoğan stated:

> What women need is to be able to be *equivalent*, rather than equal. … You cannot bring women and men into equal positions; that is against nature because their nature is different. For example, in work life, you cannot impose the same conditions on a pregnant woman as a man.[122]

The proposed local norm of 'gender justice', according to Aydın Yılmaz, 'brings a new perspective and momentum to the advancement of women's rights worldwide'.[123] KADEM has called into question the notion of universal sisterhood, criticising 'classical' liberal feminism for 'ignoring differences among women'[124] and assuming women's experiences and demands are universal. For KADEM, this universalisation served to ignore the local realities of women living in different societies.

> The emphasis on universality inherent in classical feminism has been disabled with a simplistic reductionism with generalizing policies that ignore the problems of local cultures and practices faced by women living in different societies, rather than searching for solutions to such problems.[125]

The norm of 'gender justice' puts emphasis on the collective good and, thus, is not compatible with liberalism's emphasis on individual rights. How can this local, religious-based norm be 'delocalised' and diffused in a liberal international normative setting? As Nilüfer Göle argues '[l]abeling an experience, an attitude, a social practice as local means attaching to it a place and limiting its meaning to the particular as opposed to the universal.'[126] While contesting gender equality, KADEM has employed the term 'gender' to establish legitimacy in the liberal international order but it has bent its meaning and content, reconstructing it to match the Islamic normative system. While gender is 'a primary way of signifying relationships of power',[127] Aydın Yılmaz uses the term to refer to fixed, unchanging social roles and biological differences between males and females, which have long served to justify unequal treatment of women. She argues that as Islam considers that 'women and men complement each other in terms of duties and responsibilities', 'it does not demand obedience to men, but to the order'.[128] For her, Islam's emphasis on responsibilities of men and women rather than on '"natural" capacities ceases the question of hierarchy between men and women'.[129] Yet, the acceptance of fixed masculine and feminine characteristics serves to reproduce the hierarchical positioning of these traits, privileging traits defined as masculine over those viewed as feminine.

Gender's disassociation with power relations coupled with the subsequent reconstruction of the term in association with Islamic principles have allowed KADEM both to legitimise

[122]'Turkish President Erdoğan says gender equality "against nature"', *Hürriyet Daily News* (24 November 2014), available at: {http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-says-gender-equality-against-nature-74726} accessed 28 April 2017, emphasis added.

[123]Aydın Yılmaz, 'A new momentum', p. 115.

[124]Sare Aydın Yılmaz, 'II. Uluslararası Kadın ve Adalet Zirvesi KADEM kurucu başkanı Sayın Sare Aydın'ın açılış konuşması' (25 November 2016), available at: {kadem.org.tr/ii-uluslararasi-kadin-ve-adalet-zirvesi-baskani-sayin-sare-aydinin-acilis-konusmasi/} accessed 14 November 2018.

[125]Aydın Yılmaz, 'A new momentum', p. 112.

[126]Nilüfer Göle, 'Global expectations, local experiences: Non-Western modernities', in Wil Arts (ed.), *Through a Glass, Darkly* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 44.

[127]Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 91:5 (1986), p. 1067.

[128]Aydın Yılmaz, 'A new momentum', p. 115.

[129]See Özlem Aslan, 'Equality and difference: Are they mutually exclusive?', available at: {http://turkishpolicy.com/pdf/TPQ_Debate_on_Gender_Equality_vs_Gender_Justice_Ozlem_Aslan.pdf} accessed 7 February 2017.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

conservative gender regime of the government and to claim legitimacy in the eyes of international and regional organisations and agencies. For instance, KADEM is a member of Turkey's steering committee for Women 20 (W20), which was established as part of G20 to promote economic empowerment of women, with two other NGOs (KAGIDER – Women Entrepreneurs of Turkey and TIKAD – Turkish Businesswomen Association).[130] KADEM attends the annual sessions of the UN's Commission on the Status of Women where representatives of states, civil society organisations, and UN bodies meet to discuss issues and problems relating to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.[131] Furthermore, KADEM has a project funded by the government and the EU to establish a network between civil society organisations in Turkey and in EU to support women's political participation.[132]

