



Global Gender Equality Norm and Trade Unions in Turkey: Local Contestations, Rival Validations, and Discrepant Receptions

Türkiye’de Küresel Cinsiyet Eşitliği Normu ve Sendikalar: Yerel İhtilaflılıklar, Rakip Olumlamalar ve Uyumsuz Benimsemeler

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Abstract

Gender equality is a global norm, and the existing norm mechanisms attribute to trade unions globally a stakeholder position in norm diffusion and promotion. This is well-articulated in the official documents and the institutions within the United Nations (UN) equality regime that collaborates with both the local and the international unions accordingly. Complementarily, local trade unions collaborate with the UN bodies and international trade unions in the diffusion of gender equality to their localities. Nevertheless, this multi-layered process is disrupted by local contestations, with bold consequences for the proper functioning of the equality norms. This paper is a scrutiny on the practice of the contestation on and the interruption of the functioning of the gender equality norm, with a particular focus on trade unions in Turkey. In the country, despite that trade unions have been well-integrated into the global gender regime and mechanisms; therefore, despite the existence of an uninterrupted norm flow regarding gender equality to the labour space, the trade unions offer competing interpretations, driven by their differing and even conflicting politico-cultural positioning. Within the paper, this process of interruption and its consequences for the broader functioning of the norm within the country have been thoroughly elaborated. Regarding the source of data in the research, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the union representatives, and we also extensively used the unions’ own publications and documentations.

Keywords

Gender equality, Global norm regimes, Norm diffusion, Norm contestation, Trade unions

Öz

Cinsiyet eşitliği küresel bir normdur ve mevcut norm mekanizmaları, küresel olarak sendikalara norm yayılımı ve teşvikinde bir paydaş konumu atfeder. Bu, Birleşmiş Milletler (BM) cinsiyet eşitliği rejimi kapsamındaki resmî belgelerde ve yerel ve uluslararası sendikalarla iş birliği yapan BM Sistemine bağlı kuruluşlarca açıkça ifade edilmektedir. Bunu destekler şekilde, yerel sendikalar da toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin kendi yerelliklerinde de yaygınlaşması ve benimsenmesi hususunda BM organları ve uluslararası sendikalarla iş birliği yaparlar. Bununla birlikte, bu çok aşamalı ve birbirini destekler şekilde ilerleyen cinsiyet eşitliği normunun yayılımı süreci yerel ihtilaflar ve çekişmeler sebebiyle akamete uğramaktadır. Bu makale, Türkiye’deki cinsiyet eşitliği üzerine sendikal aktivizm örnek incelemesiyle, yerel ihtilaflılıkların küresel cinsiyet

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eşitliği normunun yereldeki işleyişine ilişkin etkilerini araştırmaktadır. Öyle ki ülkede sendikalar küresel cinsiyet rejimine ve mekanizmalarına istekli bir şekilde entegre olmuş olmalarına ve bu nedenle, emek alanına toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği konusunda kesintisiz bir norm akışının sağlanmış olmasına rağmen, sendikalar, farklı ve hatta çatışan siyasi-kültürel konumlanmalarından hareketle, ilgili norma ilişkin rakip yorumlar sunmaktadırlar. Çalışma da bu rakip anlatıların norm benimseme süreci için sonuçlarını sorgulamaktadır. Çalışma kapsamındaki veri toplama sürecinde ülkedeki önde gelen sendika federasyonlarının kadın birimleri temsilcileriyle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiş, ayrıca sendikaların kendi yayınlarından ve dokümanlarından da yoğun bir şekilde faydalanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Cinsiyet eşitliği, Küresel norm rejimleri, Norm yayılımı, Norm ihtilafılığı, Sendikalar, Türkiye

Introduction

Norms are contested settings (Wiener, 2007). Their emergence is far from being a product of harmonious and accordant relations. Entrepreneurs fight for making their value-added ideas get institutionalised through global or regional governance processes. Their reception and validation are as well conflictual – actors globally do not readily show consent on what makes an idea universal or globally binding, they even antirepreneurially put their own counter norms into circulation (Bloomfield, 2015; Acharya 2013). Relatedly, norms are not stable settings (Krook & True, 2012; Engelkamp & Glaab, 2015). They are often transformed in the very process of circulation, the meanings they attain become determined by contextual validity factors, and this culminates in the norm promoting and norm receiving actors' coming to attribute different meanings to norms (Wiener, 2004, 2007; Deitelhoff & Zimmermann, 2018; Tabak, 2021). This discrepancy would become a case both in global normative discussions and in intra-local communications for validation during localisation (Acharya, 2004; Tabak, Erdoğan & Bodur-Ün, 2022).

For the former, the international governance bodies produced regulatory frameworks to prevent such an occurrence thus to increase the clarity of the meanings and prescriptions the norms they promote. However, the institutional capabilities and efforts of the international community often become disrupted by the local validation processes. Relatedly, for the latter case, the discrepancy is due to the presence of diverse and rival cognitive priors and is observable from the very beginning of norm reception. Accordingly, as soon as a norm becomes a subject of discussion in a locality or in the context of a locality (this latter may be taking place in a global/transnational argumentation), the meanings the norm-in-discussion evokes are reflected on by various actors, driven by their own cognitive priors, cultural attributions, or position in local/local or local/global power struggle (Sanholtz, 2007; Acharya, 2013; Wunderlich, 2013; Krook & True, 2012). Even actors with a shared identity may employ different interpretations in (in)validating the norm-in-discussion (March & Olsen, 2004). Norms, therefore, go through a contestation and are subject to validity or invalidity framings (interpretations) by diverse and competing actors.

