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TÜRKİYE'DEKİ KADIN SİYASETÇİLERİN EYLEMLERİ: AKP VE CHP ÖRNEKLERİ*

*THE ACTIVITIES OF FEMALE POLITICIANS IN TURKEY: THE EXAMPLES OF
THE AKP AND THE CHP*

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Şebnem CANSUN

*İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Fakültesi Siyaset Bilimi ve
Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü*

Özet

Sağ kanatta bulunan siyasi partilerle sol kanatta bulunan siyasi partiler arasında farklılıklar var mıdır? Bu makale işte bu soruya Türkiye'deki ideolojik olarak zıt olarak olan iki siyasi parti, AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) ile CHP'ye (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) odaklanarak cevap aramaktadır. AKP kendisini muhafazakar ve demokrat olarak tanımlarken CHP ise laik ve sosyal-demokrat olduğunu belirtmektedir. Bu iki parti Türkiye'de en çok oy olan partilerdir. AKP 2002'den beri tek parti hükümeti yönetmektedir, ki aynı dönemde CHP ana muhalefet partisi olarak yer almıştır. Çalışmanın verileri, parti yayınları, ideolojik olarak zıt yaklaşımda iki gazete ve partilerin değişik hiyerarşi seviyelerinde hem erkek hem de kadın siyasetçilerle yapılan 53 röportaja dayanmaktadır. Her iki partideki kadınların çalışmaları başlıca iki konuya odaklanmaktadır. Birinci olarak, siyasetçi kadınlar hayırseverlik işleriyle ilgilenirler. Bu çalışma yalnızca kadınlar ve ailelerini değil, özellikle dezavantajlı durumdaki aileleri, tüm yaş gruplarını ve cinsiyetleri ilgilendirmektedir. İkinci olarak ise, AKP'li kadınlar genellikle geleneksel aile değerlerinin korunmasıyla, CHP'li kadınlar ise toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin ve laikliğin savunulmasıyla ilgilenmektedir. Ancak ev ziyaretleri, parti içi eğitimler ve kadınlarla ilgili diğer organizasyonlar söz konusu olduğunda AKP ve CHP birbirine benzemektedir. Bu durum, İslam'ın, Akdeniz kültürünün,

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hızla büyüyen ekonominin ve genel olarak Türk siyasal kültürünün her iki partiyi de aynı şekilde etkilemesiyle açıklanabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: AKP, CHP, kadın siyasetçiler, kadın kolları

Abstract

Are there differences between the activities of women in right-wing parties and left-wing parties? This article pursues this question by focusing on two ideologically opposed parties in Turkey, the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, The Justice and Development Party) and the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, The Republican People's Party). The AKP declares itself to be both conservative and democratic while the CHP declares itself to be both secular and social democratic. These two parties win most of the votes in Turkey. The AKP has headed a single-party government since 2002, which has result in the CHP as operating the main opposition party ever since. The data come from the party publications, two newspapers with opposing ideological perspectives as well as 53 interviews conducted at different party levels with both male and female politicians. The work of the women in both parties has two main areas of focus. Firstly, women are involved in charity work. This work does not just concentrate on women but on families, especially disadvantaged families, all age groups and both genders included. Secondly, female members of the AKP are generally concerned with the protection of traditional family values, whereas those of the CHP are concerned with the defense of gender equality and secularism. However, as far as the home visits, training and other organizations directed towards women are concerned, the AKP and the CHP are very much similar. This is not surprising at all, because several facts, such as the influence of Islam, the Mediterranean culture, the rapidly growing economy and the Turkish political culture in general, influence both of the parties the same way.

Key Words: AKP, CHP, JDP, RPP, female politicians, women's auxiliaries

Introduction

Turkey's wish to enter the European Union and its official candidacy since 1999 have pushed the country to focus on the issues that have been neglected for a long time. The issue of gender equality has entered the political agenda as part of this process. Women's issues, such as girls' school enrollment, violence against women, the use of headscarf in public areas, as well as participation in economic and political life, have attracted more attention than ever in the press. This article portrays the activities of female politicians (i.e. women's auxiliaries' members, female deputies, ministers and local assembly members) and attempts to locate the differences between a right-wing and a left-wing Turkish political party from this standpoint.

The two political parties under consideration here are the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, The Justice and Development Party) and the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk*

Partisi, The Republican People's Party). These two parties win most of the votes in Turkey. The AKP has headed a single-party government since 2002, which has resulted in the CHP as operating the main opposition party ever since. The AKP won 47 percent of the popular vote in 2007 and 50 percent in 2011, while the CHP won 21 percent and 26 percent respectively (Ntvmsnbc Seçim 2011: <http://secim2011.ntvmsnbc.com/>).

