

A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: AKP'S EVOLVING APPROACH TO WOMEN  
ABSTRACT

*The Justice and Development Party (from now on I will identify the party by its Turkish initials, AKP) was founded in 2001, and it came to power in November 2002. The party rose to the power under the skeptical eyes of the Turkish secular opposition,<sup>i</sup> although the party renounced its connection to the religious National Outlook.<sup>ii</sup> Within thirteen years of history, the AKP underwent a major transformation both in its policies and discourses. This study examines policy and discourse change focusing on the women's rights. Why did AKP's policies about women and female body, as well as the party rhetoric on gender policies change dramatically from 2002 through 2015? The claim of this paper is AKP was still under construction until it increased its vote dramatically in 2007 elections – from 34.3 % in 2002 elections to 46.5 % in 2007 and won the constitutional change referendum in 2010, September the 12<sup>th</sup>. During this formation period, we can say the first eight years of the party, and within the delicate balance of global and domestic politics, the party tried to construct utmost possible consent from the different parts of Turkish population. However, once it gained the wide support from different groups in society, AKP became the party that holds bargaining power, and was able to cease its consensus-building efforts. Party, had a more affirmative and democratic approach during the first eight years, at least on the surface. Because they did not want to draw the attention of check and balance institutions. A second idea is that, their attitude was affirmative on the surface however even within the first eight years period, they were covertly injecting violence to the society. This perplexing political attitude of concurrent affirmation and negation was the intricate result of party's two ideological affirmation, conservatism and neoliberalism. This symbiosis of affirmation and negation helped the party to distract the attention of the skeptical groups.*

259. This is the balance sheet of the male violence in the last eleven months of 2015. 39 percent of them were killed by their husbands, 35 percent of them were killed for they wanted to divorce, break up or refused to reunite. 74 percent of these murders conducted with different types of firearms. Bianet is a Turkish independent online news agency. Their women and LGBTI news branch, follows up and updates a list of crime against women. Apart from the deaths, the latest update of the news website reads as 122 women were raped, 190 women forced to prostitution, 343 women injured by men during a fight or an attack, 195 women were molested.<sup>1</sup> These cases are recorded based on the data and archives of Ministry of Justice in Turkey, and these are “only” the recorded ones. Crime against women is not a particular phenomenon for Turkey. However, the fact that female murders increased by 1400 percent, i.e. multiplied by 14, during the AKP rule is a peculiar phenomenon of contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> <http://bianet.org/bianet/kadin/169771-erkekler-kasim-da-23-kadin-oldurdu>

Turkish politics.<sup>2</sup> Turkey is one of the countries in which crime against women receives inadequate address by law, or political and cultural practice and since 2011, women is “literally” absent from the social policy agenda as well: Ministry of Women, Children and Social Policies was changed into Ministry of Family and Social Policies and its involvement in women politics is reduced by the 6223 numbered empowering act legislated in the parliament. Without a dedicated state policy, the achievements of a decades of emancipation movement in Turkey is doomed to vanish. A Turkish Feminist Organization, Platform to Stop Female Murders, published a report at the end of October 2015. They underlined the causes and incentives which gave such a steep acceleration to the female causes: social and economic inequalities created vulnerable groups in society, women is at the top of these vulnerable groups. Restriction in the number and scope of social policies enhancing women is on issue, on the other hand; practice of the current criminal law helps men to parry the outcomes of their crime.<sup>3</sup> The report also lists the prevalence of the hate speech against women in the society, and sexist discourse of politicians as significant triggers.<sup>4</sup>

At this point, I would like to remind one event from 2015 New Year’s Eve. Mehmet Muezzinoglu, Minister of Health, created another controversy on gender roles on the New Year’s Eve. During a hospital visit to congratulate the parents of the New Year’s first baby; the minister gave short but a controversial speech. First he congratulated the father of the baby. As the new-born was the third baby of the family, minister said: “Good, you are one of those who follows our word” reminding the “at – least – three children” propaganda of the President Tayyip Erdogan. Minister of Health continued that the women have the chance to attain the most important career in the world which is the motherhood and women should not favor any other career path before it. In other words women should not value their

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/kadin-cinayetleri-7-yilda-yuzde-1400-artti-1030040/>

<sup>3</sup> Most of the men abused the “good conduct abatement” to benefit reduction in their penalty.

<sup>4</sup> <http://kadincinayetlerinidurduracagiz.net/veriler/2420/kadin-cinayetlerini-durduracagiz-platfomu-kadin-cinayetlerini-raporladi>

professional career as the central theme in their life. Minister completed his visit by stressing again the natural birth is the most proper and suitable way to give birth, comparing it to cesarean births, for the disposition of women.<sup>iii</sup> Following the opposition by the intellectuals, feminist circles, and female deputies Muezzinoglu repeated his words afterwards: “It’s undebatable that motherhood is a divine career which cannot be denied nor waived. It’s out of debate that mothers can put their professional career in the center of their lives as if the career is more important than motherhood. Motherhood is eternal it has lasted as of the creation until now, and it will continue to exist eternally.”<sup>5</sup> Muezzinoglu also answered his opponents who claimed that the motherhood, birth methods and number of children in a family are private matters of the individuals. Hence, these issues should not be a part of the political and/or public discussion; on the contrary they should be kept immune from the intervention of state. In response he continued: “If someone says that these issues (motherhood as career and natural birth) should not be a discussion topic among politicians; (I will answer) politicians lead and discuss any matter in a country. *As these politicians are chosen by the people, the opponents are either opposing to the people or to the democracy. If one respects to the will of the nation, s/he should also respect to those chosen by the nation*”<sup>6</sup> (emphasis added). There is not any need to apply a symptomatic reading: It is obvious that women are visible in the state’s eye as long as they accept their roles as reproductive mothers of the nation. Their attempts and efforts to follow a career path is needless and not valued. Authoritarian undertone of the Minister of Health’s speech become quite explicit when he claims his right to enter women’s lifeworld. Women has no autonomy over their own body, one of the most intimate decision on how to give birth is intervened. Motherhood on the other hand valued by religious or at least spiritual tone of his speech. Authoritarian state with his masculine