The global gender equality regime is a prime example of observing the contestations on the meanings and discrepancies in the reception of norms. Despite the global institutional consensus on the validity of gender equality, there still exist globe-wide contestations on the equality norm (Merry, 2006; Verloo, 2007; Lombardo et al., 2009; Deitelhoff & Zimmermann, 2018; Bodur-Ün, 2019; Tabak, Erdoğan & Bodur-Ün, 2022). The contestation is due to the meanings that the gender equality norm evokes for cultures globally and as well as to the global diffusion mechanisms – it is often criticized for imposing a supposedly universal cultural interpretation and language of gender roles and for forcefully replacing the existent local gender norms. The contestations have led to the states' discursively stretching and bending the meaning of gender equality or to the sub-state groups' nationally and transnationally resisting against the imposition of gender equality. Even the ones adopting gender equality, however, shared some of these critiques or during validating the equality norm, as a practice of localisation, redefined the *gender* or *equality* with reference to local historico-cultural narrations. Gender equality, therefore, often came to be encompassing different meanings for different actors in the receiving locality.

This is what we observe in the three major Turkish trade unions' (TÜRK-İŞ, HAK-İŞ, DİSK) implementing gender equality norms (also see Tabak, Erdoğan & Doğan, 2022). While all of them have long adopted gender equality and institutionalised it through official documents and programmes, they frame gender and equality differently, and the meanings they attribute to gender equality therefore to its prescriptions differ and are contestant to each other. This discrepancy in norm receptions stems from the local contestations and rival validatory involvements present within the Turkish society and political circles. These unions' membership to and close relations with international union activism platforms, which act as complementary mechanisms for the diffusion of gender equality to the country, do not change the taking place of the discrepant receptions.

Considering that global gender equality regime attributes to trade unions globally a stakeholder position in norm diffusion and promotion, this paper, in the example of the local trade unions in Turkey, elaborates the dynamics and consequences of the disruption of norm diffusion and adoption by local contestations. Regarding the source of data in the research, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the union representatives, and we also extensively used the unions' own publications and documentations. As part of the former, we conducted face-to-face interviews with the heads of the women's committees of all three union confederations (TÜRK-İŞ, DİSK, HAK-İŞ) – since all our interviewees have been principally responsible for overseeing the women and gender policies of their respective unions, the information they gave provided us with a deep insight and understanding regarding the norm reception dynamics within each union. In each interview, we asked all the interviewees the following questions: 'What do they understand from gender equality?', 'Whether they pursue the global gender agenda or share the global perspective on gender?', 'Whether and how do they implement gender equality within their own unions?', 'What do they think of governmental approach to gender issues?', 'How do they maintain relations with the ITUC, the ETUC and the TUAC on gender equality?', and 'How do they understand other/rival union confederations' gender policies?'. Regarding the latter form of data collection, we extensively made use of the publications of the unions – the items we studied include periodical magazines and journals, leaflets, annual reports and press communications. Some of these were given to us by our interviewees in each union, while others were already accessible online at the unions' websites.

Global Gender Equality Regime and Trade Unions

Gender equality is a global norm and embodies various standards for ensuring gender mainstreaming, women empowerment, elimination of discrimination against women, gender-balanced decision making or state responsibility for gender-based violence, and stereotyping (Kardam, 2004; Ferree & Tipp, 2006; Joachim, 2007; Krook & True, 2010; Zwingel, 2012). It has been institutionalized through a myriad of international, regional, national and transnational governance processes with the participation of both governmental and non-governmental agencies. There are several governance bodies closely observing, monitoring, and reporting its implementation and violation. In the making of it, the non-governmental sector, academic and intellectual epistemic communities, and activist and advocacy networks have been well-integrated into the

discussions upon which a language of gender equality is jointly produced and put into circulation globally. Upon this, we now witness that almost all regional and global institutions and myriad of transnational organisations have built a gender agenda and adopted a gender-sensitive motivation in global communications (Meyer & Prügl, 1999; Elgstrom, 2000; Walby, 2005; Van der Vleuten et al., 2014).

One of the key domains gender equality prompted widespread discussions on has been the labour markets and, in relation to this, the trade union activism. This is because the labour markets have happened to be formed around a huge gender gap, making women persistently falling into a disadvantaged position and relatedly making defending their rights a litmus test for the relevance and weight of gender equality norm. Such issues have been addressed by the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979), the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies (1985), and the Beijing Declaration (1995), key texts constituting the core building block of the global gender equality regime. The vigour of the labour market as a domain where gender inequality is sustained and equally fought against effectively has become more vocally articulated following the Beijing Declaration and when all UN bodies and affiliated institutions –including the ones dealing with the organisation and overseeing of the labour markets such as ILO, World Bank, IMF, UNDP, and OECD– integrated gender mainstreaming into their programmes and policies. All these documents underscore the role of trade unions in gender equality, and the listed institutions collaborate with trade unions as part of their gender mainstreaming efforts globally.

The CEDAW Committee, for instance, made it clear in its recommendations that states are compelled to ensure that “trade unions, which may not be subject directly to obligations under the CEDAW Convention, do not discriminate against women and respect the principles contained in articles 7 and 8” and relatedly requested from “trade unions” worldwide to “demonstrate their commitment to the principle of gender equality in their constitutions” and in the composition of their executive boards (CEDAW/C/1997/II/5; also see United Nations, 1979). The Nairobi document (United Nations, 1985) underlined that the participation of women to the “decision-making and management... [in] trade unions... on an equal footing with men is of crucial importance” (paragraph 117), “[m]easures based on legislation and trade union action should... [avoid] the tendency towards the feminization of part-time, temporary and seasonal work” (paragraph 135), and the “vocational training programmes... dealing with... trade unions and work associations should stress the importance of equal opportunity for women at all levels of work and work-related activities” (paragraphs 170, 128). The Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995), confirmingly, urged trade unions to develop and implement education programmes and vocational trainings for women and girls (paragraph 82), run campaigns for eliminating sexual harassment in workplace (paragraph 126), monitor and report discriminatory employer practices (paragraph 178), work on raising awareness for and eliminating stereotyped gender roles within the family and at workplace (paragraph 180), take action for creating “a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision-making positions” (paragraphs 192, 184, 195), and build programmes for strengthening “solidarity among women through information, education and sensitization activities” (paragraph 194).

