

# The Ways Political Actors in Turkey Conceptualize Gender: An Analysis within the Frame of Parliamentary Debates

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**Abstract**—The ways actors having social power interpret gender create a significant effect on gender regimes and policies. In the present study how political actors, who have significant force in the reproduction of gender relations, conceptualize gender, the topics addressed within the frame of gender and how the political parties of varying ideologies in the parliament approach the matter were tried to be set forth. In the study the debates that take place in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) were focused on, and the general assembly minutes documenting the debates made in the parliament from the date of 14/11/2002 marking the start of the 1st Legislative Session of the 22nd Period, to the date of 02/11/2015 marking the start of the 1st Legislative Session of the 26th Period were examined. Examined period covers the 13 years of governing period of the ruling party AKP (Justice and Development Party). Within the scope of the study, the way how gender is being conceptualized in parliamentary debates was examined within the scope of the relations set forth by critical discourse analysis.

**Keywords**— Critical discourse analysis, gender, parliamentary debates.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**G**ENDER is a socially-constructed concept that can under no circumstances be thought of independently from power relations. The concept of gender is defined within the frames of racial, religious and class relations, is not addressed solely on the basis of intersexual inequality and finds meaning within the scope of gender relations reproduced by many actors. The way socially-powerful actors make sense of gender forges a strong effect on gender regime and gender policies overall. Gender policies leave visible effect on all the institutions and structures that relate to gender in real life. Since individuals are the components of this structuring, gender concept reflects its effect on the entire aspects of social life.

In this study it has been attempted to manifest the gender conceptualization of political actors playing active role in the structuring of gender in Turkey. First the way gender has been defined; next domains that gender interact with, gender order and policies have been examined on a theoretical base. The ways political actors conceptualize gender have been attempted to postulate through analyzing parliamentary

debates.

## II. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF GENDER

Gender concept was, for the very first time, introduced in 1968 by Robert Stoller to demonstrate how gender could differ from biological sex. Such a differentiation gained further popularity at the onset of seventies as promoted by Ann Oakley (Segal, 2007:56). Sex is a concept widely harnessed in narrating the anatomical and physiological differences that define male and female bodies. Gender on the other hand is related to the psychological, social and cultural differences between men and women. Gender is closely tied with socially-constructed masculinity and femininity concepts; it does not necessarily have to be a direct output of any given individual's biological sex. Since there exist few biological differences between men and women, sex and gender distinction is the key separation (Giddens, 2001:107; Stoller, 1984:9; Francis, 2008:212; Steiner, 2005:46). Sex is a demographical category identified on the basis of one's biological sex. Gender on the other hand corresponds to being male or female and also indicates the meanings and expectations that the society and culture ascribe to individuals (Dökmen, 2006:4-5; Mies, 1998:22-23). Gender role is also associated with the kind of behaviors expected from men and women (Burr, 1998:11). Gender, once it underlines the social contexts and meanings of unequal relations intersexual, simultaneously rejects the perception that sex is simply a biological trait (Sancar, 2009:176). Rationalizing the discrimination that gender creates on the basis of biological sex, hierarchy, hegemony, reproduction, and naturalization is another socially-constructed dimension to underline (Serdaroğlu, 2010: 31).

In discussions focusing on gender it has been proven that the differences detected between men and women practices are socially constructed with no evident biological foundation of causality. It has also been evidenced that such social construction is not purely ideological but driven by material motives as well, which in effect argues that it is feasible to develop a historical approach on gender relations that can subsequently be transformed. Another detection on gender relations puts forth that these social relations are, first and foremost, founded upon the hierarchical relations between genders. The point hereby is the merge of a relation based purely on domination and hegemony-oriented motives (Hirata et al., 2015:91-92). Powerholder groups pursue to reproduce

the structure that gives them their privilege (Connell, 1987:44). Foucault argues that it is essential to grasp the plurality of power relations that were, prior to establishing authority, intrinsic to the sphere they were applied and then having managed to forge their organizations over neighboring domains. It was underpinned that grasping that such power relations find in one another commonalities that can form a chain or system; or conversely establish differences and oppositions that isolate one from the other-which eventually could lead to better understand the general disposition or institutional transparency in state organs, law formulations and social-hegemony based strategies. Power, being driven from listless points of origin, functions within a set of unequal and fluid relations (Foucault, 1978:92-94).

