

Understanding the AKP's imagination of Civil Society: Between the Free Market and the Conservative Morals¹

Simten Coşar²

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Introduction

This article aims to offer a brief analysis of the way Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) governments in Turkey (2002-) have been related to the civil society. In order to do so it relies on Turkey's recent history of the past three decades, treating the 2000s not as a break with, but as a continuity of the political developments of the 1980s and 1990s. This does not mean that the AKP itself as a political party and the AKP governments as the carriers of neoliberal-conservative alliance that marked Turkey's experience with neoliberalism, do not represent changes in the country's socio-political portrait. On the contrary, the past decade in Turkey is best characterized by rapid changes in terms of the state and social structure (Coşar and Yücesan-Özdemir 2012). Yet these changes did not take place suddenly, but emerged out of the political unfolding of neoliberal structuration process that reached its zenith, and thus consolidation phase during the AKP years. The same process also hosted the rise of civil societal activism in Turkey. Starting with the late 1980s civil society emerged as the safe grounds for citizens' involvement first in social issues and then in political matters. The 1990s witnessed the heyday of civil society with significant increase in the number of civil society organizations and their capacity to reach out the national borders, which positively effected their potential to influence the policy making process.

In this framework the article focuses on the AKP's stance with respect to civil societal activism. The main topics of interest are related to the party's policy preferences regarding the social sphere—gender policies and social policies. Here the link between civil societal activism and the party's policy preferences in the social sphere hints at the connection

between citizenship and civil societal activism. I would argue that civil societal activism as an asset of citizenship participation has been one of the main means of opposition against the AKP's neoliberal implementations in the social sphere. In parallel, the AKP governments' reaction against the citizens' activism in the civil societal sphere has so far hinted at the increasing authoritarianism at the governmental level. It is no secret that during its foundation period and in its first term in government (2002-2007) AKP had initially adopted a liberal pluralist discourse that referred to dialogue, tolerance and negotiation, recalling a consistent interaction with civil society organizations in the policy making process (Coşar and Özman, 2004). Yet as the party has guaranteed its power base—both in institutional and social terms—the conservative-cum-authoritarian tones in its discourse and policy making style have increased. This can be observed in the AKP's discourse concerning the opposition against its policies in the social sphere as well as its style of approaching to—and/or dismissing with—civil societal voices, specifically the feminist voices. Considering that the AKP has never denied its moralistic outlook in matters concerning the gender order in the country the party's increasing distaste of feminist politics is not unexpected (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011).

The article is composed of three parts. In the first part, I offer a brief historical outline of the neoliberal restructuring process in Turkey with a view to the rise and unfolding of civil societal activism in Turkey through the late 1980s and 1990s, with special reference to women's movements. In the second part, I concentrate on the evolution of women's rights/feminist activism in Turkey through the free-marketization of civil society. In the same part, I also take issue with the shift in AKP's political identity and discourse from a liberal pluralist line to a moralistic point that increasingly excludes and marginalizes feminist demands. In the third and concluding part I outline the current state of AKP's politics with its implications for the fragile link between civil society and democracy in Turkey. In pursuing my arguments I employ a feminist historico-critical reading of the AKP's record in Turkey's politics. My reading can be categorized as qualitative historical analysis, based on primary and secondary sources—public declarations by the prominent members of the AKP, related governmental documents, and research that have been conducted on the AKP's policy preferences, so far.

Historical backdrop: Civil societalism in a militaristic socio-political configuration

Despite all the ambiguities and controversies in the literature on civil society it is possible to start with a broad generalization to understand the rise of civil societalism in the late 1980s in Turkey.³ In its most general sense the notion civil society refers to voluntary involvement of individuals-as-citizens in socio-political issues more or less through daily practices.⁴ The dividing line appears when one considers the attributes of the individual in civil societal engagement, the discursive practice of citizenship in a specific socio-political context, and the way individuals get organized to tackle with the socio-political issues at hand. As for the Turkish context, it is possible to note that civil society in its most general conceptualization has always been included in the political agenda, though changing in accordance with the specific configuration of the individual-citizen nexus, which certainly depends on the socio-political dynamics of the period in question.