The CEDAW, the Nairobi and the Beijing documents all attribute a stakeholder role to trade unions in the actualisation of gender equality globally. Due to this, the organisations within the UN system include gender equality as a primary subject of interaction and cooperation in their work with trade unions globally. The ILO, for instance, works closely with trade unions worldwide to ensure that gender equality and the ILO conventions featuring gender and equality are given adequate concern by and are guiding the campaigns of the trade unions. The ILO country offices organise joint activities and maintain a close relationship with local trade unions in mainstreaming gender equality within both the unions and the labour market. The ILO even organised global surveys on the role of trade unions in promoting gender equality and published reports in the form of ‘resource kits’ to provide “information, guidelines and examples to assist and enhance the efforts of trade unions” (ICFTU, 1999; 2000). This latter was done in collaboration with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) – took the name of International Trade Union Confederation, ITUC, in 2006. In another example, the OECD utilises the TUAC (Trade Union Advisory Committee) in reaching to trade unions. The TUAC is formed to represent the interest of labourers and trade unions at the G20 level and functions as an intermediary structure mediating trade union responses at the Labour 20 (L20), a joint meeting convened with the initiation of the TUAC and the ITUC. The L20 brings together trade unions from the OECD countries, and gender equality represents an essential policy reference in its advocacy. L20 often articulates the necessity of working for reducing the gender pay gap and for increasing women’s participation in the labour market (L20, 2017; 2018).

The international and regional trade union federations also join the global effort to mainstream gender equality and involve in diffusing equality norms to national trade unions globally. Among these trade union confederations, the ITUC and the ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation) conduct exemplary practices of union activism, and both have a strong commitment to gender equality. Accordingly, the ICFTU (ITUC) readily welcomed the Beijing Platform for Action’s attributing roles to trade unions in gender mainstreaming and showed a cheerful endorsement to them – in fact, the ITUC even “lobbied hard to improve the draft texts” of the declaration (ICFTU, 2000, 3). In relation to this, the ITUC closely followed and participated in the UN’s follow-up sessions and review meetings on Beijing Platform for Action including the Beijing +5 (2000), Beijing +10 (2005), Beijing +15 (2010), Beijing +20 (2015) (ITUC, 2010b). Moreover, the ITUC has conducted surveys on women workers and unions “to assess what unions themselves have done to implement the Platform for Action” (ICFTU, 1999), published manuals for guiding and assisting trade unions in incorporating a gender perspective in trade union works, and published a resolution on gender equality defending “the full integration of gender perspectives in trade union decision-making, policies and activities” (ITUC, 2008; ITUC, 2010a, paragraph 15).

As part of the resolution, the ITUC also introduced an action programme involving references to planned actions such as promoting the access of women trade unionists to “education in all areas of trade union work at the national and international levels” (paragraph 16e), taking “affirmative action and other corrective measures as necessary to further strengthen women’s involvement in trade union decision-making, policies

and activities... and taking measures [targeting the affiliates of the ITUC] in the case of non-compliance” (paragraphs 16g, 16l), making “every possible effort to secure the application of the... CEDAW” (paragraph 16t), and promoting “the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action... in particular Section F on women and the economy, at national, regional and international levels and ensur[ing] effective trade union input and participation at follow up meetings” (ITUC, 2010a, paragraph 16u).

The norm promotion and diffusion functions of the ITUC are evident in the above-given resolution. A similar role is adopted by the ETUC, as seen in the ‘ETUC Charter on Gender Mainstreaming in Trade Unions’ published in 2007. The charter relatedly states that the ETUC and the affiliated trade unions “confirm their commitment to pursue gender equality... therefore adopt a gender mainstreaming approach as an indispensable and integral element of all their actions and activities” (article 1). In the charter, moreover, the ETUC affiliates are asked to mainstream gender equality in collective bargaining through “inviting, supporting and training women to participate in collective bargaining committees and negotiation teams” (article 3b), to gather “data on women’s participation and representation in trade unions at all levels” (article 4a), to take measures to deal with the “persistent lack of women in positions of decision-making in trade unions” (article 4b), to assess “the developments in female membership and the reduction of representation gap” (article 4c), and to “commit themselves to clearly earmark adequate budgets and support for women and gender equality policies” (ETUC, 2007a, article 5). The ETUC also conducted surveys, prepared manuals and initiated action programmes for guiding affiliated trade unions in implementing gender mainstreaming and equality (ETUC, 2007b; 2012).

In short, gender equality diffuses to national trade unions through several mechanisms. International conventions encourage national governments to create necessary legal frameworks and ground, and certain institutions and committees monitor state performances. Upon this ground, international organisations in collaboration with international trade unions, work with national trade unions to *teach* them how to mainstream gender equality within both trade union structures and the broader labour market. By the same token, the international trade union confederations both contribute to the global norm building efforts and equally function as a mechanism for norm diffusion hence act as teachers of norms and provide a social environment for affiliated trade unions to get socialised into gender equality and mainstreaming. Nevertheless, despite the joint efforts by international organisations and international trade unions, there appear discrepancies in the reception of gender equality, something generated by local contestations on gender equality.