The AKP and the CHP are ideologically different from one another. The AKP declares itself to be both conservative and democratic. Although it has embraced many politicians from all right-wing parties, its leading staff come from former Islamist parties (Feroz, 2005, p. 172-173). Some of the AKP's actions (starting with a proposal to criminalize adultery, later withdrawn) have given the impression that the party rulers have a hidden Islamist agenda (Hale, 2006, p. 79). Meanwhile, the CHP is the party established by Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. It declares itself to be both secular and social democratic but does occasionally play the religion card for electoral purposes (Öymen, 2005, p. 326). In fact, it is hard for a political party to achieve strong electoral results in Turkey without taking into consideration people's religious sensitivities.

The Research

The field research for this study rests on three pillars. The first of these is made up by the party documents, that is to say programs, statutes and internal publications. The main publications of the parties are *Türkiye Bülteni* (Turkey Bulletin) for the AKP and *Halk* (The People) for the CHP. As the second pillar of the research, two dailies, one from the center right (*Yeni Şafak* - The New Dawn) and the other one from the center left (*Cumhuriyet* - The Republic), have been chosen. *Yeni Şafak* was founded in 1995 and has a daily circulation of approximately 110,000. It has close links with the AKP. *Cumhuriyet* was founded in 1924 and has a daily circulation of 75,000. It supports secularism ardently and might be considered as the newspaper closest to the CHP. The research period is limited to the years after the Helsinki Summit in December 1999. This is the year the European Union officially accepted Turkey's candidacy for accession. The third component of the research is made up of interviews with at least one man and one woman from every level of hierarchy in each of these parties (i.e. main office administration, youth auxiliaries' administration and women's auxiliaries' administration at the district, provincial and national level). Men and women grassroots politicians as well as at least one woman and one man from the municipal councils of specific districts, provinces and in the parliament were also interviewed. The most populated city of Turkey, İstanbul, and the capital, Ankara, represent the municipal and the national levels. Two districts in İstanbul were also focused on. These are Kadıköy, for the CHP, because it is widely known as the party's fortress and Beykoz, for the AKP because of its clear support of the AKP.

Table N°1. General Information on the Interviewees

	Man	Woman	Total
AKP	12	16	28
CHP	10	15	25
Total	22	31	53

The party programs, statutes and the internal publications were read first. Then, the dailies were read at the Atatürk Halk Kütüphanesi (The Atatürk Public Library) in the Taksim district of İstanbul. Finally, interviews were conducted with the party members described above between November 2006 and February 2007. The transcripts reports were treated through the qualitative data analysis software Atlas-ti.

Women's Works in the AKP and the CHP

The work of the women in both parties has two main areas of focus. Firstly, they are involved in charity work. This work does not just concentrate on women but on families, especially disadvantaged families, all age groups and both genders included. Secondly, female members of the AKP are generally concerned with the protection of traditional family values, whereas those of the CHP are concerned with the defense of gender equality and secularism.

In the AKP, the minister in charge of women and family issues, the party's vice-president in charge of social affairs and the president of the women's auxiliaries are the female party members who appear most often in the press. Among the charity works these party members have gotten involved with concern those with disabilities. For example, in 2005, these party members have outspoken against discrimination on the basis of disability (*Türkiye Bülteni*, April 2005). On the 2005 National Disabled People's Day, the party organized a public competition on the legal knowledge concerning the disabled people (*Yeni Şafak*, November 26, 2005, p. 17; *Yeni Şafak*, December 3, 2005, p. 12). The woman minister had previously revealed numerous new projects targeting the improvement of the conditions for the disabled as well as for orphanages in the Üsküdar and Eyüp districts of İstanbul (*Yeni Şafak*, October 7, 2004, p. 8; *Yeni Şafak*, October 20, 2004, p. 14). She also worked for the Coordination Center for the Elderly (*Türkiye Bülteni*, November 2004; *Türkiye Bülteni*, January 2006; *Türkiye Bülteni*, November 2006). In 2011, the woman minister began working towards the improvement of handicap facilities in the cities, criticizing the municipalities' slowness to take actions (*Cumhuriyet*, January 6, 2011, p. 3).

