

TÜRKİYE’DE KADINLARIN SİYASAL KATILIMININ ALGILANMASI: AKP VE CHP ÖRNEKLERİ

Şebnem CANSUN*

Özet:

Bu çalışma Türkiye’deki iki ana siyasi parti, merkez-sağdan *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) ile merkez-soldan *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*’nin kadınların siyasal katılımına yaklaşımları üzerinedir. AKP’li muhafazakar erkek siyasetçiler, kadınların siyasete girmekten çok, evlenip çocukları ile ilgilenmesi gerektiğine inanmakta, AKP’li kadınlar ise kadın siyasetçilere verdiği destek nedeniyle, parti başkanlarını övmektedirler. CHP’de ise hem erkek hem de kadın partililerce, kadın siyasallaşması aynı şekilde içselleştirilmiştir. Yine de, ideolojik farklılıklarına rağmen, iki partinin karar mekanizmalarındaki kadın siyasetçi oranlarında belirgin farklılık görülmemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kadın siyasetçiler, Türk siyaseti, AKP, CHP

PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TURKEY:

THE EXAMPLES OF THE AKP AND THE CHP

Abstract:

This paper portrays how the two leading political parties in Turkey, the center-right Justice and Development Party (the AKP) and the center-left Republican People’s Party (the CHP) approach women’s political participation. Very conservative male AKP members believe women should get married and take care of children rather than getting involved in politics. AKP women idealize their chairman for his support towards female politicians. In the CHP, women’s political participation is normalized among male and female representatives alike. Despite ideological differences, there is no significant difference between the women’s rates in the decision-making mechanisms of the two parties.

Key words: Female politicians, Turkish politics, AKP, CHP

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Turkey’s wish to enter the European Union (EU) and its official candidacy since 1999 have pushed the country to focus on the issues that have been neglected for a long time. Women’s issues have come onto the political agenda as part of the EU accession process, and women’s political participation has attracted more attention than ever in the press during this period. This article portrays perceptions of women’s political participation in Turkey and attempts to locate the corresponding differences between a right-wing and a left-wing Turkish political party.

The two political parties under consideration here are the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, the Justice and Development Party) and the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, the Republican People’s Party). These two parties win most of the votes in Turkey. The AKP has headed a single-party government since 2002, which has meant the CHP has functioned as the main opposition party ever since. The AKP won 50 percent of the popular vote and the CHP 26 percent in 2011.¹

The AKP declares itself to be both conservative and democratic. Although it has embraced politicians from all right-wing parties, its leading staff come from former Islamist parties.² Some of the AKP’s actions (starting with a proposal to criminalize adultery in 2004, later withdrawn) have given the impression that the party rulers have a hidden Islamist agenda.³ Meanwhile, the CHP is the party established by Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. It declares itself to be both secular and social democratic but does occasionally play the religion card for electoral purposes.⁴ In fact, it is hard for a political party to

¹ Seçim 2011, *Ntvmsnbc Seçim (Ntvmsnbc Election)*, Retrieved on January 8, 2011, <http://secim2011.ntvmsnbc.com/>.

² Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey, The Quest for Indentity* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), p. 172–173.

³ William Hale, “Christian Democracy and the JDP, Parallels and Contrasts”, *The Emergence of a New Turkey, Democracy and the AK Parti*, Hakan Yavuz (ed.), (Utah: The University of Utah Press, 2006), p. 79.

⁴ Altan Öymen, *Değişim Yılları* (Years of change) (Ankara: Doğan Kitap, 2004), p. 326.

achieve strong electoral results in Turkey without taking into consideration people’s religious sensitivities.

The research

The research data come from the party documents (i.e. programs, statutes, internal publications), two ideologically opposed dailies (*Yeni Şafak*- New Dawn and *Cumhuriyet*-The Republic) and interviews conducted with at least one man and one woman from every level of hierarchy in each of these parties. The research period is limited to the years after the Helsinki Summit in December 1999. This is the year the European Union officially accepted Turkey’s candidacy for accession.

Table N°1. General information on the interviewees

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

The party programs, statutes and the internal publications were read first. Then, the dailies were analysed. Finally, interviews were conducted between November 2006 and February 2007. The interview transcripts were treated through the qualitative data analysis software Atlas-ti, and the results were supplemented with a discourse analysis of the dailies at the end of 2012.

Approaches to women’s political participation in general

International organizations accept that women’s political participation is a democratic necessity. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has advocated ever since 1979 that states should accept equal rights and opportunities among men and women for political and public participation (Article 7). The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), the Council of the European Union (1995, 1996) and

the European Council (1997) have also declared the democratic necessity of equal participation of both genders in the society.