Trade Unions and Discrepant Forms of Norm Reception in Turkey

Gender Equality and Trade Unions in Turkey

The norm diffusion research often draws attention to the determinacy of the cultural match and cognitive priors in the taking place of successful norm reception and adoption. The gender equality’s diffusion to Turkey represents a confirming case – the successful reception of the norm in the country has been facilitated by women-favouring and

Western-oriented modernisation project the Kemalist governments pursued all along (also called state feminism) (Çakırca, 2013). It is accordingly often articulated that Turkey's ratifying the CEDAW (1986) was an expected development. Accordingly, being part of an international convention on women was thought "to be the 'proper' line of conduct to be followed by a state where... official state ideology had loudly articulated a discourse on women's equality with men and their right to be free from sex-based discrimination" and where the state had a "long-existing commitment to gender equality on the basis of the Republic's secular and modernist orientation" (Acar, 2000, 205; see also Çakırca, 2013; Mello & Strausz, 2011). The ratification, however, was not as smooth as portrayed; it was accompanied by severe politico-cultural contestations regarding the content and the causes of gender inequalities in the country (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017).

The Kemalist political elites utilised gender equality as an instrument to achieve external confirmation of the validity of the country's modernisation and secularisation project, while the conservative block saw it as a means by which a fight targeting the traditional norms and roles represented by the Ottomans and Islam is fought through Western gender norms (Kardam, 2011; Bodur-Ün, 2019). These conceptions of the gender equality norm led to the creation of rival narrations regarding the content and the role of gender equality. The secularist interpretation was challenged by the conservatives within this scope (Tabak, Erdoğan & Doğan, 2022).

It was suggested by conservatives that gender equality does not necessarily denote a political project for eliminating the historical and religious gender values in the country and that equality norm rather confirms the historical values the Ottoman and Islamic civilisation championed regarding gender. This is the ground the conservatives, as a practice of localisation¹, reframed gender equality as a norm evoking gender justice and securing the gender equality's fitting to the local cultural context (Bodur-Ün, 2019). Gender justice, as a locally reinterpreted version of gender equality, thus is presented as compromising the global values with the traditional (mostly Islamic) values in the country regarding gender. Gender justice is in search of a balance between social and familial roles for women and advocates gender equality's becoming more responsive to diverse women experiences, which include various forms of inequalities on one hand, and on the other they are rooted in the differences in nature (fitrat) between men and women (Yabancı, 2016). So, justice argument defends that equality in rights for women may still be secured through continuing adhering to traditional roles attributed to sexes. And this is the reason, gender justice is considered as part of an effort to adopt the global gender equality norms in the local context, as the defenders of the justice norm are also fond of the global gender regime (Bodur-Ün, 2019; Tabak, Erdoğan & Bodur-Ün, 2022).

Nevertheless, these rival positions of gender equality and gender justice have also had effects in the labour market and in the occurrence of discrepancy in the trade unions' interpreting and adopting the gender equality norm. Accordingly, although all three major Turkish trade union confederations in Turkey (TÜRK-İŞ, HAK-İŞ, DİSK) are the followers of gender equality norm and have been campaigning for it all along, the way

¹ It should be emphasized here that gender justice is discussed in this article as a localization practice, as those working for achieving gender justice see their efforts as a local reconstruction of gender equality. Therefore, gender justice should be considered as a localized version of gender equality rather than an exclusionary local norm in competition with gender equality (Tabak, Erdoğan & Doğan, 2022).

they comprehend it differs. TÜRK-İŞ (Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions, 1952), as the largest union confederation in the country, has historically embraced and championed the official ideology and the official discourses on women emancipation in the country. HAK-İŞ (Confederation of Righteous Trade Unions, 1976), known for its pro-Islamist alignment and traditionalist agenda in gender issues, on the other hand, has historically had close ties with religiously motivated politico-cultural groups and comprehended gender roles accordingly. DİSK (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions, 1967), however, is a left-wing oriented union confederation, strongly values women emancipation, and sees traditionalist agendas as hindering gender equality. Therefore, the mentioned politico-social orientations almost definitively shape these unions' cognitive framings and cultural validation parameters concerning the implementation of gender equality – this is the case albeit their adherence to global gender equality regime and having close relations with the ILO, the ITUC, or the ETUC.

TÜRK-İŞ and Gender Equality

TÜRK-İŞ has historically defended the official ideology of the state – it has particularly championed progressive secularism and equally Kemalist nationalism. It was this leaning of the union that provided to gender equality a swift entrance into the union's policy agenda. This is because, the secularism discussions have long involved a bold reference to women emancipation and empowerment in the country, and so did TÜRK-İŞ in approaching to the subject all along. Moreover, as a validatory reference, by the union, Atatürk has been articulated to be the role model to be followed in thinking of and implementing gender equality since he had shown sensitivity to the women's having a voice along with men in political, social or economic spheres of activity in the country (TÜRK-İŞ Dergisi, 2011a). It is emphasized within this scope that the union works for further disseminating the women rights and liberties towards all layers of the society, for enhancing the equality discourses when gender issues are concerned, and relatedly for eliminating the disadvantages women face in participating to labour force and union activism (TÜRK-İŞ Dergisi, 2010; 2011b; 2016a).

For TÜRK-İŞ, gender inequality in Turkey is generated by the dominance of masculinity in decision-making structures, the conservative structure of the society, and the discriminatory perspective prevalent among the society. This perspective confines the roles of women to 'mothers' and 'wives' and the role of men to breadwinners –traditional gender roles–, eventually making the social status, education and career of women negligible (TÜRK-İŞ Dergisi, 2016b, 60-66). Such a viewpoint plays a "definitive role" for women and men "in choosing professions, benefiting from social opportunities, accessing resources, representation in politics/unions and participation in decision-making mechanisms" (TÜRK-İŞ Dergisi, 2016a, 78). It is again this perspective that makes the legal efforts to establish equality get undermined and weakened. For TÜRK-İŞ, the legal struggles for equality require changing the belief and mentality "of 'we are not equal' present within the society" (TÜRK-İŞ Dergisi, 2010, 17-19; 2012a, 137). For this mentality change to take place, TÜRK-İŞ underlines the necessity of the organising trainings on gender equality and introducing gender equality courses in all stages of education (TÜRK-İŞ Dergisi, 2012a; 2018; 2019) – as it is the gender equality that will ensure "the women's equal participation to education, employment, economy and all areas of the society" (TÜRK-İŞ Dergisi, 2012b, 81).