Another common area of charity work concerns orphans. Nimet Çubukçu, the minister in charge of women and family issues (2005-2009), was sensitive to the difficulties in orphanages (*Yeni Şafak*, November 1, 2005, p. 13). When the practice of torture was revealed at the Malatya orphanage, Çubukçu declared she would do everything in her power to change people's mentality towards orphans (*Yeni Şafak*, October 29, 2005, p. 5). She also announced that sexual harassment at the orphanage

should be severely punished (*Yeni Şafak*, September 29, 2005, p. 5; *Yeni Şafak*, January 9, 2007, p. 7; 'Yurtlar tecavüz mekanı değil', January 12, 2007, p. 10). Çubukçu lifted the ban on growing hair for young orphaned girls (*Yeni Şafak*, September 27, 2005, p. 4). She also supported the production of television programs concerning the protection of the youngsters and proposed that ministers and deputies become godparents to orphans (*Yeni Şafak*, April 16, 2006, p. 11; *Yeni Şafak*, November 4, 2005, p. 1, 4; *Yeni Şafak*, November 25, 2005, p. 5). Additionally she worked on issues affecting homeless children (*sokak çocukları* literally "street children") (*Yeni Şafak*, November 22, 2005, p. 15). Finally, the AKP gave jobs and public positions to 24,000 destitute and young people. It is Çubukçu herself who led this operation (*Yeni Şafak*, August 28, 2005: 5; *Yeni Şafak*, September 17, 2005, p. 13).

Female members of the AKP also work on issues relating to people disadvantaged in other ways. For example, in 2004, Emine Erdoğan, the prime minister's spouse, along with a group of deputies' spouses, paid visits to economically disadvantaged families (*Türkiye Bülteni*, November 2004). In fact, deputies' wives get together frequently to organize or provide aid to disadvantaged people (*Türkiye Bülteni*, December 2004; *Türkiye Bülteni*, June 2005). Meanwhile women's auxiliaries in districts and cities have their own charity organizations. For example, in 2006, the women's auxiliaries in Konya organized a campaign to promote organ donation, those in Trabzon organized dental exams for children (*Türkiye Bülteni*, February 2006; *Türkiye Bülteni*, September 2006).

Interviewed AKP members declared that women's auxiliaries assist all sorts of people who need help and support. For instance, one male deputy from İstanbul (a 75-year-old university professor) explained "Women's auxiliaries engage in social activities, work for children, the unemployed, women and women's protection (...) They are necessary" (Interview conducted on February 8, 2007 in Ankara). According to a 38-year-old female lawyer (a member of the municipal council of İstanbul), "[Women's auxiliaries] get together particularly for social help and social support. They lend a helping hand to the orphans, the elderly and the needy" (Interview conducted on November 23, 2006 in İstanbul). For example, not long before the AKP party members' interviews in Beykoz district took place, the village of Tokatköy had been flooded and women's auxiliaries notably worked on behalf of the victims of this inundation. This was frequently cited during the interviews with reference to women's charity efforts.

The timing of the charity work requires attention. If there is a catastrophe, the female politicians are there. Charity organizations also plan their works particularly during the holy month of Ramadan. Political scientists Ayşe Güneş-Ayata and Fatma Tütüncü have noted the increase in the activity among the AKP's women's auxiliaries during this month. In the capital city alone, members of women's auxiliaries visit

20,000 families per day, 600,000 by the end of the month (Güneş-Ayata & Tütüncü, Fatma, 2008, p. 370).

Charity as women's work also exists in the CHP. Even according to a 1948 party publication, "social help and instructive activities for peasant women" were cited as being female members' work (Ediz, 1994, p. 158). Because the CHP is not the ruling party, the work of its women is less visible. Furthermore, female members of the CHP define themselves as the defenders of secularism and by extension of gender equality, and much of their works center around attacking the 'Islamist party' through their deeds rather than around charity. As far as CHP charity is concerned, women's auxiliaries are focused particularly on the issues of women's health. For example, in 2006, the women's auxiliaries in Antalya organized medical visits for the needy (*Halk*, May 1, 2006, p. 12). In the same year, in Bursa, women's auxiliaries provided 300 women with free breast cancer screenings (*Halk*, July 15, 2006, p. 12). In 2006, members of women's auxiliaries in Amasya visited and brought flowers to hospital on the second day of a religious holiday (*Halk*, November 1, 2006, p. 13). Those examples show that women's health has a particular importance among the charity work of the CHP. The emphasis on women's health in charity works among the female members of the CHP may be put down to a social democratic outlook.

At the CHP, women are also involved in other activities on behalf of the needy. For example, when Güldal Okuducu, the president of women's auxiliaries (1996-2007), learned that noone was taking organizing the funeral of the author Muzaffer Buyrukçu, she took it upon herself to arrange everything (*Halk*, October 1, 2006, p. 13). Women's auxiliaries also helped the victims of an earthquake (*Gündem*, June 1, 2003, p. 13).