Power does not necessarily produce towards a particular objective. The product of power generally extends beyond the objective or usually ends up outcasting one group (Butler, 1997:18). Gender hegemony has also been socially pervasive in political economy and culture; state organs and public spheres. Gender authority ranges the whole list of institutions from families and kin ties to civil society. Including mass cultures, elite cultures, academic cultures, opponent cultures and cross cultures it functions in the complete range of cultural and ideological productions. Gender fights invade daily life by impinging upon sexuality, fertility, sexual passion, pleasure and personality. It infuses personal and collective identities, social enmities and intimacies and a common sense that is, though not widely, shared by all involved parties (Fraser, 1995:159). Currently it is infeasible to probe into gender by isolating from political and cultural junctions in which it has, throughout all ages, been produced and sustained. Gender has not always been established in a decisive and consistent manner in various social contexts and it has intersected with discursive racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional identities (Butler, 1999:6). Gender, sex discrimination, race and racism are among the socially-hierarchical and resuscitated structures of the capitalist world system. Gender and race function identically; just as has been the case in race and ethnic origin, gender likewise provided an excuse to assign different positions to men and women on financial model. Gender also lays the ground for different waging between men and women despite working on identical financial positions. Gender also includes establishing a hierarchy betwixt public sphere and private sphere and subjecting women to the latter domain (Pelizzon, 2009:30-31). It should also be emphasized that traditional class analysis claiming that social power relations are determined by ownership relations in production processes remain sex blind in construing the formation of sex-based authority relations (Sancar, 2009:43). Gender policy is supportive of the argument that we frequently encounter with in class-relevant discussions. Formal equality can conveniently be combined with systematic privileges and may fail to be adequate on its own terms (Phillips, 1995:200-201).

At the same time once the ways social world also construct the body as a sexually defined reality and hallmark of the essentials of sexually defining outlook and division; such a

materialized perception of social program, and its application to all things- the physical body above all else- and its biological reality also constitute a different dimension of gender and power relations (Bourdieu, 2001:11). To the end of grasping the way masculine domination is constructed in social power relations, it fails to be satisfactory to merely understand the male hegemony centered in family and private spheres. To gain a further insight on the naturalized and symbolized power relations rooted deeply into laborforce market and public spheres it is mandated to understand even the dominating masculine power and masculinity styles that promote its pervasiveness (Sancar, 2009:17).

As evident gender stereotypes are ubiquitous. Gender identity can be present even in the absence of support from openly-stated stereotypes (Fine, 2011:32). Political and linguistic representation spheres identify the criteria that form and shape the subjects. As a consequence representation can only be assigned to the party that can be valued as subject or in a different saying the preliminary requirement is to accomplish the imperatives of being a subject to obtain a representation agency (Butler, 1999:4).

### III. GENDER REGIMES AND THE GENDER ORDER

The state of interaction between gender relations in any given institute refers to the gender regime (Connell, 1987:120). It is invariably feasible to mention the presence of a sex politics. There exists a hardly adjustable relation from which nobody can be isolated but, on the contrary, leading to authority ties (Agacinski, 1998:30). In modern societies politics is not merely an action realized through legislation and judiciary organs and political parties. The functioning of inextricably intertwined mentalities at all stages of social life is political and produces politically vital results (Acar and Altunok, 2015:29).

Gender is one crucial factor in structuring the opportunities met by individuals and communities and also the type of life tools. Extending from house to the state it deeply affects the roles acted in all social institutions (Giddens, 2001:112). The state assumes a leadership role in the formation and reformation of social patterns. For instance the state administration could support marriage indirectly by offering tax amendments, housing and several other advantageous transactions. On a much deeper level on the other hand marriage in itself is already a legal process and affiliation that is stipulated, amended and imposed to a certain level by the state. Another noteworthy state interference refers to fertility case. In the establishment of social categories in gender order, state once more plays quite an effective role. Based on joint traits and relations, categories are composed as husbands, wives, mothers or homosexuals (Connell, 1987:130). It can reasonably be argued hereby that with respect to a wide array of political spheres viz. family, employment, population, settlement, organizing informal education, supervising health and sexuality state authority has hold a historic and dynamic position in the establishment of gender regime. The process of political penetration of political regimes into private

spheres could be actualized with the development of social politics and welfare regimes (Öztan, 2014:177).

It then goes without saying that effective sex regimes in modern societies are neither uniform nor identical. Gender regimes might have developed more market and family focused with the model of a welfare state or else could have been shaped by local and cultural communes or the presence of wider social spheres assigned to the rule of nongovernmental organizations (Sancar, 2013:26). Structures of a gendered hierarchy of power intersect with gendered division of work and normative heterosexuality as well. Structures of a gendered hierarchy of power not merely differentiate men and women but also classify men pursuant to their social roles and dispositions. The foremost key for the analysis is to construe the way rules, relations and their tangible results offer certain privileges for particular individuals (Young, 2005:25).

When compared to individual sexism, assigning lower positions to women in social institutes or in a more popular saying, institutional sexism leads to more critical results for women (Newman, 2013:205). All identities, gender identities at top, bear the seal of patriarchal power relations in which they were constructed and these identities are limited by such relations. From this viewpoint particular emphasis should be attached to the fact that identities and identity-based policies bear the potential risk of self enclosure and freeze (Berktaş, 2006:113).