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/27884416.asp>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

language disgraces the women, before the public eye. This discussion took place just a few days after Independent magazine declared the most sexist politicians of the world in 2014. Deputy Prime Minister took the third rank of a worldwide list by his speech on the women's laughter in public. In summary, Deputy Prime Minister indicated that the purity<sup>7</sup> is the most precious attire of the women. So women should value their purity and they should judge well what to do or not to do in the public; for instance women should not laugh aloud in the public which does not give a pure and modest look to a woman.<sup>8</sup> Mid-November in 2014, the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a similar sexist comment on women's disposition saying that the concept of equal rights of men and women are against the creation of God; women are different by disposition – delicate and gentle he says – so they cannot be assigned to same jobs or tasks with men for instance.<sup>9</sup> President also mentioned birth control methods as a way to betray the nation. He indicated that Turkish nation was pushed to extinction by birth control methods and the country needs more babies to promote the young generations.<sup>10</sup>

These three examples unfortunately were not picked from Handmaid's Tale; they emerged in day-to-day events of contemporary Turkish politics. Lately, public opinion witnessed misogynist reports of the President and other prominent politicians from AKP lines and this trend is not exceptional to the previous three months. For the last few years the subjects like gender equality, female body, women's behavior in the public, abortion, birth methods, and family planning were among the favorite discussions fueled by the AKP deputies. To remind, the tension carried to a very severe level by the mayor of Ankara, who is again from the AKP lines and a political figure known with controversial claims. His thoughts against abortion is already well known, during a brief interview - to the question if a woman can have a legal abortion when the pregnancy caused by rape - he replied with this exact

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<sup>7</sup> Deputy Prime Minister used the Turkish Word "iffet" which has undertones referring to chastity

<sup>8</sup> <http://i100.independent.co.uk/article/politicians-actually-said-these-sexist-things-in-2014--xkNiTd-8Ye>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2014/11/141124\\_kadininfiltrati\\_erdogan](http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2014/11/141124_kadininfiltrati_erdogan)

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2014/12/141222\\_erdogan\\_dogum\\_kontrolu](http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2014/12/141222_erdogan_dogum_kontrolu)

words: “Why shall a baby die, if its mother is raped, what is its sin? Mother shall die in this case.” During the last half of party’s rule, AKP does not have a satisfactory affirmative action record on gender politics. The dialogue of the government with the feminist organizations and foundations seems already blocked and not enhancing for the last seven years. When I apply the archives, news and articles I realized the last affirmative action to enhance women social status dates to 2007 and 2009. In 2007, a specialized committee to watch and record crime against women was formally established, with the contribution of public offices, feminist NGOs and academics. In 2009 Commission for Equal Opportunity for women is established. This were the last formal attempts I could reach. Unfortunately, President’s and prominent politicians degrading and polarizing discourse against women becomes more visible when we approach the current date, as the afore-mentioned examples also indicated.

However party’s history with these feminist circles was not in the same direction during their escalation in power. When we take a look at the official party manifestation of AKP just after their formation and before their first election we can observe another discourse:

The cause of endless struggle in our society and major underpinnings of religious sectarian, ethnic and gender discriminations lie in the inadequate rights and freedoms. With the new state design which is based on the human rights, our democracy will gain a universal feature, which will also put an end to the endless struggles. We are going to lead regulations in line with the implications of CEDAW and to fight with violence against women, to prevent sexual and economic exploitation of the women. The protection of the deprived women will be our first and foremost policy.

Hardly one can observe some egalitarian undertones in the party's discourse after 2011. On the other hand, as we look at the period before 2011 and slowly approach to the party formation, we can see explicit reference to the human rights of women, positive discrimination and fight with all sorts of violence against women. I do not mean that the party had a perfect women rights agenda beforehand, they adopted a paradoxical attitude towards

women rights from the very beginning of their power. However, even though the party did not have a comprehensive strategy for gender equality, it was still surprising for a party with roots in National Outlook to have explicit address to human rights.

When they gained enough power for the first time, the party remarkably put aside the vague tones of gender equality, they adopted harsh criticism towards feminism. Let alone adopting a knowledgeable and gender sensitive discourse, their discourse become humiliating and discriminative. Party also stopped building up democratic dialogue with women activists, feminist organizations and businesswomen circles. Given this current outlook, it is paradoxical that AKP had adopted a more communicative approach towards feminist circles and expressed a more moderate language during the party's formation and first two elections in the past. I have two claims at this point;

- After 2007, there is an observable increase in the negative, sexist and degrading tone while the positive elements about gender politics start to disappear
- Even before 2007, the party has a confusing attitude to address women although they have seemingly positive attempts.

This situation gives us a two layered puzzle to solve. First layer is the co-existence of covert humiliation and impediment with the vocalized approval at a certain instance in time. On the other hand, when we take a wider view point and evaluate the party politics towards women with a longitudinal approach, we will observe a gradual change in the negative direction. How this puzzle can be solved out and what explanation gives an account of these two phenomena? I shall start with analyzing the positive elements before 2007. Besides being in close contact with feminist circles and women associations during early years of party formation, one of the most concrete attempts in terms of positive discrimination was the circular letter on elimination of violence against women written by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in July 2006. Circular letter was combined under three subtopics; violence against women, honor killings

and, violence and humiliation in the media and press. Circular letter proposed many suggestions under these three subtopics, some of them can be listed as examples: In business circles employers should practice positive discrimination and should prioritize women candidates in recruitment, public spot movies should be prepared in order to raise public awareness about violence against women and local governments should be motivated to open women shelters in line with the EU regulatory standards. Circular letter also mentions the incentives that should be given to involve higher numbers of women into politics and it states that all the institutions under government house and ministries of health, justice, national education, domestic affairs, labour and social security and general directorate of women's status, with many other institutions like local governments and corporates are responsible for enhancing the situation of women. Honor killings was specially targeted as the most common cause for the victims of violence against women and public institutions were addressed to prepare quarterly reports on their studies to eliminate violence against women.<sup>11</sup>