Civil society organizations in the form of foundations, associations and trade unions had been active in channeling the citizens' involvement in matters concerning the public outside the party politics throughout the Republican era (1923-). Yet civil societalism as a discursive practice would emerge as late as the end of the 1980s, in a rather ironic style: emphasis on the political value of civil societal organizations would rise in the immediate aftermath of the 1980 *coup d'état* and the following three-year long military regime (1980-1983), under the first post-coup civilian government of the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP). Irony is revealed when one considers the continuity of the coup measures in the strict delimitation on political participation in the same period. At a time when the ban on political parties and actors of the previous decade still continued the calls from the ruling elite to enhance civil societal engagement might seem odd. This should be understood with a view to the dominant imagination of civil society among the governing cadres of the time and the implications of this imagination in real politics.

The late 1980s, when the emphasis on civil society was an asset of the governmental agendas, were marked with the transition from the military-dominated neoliberalization

process to one where civilian governments started to assume the leading role as the actors in tailoring the socio-political space in accordance with the neoliberal requisites. The 1980 *coup d'état* and the ensuing military regime had been functional in preparing the political landscape for the introduction of neoliberal policies in the country. In this respect, especially the leftist opposition with considerable experience in organized political activism was curbed. Besides the ban on the political parties and actors—held responsible for the socio-political turmoil of the second half of the 1970s—membership to political parties was required to meet strict conditions, set by the military, and the political parties were banned from forming branches with societal extensions. In parallel, the political parties—which were permitted to function on the grounds that they had no connections with the banned political parties—were subjected to the military's approval for eligibility to participate in the first post-coup general election (1983). The ANAP, which assumed power as the party to form the first civilian government in 1983 was in tandem with the post-1980 political priorities, set by the coup leaders (Coşar and Özman 2007).

ANAP's conformity to the post-1980 criteria was best exemplified in its claim that the party had no connections with the marginal—read as ideological—stances of the past decade. The party positioned itself with respect to the centre space, proclaiming the centre identity. The centrist formula fitted into the dominant political imagination of the 1980s, connoting a depoliticized and de-ideologized political stance. In the coming decades the ANAP would be identified with the centre-right line in the political spectrum pointing at “mildness”⁵ in terms of nationalism, conservatism, religiosity and a strict adherence to free market economics, understood in the neoliberal frame. Yet the party's disclaim of the connections with *marginal* political stances of the 1970s did not count for the connections with the Intellectuals' Hearth—the intellectual branch of the extreme nationalist party of the 1970s, Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP). The founding chair of the ANAP, Turgut Özal, personally embraced the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis of the Hearth as a building block of his party (Mert 2001: 69). The seeming contradiction in the emphasis on centre identity with no ideological extensions to the past on the one hand, and its overt affiliation with Turkish-Islamic synthesis, on the other hand, can be understood with a view to the militaristic dynamics of the period. While the original holders of the Synthesis—the extreme

nationalists who were organized in and/or affiliated with the MHP—were either imprisoned or banned from active political involvement, Turkish-Islamic Synthesis was first promoted through the measures taken under the military regime and then pursued by the ANAP throughout the 1980s. As Tanil Bora (1999: 127, quoted in Coşar 2011) underlines, ANAP's terms in government that marked the second half of the 1980s witnessed the “elevation of religion to the status of the ‘hardest’ element of national culture.” Through the 1980s, first by the military regime and then by the ANAP governments Sunni Islam was gradually included in the political discourse and practice at the state level. Though in Republican history Sunni Islam has always been *the* prominent religion both at the societal—the majority of the citizens in Turkey are supposed to be Sunni Muslims—and institutional levels—the Presidency of Religious Affairs is part of the state—until the 1980s, it was treated as a passive component of national identity and was kept under the strict control of the state. With the 1980 turn Sunni Islam was gradually integrated into the state ideology and political agenda of the centre politics, the latter representing the dominant political stance of the coming decades.