Two aspects of women's works in the CHP are worth attention. Firstly, some of the women's activities in the CHP might be considered more nationalist than those in the AKP. Female members of the CHP in Akçaabat visited young war veterans and the tomb of a dead soldier, İbrahim Seyis and his family, and this event was covered in the party's internal publications (*Halk*, July 1, 2006, p. 13). The AKP had not published similar events, perhaps because it does not want to risk the Kurdish vote. A second interesting point is that the charity works of the CHP appear in the party publications but not in the newspapers. This is certainly the choice of *Cumhuriyet* which wants to display the "real" political activities of female members of the CHP. That these activities are not featured in *Yeni Şafak* is unsurprising; it mentions female members of the CHP only when criticizing them.

During interviews with members of the CHP, not much was said about charity work by women's auxiliaries. This situation might be linked to the party ideology: For the CHP women's auxiliaries, charity cannot be a *raison d'être*. Accordingly, it accuses the AKP of using its charity work to "buy" votes.

[Women's auxiliaries] organize reunions, organize aids, they are in permanent movement (...) The propaganda in Caddebostan [a rich neighborhood] and along E5

[highway] are different. In Caddebostan, when you say something, it reaches its aim. However, in another place, people look at the activity not at the discourse (...) Then, a half-kilo of rice, 2 kilos of tomato sauce or this kind of thing (...) have more impact in propaganda (...). From that point of view, our women do not have that. They would not do it. But from an ideological point of view, our women are more advanced (man, 70-year-old, high school graduate, retired bank employee, grassroots politician in the Kadıköy district, CHP) (Interview conducted on December 21, 2006 in İstanbul).

This passage summarizes how the CHP perceives the AKP's charity work. A 58-year-old female deputy from Adana, also a university professor, stressed the same point in her interview (Interview conducted on February 14, 2007 in Ankara). She reported that while campaigning for her party just before the national elections, people frequently asked her what she had brought them to eat. When she explained that she was there as a candidate to share her ideas rather than food, she was told by many that they did not care about ideas and asked instead for, for example rice or meat. When the party members of the CHP were asked about the actions of their women's auxiliaries take, they tended to mention various pro-secular organizational activities rather than charitable activities, which make up the bulk of activity among the AKP-affiliated women's auxiliaries.

Female members of the CHP make war with "the enemies of women". Women's auxiliaries have prepared many booklets criticizing the "Islamist" AKP (CHP, 2005 ; CHP, 2006 ; CHP, 2006). They organize events and statements with the aim of attacking the government. For example, in 2005, when Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan learned the decision of the European Court of Human Rights regarding the use of headscarf in public places, he declared that Islamic scholars should be consulted. Female members of the CHP then organized a demonstration in Ankara sending the message that they would continue to follow Atatürk's path (*Halk*, December 1, 2005, p. 6). In 2006, the women's auxiliaries of Bursa, in their Women's Day address, affirmed the Kemalist values (*Halk*, March, 15 2006, p. 12). In 2007, on the 81st anniversary of Turkish Civil Code being put into effect, the president of women's auxiliaries, Güldal Okuducu declared that "The AKP government is the enemy of the acquired rights" and that "the Republican women [would] not remain silent before the AKP, which is working towards a revenge against the Republic" (*Halk*, March 1, 2007, p. 7). Similar declarations could be found in many publications (cf. *Halk*, September 1, 2006, p. 6; *Halk* May 15, 2006, p. 6; *Halk*, November 12, 2002, p. 4; *Cumhuriyet*, December 6, 2005, p. 8; *Cumhuriyet*, May 3, 2004, p. 5; *Cumhuriyet*, June 19, 2003, p. 7).

Several female deputies ardently criticize the AKP. In 2005, Ayşe Gülsün Bilgehan, journalist and deputy from Ankara, accused the party of not believing in the equality of men and women (*Cumhuriyet*, November 15, 2005, p. 6). When the spouse of Binali Yıldırım, minister of transportation, was spotted eating isolated, away from her

husband and other male party members at an event, Bilgehan saw this as evidence of the party's retrograde approach (*Cumhuriyet*, November 29, 2005, p. 1). In 2007, university professor Nevin Gaye Erbatur, deputy from Adana, called the prime minister "a jerk, an enemy of the Republic, secularism and Atatürk" (*Yeni Şafak*, April 19, 2007, p. 13). University professors Nur Serter and Necla Arat have also been outspoken about their Kemalist vision and their opposition to Islamism (*Cumhuriyet*, May 23, 2007, p. 6; *Cumhuriyet*, July 14, 2007, p. 7; *Cumhuriyet*, July 2, 2007, p. 1, 5). During the the February 2008 debates over amending the constitution, Serter alleged that the AKP had deliberately provoked universities regarding the use of headscarf. Arat accused the party of attempting to upset the political foundation of the country. In a corresponding attack, Nesrin Baytok, deputy from Ankara, made her point about the dangers of the AKP through an analogy of Afganistan. Bihlun Tamaylıgil, deputy from İstanbul, declared that the CHP would not let Turkey dive in the darkness of the Middle Ages (*Halk*, February 15, 2008, p. 4).