Another attempt was the foundation of research commission on honor killings within the parliament following the parliament's decision on a specialized working group, on the June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2005. This commission was also named among responsible groups of reporting in the circular letter. In 2004, with the regulations made in the Turkish Criminal Law, made opening women shelter houses mandatory for local municipalities with a population over 50 thousand.<sup>12</sup> AKP passed a statutory decree indicating that opening women shelters is a part of public service which will inhibit domestic violence. Scholars indicate that even though this attempt is in the status of a "statutory decree", it is important that the domestic violence is addressed as a political problem. (Yegenoglu and Cosar, 2014). It is interesting that in the same year, 2004, the party prepared a law draft to regulate the abortion practice which

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/kadin/81622-erdogan-in-kadina-siddeti-onleyin-genelgesi>

<sup>12</sup> This population limit of 50 thousand is raised to 100 thousand; municipality regulations with code number 5393

suggested severe reduction and limitation on abortion rights. Upon the dissent of women associations, law draft was withdrew – later on it is understood that law draft was just postponed for a temporary period. The Commission for Equal Opportunity for women is established within the national assembly in 2009. Lastly law regarding sexual assaults is regulated under crimes committed against the body integrity of the individual which is an attempt to make the relevant law more in line with the universal agreements and covenants.<sup>13</sup>

While these are noticeable attempts, it can be question were followed up or touched to the matter. For instance, only 35 provinces attempted to open up new women shelters, of course this is far below the number of provinces with a population of 50 thousand, even though Tayyip Erdogan never gave up mentioning violence against women, while differentiating domestic violence and honor killings as the most urgent problems to be fought against.<sup>14</sup> The circular letter written by the Prime Minister in 2006, which was appreciated by many different groups in the society, women associations and feminist groups were also in the list. In this circular letter, prime minister openly addressed that women should be an inherent part of politics and it is the responsibility on public institutions and private sector to put incentives to realize this aim. While claiming this, Tayyip Erdoğan never took an affirmative approach towards parliamentary quotas for women, women quotas topic is not a part of internal party by-laws. Whenever woman quotas in politics issue asked, Tayyip Erdogan said that women's inclusion into politics should be a voluntary action on the side of women instead of being carried out by law. In other words if women wants to enter into politics, they may try to do so. However the responsibility to create positive discrimination intensives is not on the shoulders of the state. Tayyip Erdogan indicated in 2007 the notion of quota (in the

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<sup>13</sup> In June 2014, government decided on another regulation over the relevant law, however it triggered public controversy. Activists and lawyers claimed that with the regulations it is more likely to remission is more likely for the abuser. Besides the new regulation is less preventive in attitude.

<sup>14</sup> He also claimed that "violence against women is inexcusable" even on the same day he made highly debated sexist remarks on women disposition.

sense of *parité* of French parties), should not be associated with the women. In the same year, Erdogan referred to lawyer Hülya Gülbahar, the head of KA-DER<sup>iv</sup> then, if she has that much willingness towards women quotas she can migrate to Rwanda where women quotas are put into action. (Cansun 2013, p.214)

I argue that neither party's more moderate attitude in terms of gender politics in the past nor its current outlook towards gender equality can be explained solely over a spectrum of religious conservatism and the connection of the party with its religious National Outlook background. Instead, economic and historical background of party formation should be scrutinized well, as well as the power dynamics of the certain *époque* when the party was formed and rose into power. In order to see how these social, economic and political underpinnings resonated in an unfair gender politics and sexist discourse of the current party politics. Coup d'état of September the 12<sup>th</sup>, in 1980 opened the path neo-liberalization of Turkey. But, apart from its economic outcomes, the coup d'état consequentially strengthened the Turkish nationalism and Political Islam symbiosis in the absence of center right parties whose iconic leaders were imprisoned and again in the absence of a strong left block which was razed to the ground by merciless military violence. AKP is a byproduct of neo-liberalization and Islamization process of the aftermath of coup d'état of September the 12<sup>th</sup>. What is called as "ideological shift or a change in discourse of the party" by one person, can also fairly be explained as an expected and intrinsic character of the party, i.e. in other words they just surfaced and left all the skeletons in the closet. What we see during second half of their reign is nothing but a discovery of the hidden skeleton. The controversial turn is actually an already embedded feature, seeded by the historicity of AKP and destined to come out later on. It is fairly consistent, hence steady, for the party to collaborate with the women rights organizations on one hand; and to try to reign over on the female body and sexuality on the other. For this reason, I will focus on this particular history of party formation.

Within the Virtue Party, which was the last successor of National Outlook parties, the young generation formed a block to push the elderly party elites towards following neoliberal policies and having a more moderate outlook. As they could not achieve to reflect their interests into the party policies; they decided to take over party leadership. This reformist wing was led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Bulent Arinc, lost the party leadership to the experienced and traditional National Outlook representatives.

Virtue Party has shared some of the typical characteristics with other National Outlook Parties: The Party clearly announced its hostility towards the Western Culture and turned their back to all political, cultural and economic ties with the West. The party favored Necmettin Erbakan's idea of establishing alternative Islamic unions rather than EU and NATO, imagining Turkey as a regional power in this Muslim world. Party kept close ties with local religious circles and sects - and especially with the "Nakşibendi" Sect (one of the most hard core fundamentalists in Turkish Islamic Society). Virtue Party, just like other parties in the National Outlook movement, has a dedication in the Turkish – Islamic synthesis, hence stressed nationalist undertones of this combined ideology. And instead of keeping up with the world-wide neo-liberalization trend, they adopted nationalist version of development and focused on the necessity of creating a local industry. Virtue Party followed the tradition of the National Outlook in terms of human rights and democratization; party took these notions as cultural components of the West aimed at assimilation of Islamic values, hence unbridgeable to Turkish culture. (Uzgel, 2009)

The closure of the Virtue Party was the expected opportunity for the young reformist wing. When the Virtue Party is closed for the alike reasons as other National Outlook parties – religious fundamentalism, hampering the laïcité principle of the nation and providing a risk of sedition in the society – it gave birth to two parties. One of these parties was Felicity Party, another ring of the National Outlook Series and the other one is established the younger

opponents; Justice and Development Party. Second represented the new generation of reformist wing that took its lesson from the National Outlook history; what matters is not to rise into power, instead what matters is to remain there. Party had a well elaborated strategy to remain there.