The civil societal discourse was pushed to the agenda in such a milieu. ANAP with its centrist identity, embraced nationalism, conservatism with the motifs of religiosity, social democracy and liberalism (Kalaycıoğlu 2002: 45). The last ingredient connoted the party's pro-free market stance and support for the flourishing of civil societal activity in Turkey. It can be argued that the enthusiasm of the ruling elite for civil societal activities pointed at alternative venues and styles of engagement with politics that can be controlled so as not to threaten the neoliberal structuration process. While the narrowing down of the political space with a concern to preempt structural opposition—mainly from the Left—offered the grounds for the neoliberal policy makers to take the necessary measures with ease, the emphasis on carving out opportunities for civil societal organizations was associated with the social transformation in terms of the free-marketization of society. In this respect, civil society, understood in individualistic terms was an apt alternative to organized political activism of the past decades. Ironically, two political strands came forth in manipulating this opportunity space: Islamist movement and women's movement. Considering the space that was configured for religion in the new socio-political setting it is no surprise that Islamist

movement benefited more from the civil societal discourse. The women's movement, on the other hand, successfully manipulated the dynamics of the period to escape from the political restrictions in forging out the grounds for feminist political opposition of the next two decades.⁶

The women's movement in Turkey, which could manipulate the de-politicization process in the country started to organize independently of existing patriarchal political stances. The feminists did so through informal gatherings in small groups. It can be argued that despite the continuing restrictions on political participation the feminists could organize in autonomous structures, problematizing such issues, deemed "private" in the dominant patriarchal gaze, as sexual freedom, violence against women in all its facets, and discrimination at the workplace (Bora and Günal 2002). Clearly starting from the "personal is political" argument, the feminists could raise these issues first through the consciousness-raising groups, and afterwards through public campaigns. Though feminists in the late 1980s were acting on seemingly apolitical issues, according to Sirman (1989: 29) they still had to watch out the police force under the riot control regulations. The issue-based cooperation in a non-hierarchical, and ad hoc style (Sirman 1989: 19) on the basis of which they could organize and act in the late-1980s evolved into institutionalization toward gender-mainstreaming throughout the 1990s. In the authoritarian milieu of the 1980s, which they could—ironically—manipulate to organize independently of the grand ideological narratives around feminist concerns, the feminists were also keen on keeping their negative attitude toward the state (Coşar and Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2008: 330). By the institutionalization process in the 1990s, certainly with exceptions, they started to get into dialogue with the state (Kardam and Ertürk 1999: 176-180). Similar to the 1980s, the 1990s, too, were characterized with contradictory developments in terms of authoritarian state policies and civil societalism as a discursive strategy on the part of the governments. While those socio-political issues that were deemed to be a concern of national security were treated with authoritarian responses on the part of the state, the women's movement could find opportunity spaces for gender mainstreaming. Exemplary is the foundation of the Directorate General on the Status and Problems of Women (*Kadının Statüsü ve Sorunları Genel Müdürlüğü*, KSGM),⁷ which offered a venue for the women's rights organizations to push for governmental

measures to fight against violence against women and gender equality. It is certain that the relations between the related organizations and the Directorate have not always been harmonious but nevertheless, starting with the late 1990s, positive outcomes could be observed, as in the case of legal amendments that aimed at eliminating violence against women—specifically domestic violence—and such symbolic acts by the ratification of international conventions against violence against women.⁸

Civil societalization of feminist politics and the AKP's neoliberal authoritarianism

Although the women's movement in Turkey could retain the leverage that it had gradually forged through two decades, by the 2000s, it had to confront the authoritarian side of the neoliberal coin. This is not to say that starting with the late 1980s it was the women's movement which had the maximum benefits of the structural transformation process. On the contrary, the neoliberalization of the country has posed vital hindrances to the achievement of gender equality since it has worked through patriarchal means. Nevertheless, feminist activists have tactfully played in the niches of the contradictory workings of the transformation process through the late 1980s and the 1990s. However, with the consolidation phase of Turkey's neoliberalization the niches were started to be filled in by the power elite, this time not with liberal calls for participation in the civil sphere on individual grounds but with conservative morals.

The AKP's terms in power, almost two decades after the initial steps had been taken to the neoliberalization of society through the ironic co-existence of authoritarian policies and civil societalism among the ruling elite should be read with a view to this historical backdrop. The party had started with a "synthesizing discourse", reminiscent of the ANAP, when claiming power during its foundation (2001) and during its first term in government (2002-2007). The party had defined itself with reference to "conservative democracy" and reformism. In its policy preferences it adhered to neoliberal requisites, continuing with the Strong Economic Program, devised by Kemal Derviş, the technocratic minister of the then coalition