As attested by Acar and Altunok (2015:57; Dedeoğlu, 2015: 259-260 ) pillar social tenets and choices have been, since the 1980s partially and increasingly and effectively on the rise since the 2000s, determined with respect to the intersection and framework of neo-liberal and neo-conservative rationalities in Turkey. Accordingly definition of citizenship takes reference from the market and gender roles are defined in regard to family and sexuality. Yeğenoğlu and Çoşar (2014:159) hold the belief that not AKP (Justice and Development Party) alone, but the entire list of post-1980 governments adopted such discourse: liberal in financial sphere and yet conservative in cultural sphere as was the then-popular approach of neoliberal age. Nonetheless what particularly draws attention in AKP model is its Islamist political roots. The authors argue that AKP bears an organic tie surrounding gender policies in a patriarchal style through a neoliberal-conservative alliance (Yeğenoğlu and Çoşar, 2014:167). Yücesan-Özdemir (2014: 117) suggest that social politics regime having developed during AKP rule bears the signature of neoliberalism.

To sum up gender-differences based social relations disunite the inferences between civilian and public, political and social, social and private/excluded/familial spheres and code each one of them separately and ensure the common functioning of the levels in such spheres; set connections and provide assistance to enacted regulations (Sancar, 2013:27).

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

This study attempts to demonstrate the ways political actors conceptualize gender. The issues tackled with respect to

gender have been assessed within the framework of the different ideological approaches of the political parties represented in Turkish Parliament. In this study debates held in Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) have been focused on and general board minutes that registered minutes of parliamentary debates have been examined from 14/11/2002 indicating 22nd Term of the 1st Legislative Year till 02/11/2015 indicating 26th Term of the 1st Legislative Year. The term under scrutiny encompasses a continuous 13-year reign of ruling party of present day, AKP. On the webpage of TBMM key word “toplumsal cinsiyet” (gender) was entered to search link of parliament minutes and within the scope of this scan, it was aimed to make sense of the operations in reference to gender. In this paper, the ways gender is conceptualized in parliamentary debates have been examined within the framework of Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis. In critical discourse analysis Fairclough (2003:209-210) mentions five stages respectively; focusing on one social problem, identifying the obstacles faced in solving these social problems, spotting the actors that would benefit from the insolubility of tackled problem, clarifying the methods that could surpass the obstacles blockading the problem and reflecting personal social position of the individual conducting the analysis. Critical discourse analysis is a method that links to social events, that deals with power relations in a discursive way, that is driven from the perspective that discourse builds society and culture, that underlines the idea that discourse functions ideologically, that establishes a historical connection, that recognizes the idea that connection between text and society is mediated, that defines discourse analysis as interpretive and informative, that recognizes discourse as one form of social activity (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 271-280).

#### V. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF GENDER IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

##### *A. Conceptualization of Gender in the Discourses of Ruling Party*

##### *1. The Way Gender is Defined*

AKP basically interprets gender within the framework of women-related problems. As has been accentuated gender equality is a fairly new concept in Turkey and gender equality refers to equal opportunities for men and women and also the recognition of the indivisibility of values and standards set by international organization (Nimet Çubukçu, 25.02.2009).

By underpinning the fact that fight for women is the same with fight for modernization, democratization and advancement (Fatma Şahin, 07.03.2012) the general framework of gender has been drawn by the party. In the gender based arguments of ruling party “family” sits at the very center. In the Constitution Article 41 titled as “protecting the family” the argument is such “Family is the pillar of Turkish society” and the importance attached to the family by Turkish government is evident hereby. In 2004 AKP authority reorganized this institution as General

Directorate of Prime Ministry Family and Social Researches for the aim of assisting to establish “a national policy on family” (Harun Tüfekci, 18.12.2005).

### *2. The Way Obstacles Experienced in Solving Gender Relevant Problems and Responsible Actors Playing Role in the Insolubility of Problems is Defined*

In AKP discourses “education” grabs attention as a critical issue within the framework of gender arguments. “Gendered judgments” in social structuring pose some serious obstacles in women’s daily life practices and enjoyment of their equal rights. Problems witnessed in worklife are accentuated and in family, responsibilities of women, as emphasized, put a distance between women and worklife. It has also been noted that women are disproportionately represented in politics and for the aim of stopping violence, tradition and honor killings against women it is imperative to fight against “traditional” approaches subverting women to a disadvantageous position. One method to ensure this is marked as providing gender equality via promoting awareness, consciousness and sensation towards women (Nimet Çubukçu, 07.03.2007). Despite the latest developments achieved through the most recent structural and legal regulations on women’s rights in Turkey it is widely known that women in daily life are not yet fully capable of practicing such benefits and the major cause for this failure is the domination of “traditional value judgments” (Canan Candemir Çelik, 11.02.2009). Women problem is not merely an issue relevant of all women alone; but it is a matter that should equally be significant for men since all men have either wife, or sister but a mother after all (Canan Kalsın, 25.02.2009).