The union has been spending efforts to educate and empower women as part of a specific programme since the early 1980s, starting with the opening of a Women Workers Bureau in May 1981. The establishment of the bureau “was assisted, upon the request of TÜRK-İŞ, by the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO), with which TÜRK-İŞ runs joint works at the time” – the bureau has long proved that it is “worthy of the Atatürk’s Republic and has all along aimed to work in line with his principles and reforms” (TÜRK-İŞ, pers.comm., February 12, 2020). Since the establishment of the Women Workers Bureau, “training seminars, congresses, conferences, symposiums etc. have been provided... to female/male worker/manager members in different provinces... [and] several resolutions were introduced in the General Assemblies... to ensure gender equality in working life” (TÜRK-İŞ, pers.comm., February 12, 2020). Moreover, TÜRK-İŞ, starting from 1993, launched complementary offices on women in each member trade unions, formed a Union Academy with curriculum formulated with reference to gender equality (TÜRK-İŞ Dergisi, 2012c), pays attention to gender balance in recruitments, runs projects for increasing unionisation of women workers, and applies quota in managerial roles for women workers. The latter, however, is the case only in a number of member unions such as the Türk-Gıda Sen as there are no women managers in TÜRK-İŞ head office (Özkuzukıran, 2008).

Since TÜRK-İŞ is the largest union in the country and the one representing the Turkish unions and workers internationally, the governments, including the AKP, have had to form positive relations with it. In return, in order not to lose its dominant position and influence in union activism in the country, TÜRK-İŞ also had to establish constructive relations with the governments, including the AKP. Nonetheless, TÜRK-İŞ also highly criticized the privatisation policies of the governments, the widespread practices of the utilisation of subcontracted workers, the abolition of the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs (it was replaced with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies), the Family and Dynamic Population Structure Protection Plan (2015), the policies supporting the integrity of the family at the expense of making child marriages legal (or even encouraging them) or of whitewashing child abuse and rapes (TÜRK-İŞ Dergisi, 2011b; 2016a). TÜRK-İŞ, moreover, runs campaigns for making nurseries and childcare facilities at the workplace more accessible, for increasing the women’s access to education and professional training, for encouraging designing workplaces and working conditions women-friendly, and for eliminating the gender-based wage gap. TÜRK-İŞ also campaigns against sexual harassment and mobbing at work-place, the sexist legal frameworks, and irregular and flexible works (TÜRK-İŞ, pers.comm., February 12, 2020).

TÜRK-İŞ is a proud member of the ETUC, the ITUC, and the TUAC, as stated in its constitution. The ILO also comes forth as a key international partner. As the largest union in Turkey, for these international organisations, TÜRK-İŞ is of vital importance, and they always include TÜRK-İŞ in their projects targeting the labour problems in the country. In return, TÜRK-İŞ closely follows these organisations and campaigns in the country for the adoption of their resolutions, including the ones related to gender equality. Despite sharing an agenda with the international bodies, TÜRK-İŞ also shows discomfort from specific proposals made by them regarding gender equality. For instance, TÜRK-İŞ holds that the legislations introduced during the EU accession period that encourages flexible

work, which is also defended by the ETUC, may be harmful to the workers in Turkey. Here, TÜRK-İŞ draws attention to “contextual factors” and argues that the legislative changes imposed during the EU harmonization process rule out the country’s social, cultural, economic, or geographic conditions; as, while the flexible work in the EU is facilitating the participation of women to labour force, in Turkey flexible and irregular jobs jeopardize their legal gains and rights. The patriarchal mentality in the country, accordingly, lead the flexible works to be used as means for excluding the women workers from the labour force or exploitation of their labour – and also flexible jobs make women deprived of social security and union rights. For TÜRK-İŞ, therefore, the cultural contexts should be taken into consideration in translating international agreements into national legislation (TÜRK-İŞ, pers.comm., February 12, 2020).

HAK-İŞ and Gender Equality

HAK-İŞ was founded in 1976 and the union refers to the value of nativity (*yerellik*), nationalness (*millilik*), spirituality (*manevilik*), law and justice in empowering labour movement. The union also has a bold reference to democracy and liberties in campaigning. Their merging of traditionalist and progressive discourses defined the union’s both political alignment and gender perspective. Accordingly, the union has readily supported the AKP’s broader political agenda (of initially liberalism and later traditionalism) and followed its gender policies from the very beginning (Duran & Yildirim, 2005). The union, following the AKP’s traditionalist approach, thus incorporated a locally-interpreted gender perspective to their activism.

For HAK-İŞ, gender equality is a subject related to the place of women in society, on the one hand, and to the nature (*fitrat*) of women on the other – this is the reason, HAK-İŞ built its entire programme and discourse on gender equality on the following mottos: *empowered women, empowered society* and *difference in nature (fitrat), equality in rights*. The first motto refers to that empowering women is necessary for achieving a democratic, modern and empowered society. The society here, however, is thought to be formed around both local and universal values – while its universality is related to the country’s integration to the global agendas on women empowerment, its locality derives from Turkey’s civilizational heritage that envisages a decent place to women in society. With reference to this, Fatma Zengin of HAK-İŞ states that

We persistently endeavour to extract new union values from our historical genes and build our future with our historical [civilizational] accumulation, against the efforts with ideological deviations of breaking us from our history. For this purpose, I invite our women to be more active in union organisation to build the future together (HAK-İŞ, 2019c).