government, composed of Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Parti*), ANAP and MHP (1999-2001). It persistently referred to democracy, tolerance, differences and societal peace in addressing the populace and in grounding its policy preferences. In the same period the party utilized the emphasis on civil society, understood in liberal terms, as a way to prove its democratic identity (Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2010: 201). In practice, the pluralist stance turned out to be a preferential treatment of civil society organizations. In this treatment two persistent features of AKP's identity have been decisive: the party's commitment to neoliberal program and conservative morals. To put it more clearly, while emphasizing the political value of civil society as a sphere ensuring "widest possible consultation and consensus" (Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2010: 200) the party has embraced ANAP's approach, "identifying civil society first and foremost with the private sector" (Coşar and Özman 2004: 64). Yet, the reference to democracy, tolerance, differences and societal peace would gradually fade away in the aftermath of the party's first term in government.

In the AKP's discursive practices two traits have persisted throughout its life-time: neoliberal measures and conservative morals. The unfolding of governmental policies embracing conservative morals under the AKP governments was managed through the neoliberal agenda. As might be expected, this persistence directly affected the party's positioning *vis-à-vis* civil society organizations. Civil society proved to be both the discursive tool and the material sphere that the AKP manipulated in consolidating its power. The handset that the party used in its initial years in power was not brand new, but was handed over by the neoliberal structuration process since the late 1980s. The neoliberal distinction between the social and economic spheres, and the neoliberal conceptualization of politics-as-administration that has gained currency in the second half of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, reveals this legacy. Here, politics-as-administration formula corresponds to the technocratic understanding of politics—i.e., policy-making and implementation in terms of managerial problem-solving mentality. This understanding, expectedly, operates through the marginalization of political participation in deciding about socio-political matters, handing over the resolution of issues to the specialists and experts. Nilüfer Göle's (1993:213) analysis of ANAP as a "...*policy*—rather than *politics*-oriented [party, which] ... defined its identity in

terms of pragmatic rather than ideological values” summarizes this understanding. A parallel mentality can be observed in the words of Tansu Çiller, the incumbent chairperson of the center-right True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*) and the prime minister between 1993 and 1996: “I pursue above politics policy... I promised not to engage in politics. ... I entrusted myself to the people. I work for them. I do not engage in politics” (Cited in Coşar and Özman 2007: 212).

The distinction between the social and the economic spheres has been conceptualized in terms of the distinction between the person and the individual. As prevalent through different versions of neoliberalization worldwide, the individual—portrayed in terms of the will and capacity to seek her/his own benefits, rationality to make accurate cost-benefit analysis, and the liberty to possess and accumulate—is assumed to be located in the economic sphere—monopolized by the idealization of free market. The person, on the other hand, is derived from the conservative tradition pointing at the neoliberal imagination of society through familialism.⁹ This matrix reveals the neoliberal-conservative alliance over the sustenance of free-market mechanisms. “[N]eoliberal rationality” concedes to “the moralism, statism and authoritarianism of neoconservatism”, giving way to “the profoundly anti-democratic ideas and culture to take root in the culture and the subject” (Brown 2006: 702). The inner contradiction—between the emphasis on the individual and the person—can be observed in the implications of this rather simple distinction for policy practice: the separation, so far, could not work at the level of practice, since the neoliberal policies that are deemed to be based on it signified the extension of the private sphere so as to embrace both the *social* and the *economic*. Despite the seeming clarity in the distinction between the social—read as the space outside the economic and the political matters in general, and gradually with reference to the family in particular—and the economic—read as the space of free-market—in practice it turned out to be the economization-cum-free marketization—and thus privatization—of every individual and/or collective activity. This shift of spaces and the liquidation of everything into the economic mentality were achieved through three decades of neoliberal discourse and related policies, especially those concerning social rights

and gender-based claims. Unsurprisingly, the most vivid examples can be observed under the AKP's terms in government.