1997 Military Memorandum, known also as February the 28<sup>th</sup> procedures pushed Necmettin Erbakan, to resignation who was the author of the National Outlook movement from the very beginning and leader of the Welfare Party back then. However the effects of the so called “Postmodern Coup”, February the 28<sup>th</sup> events, was less visible yet deeper on that conservative bourgeoisie that have ties with Welfare and Virtue Parties. This conservative bourgeoisie had an opportunity to emerge after 1980 coup d’état and became stronger with Turgut Ozal’s economic policies. The “new” bourgeoisie looked complete opposite of the elite, urban and bureaucratized bourgeoisie of secular background from Adana or Ankara. The conservative-religious bourgeoisie was composed of small and middle size enterprises, usually under educated, and having background in other cities of Anatolia such as; Kayseri, Gaziantep, Denizli, or Konya. The emerging bourgeoisie got politically united under MUSIAD (Association of Muslim Industry and Business Men). MUSIAD always had affiliation with National Outlook Movement, as İlhan Uzgel, indicates that “Refahyol” coalition<sup>v</sup> provided certain opportunities for the group. For the first time in their history MUSIAD enjoyed almost an equal privilege that of their elder, stronger and secular brother TUSIAD (Association of Turkish Industry and Business Men) (Uzgel, 2009: 17) However, again for the first time in their history MUSIAD were that close to pay a seriously big price because of their overt connection with the National Outlook Movement and the movement’s radical actions that prepared the route to 1997 Military Memorandum.<sup>vi</sup> During the February the 28<sup>th</sup> period, business and trade owners organized under MUSIAD, were defined as “Green Capital” and were targeted by the General Military Staff. I am directly quoting from Uzgel:

Turkish General Staff declared lists of certain companies (of Green Capital) and blocked these companies from public tender opportunities. Some of the owners of these companies, who were put under close observation and felt stressed of losing their capital by force, tried to transfer their money abroad discretely and literally in their luggages. As most of them were captured at the airports their money was impounded. (Uzgel, 2009:17)

There were many lessons in this story; after painfully seeing the risks of having close ties with Welfare Party and with any Islamic Radicalism, MUSIAD abandoned its ties with Erbakan and National Outlook Movement. Virtue Party, the successor of National Outlook Movement, was abandoned by its capital base, and they soon became marginal. As I said previously, reformist wing well understood the importance of maintaining the power. With the February 28<sup>th</sup>, they also see the importance of the capital in other words the bourgeoisie's support. Meanwhile MUSIAD leaders started to look for a more moderate political path, which is not marginalized like National Outlook and which is able to mingle with the requirements of global economic system – put it differently, neoliberalism.(Uzgel, 2009:18) Only small religious groups of businessman, like TUSKON and ASKON, remained in the traditional path of national outlook movement.

These two actors – MUSIAD and AKP - matched like jigsaw puzzle in that sense. Turkish Political and Economic scene was supposed to see how these two were going to support each other. It would not be a bold claim to say that, MUSIAD is one of the first important supporters of AKP. With a completely different ideological outlook AKP was ready to go for its first elections: They declared themselves to be the complete opposite what Virtue Party was: They were ready to enhance politic and economic relations with the West and open to seek neoliberal global opportunities. Although they were stressing some elements of Turkish-Islamic synthesis, they definitely smoothen the religious discourse and put stress on

human rights and democratization. AKP defined its ideology as "conservative democracy"<sup>15</sup> in their first party program and stated equal distance to all components of the society, and aim to live in a harmonized democracy. Party's strategy was smartly due fold: i. never lose the religious conservative core of the votes and keep the emerging conservative bourgeoisie on your side. For example, members of the party did not renounce their Muslim belief and underlined the cultural role of Islam in the Turkish society. ii. Never get too radical, never repeat the mistakes of the National Outlook movement. Try to get the approval stamp of different groups in society; eventually secular bourgeoisie and intellectuals, ethnic or religious minorities, civil bureaucracy and maybe even the military. Tayyip Erdogan made metaphoric reference and declared that "He has taken of his National Outlook Movement design shirt". (Kumbaracıbaşı, 2009:180) Scholars at the beginning called AKP as a catch-all party.

Another important component of the AKP policies, is the global support AKP gained due to its consensus building efforts and thanks to global conjecture of the time back then. It was the aftermath of September 11 attacks in US when AKP came into power and culturally speaking *Clash of Civilization* of Huntington was the Zeitgeist. Both US and EU were looking for a model in the Middle East, which can be a democratic state with a Muslim population; hence, that can be a solution for the "clash of civilization", an ally of the US providing a buffer zone. (Yalman, 2014: 26-27)

Young AKP knew that Western support is highly important in Turkey's political history. In terms of relations with Europe, US and even Jewish lobbies in United States, AKP differed from its National Outlook ancestors. "Erdogan and Gul, went to US to start collecting the needed consents even before they came in office. In so called transformation process one of the most important allies regarded to be US and Jewish lobbies in the States." (Uzgel,

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<sup>15</sup> Conservative democracy notion mentioned in the first party programme of the party, currently it can be seen in the 2023 Political Vision part of the web side: [http://www.akparti.org.tr/english/akparti/2023-political-vision#bolum\\_](http://www.akparti.org.tr/english/akparti/2023-political-vision#bolum_)

2009:21) At the end of all these negotiation efforts AKP gained the support of important Democrat Party members like Madeleine Albright, Richard Holbrooke, and Henri Barkey.

The party played its foreign policy card at different stakes very strategically. I already indicated one of them: Capability of changing negative prejudice of the West towards the would-be-party, convincing them of the disassociation with the marginal past and gaining their consent were all important aspects in themselves. As already stated, AKP's strategy was to increase the consensus about the party as much as possible by gaining the consent of doubtful parties.