Violence against women holds the center stage in gender discussions. It has been widely shared that domestic violence and killing of women are the existential social health problems in Turkey and it is a constitutional duty to protect family union and a holy mission to safeguard human life and prevent deaths (Mihrimah Belma Satır, 25.11.2014). Violence against women and killing of women are even presently one of the most critical problems on globe and these threats imbue women's lives with terror and sorrow and dissuade them from exercising their preliminary rights and liberties (Ayşenur İslam, 17.02.2015).

### *3. Suggestions to Solve Gender Related Problems*

AKP discourses underline that legal regulations play crucial role in the elimination of men-women inequality and gender-based discrimination but it is still mandated to reexamine social approach and behavioral forms, question and modify if need be (Mehmet Vecdi Gönül, 11.11.2003). As stated the most critical objective that limbs Turkey in its aim to solve social problems failure to implement a “project of intellectual transformation” (Güldal Akşit, 18.05.2005). Another accentuated point is that transformation of social values and dynamics in favor of actualizing gender equality necessitates a process that reaches far beyond achieving a temporary change in the decisions and attitudes of individuals. As underlined, to ensure this model of transformation, it is imperative to implement effective

policies in the remaining battle grounds including work and family lives in addition to educational system (Selma Aliye Kavaf, 11.02.2009).

It is noted that ruling party does not limit violence with physical violence alone but attaches utmost importance to preventing any forms of violence that can injure women’s self esteem, and damage her honor. It has widely been repeated that an intellectual model apt to fuel mental revolution among men and question violence orientation should instantly be founded (Türkan Dağoğlu, 07.03.2012). Another emphasis is rendered on the assumption that AKP rule labels violence against women as a humanity crime (İdris Şahin, 07.02.2013). It has also been emphasized that since its establishment AKP rule took action in line with the motto “strong women, strong family and strong society” and in all the policies enacted as of 2002, women's rights have been prioritized and positive discrimination towards women has been promoted (Mine Lök Beyaz, 11.03.2015).

### *B. Conceptualization of Gender in the Discourses of Opposition Parties*

#### *1. The Way Gender is Defined*

In this study current opposition parties CHP (Republican People’s Party), MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) and HDP (Peoples’ Democratic Party) have been delved into as opposition parties. Since in the analyzed term, DTP (Democratic Society Party) and BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) represented HDP’s tradition, discourses of those two parties have also been included into the research<sup>1</sup>. While referring to the issues pointed within the framework of gender concept in parliament meetings it can be argued that discourses of CHP and HDP line are particularly visible.

For CHP gender equality is beyond being the preliminary principle of democracy but also one prerequisite of sustainable development (Nevin Gaye Erbatur, 27.10.2004). CHP is positioned as the strongest warrant of women’s rights and liberties and guardian of women’s revolution (Nevin Gaye Erbatur, 08.12.2007). It has also been stated that gender equality corresponds to the assignment of equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities of men and women in public and private spheres and also to endow women with equal share of visibility, power and citizenship rights (Nevin Gaye Erbatur, 10.02.2009). Another accentuated issue is that throughout Turkey it is not only women and children being victimized but members of LGBT are also left unidentified. It

<sup>1</sup> AKP defines its organization as a “conservative democrat” mass party. (<https://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/akparti2023siyasiyizyonuturkce.pdf>). In its party constitution CHP describes itself as a modern, democratic, left-wing political party (<https://www.chp.org.tr/Assets/dosya/chp-tuzugu-2015-01-12.pdf>). MHP is a political party advocating Turkish nationalism. In its constitution MHP adopted the entire lines of national and moral values of Turkish Nation and in all its political acts it defines the party approach as the political representative of social core ([http://www.mhp.org.tr/usr\\_img/\\_mhp2007/kitaplar/mhp\\_parti\\_tuzugu\\_2009\\_opt.pdf](http://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/_mhp2007/kitaplar/mhp_parti_tuzugu_2009_opt.pdf)). HDP is one of the vanguards in Kurdish politics and the party constitution defines the organization as a political party geared toward a democratic people rule in which all the victims and abused subjects unite to lead a worthy life as esteemed human beings (<http://www.hdp.org.tr/parti/parti-tuzugu/10>).

is therefore pointed out that gender discussions are not merely restricted to women (Ayşe Eser Danişoğlu, 10.06.2014).