Theories that attempt to explain the under-representation of women in politics focus on issues of political culture, socialization, role conflict, and discrimination against women by the political elites, the electorate and the political system.⁵ Also, in Muslim countries, women’s exercise of power is sometimes taken as a problematic. According to some researchers, in Muslim societies, women have a second-class status and rarely hold positions of authority positions.⁶ Meanwhile, according to the Presidency of the Higher Committee of Religious Affairs in Turkey, women who have the knowledge and merit can take on any position of responsibility, including those of running a state.⁷

Generally speaking, left and center-left parties are perceived as having more favorable attitudes to the ‘women’s cause’ as a component of faithfulness to equality.⁸ Historically speaking, the feminist movement has always had a connection with the left-wing parties⁹ and most academic works characterize the left as more pro-women than the right.¹⁰ However, some recent academic works have

12
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⁵ Janet Clark, “Getting There: Women in Political Office”, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 515, *American Feminism: New Issues for a Mature Movement* (May 1991), p. 63-76.

⁶ Watson, Robert, Jencik, Alicia Jencik and Selzer, Judith, “Women World Leaders: Comparative Analysis and Gender Experiences”, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Vol.7, N°2 (November 2005), p. 70. 53-76.

⁷ The Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, October 24, 2002, “Women’s taking place in work and administration”, Retrieved on October 3, 2008, <http://www.diyenet.gov.tr/english/karar.asp?id=3&sorgu=1>.

⁸ Richard Matland and Donley Studlar, “The Contagion of Women Candidates in Single-Member District and Proportional Representation Systems: Canada and Norway”, *Journal of Politics* 58 (3) (1996), p. 707-733; Mala Htun and Timothy Power, “Gender Parities and Support for Equal Rights in the Brazilian Congress”, *Latin American Politics and Society* 48 (4) (2006), p. 83-104; Kimberly Cowell-Meyers & Laura Langbein, “Linking Women’s Descriptive and Substantive Representation in the United States”, *Politics & Gender* 5 (2009), p. 491-518.

⁹ Mary Katzenstein and Carol McClurg Mueller, *The Women’s Movements of the US and Western Europe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Monica Threlfall, “Explaining Gender Parity Representation in Spain: The Internal Dynamics of Parties”, *West European Politics* Vol. 30, No. 5 (November 2007), p. 1068-1095.

demonstrated the failure of some left-wing governments and noted the success of some right-wing governments regarding feminist politics. For example, according to Lovenduski and Norris, left-wing parties do not do much better than right-wing parties in this respect.¹¹ According to Guadagnini, right-wing parties set and meet gender quotas more effectively than left-wing parties.¹² Nevertheless, the relationship between the right and women is not always a smooth one. For example, sociologist Fodor affirms that in the case of the Czech Republic, left-wing parties are more likely to keep promises to women¹³. Hinojosa’s research indicates that women from the right-wing Independent Democratic Union who are elected to municipal assemblies remain under the power of men.¹⁴

The positions of the two parties regarding women’s political participation

The rates of women’s participation in the decision-making mechanisms of government, as well as in the local and national assemblies of the AKP and the CHP, give us some basic information on how these two parties approach women. The AKP, despite its traditional approach towards women and position vis-à-vis family and society, is not significantly behind the CHP. The CHP has set a women’s participation quota of 25 percent in its statutes since 1989, which was raised to 33 percent in 2012. However, the AKP reaches pretty much the same rates through ‘soft quotas’. Party chairman Tayyip Erdoğan verbally supports the presence of female politicians in decision-making apparatuses, and this support translates into

¹¹ Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris, *Gender and Party Politics* (London: Sage, 1993).

¹² Marila Guadagnini, “Gendering the debate on political representation in Italy: a difficult challenge”, *State Feminism and Political Representation*, Joni Lovenduski et al. (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 130-152.

¹³ Eva Fodor, “Women and Political Engagement in East-Central Europe”, *Governing Women, Women’s Political Effectiveness in Contexts of Democratization and Governance Reform*, Anne-Marie Goetz (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 112-128.

¹⁴ Magda Hinojosa, “Whatever the Party Asks of Me: Women’s Political Representation in Chile’s Unio’n Demo’crata Independiente”, *Politics & Gender*, 5 (2009), p. 377-407.

practice.¹⁵ Female AKP members are aware of their chairman’s attitude and praise him for this support.¹⁶ The AKP’s practices carry a paternalist tone, which does not exist in the CHP.