The AKP's new social security law (Law No.: 5510; Date: 2006) solidified the discursive and practical attempts for the reorganization of public expenditure on social services throughout the three decades. The law was promoted as a remedy to the deteriorating regulations on social security, and as a means to standardize the social services through individual rights and liberties. The key phrase here is *individual rights and liberties*, in that while justifying the liquidation of the rights as social—and thus public—matters the law further called the individual to take responsibility of her/his health and physical security, in the most general sense of the term. In other words, the new law was based on a reading of citizenship with reference to the individual of the free market, which in turn tends to relieve the state of its responsibility to ensure equal social rights within the wider scope of citizenship rights. This reading of citizenship might seem to contradict with the fact that the related legislation established the state's responsibility to contribute to the social security system. Yet as the system has so far proceeded, this contribution has proved to be realized at a very low level. This contradiction is further resolved when the specific measures adopted by the law are taken into account. Through the new regulations the retirement age is raised, the contribution period is extended, and retirement, disability, and survivor benefits are reduced. As for women's rights specifically, the law includes a measure that further deepens women's disadvantaged social position. The current regulations do not entail egalitarian measures, but position the women in the labor market on the same competitive grounds with men—which in essence means negative discrimination against women—while at the same time reinforce women's domestic labor, deepening women's double servitude (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2009). The most recent acknowledgement of this state of affairs can be observed in the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's words: "You cannot make woman and man equal. This is against creation. Because they are different by creation" ("Kadın Erkek Eşitliği Fitrata Ters" *Hürriyet* 2014).

The account above summarizes just a small part of an holistic transformation process in Turkey. Such legal regulations, tending toward the dissolution of social rights into individual matters are accompanied by an accelerating decrease in women's participation in the workforce throughout the AKP's terms in office, and an increase in the conservative tune in the AKP governments' policy preferences. Though seemingly contradictory, the co-existence of the individualizing tendency in the liquidation of social rights and the increase in socio-political conservatism points at a fine synthesis for the working of the neoliberal order of things. This synthesis is manifest in the AKP's gender policies. The AKP's terms in office witnessed the rise of a new mode of patriarchy in Turkey: neoliberal-conservative patriarchy (Yeğenoğlu and Coşar 2012). In this new mode of patriarchy, women are still considered as natural assets of the familial sphere, while at the same time they are called to participate in the labor market—as the most easily accessible cheap labor force. In so doing, the party regularly sends warnings signaling the dangers that worklife pose for women's familial responsibilities. The notorious “family package,” composed of legal regulations organizing women's place in the labor force and in the family is a vivid expression of this conservative mood. Designed as the Program for Protection of Family and Dynamic Population (January 2015) (Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı 2015), the regulations combine the adjustment of women's labor force to flexible labor market conditions with reference to achieving harmony between worklife and family life. However, as elaborated in the press declaration by *Kadın Emeği ve İstihdamı Girişimi (Initiative for Women's Labor and Employment)* (February 17, 2015), the program can be considered as another example of forcing the women into the flexible working conditions through familial roles, while at the same time prioritizing the patriarchal family structure as the essential reference for women's *natural* roles. Considering that the family has also been deemed to be a social security institution in Turkey under the AKP governments (ASAGEM 2008: 8), the program hints at the dismissal with feminist claims for women's socio-economic rights. Here, the neoliberal separation between the social and the economic spheres becomes once more salient. The conceptualization of family both as the natural sphere for women and as an asset for social solidarity blurs the distinction between the individual of the free market and the person of the social sphere, actually underlying the unease inherent in such a distinction.

At this point, it is apt to argue that this seeming contradiction in the AKP's neoliberal discursive policies is resolved in the conceptualization of citizenship with respect to the public and private spheres. As elaborated by Nalan Soyarık-Şentürk (2012), AKP's socio-political transformation record included a new phase of citizenization process characterized by a hesitant mix of neoliberal, nationalist and religious motifs. However, this hesitancy does not count for the exclusion of social rights from the scope of the policies related to the re-definition and re-construction of citizenship-as-a-status. Considering that civil societal organization and activism are directly linked to citizenship—notwithstanding the contention in the literature on civil society that civil society is broadly conceptualized as the sphere of citizens' involvement in social and political matters outside the institutional political organizations—it is possible to note that this exclusion lays the grounds for the relegation of civil society into the economic sphere.

As noted above, neither the separation between the *social* and the *economic* nor the relegation of civil society to the economic sphere emerged as brand new developments during the AKP's terms in government. Rather, the rise of civil society in the late 1980s as the sphere for citizens' involvement in social and political matters and as a matter of individual rights and liberties, was basically managed through the free-market discourse. What distinguishes the AKP is that its rule marked the consolidation phase of this frame. As the party has consistently proved its victory through three general elections (2002, 2007, 2011) and local elections (2004, 2009, 2014), and finally in the presidential election (2014), in contradistinction to its first years in government it consistently distanced itself from the pluralist discourse, tending toward an increasingly selective and exclusionary approach toward civil society organizations. In so doing, the AKP has manipulated the neoliberal separation between the *social* and the *economic*. This is most manifest in the party's disavowal of feminist organizations in relating to the civil societal sphere. In this denial, both neoliberal measures and conservative morals are at work.