In MHP's discourse women are viewed as the basic components of a living and active community and nation. Inseparable from men and kids woman, for thousands of years, bore in her bosom the sorrows, joys and mishaps of everyday life (Behiç Çelik, 10.02.2009). Driven from the motto "Paradise lies at the feet of the mother" and "Mothers are the best lovers" it has been emphasized that Turkish society is in a far privileged position in contrast to other nations (Hasan Çalış, 11.02.2009). As argued in their approach Turkish people receive earliest training from parents and so for Turkish nation the words "ana"(mom) and "kardeş" (sibling) bear priceless meanings and that once the word "ana" is uttered all things freeze for once (Reşat Doğru, 11.02.2009). Gender arguments are settled into a more traditional discourse and motherhood identity of women is paid further credence. Men and women are not categorized as two opposing forces fighting on each other's right or left sides or in front or rear trenches but as two complementary forces existing for partnering each one. Men and women, irrespective of bearing dissimilar tools, traits, tasks and functions, they are the two equal sides of one whole part by virtue of the reason they were created, their humanity and complementing one another's defects (Süleyman Latif Yunusoğlu, 11.02.2009). In the interpretation of gender, discourses closer to biological approach and creation discourses have been equally underlined.

In DTP, BDP and HDP frontline gender is illustrated as; "socially-constructed sexist roles, expectations, attitudes and behaviors assigned by the society to men and women". Aside from the female victims of violence there is a rising demand to include "trans women, lesbians, gays and homosexuals" into Draft Law on the Protection of Family and Preventing Violence Against Women (07.03.2012) which indicates the fact that the way gender is conceptualized by this party extends beyond the framework of women-related issues alone. As stated women are labeled as secondary kind and LGBT members are not even valued as third kind or rendered equal rights (Ayla Akat Ata, 07.03.2012). It is emphasized that without correcting gender inequality no other equality would truly be equal (Sebahat Tuncel, 10.02.2009). Since this very present day male-dominated system and intellect labeled feminism as "male hatred" whilst in reality feminism equates with analyzing the society from the ideology of women's salvation and women's perspective (Sebahat Tuncel, 07.03.2012).

## *2. The Way Obstacles Experienced in Solving Gender Relevant Problems and Responsible Actors Playing Role in the Insolubility of Problems is Defined*

In CHP's discourse it has been argued that on the entire society and among the heads of the state at most the widespread perception is assigning women with the tasks of child-bearing, caring after husband and kids, completing domestic chores. They argue that this is quite an outdated approach and demands to be corrected instantly, as the key

problem to solve (Sedef Küçük, 22.07.2014). Confinement of women to second-class citizenship and denying equal opportunities in public sphere and education, tolerating violence against women, legitimatizing the killing of women with the sick mentality of "she found what she deserved" are the greatest obstacles impeding women to take equal share in life itself. As emphasized historical, religious, social, and economic dynamics lay the ground for the rise of such a low mentality (Sedef Küçük, 22.07.2014). Modern countries have adopted women-centered approaches to correct gender inequality whilst Turkey still favors a family-centered approach. It is recognized that family indeed matters, but still, attributing the existential cause of women to motherhood and partnership alone (Sedef Küçük, 07.03.2012) is open to discussion.

Assessments of CHP on the new regulations on gender are evidently critical of the practices of government hence from this viewpoint CHP, in addition to the listless factors playing role in the insolubility of pervasive problem, government itself is the number one propeller of problem. In CHP's discourse it is claimed that including but not limited to AKP Government, all right-wing governments, irrespective of their claims to guard family, have failed to be sufficiently attentive to protect or boost the welfare (Canan Arıman, 10.11.2004). Government is accused of failure to show a determined attitude towards gender equality and even worse it is blamed for pumping the society with "a woman's place is home" message and spreading a sexist and male dominated narrative to all spheres of life (Sedef Küçük, 11.10.2012). Gender is described as a political system and it is criticized that while on one hand radical practices of religion are promoted and child marriages are licensed, on the other hand ironically women are supposedly planned to be integrated into all aspects of life, which in reality fails to solve the existential problem of women. In such a mentality valuing marriage as the pivotal element of life cycle, the raped victim is forced to marry her rapist (Sena Kaleli, 22.10.2013) which unquestionably exemplifies the problems related to the social organization of gender. President's statements as "men-women equality is against the nature, motherhood is a woman's highest duty", and a similar remark from Vice Prime Minister "women have to be morally superior than men and never ever laugh out loud in public", or Minister of Health's claim that "motherhood is the one and only career option that women have to focus" are also on the same page with this mentality and ironically in Turkish Language Institute dictionary the term "available" is equated with "a women open to flirting". All the practices explained above clearly contradict the equality discourses of the government (Sedef Küçük, 11.03.2015).