The female members of the CHP have more recently criticized the Prime Minister Erdoğan along two main lines of argument. The first of these relates to the prime minister's encouragement of families to have at least three children, which he explained in terms of preventing economic problems relating to aging populations. CHP Secretary General, Bihlun Tamaylıgil accused him of being insensitive to the expense of raising multiple children (*Cumhuriyet*, March 8, 2010, p. 6). In 2012, when the prime minister announced he considered abortion murder and called for an end to abortion as well as to cesarean births that were not medically warranted, the female members of the CHP joined protests against him (*Cumhuriyet*, June 28, 2012, p. 1).

Among the female deputies of the CHP, Canan Aritman, deputy from İzmir and a well-known gynecologist, is particularly critical of the AKP. Aritman called the AKP government the enemy of Turkish women (*Cumhuriyet*, March 18, 2004, p. 3), accused the Institution of Family Research of not practicing responsible family planning (*Cumhuriyet*, November 2, 2004, p. 4), characterized the parliament of broadcasting an anti-secular image (*Cumhuriyet*, June 10, 2004, p. 5) and admonished the veiled spouses of ministers of ruining the image of Turkish women (*Cumhuriyet*, June 12, 2004, p. 4). She also complained that the spokesperson of the parliament Bülent Arınç had allowed women in the full body chador on the floor of the parliament, a violation of Turkey's parliamentary dress code (*Cumhuriyet*, June 15, 2004, p. 5). She accused Arınç of lacking respect towards women and of having an Islamist vision:

I am not like the women he knows. We are not women who became members of the party today, then elected deputies the following day (...) These men should first learn to respect women. What is behind this discourse is an impertinence towards women (...) They will not build the religious state of their dreams (*Cumhuriyet*, August 18, 2004, p. 5).

Aritman added that the AKP ought to focus on fighting the country's economic problems. She denounced the lack of adherence to the dress code as a crime (*Cumhuriyet*, August 19, 2004, p. 5; *Cumhuriyet*, November 10, 2005, p. 4). Among other critics, Aritman also filed a motion during the visit of Hamas leader Khalid Meshaal inquiring as to whether the Minister of Foreign Affairs could host foreign comities with his AKP member identity (*Cumhuriyet*, February 21, 2006, p. 9).

The female deputies of the CHP are not the only ones to criticize the AKP. The presidents of women's auxiliaries have done similarly. According to Zeynep Arpa, president of the Amasya women's auxiliaries, "the AKP government (...) makes politics by passing by the veil, by abusing religious sentiment" (*Halk*, March 15, 2006, p. 13). President of women's auxiliaries in İstanbul, Marziye Gülenç declared that "the AKP considers women to be second class citizens" (*Cumhuriyet*, April 11, 2006, p. 5). According to her, the AKP government practices push women out of society (*Cumhuriyet*, March 9, 2006, p. 6). During the 79th anniversary of the constitutional introduction of secularism, she criticized the government once more and bemoaned the fact that women had a greater burden to carry in this era (*Cumhuriyet*, April 11, 2007, p. 4). In fact, according to the female members of the CHP, the AKP works for its own good and not for that of the people. Because many deputies of the AKP, ministers included, have escaped trials thanks to the parliamentary immunities, the CHP women's auxiliaries have organized activities with the aim of lifting these immunities (*Cumhuriyet*, May 26, 2005, p. 1, 8; *Cumhuriyet*, December 31, 2003, p. 6).

Female members of the CHP think that the real aim of the AKP is to confine women to the four walls of their homes. Defense of gender equality, secularism, democracy and Atatürk's values are exposed in Article 14 of the auxiliaries' regulation, and female politicians of the CHP attack the AKP ardently. While CHP women's auxiliaries have their own regulations since their founding (Ediz, 1994, p. 159-160) AKP women's auxiliaries have none. However, despite these regulations and gender quotas in the CHP (25% as of 1989, 33% as of 2012), the ratio of women in the decision-making mechanism is more or less the same in the each party. In 2011, for instance, only 14% of deputies in either party are women (*Yeni Şafak*, July 27, 2011, p. 1).