After coming into power, TUSIAD turned to be an easy gain. The economic power elite was ready to reconcile with the new winners so that their business will run smoothly. After all, the new political formation cut its ties with their dark past, was underlining the liberal economic principles and building up the relations with the West. But above all they promised the stability in politics and decrease in the inflation which was so charming for the economy elite sickened by the years of instable, unsustainable coalition governments.

Support of EU and US was very instrumental in domestic politics, AKP used that international support in a very tricky way at home. AKP's toughest rival was Turkish General Staff which declared itself as the guardian of national and secular values in the republic, which never hesitated to intervene into politics if necessary even by force, and which showed its presence again in 1997, February the 28<sup>th</sup> events. How to eliminate this fearsome and stubborn rival, if they show no interest in reconciliation? AKP used the soft belly of mainstream liberals and democrats. In order to proceed better in EU aquis adjustments within the society and in the Turkish State, Turkey was supposed to clean the remarks of its militaristic past. In order to eliminate the Turkish General Staff's impact on politics AKP applied to "demilitarization and democratization" card in the game, and claimed that they are going to create a more "civil and de-militarized" stage in Turkish history. This attempt had

important rewards which were multiple in number. This action was supported by the West and led to fruitful results in foreign policy. Secondly, elimination of the Turkish General Staff's power was presented as a part of more democratic and de-militarized society project, and a must of EU acquis adjustments. EU membership and the promise of democratization were the exchange items AKP proposed to get the mainstream liberals' consent in overall process of bargaining. Hence, EU membership and US support served for two critical purposes: Firstly for gaining more consent or building up a stronger consensus. Secondly eliminating an old strong rival. They killed two birds with one stone, with EU Acquis process they get the mainstream liberals and democrats and provide the context beforehand for their future attacks on the army. Attempts in foreign policy mixed very strategically in domestic politics. In order not to disturb traditional core of voters, AKP "translated" any foreign policy decision with a very nationalist and traditional discourse to domestic politics. (Cosar, 2014: 73) Erdogan sometimes does aggressive speeches about EU membership negotiations and packages conveyed within a heroic and romantic nationalism. Saying "If it means the end, we won't give a damn! EU and Turkey negotiation process will just stop!"<sup>16</sup> or famous "one minute" attack on the Israeli President in Davos Summit are just some examples to show how heroically depicted Tayyip Erdogan was at home. Just after having an argument with foreign leaders or giving a polemical speech about foreign policy partners, some of the supporting media institutions always conceptualized these acts as saving our nation's dignity vis-a-vis an arrogant West(!).<sup>17</sup>

Taking the insights from other aspects of party politics, I want to focus on gender politics. AKP's approach to women, feminist organizations, and business women groups was on the same track. Party needed to collect as much consent as possible. So by itself and in

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=190709>

<sup>17</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/davos/7859417.stm>

itself, dialogue with the women is important; it may lead to some additional votes coming from the women. But also *rapprochement* with women, served as to ameliorate party's image in the doubtful eyes. However one of the most inconsistent and unconvincing realms seemed to be the realm of women politics, even though women's situation was tried to be enhanced on social level. Seemingly, smooth and positive dialog between women and the early AKP, shattered during the adultery law debates. Year 2004, was a very busy year for the legislative branch. National parliament mostly worked on the adaptation of EU *acquis* criteria within the Turkish Constitution. This procedures are usually referred as Turkish Penal Code reformation in domestic politics. Some of the reformation plans gained accolades from a majority of the public. However when AKP, offered to supplement the legal reformation with a so-called "adultery law" women organizations raised their voice. Party tried to justify their law offer on the grounds that it is always the married women – especially in the small towns who live without any economic independence – who suffers from the adultery of their husbands. Women organizations mobilized 1500 women in Ankara, on the day when deputies were discussing adultery law, they walked to the parliament and started a protest. It is an important fact that women gained considerable support from the public opinion by underlining the adultery law actually is an example of state intervention into the private life. Nonetheless, global support for the Turkish feminists and EU's pressure on the government played equally important roles. AKP, did not insist any longer to include the adultery law under Turkish Penal Code reformation. Later on, it turned out that, the party's seemingly balanced and positive relations with other groups had always been fragile, and were destined to shatter. However gender politics is the realm which had the ups and downs quite earlier than any other one. The women groups insisted on parity and dedicating half of the polls to women. Party tried to parry, claiming that their party's women branch is important for them to such an extent that 20 percent of their party members is women. AKP never showed agreement

towards subjects like gender quotas, and their attitude towards woman quota was always in line with the statement that “women should become an inherent part of politics through an evolutionary process. However while this evolution is experienced, conservative values like family, morals and traditions should never be put aside. Within the agreeable framework of family, morals and traditions only women may get more active in politics.” (Tür and Çıtak, 2009:628) Özlem Tür and Zana Çıtak also indicates several times in the same text that, during their power AKP has taken social policy attempts to protect women against violence and domestic violence, however they never took women separately from their family, as an individual. (Tür and Çıtak, 2009)

AKP exercised a Janus-faced policy in many realm of the politics. A case in point could be EU membership move, through which AKP increased the consensus they had and rationalized a de-militarization process. Only then, AKP attacked to the former military elites and military itself. Party’s Janus-faced strategy seems to be an explicative tool for my question. Gender politics partakes in that trend too: AKP government signs a legislation which indicates that provinces with a population over 50.000 will open women shelter houses however during their rule women killings may increase by 1400 percent. Prime minister may say that they are ready to welcome women politicians, however may refuse the gender quota guaranteed by law which will probably increase in the number of female deputies. Janus-faced policies might seem hard to conceptualize and lacking of inner consistency. However, this Janus-faced characteristic is both a natural cause of the roots and ties that prepared the party’s formation and its rise to the power. Janus-faced characteristics of the AKP policy and discourse is an expected result of intermingling of neoliberal ideology with Turkish Islamic synthesis. Our question is actually the answer itself.