KADEM's reframing of 'gender' has also affected its approach to the question of violence against women. KADEM, like independent women's groups, highlights the importance of combatting violence against women. But while independent women's organisations view violence as underpinned by unequal gendered relations, patriarchal structures, and male dominance, KADEM views domestic violence as gender-neutral.[133] For KADEM, violence is 'a human rights issue' and the organisation 'say[s] no to all kinds of violence against everyone'.[134] KADEM's gender-neutral focus on violence against women, children, and men,[135] however, glosses over the reality of gender-specific patterns of violence against women, leaving patriarchy unquestioned. For instance, KADEM's campaigns to fight male violence against women, such as 'Overcome your anger if you are a man!' (2013) and 'Be a man first!' (2014) targeted men,[136] asking them to control their emotions. Reducing male violence to a personal issue of male anger and aggression, these campaigns not only ignore that violence against women stems from unequal power relations between women and men, but also cast women as objects of male protection, denying them any agency. Refraining from 'othering men',[137] KADEM's campaigns entrust women to men, who are expected to behave in culturally appropriate ways to protect women. Locating the problem of violence in the private realm and viewing it as a personal issue, KADEM's discourses and campaigns subvert the decades-long struggles of independent women's organisations that have exposed domestic violence as a structural problem in patriarchal societies.[138] Despite such discourse, KADEM publicly criticised a proposed bill, which would have suspended the sentences of men who had sexually assaulted underage girls and then married their victims. Independent women's organisations demonstrated in İstanbul, Ankara, and other cities against the proposed bill, claiming that by exonerating the perpetrators of child sexual

[130]KADEM, 'W20 was Officially Launched', available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/en/konular/our-activities/international-activities/} accessed 28 October 2018.

[131]KADEM, 'Commission on the Status of Women: Session 59th', available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/en/commission-on-the-status-of-women-session-59th/} accessed 28 October 2018.

[132]KADEM, 'EU-Turkey Civil Network for Women in Politics', available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/en/grant-projects/} accessed 28 October 2018.

[133]Sare Aydın Yılmaz, 'Uluslararası Kadın ve Adalet Zirvesi KADEM kurucu başkanı Sayın Sare Aydın'ın açılış konuşması' (24 November 2014), available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/kadem-kadin-ve-demokrasi-dernegi-baskani-sayin-sare-aydinin-acilis-konusmasi/} accessed 12 November 2018.

[134]Interview of KADEM's President Sare Aydın Yılmaz with *Kadın ve Toplum* (n.d.), available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/kadem-genel-baskani-doc-dr-sare-aydin-yilmazin-kadin-ve-toplum-dergisi-roportaji/} accessed 11 November 2017.

[135]Ibid.

[136]'"Erkeksen öfkeni yen!" diyerek ironi yaptık', interview of KADEM's President Sare Aydın Yılmaz with the national daily *Sabah* (1 December 2013), available at: {https://www.sabah.com.tr/pazar/2013/12/01/erkeksen-ofkeni-yen-diyerek-ironi-yaptik} accessed 4 June 2019.

[137]Ibid.

[138]KADEM, 'If You are a Man, Overcome Your Anger!', available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/en/if-you-are-a-man-overcome-your-anger/} accessed 31 May 2019.

abuse, the bill would legitimise statutory rape and child marriage.[139] KADEM issued a public statement against the bill, arguing that when it comes to underage children it would be difficult to establish consent and this would result in abusers avoiding any punishment.[140] President Erdoğan called for a broad consensus on the issue and the government withdrew the proposal.[141]

KADEM has employed discursive strategies such as devaluation, reframing, and bending to delegitimise gender equality norms and to justify the need for a new, local norm. Emphasising the importance of 'gender complementarity', KADEM criticises independent women's groups for promoting the vision of equality as sameness, which in fact these groups vehemently reject.[142] KADEM also blames the women's movement for being discriminatory and criticises the movement for ignoring the problems of ordinary women, especially women wearing headscarves (*türban*).[143] Presenting itself as the real representative of ordinary Muslim women in Turkey, KADEM casts independent women's organisations as elitist and Westernised (that is, feminist), devaluing their struggles for equality and delegitimising their voices.