Table N° 2. Percentages of women in the party direction¹⁷

	AKP	CHP
Women in the Central Executive Committee	15	23.5
Women in the Central Decision-Making and Administrative Committee/Party Assembly	29.4	26
Women in the Central Disciplinary Board	27.2	20
Women among provincial chairs	0	2.4

Table N° 3. Percentages of women in the local and national assemblies as of 2012¹⁸

	AKP	CHP
Women in local assemblies	4.61	6.52
Women in the parliament	14.11	14.17

According to the 2005 report on the AKP’s millennium development goals, the feeble proportion of women in decision-making political mechanisms is a democratic deficit, and its goal is for 17 percent of deputies to be female by 2015.¹⁹ The party supports women’s participation and representation in political life. In its program, the AKP promises to encourage women to join the party and to take active roles in

14
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¹⁵ Cansun, Şebnem, “Siyasette Cinsiyet Kotası: AKP ve CHP Örnekleri” (Gender quotas in politics: The JDP and the RPP examples), *İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University Journal of Social Sciences* 1(1) (November 2012), p. 78-96.

¹⁶ “Kadınlarımızın Seçme ve Seçilme Hakkını Alışlarının 70. Yıldönümü” (The 70th anniversary of our women’s getting the right to vote and to run for office), *Türkiye Bülteni*, January 2005, N°20, Retrieved on January 5, 2010, <http://www.turkiyebulteni.net/20/33.htm>.

¹⁷ Ka-der, *Kadın İstatistikleri* (Statistics on women), 2012.

¹⁸ “Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Milletvekilleri Dağılımı” (The distribution of deputies in the

Grand National Assembly of Turkey), Retrieved on January 5, 2013, http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz_sd.dagilim; CHP, *Belediye Meclis Üyeliklerinde Kadın Varlığı* (The presence of women in local assemblies), Retrieved on January 5, 2013, http://chpkadin.chp.org.tr/wpcontent/uploads/2011/09/Belediye_meclis_uyeliklerin_de_Kad%C4%1n_Varligi.pdf.

¹⁹ Sayın, Aysun, *Kota el kitabı, Geçici Özel Önlem Politikası, Kota* (The quota handbook: A temporary special measure, the quota policy) (Ankara: Ka-Der, 2007), p. 25).

politics.²⁰ Even so, as of 2012–2013, there is only one female minister out of twenty-five in the cabinet. Minister Fatma Şahin, also a chemical engineer, is in charge of what we would call ‘a typical woman’s job’: She is Minister of Family and Social Policies. Also, the fact that there is no female provincial chair in the AKP is an indication of patriarchal hierarchy within the party structure.

Support for women’s political participation exists in the CHP’s program as well. The CHP wants women to be aware of their social and political rights. It promises to encourage women to participate in decision-making processes and wants the number of women in politics to multiply.²¹ In contrast to the AKP, the CHP’s women’s branches have a program (2002). This program describes the main obstacles to women’s political participation as physical and moral violence, poor economic conditions, feeble economic participation, low school enrollment, lack of social security services, unequal distribution of family responsibilities, institutionalized traditions and judgments, and social factors that make women dependent on men. The recent *Women’s Report* (2011) also emphasizes the same points and underlines particularly the importance of the gender quotas regulations.²²

Selma Kavaf, former president of the party’s women’s branches (2002–2009) paid particular attention to women’s political participation in eastern and southern Turkey, where 70 percent of the female population is still illiterate, and where mothers and children still have high mortality rates.²³ Kavaf emphasizes that Prime Minister Erdoğan demands as many women as possible in politics, that the AKP works to find and promote women involved in politics.

²⁰ AKP, *Party Program*, 2001, p. 64.

²¹ CHP, *Party Program*, 2008.

²² CHP, *Kadınlar her alanda eşit ve güçlü* (Women and equal and strong in all fields), 2011.

²³ Adım adım Anadolu’da (Step by step in Anatolia), *Türkiye Bülteni*, N°4 (September 2003), Retrieved on January 5, 2010, <http://www.turkiyebulteni.net/04/29.htm>; “Üçüncü Kuruluş Yıldönümümüzü Kutladık” (Celebrating the third anniversary of our founding), *Türkiye Bülteni*, N°34 (March 2006), <http://www.turkiyebulteni.net/34/29.htm>.

Prime Minister Erdoğan has declared that a political system that ostracizes half of its population cannot be truly democratic, and that women should be in politics.²⁴ Female AKP members tend to adopt the same discourse regarding the relationship between women’s presence in politics and democracy.²⁵

Despite this welcoming rhetoric, Erdoğan has also suggested that for women to participate in politics would pose some difficulties, namely to do with the inconvenience of working hours.²⁶ The president of the parliament’s Constitutional Commission, Burhan Kuzu, also a law professor, made a similar but sharper declaration in 2004 on the *Kafe Siyaset* (Café Politics) program on CNN Türk. According to Kuzu, “Women who get back home after 11 o’clock are seen differently”.²⁷

AKP women do not agree with this sexist mentality. The day after Burhan Kuzu’s declaration on the TV, two female deputies of the AKP, Fatma Şahin (Gaziantep) and Zeynep Tekin (Adana) spoke out in opposition. According to Şahin, “There is no difference between men and women in this (politics) profession”.²⁸ According to Tekin, “This mentality has to change”.