It is acknowledged that CHP puts its best efforts to correct all legal practices behind gender inequality (Canan Arıman, 07.12.2004). As regards honor-tradition killings against women, members of CHP in Research Commission claimed that "even now there are legal regulations in our laws that seek to control female body and dearly costing their lives. We must take action to change such regulations, any structures

and laws that prevent liberation and equality of individuals” The governing party responded this way “we have no such practices in our party policy” (Canan Arıman, 19.12.2006). Although the initial motive was to term Committee on Equality for Women and Men it was, upon pressures of AKP representatives, titled as Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men (Nevin Gaye Erbatır, 25.02.2009) is criticized by CHP and it is claimed that the amendment clearly originated from the intolerance against men and women equality, hence it was far from being an innocent change of name (Canan Arıman, 25.02.2009).

In the arguments CHP proposed within the framework of gender, violence against women constituted a major dimension. Violence against women is categorized as one of the violations of human rights most widely and frequently experienced type of abuse by female population (Nevin Gaye Erbatır, 26.04.2007). The issue of education is also one hot topic pervading gender discussions. Schools are, regardless of their level, marked as the pillars of infusing stereotypical judgments and debilitating views against women among male and female students. It has also been argued that education also serves to reproducing patriarchal culture and ideology. Another discriminatory educational act against women is marked as segregation that is ubiquitous in course books and teaching materials (Nevin Gaye Erbatır, 26.01.2006). Sexist roles in worklife are criticized and it is noted that such discrimination forces women to cope with a syndrome namely “glass-ceiling syndrome” (Nevin Gaye Erbatır, 04.02.2011).

One different issue that CHP questions within the framework of gender is the relation between “media and gender”. It is criticized that via manipulating media products the subservient position of women within male-dominated society is further strengthened and reproduced (Nevin Gaye Erbatır, 10.07.2008). Additionally sexist language that reproduces gender is also one other problematic approach.<sup>2</sup>

In MHP’s discourse, gender based problems are ascribed to the political mentality that, in all stages of history, dominated the state and society, administration types, religions, ideologies, a range of concepts that included women or institutions which women personally interacted with have been equally effective factors in this shaping and throughout all ages such factors collectively designated women’s socio-cultural, economic and political role. It has been underlined that paid employment is the best method ever to make any woman more visible outside her domestic circle, to participate women as active individuals of society and pave the way to access social, cultural and political rights and equal opportunities. In these reviews government policies received the criticism and it was advocated that during AKP reign moral and national values were exploited to serve the party’s political interests (Şenol Bal, 10.02.2009). In a range of

domains including worklife, higher education and politics male pressure and enforcement of tradition still heavily dominate women. It is underlined that the very origin of the problem dwells on male mentality and unless the way people think is changed and improved, equality between genders can never be achieved (Beytullah Asil, 11.02.2009).

On the platform of gender violence is accentuated as another problematic concern and violence against women is lent credence. Violence has been classified as a public health problem (Ruhsar Demirel, 07.03.2012). It is underscored that violence can be remedied to some degree only after integrating men to the process since in Turkey it is still men alone who exploit women for political motives and shares (Ruhsar Demirel, 25.11.2014). They claim that MHP as a party strongly opposes to all forms of violence including but not limited to violence against women or needy ones (Ertuğrul Kumcuoğlu, 25.11.2008).

DTP, BDP and HDP co-platform advocate that male-dominated system has, for ages, reformulated the wheels of politics, economy, culture and language to the best interests of men. They argue that family model born out of this traditionalist approach fails to solve the problems of twenty first century (Sebahat Tuncel, 07.03.2012). Just because women are endowed with the privilege of fertility does not justify women’s domestic-incarceration and it should never be thought that, “yes, whenever a woman gives birth her rightful place is then home” (Ayla Akat Ata, 27.01.2011).

In DTP, BDP and HDP co-discourse one of the key actors responsible for the insolubility of gender problems is government. Government policies are continually targeted points of criticism. Gender clichés are manipulated to suppress women (Gültan Kışanak, 22.12.2008), and by fueling a discussion with the statement “men and women cannot be equal” it is aimed to mislead the general public (Sevahir Bayındır, 25.02.2009). Replacing the name of Committee on Equality for Women and Men with Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men (Pervin Buldan, 11.02.2009), and omitting the word “woman” in the full title of “Ministry of Family and Social Policies” are rather disputable practices and such practices simply translate to the fact that in the eyes of government women are not autonomous individuals but family members alone, hence unequal treatment towards women is prompted by the state administration itself (Sebahat Tuncel, 14.12.2011). Government is truly busy with projects that fortify subservient and secondary class role assigned to women who are merely confined to domestic circle (Sebahat Tuncel, 07.02.2013). One other criticism is that gender concept advocated by AKP administration is far from being neat. In the previous legislative term, “gender ” concept to stop the violence against women was withdrawn unanimously by female representatives of AKP and that it then became evident this concept was, for some representatives, equated with the concept of “homosexuality” (Sebahat Tuncel, 06.03.2013).