Galip Yalman and İlhan Uzgel name this hybrid discourse created by the principles of neoliberal economy and Turkish-Islamic synthesis as opponent and – at the same time –

hegemonic discourse, *muhaliif hegemonik söylem*. Especially Galip Yalman puts special attention to define opponent and hegemonic discourse. According to him opponent, and hegemonic discourse is the ideological leverage of AKP. “Opponent” part depicts the AKP’s claim that they are after a minimal state instead of the tyrant state of the past, they are opposing the idea of state imposing its will over its citizens. AKP’s party program is including the motto of “let people live so that state lives”. ‘Hegemonic’ on the other hand reflects the discourse’s power to create an image of a “tyrant” state and manipulate the entire public discussion around this notion of tyrant state. (Yalman, 2014 : 23-27) Hegemonic aspect of their discourse becomes more apparent in party’s actions. AKP is opponent when the obstacles before EU procedures or creation of a liberal economy is considered, however hegemonic as long as it designs the limits of public discussion and provides the words and tools of this public discussion. AKP government initiated the law reformation, however from behind they did their best to inhibit the practice of this reformation.

Opponent and hegemonic notion is important for other social scientists as well. Simten Coşar and Gamze-Yücesan Özdemir, underlines the utility of opponent and hegemonic discourse. It is maybe the most important tool to silence down the state’s violence and State’s intervention to every realm of the world, hence to the realm of the women as well. The rough exploitation of the neoliberalism is covered and silenced down by Turkish Islamism. They put the stress on neoliberalism. Neoliberal applications composed of political and economic principles, got normalized and welcomed within our lives entering to the micro realms on the back of Islamic networks, belief systems and life styles. (Coşar & Yücesan- Özdemir, 2014: 249) According to Metin Yeğenoğlu and Simten Coşar, gender politics should be understood within this neo-liberal and Islamic mixture of hegemonic discourse. As a new type of patriarchy has emerged which mingles the neoliberal violence with religious values, over

which lines and how these two functions must be questioned. (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2014; 160, 161 and 163)

I have already said that AKP, preceding their formation, studied well the case of National Outlook: They did not have the majority of the support and instead of marginalizing themselves, they were willing to negotiate to earn more votes. Yet, the party mostly owed its position to the neoliberal context of the world when it ascended into power. Party's first and foremost supporters were different sides of Bourgeoisie. Islamic wing of the Bourgeoisie mostly was on the party's side, in a very short time they achieved to gain the secular wing as well. As long as the party kept its word on favorable economic conditions for investment and stable/manageable inflation rates Bourgeoisie was supposed to support the party. AKP never left its dedication to neoliberal economic principles. In certain cases that the party needed to mask the tearing down effects neoliberalism, party applied to its useful synthesis of neoliberalism and neo-conservatism with Turkish-Islamic undertones. At this point, I am trying to say it is blurred if the party prioritize the de-secularization of the society or enhancement of the market economy. I claim they applied and used both of them equally, for these values do not contradict with each other at all. In the Turkish context, they walked in hand in hand and they strengthen one and the other, for they both curb the leftist, feminist and democratic criticism. Religious undertones, belief systems and rituals helped both to install neoliberalism in Turkey, and to create a "local and authentic" version of it as Simten Cosar tells. Whenever the neoliberal transformation became intolerably violent, AKP addressed religious conservatism to hide or soothe these destructive effects of neoliberalism. The Soma Mine Disaster, occurred in May 13, 2014. It is the worst mine disaster that ever happened in the Turkish Republic's history; 301 miners died in the explosions, (it is also claimed that the deaths were higher in number but hidden by the government) some burnt alive and some of them were suffocated. Lately it was revealed out that the demand by the main opposition

party, the Republican People's Party, to investigate the mine's safety was rejected in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey with votes from the ruling Justice and Development Party only weeks before the disaster. Secondly, only if there were safety shelter rooms in the mine, in which the miners could have locked themselves in and saved their lives, the number of deaths would not be that high. In response to these accusations, prime minister gave a speech with full of religious reference: "It is in the creation/disposition of being a miner to die in such an accident. These brave people were now martyrs." Just as the disposition of women (by God) is motherhood, as if AKP's over-population strategy is not to create cheap labour, hence economically motivated. AKP government's so called "contradictory" or "inconsistent" statements or policies, combined with the capacity to create controversy, was perfectly consistent and explainable in this sense: This seemingly inconsistent attitude is the result of mixing two rising trends of the time, neoliberalism and religious conservatism. Again these contradictory and inconsistent policies or discourse is useful as well, to the extent that they create an opportunity to conceal harmful effects of neoliberalism and to the extent that they helped to bargain and gain the support of various groups in society. The question is, on the other hand, why then did the party leave to adopt such a silencing or pacifying tool? Instead they became openly aggressive and always ready to attack without giving any positive incentives to the previously negotiated groups.

Carrot and sticks perfectly co-existed in the AKP's former years: The confusion that this eccentric combination created, was itself the perfect tool to mesmerize the masses. By the analogy of a Puppeteer, AKP sometimes pulled the strings strongly and sometimes they relaxed them down. Show continued and when the party made sure that, there is no one left with a knife, no threat for the control of the strings they throw away the carrot. Within approximately eight years majority of their opposition was gained to their parts, manipulated

or weakened. When there is only – so called – extremist opposition, who cannot provide a serious risk party increased the volume of authoritarian voice.

Within the 13 years of AKP government there are some critically important moments: 2007 elections is one of them when party increased its votes to 46%, EU's and Western countries' support can be a second factor in the list, destructing the power of Turkish General Staff and its possibility to intervene into politics as of 2007 and rise of the Islamic Bourgeoisie are all the factors which turned AKP to the stronger player in the game day by day. In 2010, AKP made a referendum to have the power of changing the constitution even though it was not the project of a groundwork change, it was not a mere one either. Almost fifteen articles was supposed to change. But I think the real importance of this referendum derives from another fact; derives from its being a psychological test. AKP did not vote these new fifteen articles, and they did not create a public sphere to discuss the new constitution. They asked the population if it gives the approval to AKP the authority of changing the constitution through a very successful propaganda campaign. The referendum announced to be on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Turkey's most harsh coup d'état, the September 12<sup>th</sup>: "Thirty years after, the society was given a chance to erase the militaristic and anti-democratic footprints of the coup d'état, if they says yes to a new democratic constitution on the same date." 58 % of the voters said "Yes" on the referendum in 2010. This was the highest percentage of votes AKP gained in its history and its motivating impact was crucial on the party. After the 2010 referendum the principal change in the constitution was eliminating the autonomy of Highest Council of Judges and State Attorneys (HSYK). HSYK had been an important organ to keep Judiciary branch from the intervention of the Executive Branch, besides the organ had a monitoring or supervisory impact over controversial trials attacked to the military elites and Kurdish opponents like Ergenekon, Balyoz or KCK . After the referendum, Turkish State had a less powerful HSYK. Second important change in the