Despite purported party secularism, one should not forget that the female members of the CHP sometimes confront the limits of their own party in attacking the AKP. As mentioned earlier, the party cannot stop itself from playing the religion card. For instance, in 2010, the CHP women in Mersin publicly ripped apart a black chador on the 86th anniversary of the annulment of the caliphate. This action was surely intended as a criticism of anti-secular attitudes and traditions that tend to oppress women. However, because the issue of women's covering is highly instrumentalized in Turkey, the CHP made the women politicians who had taken part in this event resign. The party president in Mersin, Yılmaz Şanlı, made a public declaration, according to

which these female politicians of the CHP had torn apart black tissues representative of black clouds, and that it had had nothing to do with chadors (*Cumhuriyet*, March 6, 2010, p. 1). Deniz Baykal, then party chairman, emphasized the CHP's respect for all women's traditions and beliefs (*Cumhuriyet*, March 7, 2010, p. 4).

Charity works aside, female members of the AKP are generally concerned with the protection of traditional family values, and this is part of party strategy. The paragraph titled "G.1. The reinforcement of the family" from the AKP's electoral program promises that the party will "support efforts on the protection of family, the essence of society". The AKP therefore believed that messages from the mass media and internet should encourage the protection of the Turkish family structure. Female politicians work on this aspect. For example, in 2008, the women's auxiliaries, along with the spouses of deputies and ministers, organized a reunion on the theme "the family". Emine Erdoğan, Tayyip Erdoğan's spouse, affirmed that a woman should develop herself in order to protect her family from threats (*Türkiye Bülteni*, February 2008; *Türkiye Bülteni*, June 2007). In this declaration, Emine Erdoğan was wishing for the intellectual development of women as a path to create family happiness. This shows that, in the AKP, women are considered an essential part of the family structure rather than individuals.

In order to protect the traditional family structure, female members of the AKP, want to reduce the negative influences of the media. In 2005, the minister in charge of women and family issues, Nimet Çubukçu criticized television series that gave wrong information about the rights of divorced mothers (*Yeni Şafak*, September 13, 2005, p. 1, 19). The same year, regarding Ata, who had become famous through a television show and who later died from a drug overdose, she said that "Televisions should take a lesson" and institute broadcast control mechanisms (*Yeni Şafak*, September 23, 2005, p. 14). In 2006, Çubukçu criticized television shows where women dress like men and men like women (*Yeni Şafak*, May 9, 2006, p. 1, 14). In 2007, she asked RTÜK (*Radyo Televizyon Üst Kurulu*, The Turkish Radio and Television Supreme Council) to ban a sexist program *Beauty and the genius* airing on the Show TV network (*Cumhuriyet*, July 13, 2007, p. 7). Zeynep Tekin Börü, deputy from Adana, also asked RTÜK to stop the television show *He is a lady*. According to Börü, the program encouraged homosexuality and was thus bad for the youngsters (*Yeni Şafak*, May 2, 2006, p. 2; *Yeni Şafak*, May 4, 2006, p. 11). Later on, Börü filed a proposal to the parliament suggesting the formation of a commission for the elimination of such programs. Fatma Şahin, deputy from Gaziantep, described Kaya Çilingiroğlu's out of wedlock relationship as an "unbalanced relationship". Çilingiroğlu, a socialite who is often seen in the press, sued the deputy in the courts, but the deputy stood by her remarks. According to her, "The fact that that these kinds of relationships are perceived as normal in the Turkish nation's customs and convictions is not correct. The statements of people who use media really affect the Turkish family system and the transformation of the Turkish youngsters" (*Yeni Şafak*, October 18, 2006, p. 1-2). In 2010, the minister in charge of women, Selma Kavaf even declared that she was irritated by seeing erotic scenes on the

TV series. Her attitude towards such scenes and her view of homosexuality as a sickness was heavily criticized (*Cumhuriyet*, March 15, 2010, p. 5).

Finally, there are two examples of conservatism coming from the female members of the AKP. Firstly, on the protection of the family structure, in August 2008, the vice-president of the AKP who became a deputy in 2007, university professor Edibe Sözen, wrote a text on “the bill concerning the protection of the young people”. Sözen was inspired by the law concerning youth in Germany, but added some conservative features to her document such as the opening of worship spots in all schools, from nurseries to colleges. The female deputies of the CHP Canan Aritman and Nur Serter found this proposition anti-secular (*Cumhuriyet*, August 8, 2008, p. 5). Faced with these strong reactions, deputy Sözen from the AKP had to withdraw her proposition. The General Secretariat of the AKP declared that this proposal had nothing to do with the party direction, that it was the deputy’s individual work. Party chairman Tayyip Erdoğan advised all party executives to talk about their individual works with the Central Executive Board before submitting them for public debate (*Yeni Şafak*, August 9, 2008, p. 1; *Yeni Şafak*, August 10, 2008, p. 1; *Cumhuriyet*, August 13, 2008: 5; *Yeni Şafak*, August 13, 2008, p. 1; *Cumhuriyet*, August 18, 2008, p. 1, 5).