While KADEM criticises the women's movement for ignoring differences among women, it is not very clear if the norm of 'gender justice' is inclusive of women with different identities and beliefs. The proposed norm recognises differences only between women and men, thus hiding other inequalities intersecting with gender hierarchies and discriminating against women. It also limits sexual identity/difference to two opposing sexes, ignoring gay, lesbian, intersex, and trans individuals.[144] KADEM does not support LGBTI rights, claiming that 'homosexuality is contrary to our belief and the values of humanity'.[145] Furthermore, the norm of 'gender justice' constructs women's labour, identities, and bodies only in relation to the private sphere of the family. Thus, it serves to retraditionalise the gender discourse and legitimise the naturalness of women's roles as mothers, wives, and caregivers. It, thus, legitimises AKP's neoliberal approach to social policy in which women play a crucial role as primary caregivers at the household.[146] KADEM's discourses sanction 'the marriage of convenience' between neoliberal welfare policies of the government with 'a neo-conservative familism that cements ideals of female domesticity'.[147]

Conclusion

This article contributes to recent norm research in three main ways. First, building on the constructivist IR literature on norm translation and contestation, it highlights the creative agency of non-Western entrepreneurs in normative change. Second, it explores the agency of local norm

[139]'Turkey: Bill to quash child sex convictions protested', *Aljazeera.com* (20 November 2016), available at: {https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/11/turkey-bill-quash-child-sex-convictions-protested-161120075936564.html} accessed 11 November 2017.

[140]KADEM, Press Release, 'KADEM'den cinsel istismar suçu ile ilgili tasarıya yönelik kamuoyu açıklaması' (n.d.), available at: {http://kadem.org.tr/kademden-cinsel-istismar-sucu-ile-ilgili-yasa-tasarisina-yonelik-kamuoyu-aciklamasi/} accessed 11 November 2017.

[141]'Turkey puts off controversial sexual assault and consent bill', *CBC News* (22 November 2016), available at: {https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/turkey-controversial-marriage-consent-law-1.3861718} accessed 11 November 2017.

[142]Bodur and Franceschet, 'Movements, states and empowerment'.

[143]Aydın Yılmaz, 'Eşitlik üstü adalet'. Feminists supported women demanding to wear *türban* in the public sphere, arguing that covered women were not admitted to universities not just because of their religious beliefs but because they were women. Men with the same religious convictions had no problems with being admitted, as their heads were uncovered. See, for example, Nesrin Tura, 'Türban yasağına hayır', *Pazartesi*, 43 (1997), pp. 2–5; Sedef Öztürk, 'Kadın sorunu İslamcıların gündeminde: Nereye kadar?', *Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs*, 2 (1988), pp. 38–43.

[144]Aslan, 'Equality and difference'.

[145]Kaos GL Association, 'Pro-Government Women NGO: "Homosexuality is Against the Values of Humanity"' (17 April 2019), available at: {https://kaosgl.org/page.php?id=28082} accessed 4 June 2019.

[146]Yazıcı, 'The return to the family'; Dedeoğlu, 'Equality, protection or discrimination'; Acar and Altunok, 'The "politics of the intimate"'; Buğra, 'Revisiting the Wollstonecraft dilemma'.

[147]Kandiyoti, 'Locating the politics of gender', p. 111.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

entrepreneurs in the Turkish context, critically examining and identifying the discursive strategies and justifications they have adopted upon encountering norms that challenged their normative beliefs, values, and practices. More specifically, the analysis has revealed the agency of KADEM, a pro-government conservative women's organisation, in contesting global gender equality norms and in advancing alternative understandings of gender, equality, and justice, based on religious values and beliefs. The article points to the power dynamics at play in determining whose voices to be heard/silenced during norm translation and contestation processes.