constitution was about the election procedures of Supreme Court members. Without forgetting media institutions were captured within the process. Almost all of these critical changes happened after 2007 elections. As AKP increased its power and eliminated its rivalries' strength, less dependent it become on the consensus of the different parts of the society. Less need of the consent, meant more open violence. I will count three examples for open violence conducted by an authoritarian government; Uludere (Roboski) Massacre, Attack on the pro-abortion feminist groups in an attempt to limit abortion rights, and lately police violence during the Gezi Events. The end of December, 2011 Turkish air strike kills 35 civilians near a Kurdish Village close to Iraq border, called Uludere (Roboski). People were Kurdish smugglers, and confused to be the guerrilla fighters. Year 2012, was a year of abortion right discussions, and restriction on the caesarian births for the feminist circles. Abortion is legally permitted and free in public hospitals since 1983. Early years of the republic and aftermath of the world wars witnessed serious abortion restrictions as a result of population increase policies. But, in Turkey there has never been a pro-life and pro-choice blocks. Public discussion was hardly abortion centric, however when abortion became a subject it was never discussed based on religious arguments. The religious conceptualization of the abortion and to condemn it as "sin" is the gift of AKP years in Turkish politics. When the feminists raised their voice and held protests, they could not find the government that had been before them six years ago. Prime Minister openly stated that abortion is a state matter, he humiliated and mocked the female protestors for numerous times. According to current law abortion is still legal in Turkey up to ten weeks. On the other hand abortion rights of women curbed in practice through various methods: Some public hospitals started to refuse women either discursively by trying to convince them about not to have abortion or by giving late appointments which is after the critical ten week threshold. Restrictions in the public health institutions constitute a serious limitation; because abortion is an expensive practice in private

hospitals. Apart from this, following the deferral of abortion discussions, gynecologists are put under surveillance by the Ministry of Health. Ministry of Health created an online portal called “GEBLIZ” and pushed the gynecologists to register all the procedures they attempted, first and foremost the abortions, with detailed information of the patient. It is an authoritarian practice in the sense that state makes itself present in the examination room, and some doctors got warnings for their high abortion or caesarian performance. This attempt is not only an authoritative practice, but it also hampers the privacy of patient – doctor relations. It seems to me that, even though the law is not changed *yet* doctors feel stressed enough to proceed an abortion. On the other hand, patient already conceptualized as mother, who will not have such a sinful deed and will give birth to her baby.

As of the Gezi Events, government do not attempt to conceal or hide its aggressive language. They are openly attacking to the components of society they do not agree with, no more attempt to bargain. Only negotiation process which still continues – with or without government’s silent or overt violence – is the negotiation with Kurdish minority. Women were among the first neglected and abandoned group. They lost first, for being the least risky group to throw down AKP’s power. Gezi has a very important symbolic importance since from the very beginning state showed the sticks. It is one of the events in Turkish history, police violence reached to utmost degrees, eight people were killed by the police. We have seen the most authoritarian and hostile face of the government since they gained the power. “I told you to stop, if you don’t I will take whatever it takes to make you stop” since then any protest ends with a harsh police response, no mass gathering is tolerated.<sup>vii</sup>

Overall, I argued that AKP’s policies and discourse cannot be analyzed over a caliber of religious conservatism. It is not a more religious AKP right now which is using aggressive and sexist language towards women, nor was it a less religious or more secular AKP then which bargained and communicated with women before 2007. AKP is a party that does not

need to create any consensus right now, or *thinks* that it does not need to create any consensus. Secondly, as I argued how useful this ambivalent and inconsistent attitude in bargaining procedures, I also claim that AKP does not have as many tools as it had in the past to have a useful ambivalent strategy. AKP lost most of the EU and US support which were given as excuse or reason for many acts of the party. Besides economic indicators of the country are not as positive as it was in the past. Turkish economy has been enjoying foreign indirect investment to an important degree. However foreign indirect investment also means the money in flow. With the decreasing support from the West and with the political upheavals within the country AKP government might lose its economic source even more. So not only a powerful AKP, who does not need to collect consent any more, but an economically weak or unsupported one, who has no capacity to create due fold ambivalent policies might turn towards open violence, instead of a silent violence in bargaining procedures. Is AKP unable to mask its hegemonic language, so we as citizens started to notice this violence or at least negligence? Or does AKP think agreement and consensus are now not a necessity but luxury because they think that they are so powerful now on? These last remarks are opening a path to a new paper, I hope to seek their answers in the following researches.

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<sup>i</sup> These doubtful witnesses which I preferred to sum as secular opposition block includes the political parties which do not make an alliance with Islamization, Turkish Military, secular bureaucrats.