It is claimed that AKP Government administers a suppressive policy that eliminates the rights and liberties of women as free individuals; that denies women’s identity &

<sup>2</sup> “Initially language should have been changed. As all you know no one uses “bayan” (Mrs.) term any longer but prefer to say, “women”. Besides gender equality has penetrated into dictionaries as one basic part of human rights. For instance no one uses the word “bilim adamı” (science man) but chooses “science person” as a far better expression now” (Ayşe Gülsün Bilgehan, 13.11.2013).

body and self will thus sparing almost no human right for women and bolstering traditional family structure in which a conservative, oppressive and hegemonic masculinity sphere is exercised. It is also remarked that all Turkish governments have, during their reign, promoted their party politics toward sanctifying family structure and linking female identity with domestic circle but AKP's motivational discourse on breeding 3 kids at minimum and barring the practice of abortion which are allegedly geared toward "continuation of family structure with the help of government interferences" are no longer merely confined to theory but already have been put into practice through legal policies (Selma Irmak, 14.12.2014).

On DTP, BDP and HDP co-platform violence is one of the prioritized topics within the framework of gender concept. Violence is not treated with respect to violence against women and government party is harshly criticized in violence-relevant discourses as well. Male-dominated ideology in social structure is labeled as the foundational origin of violence against women (proposal on enacting a parliament research, 08.06.2010). The argument favoring that "what happens in family stays in the family" and the solution for the domestic problems should be sought after in family dynamics, as argued by the Government, has been criticized (Ayla Akat Ata, 07.03.2012). Social inequalities are signaled as the original causes of violence. It is accentuated that no men can have a word of right on any woman's body and women themselves are the righteous determinants of their future plans. Female body intervention by men is also categorized as a form of violence. Violence against women is not a female problem but rather a male problem since men themselves are the perpetrators of violence crimes against women (Sebahat Tuncel, 25.11.2010). Violence directed at LGBT agencies is problematic and a homophobic stance is being thus expostulated (Sebahat Tuncel, 22.11.2011).

Education is another topic being elaborated within the scope of gender. School setting and school education is considered as a social domain in which gender roles are reproduced and male authority is promoted. In Turkey elementary education and high school education curriculums in particular manifest the bolstering of sexist, masculine, conservative, militarist and even at times hatred speech (proposal on enacting a parliament research, 04.08.2014). Media organs are also signaled as an origin of gender related problems. It is claimed that media employ a language that further blazes violence, sexism, and nationalism (proposal on enacting a parliament research, 02.06.2010).

### *3. Suggestions to Solve Gender Related Problems*

To solve the ubiquitous gender related problems CHP suggests that equality practices should decisively be prioritized as one major component of national policy (Nevin Gaye Erbatur, 27.10.2004). First and foremost of all gender equality needs to be secured by effective laws and thus the gate to social transformation could be left widely ajar. It should however always be noted that gender equality can never be maintained via laws alone but with the implementation of mentality transformation for the enactment

(Nevin Gaye Erbatur, 26.04.2007). In any given society unless gender equality perspective were widely shared by all members, it would simply be unrealistic to mention the presence of human rights or actual democracy (Necla Arat, 11.02.2009). To start with women should be educated about the fact that they are equal members of society as men who should not simply enjoy further rights just because of their manhood (Nesrin Baytok, 11.02.2009). In Turkey top-notch problematic domains as regards gender equality are listed as education, worklife, violence and political participation and mandated changes in school curriculums need to be initiated to enable the internalization of gender equality starting from preschool age and courses on gender equality and fight against violence toward women be integrated into primary education, high school and higher education curriculums (Nevin Gaye Erbatur, 08.12.2009). In parallel with the rise in a woman's education level she can grasp the tools to move beyond enforced identities and those who have zero tolerance for a free society or zero sympathy for women who refuse to subvert to their assigned roles should be spotted more transparently (Sedef Küçük, 25.11.2014). In an attempt to solve the prevailing problems gender sensitive budgeting is highly valued (Nevin Gaye Erbatur, 27.02.2008; Tekin Bingöl, 11.02.2009). Another issue treated with respect to gender platform by CHP is city and gender. To ensure convenient access of women to city services, urban service providers are mandated to offer services that can fulfill the essentials of gender equality (Nevin Gaye Erbatur, 02.07.2008).

In regard to violence, which is another widely-discussed issue within the framework of gender, it is accentuated that violence against women could not be prevented via law enactments alone but could be feasible by altering the mental map of children from the very onset (Aylin Nazlıaka, 09.02.2012). Integrating gender, human rights for women and gender equality courses to primary and secondary education curriculums would offer major breakthroughs in the transformation of social mentality (Ayşe Nedret Akova, 07.03.2012).