First, the neoliberal frame has so far offered a convenient venue for the governments to draw a tolerant and negotiation oriented portrait in their approach to civil societal actors. It did so by redesigning the political space in terms of administration. Briefly, civil society in the neoliberal frame is meant to be located in a quasi-free-market space, outside what is deemed to be political. The feminist organizing in the post-1980 era manipulated this formula in laying the grounds for feminist political involvement in the coming decades. In the 1990s, women's rights and feminist organizations used the opportunity to contact with state institutions in pushing for women-friendly legislation and gender mainstreaming. In so doing they benefitted from the international bodies and transnational feminist activism (Aldikacti-Marshall 2009). However, by the consolidation-cum-crisis phase of neoliberalization in the 2000s, the convenience seems to have come to a halt. For, the crisis phase also hosted the ongoing conservatization.

In a milieu where politics has long been defined in technical terms and where citizenship participation through civil societal activism has gradually been subjected to free-market dynamics, feminist politics, nevertheless, could carve out a space for women's solidarity. Certainly this has not been without a cost—feminists, too, had to play in the language of free-market in terms of fund-raising, issue-setting, and campaigning. As the state funding, which had already been scarce when it came to “women's demands,” almost completely diminished for feminist organizations,¹⁰ and considering the insufficiency of membership fees, the latter had to rely on projects not only for dealing with specific socio-political issues but also—and rather uneasily—for survival. In other words, feminist organizations themselves have never been *immune* to the neoliberal order of things. On the contrary, the initial capacity to manipulate neoliberal de-politicization process in the late 1980s seems to have turned into a risk of articulation into the neoliberal civil societal engagement as project-based activity (Coşar and Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2008; Bora 2006; Sirman 2006; Üstündağ 2006). In other words, the permeation of project-based mentality in dealing with women's issues among women's rights and feminist organizations risks solidarity by turning the activists into competitors for funding (Coşar and Özkan-Kerestecioğlu forthcoming in 2015).

The neoliberal frame also pacified the holistic potential of feminist civil societal activism. The neoliberal design of the political space as *administrative business* requires taking the issues of socio-political concern as partial matters with no necessary connections while at the same time preventing the calls for holistic approach to seemingly diverse socio-political problems. This style has dominated the governmental mentality in Turkey since the 1980s: dividing the interconnected socio-political matters into separate spheres, and hence preempting the possibility of structural opposition. It also pushed women's civil societal activism to specialization which works in parallel to project-based activism. As Coşar and Özkan-Kerestecioğlu (forthcoming in 2015) argue the infiltration of project mentality side by side with specialization has been functional in side-stepping the holistic demands of feminist political activism into issue-based areas of activity (cf. Üstündağ 2006 for the possibilities of the manipulation of project-based activism by feminist concerns).

This side-stepping has been further enhanced through consistent appeal to conservative morals in the AKP's discursive policies. The AKP has been tactful in locating its consistent conservative stance into the neoliberal order of things during its terms in government. It is no secret that the party has had a negative stance to the F-word even when it played in the language of tolerance and negotiation. The neoliberal separation between the individual—of the market—and the person—of the society eased the normalization of AKP's conservative policies in social and political spheres. In this matrix, civil society as a sphere of citizens' socio-political involvement is put into a rather ambiguous spot between the market and state—as the administrative unit. Those instances of civil societal activism, which carried the potential to go beyond the borders drawn by the market-state nexus—as feminist activism—are doomed to hit the conservative enclosures through marginalization and/or demonization. This was evinced in the government's violent response to the Gezi Resistance that started in May 2013.