Upon this, for HAK-İŞ, the woman in society is a subject directly related to motherhood, making women-empowerment a case for empowering the family, as historical values may suggest. As our interviewee from HAK-İŞ confirmingly stated;

protecting the family requires establishing harmony between women’s work-life and home life and regulating the working conditions of the woman by taking into account the requirements of family life (HAK-İŞ, pers.comm., February 07, 2020).

Therefore, in thinking about the place of women in the labour market, for HAK-İŞ, the work-family balance of women comes before their labour productivity; thus the

family- and work-life must be designed in complementarity to each other, other than as a conflictual duality (HAK-İŞ, 2019a). This is suggested to be a necessary choice because the responsibilities women bear in family and those in working life create a conflicting duality for women and force them to choose either to ignore family or to become excluded from the labour market. The *balance* is the only way, to HAK-İŞ, to “provide the women with equal access to political, economic and social rights and [at the same time to] protect the family structure” (HAK-İŞ, 2019a).

The motto of “*difference in nature, equality in rights*” refers to the union’s efforts to “remov[ing] the barriers before the women’s access to equal opportunities and contibut[ing] to *justice* between sexes” (emphasis added) (HAK-İŞ, 2019c). Here, the union assumes that the idea of gender equality should be able to account also for biological differences between men and women – other than merely suggesting a socially constructed role division, thus championing gender-neutrality. Saying so, the union suggests that the nature-based differences between sexes prevent women to more readily enter to the labour force, and to achieve equality in this thus to facilitate women’s access to more extensive opportunities, the women’s nature-imposed needs such as ‘maternity leave, breastfeeding break, child care’ should be put at the centre of gender equality argumentations. This perspective is also coined as gender justice – a modified version of gender equality. The government as well prefers *justice* other than *equality*, and the approach of HAK-İŞ here is in line with that of the government. Nonetheless, the union prefers to present the *difference in nature, equality in rights* as a third way, in order not to confront the gender equality advocates and also not to be seen as aligned with the government against other unions (HAK-İŞ, pers.comm., February 07, 2020).

Based on these two mottos, for HAK-İŞ, gender inequalities or gender injustices in the labour market are produced by the incomplementarily designed work and family life (HAK-İŞ, 2017b). This incomplementarity, for instance, causes women to suffer from irregular and long working hours, night shifts, transportation problems, and absence of childcare and elderly-care facilities. It, moreover, results in discriminations, such as not being treated fairly in the distribution of duties, getting dismissed first in times of economic crisis, being paid low wages, being deprived of necessary vocational training or being discouraged regarding participating union activities (here the unions are seen as appealing to men than women). To overcome this, HAK-İŞ underlines the necessity of a cognitive transformation regarding cultural codes, traditions, and persistent patterns of practices.

Driven by such positioning, HAK-İŞ developed various policies and strategies within the scope of gender equality. As part of ensuring intra-union gender equality, the following provision is included to the union constitution in 2007: ‘[HAK-İŞ] make[s] efforts to increase the role and status of women in society’. Concomitantly, in the same year, a women committee was established and began providing training on gender-bias and equality to the union staff and members and sending women representatives to international missions within ITUC and ETUC. In its 13th Ordinary General Assembly (2015), HAK-İŞ agreed on ensuring equal opportunities for men and women within the union (and labour market). In the same year, HAK-İŞ published a ‘women strategy document’ and identified the necessary strategies to be followed in mainstreaming gender

equality both within and without the union. The strategies include, for instance, (i) increasing the number of female members by at least 50 per cent by 2023, (ii) increasing the number of women in management and representation bodies, (iii) improving the women committees in the member-unions, (iv) adding women-oriented provisions to collective bargaining agreements, (v) adopting a bottom-up approach in identifying the needs, expectations and demands of women workers and in developing women-oriented policies, and (vi) improving the international roles and responsibilities the union upholds in gender issues (HAK-İŞ, 2015). The Committee also published a manual on gender equality for the use of the sub-committees of the member unions (HAK-İŞ, 2017a). In the implementation of such strategies, as our interviewee from HAK-İŞ stated,

the union appointed women managers to positions such as the finance director, the office of press and public relations, the office of international relations, and the women committee directory; it intentionally sends women representatives to international meetings, places a women member to the collective bargaining committee, oversees the coordinatively working of the women commissions in member unions, and a member union, Hizmet-İŞ, now allocates seats in management to women based on the women membership ratio within the union – the current ratio is 23 per cent (HAK-İŞ, pers.comm., February 07, 2020).

With regard to the labour market, HAK-İŞ cooperates with national and international governmental and non-governmental organisations in running projects such as ‘documenting women-friendly workplaces’ (in cooperation with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services) and ‘more and better jobs for women: women’s empowerment through decent work in Turkey’ (with the ILO), and prepares reports for and lobbies with the government for the introduction of Work and Family Life Reconciliation policies, or campaigns for increasing women participation to politics, thus encourages women to claim leadership positions in local and national government (HAK-İŞ, 2014; 2017c; 2017d). The government officials including the president, the first lady, and ministers regularly join HAK-İŞ’s programmes on women and deliver speeches, publicly declare support, and make the government bodies and pro-government NGOs to run projects with HAK-İŞ jointly. In return, HAK-İŞ has been boldly supporting the government’s policies on women, equality and justice – for particularly the latter, HAK-İŞ embraces the discourses produced by government-supported NGOs on gender justice. Having done so, HAK-İŞ also urges the government to fulfil its responsibilities arising from the CEDAW (HAK-İŞ, 2019b).