Secondly, in 2011, two female AKP deputies, Alev Dedegil and Aşkın Asan worked on a bill proposal regarding chemical castration for repeat rape offenders. The deputies’ main aim was to prevent child molestation, and they considered chemical castration a “cure” rather than “punishment”. The idea of punishing rapists by chemically castrating them was highly criticized by many politicians and lawyers. For instance, according to Canan Aritman, CHP deputy and gynecologist, such a punishment would not be medically ethical (*Cumhuriyet*, February 11, 2011, p. 6). Despite criticism, the Justice Commission of the parliament accepted the bill on April 4, 2011. These examples show that female members of the AKP are sensitive to the protection of the family structure.

The main conceptual difference between what was expressed by interviewees of each party was that at the CHP, party members highlight the activities of women that promote the protection of secular values. Other than that, the types of charity work the women’s auxiliaries of each party are involved in are relatively similar. In a first analysis of the results, three particular points stood out. First, some members of the AKP consider Tayyip Erdoğan to be “the person who founded women’s auxiliaries in Turkey”. However, in reality, he played an important role in the foundation of women’s commissions in the *Milli Görüş* (Islamist National Outlook movement), whereas women’s auxiliaries had existed in the CHP since the 1950s. Second, female members of both parties perceived women’s auxiliaries similarly, except that in the AKP, one out of every three women interviewed expressed the opinion that the current conditions of Turkey make the women’s auxiliaries necessary, and that they might

disappear in time. Among both men and women of the CHP, nearly half of the interviewees believed the existence of women's auxiliaries to be a necessity in the Turkish society. Finally, the presidents of the women's auxiliaries in the AKP party organization of Beykoz district and the İstanbul municipality expressed they would not consider working in the principal unit (outside the women's auxiliaries) to be a promotion; that is, women who work in the women's auxiliaries are happy to work there permanently. There might be three explications for this thinking among female members of the AKP: 1. These women are so conservative that they avoid mixed gender atmospheres, 2. Men in their families do not want their wives to work in politics unless it is in the women's auxiliaries, 3. These women simply enjoy working in the women's auxiliaries, and they do not have higher political ambitions.

In the interviews, members of both parties cited three main activities of women's auxiliaries. These were participating in home visits, trainings and several organizations that help women earn money. The home visits were the first activity to come to their minds. One in two men and one in four women from the AKP named home visits among women's activities. One in three men and one in five women from the CHP, meanwhile, named home visits among women's activities. When the parties want to initiate door to door campaigns, they find doors do not get open to men, so only women are successful with this style of party promotion. This has something to do with conservatism among Turkish people in general, and that homemakers do not invite strange men into their homes.

When it comes to providing training for women, other women were also deemed the most appropriate to provide that training. The 30-year-old secretary of the women's auxiliaries in the AKP municipal party organization spontaneously cited the awareness days (World Women's Day and the anniversary of Turkish women's receiving the right to vote and to be elected) as an example to this. The AKP organized three women's councils and a panel on violence and women (Interview conducted on November 22, 2006 in İstanbul). At the CHP, a female lawyer and a member of the directorate in the party organization of the Kadıköy district (62-year-old), thinks that "Women's auxiliaries should exist (...) particularly because of the training they provide" (Interview conducted on December 20, 2006 in İstanbul).

A third activity labeled as the purview of women is fundraising. The president of the women's auxiliaries in the AKP of the Beykoz district (31-year-old high school graduate) described the projects of women in the municipality, which work with the women's auxiliaries of the party on creating "women's handicrafts, pull-overs, laceworks, paintings (...) When these products are sold, the women are called and they come to get their money" (Interview conducted on November 11, 2006 in İstanbul). The mayor of Beykoz is from the AKP. Therefore, the women's auxiliaries of the party are in direct contact with the municipality. Other training and activities, such as the sale of crafts take place at the district municipality. The same situation exists for the CHP and the municipality of Kadıköy. A female pediatrician, also a grassroots

politician (81-year-old), draws attention to the Women's Consultation Center at the municipality. This center works with the women's auxiliaries of the CHP in the district. "There are literacy classes, computer classes, sewing, cooking and baking classes, wood painting classes" and women are encouraged to earn their own money.