The Gezi Resistance sparked a flow of spontaneous citizenship-based opposition in the country throughout the summer of 2013, which can be linked to civil societal activism. The resistance persisted in the face of increasing police violence. Despite the extent of the

divergence among the participants in terms of political identity and ideological affiliation the common grounds was forged around rights-based claims: right to the city, right to organize, right to protest. The AKP's strategy in countering the resistance was first marginalizing the citizens who participated in the resistance, and then monsterizing them. In parallel to the government's ongoing labeling of feminists as "a few marginals" and feminism as a threat to the traditional Turkish norms and morals,¹¹ the Gezi dissidents have been labeled as looters and/or traitors by the then prime minister Erdoğan (President of the Republic as of August 2014). The combination of a marginalizing/monsterizing discourse with police violence attests the neoliberal authoritarianism that defines AKP's rule in contemporary Turkey. In this rule, the formula seems simple: civil society is meant to stay within the limits of the free-market so as not to pose a risk to the existing neoliberal order, and in case some civil society organizations and/or citizens attempt to go beyond the free-market and trespass the politics-as-administration, they are doomed to face with the authoritarian hand of the government.

Concluding remarks: Civil society inbetween activism, the state, and the free-market

In the discussion between Bryan S. Turner and Jeffrey C. Alexander on the meaning and significance of civil society, the focus of attention is on the definition of citizenship in a specific polity, and relatedly the relative positioning of the state and citizens, as well as the connection among them. The lines of argument that Turner and Alexander develop tends to converge on the necessity that the holders of the monopoly of power should be subjected to the control of the citizenry. While Turner dismisses with the possibilities that civil society might offer for the practice of this control, Alexander insists on the necessity of civil sphere for the active involvement of citizens in the polity through civil society. In this frame of argument, civil society is considered—in its widest sense—to be the field where citizens organize voluntarily and autonomously—from the state—in matters they think they have a say (See Turner, 2008; Alexander, 2008).¹²

The current state of institutional politics in Turkey risks developing an academic discussion on civil society to turn into a futile attempt. As the AKP has proceeded to become increasingly authoritarian in approaching the social opposition, and conservative in approaching the society at large the civil society as a venue for citizens' participation in everyday politics has turned out to be more of a utopia. On the other hand, the citizens' persistent opposition—mainly on the basis of the right to city, but not restricted to it—to the AKP government's policy preferences especially since the start of the Gezi Resistance hint at the possibilities to counter the authoritarianization and increasing conservatism. The Gezi Resistance is symbolic in the sense that it revealed the ambiguous state of civil societal politics in Turkey. The same holds true for feminist politics—as part of the resistance (Coşar and Özkan-Kerestecioğlu forthcoming in 2015).

The ambiguity starts with the definition of civil society, or put differently, according to those organizations that are deemed to reside in the civil societal sphere by the state. According to the report by the Balkan Civil Society Acquis (2014) Turkish law lacks clarity and comprehensiveness in defining the civil society organizations. More briefly, only “associations and foundations are recognized as civil society organizations” (Balkan Civil Society Acquis 2014: 17). Platforms, initiatives, and collectives, which represent significant forms of feminist organizing, are not legally recognized as civil societal organization. Besides, those citizens' initiatives that emerge on rights-based claims—as in the case of Gezi Resistance and in its follow-up—and embrace diverse political stances—both with organizational identity and on an individual basis—fall outside the official view of civil societal activism. Side by side with the legal restrictions,¹³ financial limitations and the discretionary power of the police forces, which hinder civil societal activities especially when they run counter to governmental preferences, those formations that are not recognized as civil society organizations complicates the state of civil society. Basically the question lingers: where should one locate those activisms that fall outside the free-market and/or contradict with the state and government with rights-based claims?

Current state of politics in Turkey does not offer clues for this question. For the official discourse toward any socio-political opposition to the governmental policy record is either condemned as monstrous or defined in terms of terror—i.e., as a threat to the state. On the other plane, already well-established and legally defined civil society organizations—including the feminist associations and foundations—are pushed to play in the rules of free-market, thus to a constant search for funding through projects. The *rest* is also forced to linger between the principles of citizens' right to participation and autonomy, on the one hand, and coming to terms with the structural hindrances for survival on the other hand. In other words, the issue of civil society is not limited to the strong state tradition *versus* weak civil society formula as it is widely assumed (İçduygu 2007; Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2010); it is rather a matter of the way citizenship-state-free-market nexus is organized. It can be argued that under the AKP's rule for more than a decade the nexus is organized on the basis of free-market mentality where the state acts as the regulator of the flow of capital, and the citizen is bifurcated into separate identities as the individual and the person, depending on the spheres that s/he is supposed to stay. The rights-based claims that are voiced through civil societal sphere are deemed to be threatening to this organization, and for the time being, are met not by the free-market rules nor by citizenship rights, but by authoritarian state policies and conservative morals that have become prevalent in everyday politics.