While the postsecular turn in feminism has enabled us to rethink women's religious agency beyond the binary of submission versus resistance by highlighting women's pious subjectivities and practices, it has downplayed religious women's political agency, which may or may not be informed by religious beliefs, principles, and norms. This article reveals the limitations of postsecular feminist theorising by pointing to the agency of a conservative women's organisation as a non-Western norm entrepreneur. Far from being a 'docile agent',[148] who may accept hierarchies of power in society and 'who may be socially, ethically, or politically indifferent to the goal of opposing hegemonic norms',[149] KADEM, as an active agent, not only challenges Republican secularism and feminism in Turkey but also subverts the norm of gender equality, advancing the local norm of 'gender justice' as its alternative.

Finally, the article supports previous research that local actors often strategically and selectively appropriate or 'bend'[150] feminist terminology and discourses to achieve their political goals. While independent women's organisations have embraced and promoted global gender equality norms, monitoring and challenging the state to protect and promote women's rights, KADEM has contested the moral validity of gender equality norms. KADEM's norm entrepreneurs have devalued global gender equality norm arguing that it is *alien* to Turkish society as it is embedded in a different (that is, Western) normative order, and thus, have established the need for a new norm, 'gender justice', which is built on the notion of gender equivalence and Islamic culture and tradition. While contesting gender equality norms, KADEM has employed the vocabulary of gender but it has compromised its core attributes to match it with Islamic normative system, ignoring the unequal power relations between women and men. Retraditionalising women's role in the family, KADEM's proposed norm of gender justice serves the objectives of conservative political authorities, who recast the global norm of gender equality as a threat to the strength of the family and, thus, to the strength of the nation. As the government marginalised independent women's organisations, KADEM has assumed the role of representative of Turkey's women's NGOs in regional and international platforms. KADEM has strategically reframed the term 'gender' to appeal to various audiences, including international, transnational, and regional organisations, which operate within the liberal international order. KADEM's strategy to employ the term 'gender justice' rather than 'gender-complementarity', with its particularistic connotations, enables KADEM to claim legitimacy in the eyes of international and regional actors and to promote its local, religious-based norm in liberal international normative settings.

This article, thus, recognises the diversity of actors, who are actively engaged in the processes of contestation over global norms. Power positions of local actors and their relations to political authorities and policymakers as well as their identities and beliefs are among the factors that shape their roles and strategies in the norm contestation process.[151] These factors determine who would be the local translators or active norm makers during the norm translation process. By analysing the norm contestation and promotion efforts of a local, non-Western actor, this article has contributed to the recent norm research that highlights the normative agency of

[148]Saba Mahmood, 'Feminist theory, embodiment, and the docile agent: Some reflections on the Egyptian Islamic revival', *Cultural Anthropology*, 6:2 (2001), pp. 202–36.

[149]Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 9.

[150]Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo, 'Stretching and bending gender equality'.

[151]Van Eerdewijk and Roggeband, 'Gender equality norm diffusion'.

non-Western actors in contesting global norms, advancing local norms arising from cultural and religious traditions as alternatives. The Turkish case is important as it reveals the agency of a conservative women's organisation as a non-Western norm entrepreneur rather than a passive norm taker.

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank Rianne Mahon, Aslı Ilgıt, and the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and insights. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the International Studies Assocation Annual Convention (2017) and the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Conference (2017). This work was supported by Çukurova University Scientific Research Project Fund (project number SBA-2017-8503).

Marella Bodur Ün is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey. Her research interests include gender and politics, social movements, norm contestation, and migration. She is the author of 'Turkey: From symbols to actors in the struggle for political rights', in Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Netina Tan (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Women's Political Rights* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) as well as articles on international norms, social movements, collective political violence, and women's movements in Turkey.

Cite this article: Bodur Ün, M. 2019. Contesting global gender equality norms: the case of Turkey. *Review of International Studies* X: 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 54.70.40.11, on 02 Sep 2019 at 13:36:33, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051900024X