MHP, in view of gender related problems, notes that gender based roles mirror authority relations and legitimize male hegemony over women. Gender-based discrimination has been utilized as a tool and reproduced in any given male-dominated linguistic and cultural setting and in both social and private spheres as the foundational bearers and this is a problematic practice, as argued by MHP. Failure of government to alleviate or prevent prevalent violence in both public and private spheres or to generate effective policies against gender discrimination simply added more fuel to the already burning flames on violence against women. Releasing the chains of male-dominated social perspective would not only boost life standards of women alone but effectively climb men's standards too (proposal on enacting a parliament research, 25.11.2014) which is one of the solutions offered by the party. Being man and woman is known to be a biological classification and yet once we dig into the issue from the perspective of owning and using the rights and exercising the

equal rights it surfaces that with respect to a list of terrains viz. education, health, employment and political participation women have not been provided with the equal opportunities which in turn create a social problem for women and the very same causes also lay the ground for violence against women. MHP's preliminary objective is identified as forging a country in which all members are treated equally and in their attempt to ensure such equality the focus of their basic approaches centers around actualizing the kind of policies structured by women. It is claimed that gender equality is not related to adapting to male values but indicative of gender equality, equal rights for men and women, and new and just relations that are established on the basis of equal liabilities and opportunities (Ruhsar Demirel, 22.11.2011).

On DTP, BDP and HDP co-platform it is advocated that all masculine values must be reconstructed from the top to the toe after performing a thorough analysis and discussion. It is of high necessity to suffocate male mentality. All women should question the workings of capitalist and modernist system and male authority and save themselves from being subjected to men and succeed in going back to their inner nature (Aysel Tuğluk, 10.02.2009). They also claim that by redefining all the habits of the system based on securing gender equality, the language infused by the system and femininity & masculinity roles a new approach and mentality for life should be adopted. It is also underlined that battle to ensure equal rights for women should not merely be considered as women's duty and men should put as much effort as women to warrant equal treatment toward women (Sebahat Tuncel, 10.02.2009).

To safeguard gender equality it is suggested to set a largely autonomous ministry named as "Ministry of Women". In all school curriculums starting with primary school the kind of discriminatory approach that upgrades manhood and warship as male traits but degrade women as passive entities suffering, giving birth and looking after husband and kids should thoroughly be eliminated to launch some critical reforms (Gülser Yıldırım, 21.02.2015). Law on Political Parties should be set free from its masculine character and a new Law on Political Parties that would control the democratic administration order in Turkey need to be concocted (Sebahat Tuncel, 11.02.2011) in an attempt to provide solutions for the dominant positional problems in women's political life. In budget preparations it is demanded to adopt an inter-gender equality perspective on a general political platform (Sebahat Tuncel, 25.12.2008). Gender based statistics is (Ayla Akat Ata, 25.11.2008) another issue that has been led credence.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to unveil gender perceptions and policies of the political actors in Turkish Parliament.

The study manifested that governing party, AKP, treated the concept of gender from the perspective of women's problems, interpreted gender within the framework of a biological approach foremost of all and paid less attention to the socially and culturally constructed dimensions of gender.

In discussions centered around gender, different sexual orientations and relevant policies are invisible. Hegemonic masculinity discussions that preserve a large space in gender discussions also fail to stand out in party discourses. Despite the attempts to make visible the focus on woman as an autonomous individual, family receives larger predominance in gender discussions and family-centered discourses become further accentuated. It is also pinpointed that in the face of existing problems related to gender a social-based mental transformation is urgently needed.

CHP and HDP tradition do not treat gender within the framework of biological approach but attempt to interpret gender as a socially and culturally constructed set of roles assigned to men and women. In HDP tradition and CHP's gender policies different sexual orientations are visible. CHP and HDP tradition criticize government party's attempts to subordinate women-centered approach while superordinating a family-centered approach. Party members also hold the belief that patriarchal mentality demands to be problematicized and instead of defining women with respect to assigned traditional roles and ascribing motherhood as the holiest status it should be emphasized that motherhood cannot not the one and only identity of a woman. In their attempt to conceptualize gender, parties that follow HDP tradition deeper question hegemonic masculinity and discuss gender with respect to a list of dimensions such as ethnic, religious and nationalistic. Parties that follow CHP and HDP tradition find gender equality policies of government superficial as they claim that ruling party directly interferes with female body, lay rules on the number of kids to give birth, and deny the urgency for gender equality in regard to the discourses related to government speeches.

MHP in essence interpret gender within the framework of men-women equality and women problems. In gender discussions MHP failed to be as effective as parties that follow CHP and HDP tradition. Men-women equality is frequently worded but still women issue is treated from a more traditional approach, motherhood identity is exalted and family is valued as the worthiest social institution. In the interpretation of gender discourses that are nearer to biological approach discourses are also visible. In their gender and women approach a nationalist discourse is accentuated on the basis of historical references and "Turkish women" term is intentionally underlined. In MHP's gender policies different sexual orientations are not visible. MHP's gender criticism directly targets government policies and attempts to provide some gender perception within the framework of such criticisms.

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