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² Hacettepe University

³ On the contested nature of the conceptualization of civil society see, for example, Alexander 2008; Turner 2008; Yerasimos, Seufert and Vorhoff 2000; Flyvbjerg 1998; Beckmann 1997; Hann and Dunn 1996; Keane 1993.

⁴ For the ambiguities in the definition of the concept with a view to Turkey’s political history see Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2005 and Şimşek 2004.

⁵ Nur Vergin defines center right as “that platform formed by people who avoid excess... these are people who search for “sound” [policies]. Sound, that is center-right, is a locus composed of sound people ... who in some respects express mild demands. They are conservatives, but they do not pay tribute to fanaticism. They are religious, but they do not like fanaticism. They stand at a distance from the state, they want to change [state] structure, but they do not even imagine damaging it. They adhere to their traditions, but they inherently have an enormous will to change. They want freedom, but they do not overlook the destruction of order. They have developed national sentiments, but they oppose ethnicity or racist nationalism. They are against state control over the economy, but they aspire to a regulatory state. They support democracy to the extent that it does not threaten the unity of the state” (Quoted in Sever 2002; cited in Coşar 2011).

⁶ Alongside with the women’s movement human rights organizations were started to be founded in the early 1990s. What differentiated the women’s movement is that it has long manipulated the official approach to women’s issues as “apolitical” topics.

⁷ As of 2004 the name of the Directorate was changed to the General Directorate on the Status of Women (*Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü*).

⁸ The amendments to the Turkish Penal Code in 2004 is among the most pronounced legal amendments. The enactment of the İstanbul Convention (Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) in 2014 is a parallel development. However, these and the other amendments and legal regulations were managed side by side with conservative measures that *ironically* opt for delimiting feminist activism.

⁹ For a succinct account of the conservative articulations into the neoliberal order through the appeals to personal morals, loyalty to traditions, and faithfulness see Dardot and Laval 2012: 263-281.

¹⁰ In Turkey state funding for civil society organizations has always been limited. By the selective approach of the AKP feminist civil society organizations are among the most disadvantaged ones in this respect. Additionally, when one considers the fact that such actors of the civil societal sphere as platforms, initiatives and collectives, which constitute a considerable form of feminist organizing are not recognized as civil society organizations by the related laws, the financial bottleneck that most feminist organizations face becomes clearer.

¹¹ Erdoğan does not refrain from outwardly stating his contention that men and women cannot be equal. In parallel, he has been outspokenly hostile to the feminists claiming gender equality by labeling them as “a bunch of marginal women... who do not comply with Turkish morality” (Cited in Yeğeneoğlu and Coşar 2012: 197). This hostility is not restricted to Erdoğan’s personal opinion; it can also be observed at the institutional level. Thus, the Presidency of Religious Affairs explicitly denounces feminism with the contention that it “...leads to grave consequences in moral and social respects. ... the woman who falls into the feminist movement... ignores many of the rules and values, which are indispensable for the family” (Cited in Yeğeneoğlu and Coşar 2012: 198).

¹² Though the discussion concerns more the relation between civil society and democracy in the twenty-first century I think it is relevant for a further understanding of the state of civil society in Turkey. In the course of the original debate between Turner and Alexander, Turner is skeptical about the implications of civil society-as-it-is in the twenty-first century for democracy, especially with regard to the pervasiveness of identity politics. Alexander insists on a more positive reading with a view to a balance between universalism and multiculturalism.

¹³ The report of the Balkan Civil Society Acquis defines the legal regulations in Turkey pertaining to civil society as tending to restriction rather than to freedom. In parallel, the report also points at the ambiguity in the regulations on state monitoring of the civil society organizations that risks arbitrary practices. This is especially relevant in the case of the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations. Although the right to organize meetings and demonstrations is recognized as a citizenship right, the wide discretionary powers of the police force, accompanied by secondary legislation—regulating the exceptional situations—almost nullifies the practice of the right (2014: 17).