<sup>ii</sup> *Milli Görüş Hareketi* – translated as National Outlook or Vision preferably, refers to a series of Islamist Parties founded in succession. Father of the National Outlook Doctrine, Prof. Necmettin Erbakan, was an independent candidate from Konya, before the General Elections in 1969. Following his entry in the Parliament, the first party of the succession is established. All of these parties remain in the principal aspects of constituent manifesto by Necmettin Erbakan, written in 1969. Erbakan claimed that they were the only “national” movement in the Turkish Political scene, as all the other parties were blinded by the Christian values, and westernization paradigm; they were “non-national”. Some authors (such as Banu Eligur) interpreted this manifesto from a different angle, as Turkish constitution forbade religious references in the party programs and policies, words “national” and “culture” were actually used to replace “religion” on the other hand national

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vision/outlook stood for “Political Islam” project. Some of the most important elements of National Outlook can be summarized as creation of a national economy which will be regulated with Islamic rules, e.g. there should be no interest rates. National Outlook renounced all the rapprochement with the West. The movement blamed EU and NATO for being Zionist organization. Instead underlined the importance of authentic national and cultural (hence religious) values. Lastly, they suggested the formation of a national industry and domestic production. The parties in the National Outlook parentheses can be listed chronologically as such: National Order Party (MNP) (1969-1971), National Salvation Party (MSP) (1972-1980), Welfare Party (RP) (1983-1998), and Virtue Party (FP) (1997-2001). On party is formed following the closure of the other. All these parties were blamed for their religious fundamentalism that threaten the secularity principle of the constitution. The closure of the Virtue Party, again by the Turkish Supreme Court led two parties for this time. The younger and pragmatic wing of the party members were dissatisfied with the traditional ideology of the National Outlook. Those following the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Gul formed Justice and Development Party (AKP). Traditional wing stayed with the National Outlook and they formed the Felicity Party (SP). Both parties were formed in 2001, and they are still present in the Turkish Politics.

<sup>iii</sup> Abortion discussion dates back to 2004. The AKP government announced to prepare a new law draft to regulate the abortion practices. When the first draft was prepared it fueled a public discussion. As of 1984 the abortion was legal up to 10 weeks, under certain circumstances such as if the pregnancy enters a risky stage for the mother’s health or if the baby was diagnosed to be disabled, then it was legally allowed to pass this threshold following the mother’s consent. New law draft, was limiting the threshold with 8 weeks, and under any circumstances it was not allowed to pass this threshold even if the disability can be diagnosed on the 10th week of the pregnancy. Faced with the strong opposition from the feminist circles law draft was not carried to the legislation process. Abortion discussion was supposed to revive in 2012. Then the prime minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a very controversial speech in which he defined abortion as murder. At the end of December 2011, Turkish air strikes killed 35 civilians near a Kurdish village close to Iraq border, called Uludere (Roboski in Kurdish). Pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party condemned the airstrike as a massacre underlining the fact that all the victims were Kurdish civilians whose age differed between 16 and 20, and the put the responsibility on the Party in rule. Prime Minister – probably also to parry the criticism about the massacres claimed that “In everybody’s speech there is Uludere nowadays. No one talks about abortion. Abortion is murder. Each abortion is the equal of Uludere in my opinion.” Prime Minister had proved his talents to manipulate public discussion before, but re-heated abortion debate was soon revealed to be genuine one. Two months after this polemical statement, Prime Minister was invited to a private hospital opening ceremony, his speech there reads as: “I said and I am saying it again: I am against the abortion. I will repeat the same for caesarian births. I hope the Emsey Hospital will not have low numbers in caesarian births. How great (!) that some hospitals have promising caesarian birth rates. Cesarean is a result of decreasing the population rates conspiracy... Choosing caesarian means at most two births. Why should the women stop at the second birth? Why not more than two babies. Some (of the opponents) addressed me that I should not involve in such private matters. I am the Prime Minister of this country. I am responsible for each and every issue in this country.” Ministry of Health’s speech includes obvious referrals to this statement of the prime minister.

<sup>iv</sup> KA-DER is the Turkish initials of *Association for Support of Women Candidates*.

“Founded in March 1997, KA.DER aims to increase the number of women in politics and in decision making positions so as to achieve equal representation of women and men. KA.DER believes the different experience and capabilities of women should also be reflected in social and political issues.”

<sup>v</sup> The 54th government of Turkey which governed Turkey from 28 June 1996 to 30 June 1997. It was a coalition government formed by Welfare Party (RP) which is a chain in the National Outlook line and True Path Party (DYP), which is well known with its strong neo-liberal economic message. “Refahyol” is a portmanteau word of the Turkish names of the two parties in the coalition.

<sup>vi</sup> After he rose in power, Erbakan invited religious sects’ heads to the Prime Minister’s Office. In January 1997, Welfare Party’s governor in Sincan province organized a “Jerusalem Day” event with references to Islam and anti-Semitism. There were posters of the Islamic Jihad and Hamas leaders on the walls of event pavilion. Çevik Bir, general and the head of the Turkish General Staff then ordered to the vessels which were coming back to Ankara from a military back practice to throw down the pavilion. One month after on the 28th of February,

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soldiers proposed an 18 article document of new regulations. Refahyol government unwillingly accepted the regulation offers. Not long after Erbakan resigned and Refahyol government dissolved.

<sup>vii</sup> Gezi events refer to the mass mobilization of people in June 2013 to protest government's actions and its authoritarian decision making. Some media institutions in the West called the events as Turkish Spring by metaphorically referring to Arab Spring. In 2013 party wanted to privatize a public garden which is known as Gezi Park in the center of İstanbul, and re-project the entire area as a massive indoor space shopping mall. At the end of the May construction equipment and caterpillars entered the park, but, so as the opponent civilians! Protesters decided to occupy the park as of May the 28th, they peacefully wanted to remain in the park and tried to protect it by not leaving from there and not letting the park to be destroyed, via their presence only. With the 31st May dawn, peaceful resistance entered a new phase eventually, when the police attacked the occupiers in the park. Police attack the occupiers in the park early in the morning, and forced them to exit Gezi Park. Protestors used social media immediately to let people about the police violence there. I believe this drew the crowds to the Taksim Square, government exercised an overt, direct and crude violence in its most populated city for the first time during their rule. A national journal's survey, circulated in the social media, was indicating that most of the protestors decided to join the side of Gezi Park occupiers when the police violence started. Interestingly, most of them did not have any party or ideology affiliation beforehand. Gezi protests spread out the nation and lasted until the end of summer. Seven civilians were murdered by the violent police attacks during the protests. Following March, with the death of Berkin Elvan, a 15 year old adolescent who was shot by his head with tear gas capsule in front of his house, could not overcome the coma stage and the number of causalities reached to eight. Even though some may evaluate the Gezi Movements as unsuccessful by being unable to overthrow the government, I mostly evaluate them positively as mobilizing mass numbers of people and for reminding us the possibility of resistance.

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