The duality in HAK-İŞ’s approach to gender equality is evident also in the union’s relations with international organisations. Accordingly, HAK-İŞ embraces the procedures and principles on gender produced both by the UN bodies and international/regional unions such as the ITUC and the ETUC, and the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC). HAK-İŞ is a member of and sends women representatives to the Economic and Social Council, the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee, the ILO, the ITUC, or the ETUC – the women committee members of HAK-İŞ have also been selected for international duties such as Pan-European Regional Council (PERC) Youth Committee Presidency, ETUC Women Committee Vice Presidency, and PERC Women Committee Board of Directors (HAK-İŞ, 2017a). In the meantime, HAK-İŞ has been participating in the OIC’s works on gender equality. The OIC, confirming the global agenda on gender, makes regular references to discrimination, equal opportunities, protecting the family,

empowering women, preventing violence, and women's participation in decision-making mechanisms. At the same time, the OIC embraces a religious sensitivity perspective and puts an additional emphasis on issues including Islamophobia targeting Muslim women and women nature in its approach to gender equality. HAK-İŞ welcomes the OIC's adhering to the global gender agenda and equally taking a religious standpoint (women nature), which constitute the two building blocks of the union's gender perspective. Owing to this, HAK-İŞ eagerly involves in the OIC's efforts on gender equality both discursively and practically (HAK-İŞ, 2017a).

DİSK and Gender Equality

DİSK is a political leftist union and unfolding and overcoming the exploitation of women labour constitutes the basis of its gender equality programmes and planning. DİSK's position in gender equality is in line with the Marxist-Feminist discourses, therefore principally denounces the exploitation of women labour under capitalism and women's oppression under patriarchy through expulsive (traditional) maternal, marital and domestic roles forced onto women (Yılmaz, 2014). For DİSK, capitalism and the patriarchal system deepen the inequality between men and women, leading to the women's double exploitation both at work and in their social and domestic roles (DİSK' in Sesi, 2016). Accordingly, "women are exposed to discrimination due to their gender in work-life [and] seen as an army of cheap and reserve labour to be employed in precarious jobs and informal sectors" (DİSK/Genel-iş Sendikası, n. d.). On the other hand, "in the society, the primary duty of women is seen as being 'a good mother, a good wife'... making women's participation to work-life come secondary and their labour worthless" – this in return forces "women to work in informal sectors for a low wage under irregular and precarious working conditions" (DİSK/Genel-iş Sendikası, n. d.).

From this comes DİSK's critique targeting neoliberal policies. Accordingly, to DİSK, the neoliberal policies implemented after 1980, while not increasing the participation in employment of unskilled women workers, for skilled women, they created limited employment opportunities and invisible barriers in accessing to top managerial positions (the glass ceiling) – this resulted in sex-based segregations in labour through defining occupations and jobs as 'women's work' and 'men's work' or though creating differences in wages, as women do not receive equal pay even though they produce the same value as men (DİSK/Genel-iş Sendikası, n. d.). This is accompanied by the maternal roles' – imposed on women within the family such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, dishwashing, ironing, child and elderly care – making women's labour invisible and creating obstacles in participating employment (DİSK/Genel-iş Sendikası, 2017). The current government's conservative and traditionalist policies on women, to DİSK, furthered this outcome – as the government encourages women not to refrain from "being around the house, however successful her working life is" and to give birth to *at least* three children (The Guardian, 2016), they exclude women from both public sphere and labour force in the guise of valuing motherhood and through marginalizing the feminine being, body, identity (DİSK/Genel-iş Sendikası, 2016).

As a means to overcome this dual (capitalist and patriarchal) oppression and exploitation and to ensure gender equality, DİSK embraces the motto of "we will not be

a slave to the family, nor will be a servant to capitalism” (DİSK, 2015a). Based on this understanding and positioning, DİSK developed various policies and strategies within the scope of gender equality.

As part of ensuring intra-union gender equality, DİSK issued decisions in its general assembly on gender-based problems and on the struggle for women’s rights since 1991 (following the union’s re-establishment) – for instance, it was expressed in the 13th General Assembly’s final guidance document that “the union stands against all kinds of discrimination and will advocate equality between men and women in all areas of life” and work for increasing women’s unionisation (DİSK, 2008). In 2004, a women committee was established to oversee gender equality and women’s rights struggles and activities and to work for eliminating the reasons preventing women from participating in union activities. Moreover, DİSK makes sure women members are present in collective bargaining negotiations and take initiative (DİSK, pers.comm. 1, February 07, 2020), provides trainings on gender equality and women occupational health and safety to the union staff and members (DİSK, 2015c), organises annual women conferences (DİSK, 2015c), publishes pamphlets and periodicals with special issues on gender and women, and runs intra-union campaigns for making women more visible in higher managerial levers within the member unions (DİSK, 2009). The latter effort is necessary, as DİSK comes forth as the only union confederation in the country with a woman president.

With regard to the labour market and governmental politics, DİSK often urges the government to extract and replace sexist legal provisions (DİSK, 2006a; 2006b; 2006c), requests child and elderly care facilities and health services to be provided as a free public service (DİSK, 2015b), demands domestic labour to be covered by social security and social insurance system, runs campaigns on ‘equal pay for equal work’, campaigns for maternity leave to be increased to at least six months after birth, and demands the textbooks and materials to be cleared from sexist references at every stage of the education and the introduction of courses on gender at schools (DİSK, 2009). Moreover, it campaigns against the irregular and subcontracting works, the limits imposed on the number of women workers required to open nurseries and childcare facilities at the workplace, and legal frameworks such as Family and Dynamic Population Structure Protection Plan (2015) and Work and Family Life Reconciliation policies (DİSK, 2015a).