Finally, according to some grassroots politicians of the AKP, women's sociability through women's auxiliaries is an activity onto itself. According to one male member of the youth auxiliaries in the AKP of İstanbul (29-year-old college graduate),

Even if it is a meeting around a cup of tea, even if it does not serve anything, it is at least some thing social. Something to make women happier. At least, she would have something to tell others (Interview conducted on November 21, 2006 in Istanbul).

On the other hand, CHP members see their fight against the AKP government or the protection of secular values as an essential mission of women's auxiliaries. According to CHP municipal press advisor (34-year-old female journalist), the main work of the women's auxiliaries is the critique of Islamists:

"Women's auxiliaries go from door to door to explain that the AKP wants to erase women's rights (...) The women's auxiliaries administration (...) offers a series of books on the critique of the [AKP]. (...) It is distributed free on the streets to women". This narrative well summarizes the way the CHP perceives the AKP and shows also how its women's auxiliaries attack the AKP. To the CHP, the AKP is an Islamist party no different than any of the Islamist parties that preceded it, as opposed to a conservative democratic party, as it perceives itself. In other words, CHP women's auxiliaries reflect the general CHP stance as the defender of secularism.

Conclusions

Female members of the AKP provide emotional and financial support to the orphans, the poor, the handicapped and the elderly. At the CHP, helping the disadvantaged takes on another dimension. CHP women's auxiliaries organize mass breast cancer screening for disadvantaged women. AKP women's auxiliaries organize dental check-ups. CHP women's auxiliaries visit hospital patients, invalids, soldiers' graves and families. AKP charity is more classical and less nationalist than that of the CHP, perhaps for the fear of losing support from the Kurdish electorate.

One difference between the two parties is that the female members of the AKP are overtly concerned with the protection of family values from the supposed negative impact of the media. They complain that certain programs may be a bad influence on the youth. In contrast, for the CHP, the concern is the AKP itself. Female members of the CHP attack the AKP, in an effort to defend against an Islamist threat, though they do not propose much that is innovative or different outside of this.

The interviews also revealed some other differences. Party members often spoke about the home visits women conducted. During election periods, women are the most effective door-to-door campaigners, so both parties leverage women for this purpose. CHP party members did not talk about women's charity work as much as those of the AKP and in fact accuse the AKP of manipulating charitable intentions in an effort to "buy" the votes of the disadvantaged.

Table N°2. Perceptions of Women's Auxiliaries

	AKP		CHP	
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
There should be women's auxiliaries	12	9	5	7
There should not be women's auxiliaries, but the conditions of the Turkish society make it necessary	0	6	4	7
There should not be women's auxiliaries	0	1	1	1
Women's auxiliaries make home visits	6	4	3	3
Women's auxiliaries do charity work	5	5	2	2
Women's auxiliaries provide training	1	5	3	4
Women's auxiliaries help women earn money	0	3	1	3
Women's auxiliaries safeguard secular values	0	0	2	3
Number of interviews	12	16	10	15

The table above shows some striking patterns: Most notably, the opinions of AKP women more closely resemble those of both men and women from the CHP than they do the opinions of men from their own party. For instance, some female members of the AKP, very much like the members of the CHP, stress that current conditions of Turkey are what make the existence of women's auxiliaries necessary. Furthermore, in both the parties, there are members who are totally against the existence of women's auxiliaries. A female member of the party directorate in the municipal organization (a 32-year-old lawyer) as well as a male member of the party directorate in the district organization of the CHP (57-year-old university graduate) represent this group. According to these two people, the existence of women's auxiliaries creates distinctions among party members that resemble class distinctions. In the AKP, a female vice-president of the youth auxiliaries in the municipal organization (27-year-old college graduate) has similar ideas. According to this young woman, the existence of women's auxiliaries is "absurd", because women already work with men.

Regarding women's activities, the AKP and the CHP have some ideological differences. For example, female members of the AKP are mainly concerned with family and conservative values, whereas female members of the CHP maintain

Kemalist and secular values. Also, women's activities in the AKP are less nationalistic than those of the CHP. However, as far as the home visits, training and other organizations directed towards women are concerned, the AKP and the CHP are very much similar. This is not surprising at all, because several facts influence both of the parties the same way. These include the influence of Islam, the Mediterranean culture, the rapidly growing economy and the Turkish political culture in general. They nudge the parties towards each other, despite ideological differences, women involved in politics on both sides of the divide look quite alike.

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