DİSK is in close cooperation with the ILO, participates in the L20 conferences (DİSK, 2017b), maintains close relations with the ITUC and the ETUC, and declares public support to CEDAW Convention and Istanbul Convention. The ITUC and the ETUC are particularly necessary for DİSK as DİSK utilises the ground for cooperation with these two internationally acting union bodies to expand the trade union rights and freedoms and to strengthen the unionisation in multinational companies operating in Turkey (DİSK, 2017a). Together with them, DİSK organizes joint training, research, and publishing activities. DİSK sees that for achieving class solidarity at both national and international levels and to collectively defend the workers’ rights, the ILO norms, including the gender equality, should be fully adopted and employed as they would increase women’s participation into labour force, reduce the wage gap, eliminate the disadvantages the women face regarding social security, and end the violence and harassment women face in the workplace and at home (DİSK, 2019).

There are, however, certain points DİSK's understanding of gender equality differs from the international mainstream perspectives and implementations. DİSK and the global agenda have differing priorities stemming from the contextual differences. As one of our interviewees stated:

We attend the meetings of the ILO, the ITUC or the ETUC all the time... [and see that] we have significant differences with Europe. In this sense, we are behind Europe, and we have more urgent priorities... [for example,] in 2009, I participated in a workshop of ETUC on gender equality. They encouraged flexible work, which came to be a widespread practice in Europe, and they suggested that it would also be a helpful practice [in Turkey]. However, this is not suitable for Turkey as it would cause for women in Turkey a decline in wages and social insurances, and may confine women to the home. The truth is, they are ahead of us in the field of human rights, and they may benefit from this, but we cannot (DİSK, pers.comm. 2, February 07, 2020)

From this follows DİSK's standing against the family- and work-life reconciliation practices in the country – as aforementioned. Having seen that HAK-İŞ is favouring such a practice, there occurs a clear contestation between the two unions here. There are, however, other contestations manifesting themselves in the unions' approach to gender justice and relatedly to the nature vs nurture arguments in gender roles. For the former discussion, DİSK thinks that the justice argument may be problematic. This is because, due to a “bold reference in gender justice to religious norms”, it may evoke “the superiority of men”, may justify “domestic violence”, may validate “confining women to home”, and may “exclude women from the public sphere” (DİSK, pers.comm. 2, February 07, 2020). For the former discussion, DİSK holds that “[t]he concept of gender refers to social roles shaped by societal, cultural and historical structures, [and is] distinct from biological differences between men and women. When we look at the sexes from a biological point of view, the inequalities between men and women becomes blurred” (DİSK/Genel-iş Sendikası, 2016, 7). For the latter discussion, to DİSK, the oppression women experiences are not caused by nature (*fitrat*), but rather by the society-wide justifications for discrimination (DİSK, 2015b). In line with this, DİSK argues that “the biologically-defined roles attributed to women further and justify the discriminatory practices women face”, which also constitute the ground for the emergence of gender inequalities – therefore, the gender justice arguments involve specific characteristics that may make the gender equality null and void (DİSK, pers.comm. 1, February 07, 2020). Finally, for DİSK, both TÜRK-İŞ and HAK-İŞ “mostly act together with the state”, therefore, weaken the unionized struggle for women's rights in the country (DİSK, pers. comm. 2, February 07, 2020).

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Gender equality diffuses to local trade unions (the stakeholders in the actualisation of gender equality in the labour markets) through several mechanisms, and we saw the functioning of all of them in the Turkish case. The union confederations adhere to the global gender equality regime and collaborate with the UN bodies, the international union confederations and the local governmental and/or nongovernmental sector on the advancement of gender equality in the country. There, therefore, is an uninterrupted norm flow regarding gender equality to the country. Nevertheless, the contestations on and the

rival validations of the content and the meaning of gender equality in the country create discrepancies in the unions' norm reception and hinder the norm's proper functioning.

Accordingly, in the reception of gender equality by TÜRK-İŞ, the equality norm has been validated through underlining its fit to the Kemalist projects of women emancipation and empowerment, and relatedly through denouncing the conservative structure of the society and the traditional gender roles attributed to women within it. The gender equality norm, therefore, came to be the ground, with which TÜRK-İŞ campaigned for changing the paternalistic and patriarchal belief, mentality, and practices in the country, and specifically within the labour market. DİSK, on the other hand, validated the necessity of adopting gender equality through laying a bold emphasis on the exploitation of women labour under capitalism in the country. DİSK, similar to TÜRK-İŞ, utilised gender equality as a legitimate institutional ground also to challenge the detrimental effects of patriarchal maternal, marital and domestic roles culturally imposed on women. HAK-İŞ, while underlining the necessity for the country of integrating the global agendas on women empowerment into policy priorities, persistently campaigned for making gender equality also a ground the biologically-defined roles between men and women can be harmonized. To HAK-İŞ, this is due to the fact that the nature-based differences between sexes make women face disadvantages in the labour market, and to be able to institutionally deal with this, it is essential for the equality norm to account for both socially constructed and equally naturally imposed gender roles.

While all of these unions are fully committed to the equality norm, they offer competing interpretations, driven by their differing and even conflicting politico-cultural positioning, on sexes and gender roles within the society. HAK-İŞ, for instance, offers a religiously justified cultural interpretation of biology-driven gender roles, TÜRK-İŞ and DİSK rather make a bold reference to the socially constructed character of gender thus defend a secular positioning against the religiously motivated biology-driven roles argumentations. Neither the secular positioning on equality has a singular manifestation – while to TÜRK-İŞ, gender equality confirms and adds on the Kemalist conception of state-sponsored women emancipation, DİSK rather sees it as an anti-capitalist standing for emancipating women from exploitation within both society and labour market. Furthermore, for DİSK, the Kemalist emancipatory discourse alone cannot secure equality within the labour market and, equally, the biology-driven role conceptions would only worsen the existing inequalities women face.

To conclude, the discrepancy in gender equality's reception and validation, no doubt, hinders the norm's proper functioning in the country and is one of the reasons why the governments remain hesitant in furthering the efforts for the actualisation of gender equality.

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