The 2004 resignation of Reyhan Balandı, deputy from Afyon (AKP), did not have to do with late night meetings but is another significant example of the difficulties women confront in the political arena. In 2004, Balandı resigned from her party over rumors regarding her private life. The city’s local party leader Burhanettin

²⁴ “Yerel yönetimde Kadın Şûrası” (The council of women in local administrations), *Türkiye Bülteni* N°17, (October 2004), Retrieved on January 5, 2010, <http://www.turkiyebulteni.net/17/30.htm>.

²⁵ “Kadın Kolları Trabzon Kongresi’nde” (Women’s branches in Trabzon’s congress), *Türkiye Bülteni* N°21, (February 2005), Retrieved on January 5, 2010, <http://www.turkiyebulteni.net/21/29.htm>.

²⁶ “Kadının etkin olmadığı bir toplum eksik sayılır” (A society where women are not active is a deficient society), *Türkiye Bülteni* N°42, (November 2006), Retrieved on January 5, 2010, <http://www.turkiyebulteni.net/42/20.htm>.

²⁷ “Kadına çarpık bakış” (A twisted look at women), *Cumhuriyet* (May 3, 2004), p. 5.

²⁸ “Bu zihniyet değişmeli” (This mentality should change), *Cumhuriyet* (May 4, 2004), p. 5.

Çoban, received no initial punishment for starting the rumors. According to his claims, the female deputy was consorting with male deputies and ministers, but according to the *Cumhuriyet* daily, the resignation was actually motivated by the party administration’s Islamist perspective. Çoban was later called in to the party headquarters and forced to resign.²⁹

This episode signifies that for the AKP image is very important. Since the controversy rested on the issue of a woman’s honor, the party did not take pains to protect Balandı. However, neither did it tolerate a provincial party leader perceived as retrograde. For analysts of Turkey’s political culture, the episode is not a surprising one. The issue of women’s honor is highly charged, and to publicly cast doubt on one’s honor is to suppress the source of her power.³⁰ Bitter attacks against female politicians through sexuality exist in other countries as well.³¹ We can enumerate French politicians Ségolène Royale and Dominique Voynet as examples of women who have had to endure sexist insults during their political careers. In Balandı’s case, Canan Arıtman, a female deputy from Izmir (CHP) and also a gynecologist, was her most vocal supporter. She thinks that “The general attitude of the AKP is always to think and strike below the belt”.³² Only two members of the AKP, both male, supported Balandı. The deputy from Afyon, İbrahim Hakkı Aşkar, and the mayor of Afyon, Abdullah Kaptan, made a press declaration in which they characterized the actions of the provincial party leader as aggressive and corrupt.³³

²⁹ “AKP’de kadın-örgüt tartışması” (A woman vs. the party at the JDP), *Cumhuriyet* (January 2, 2005), p. 5; “AKP’de uyuşmazlık firesi” (AKP penalised by internal disaccord), *Cumhuriyet*, (December 29, 2004), p. 5.

³⁰ Serpil Sancar-Üşür, Mesut Yeğen, Tamer Kozaklı, “Siyasal Partilerde ve Sendikalarda Cinsiyetçi Zihniyet Örüntüleri” (Sexist representations by political parties and syndicates), *Non-published research on the project of women’s economic activities* (Ankara: Kadının Statüsü ve Sorunları Genel Müdürlüğü ile Dünya Bankası Projesi, 1998).

³¹ Muriel Fitoussi, *Femmes au pouvoir* (Paris: Editions Hugo, 2007).

³² “AKP’de kadın-örgüt tartışması” (Women vs. the party at the JDP), p. 5.

³³ “AKP’de örgüt krizi” (The organizational crisis at the JDP), p. 5.

This resignation shows how rumors about personal lives hang over women’s heads in the political arena like a Sword of Damocles. The spouses of female politicians are particularly sensitive to this. Two women from the CHP pointed out that husbands could easily become jealous of wives who work alongside men. For example, the president of women’s branches in the Kadıköy district (56 years old) mentioned that her husband never wanted her to participate in politics.³⁴ Although he would have preferred she stay home and take care of the children, she was already working hard in the youth branches when they got married and he had accepted that in her career of choice she would be coming home late from her political meetings.

These examples illustrate that female politicians from both the AKP and the CHP face similar constraints and pressure. Here are some more details on the CHP’s approach towards women’s political participation. The CHP discourse is sensitive to issues obstructing women’s participation in politics. Former party chairman Deniz Baykal (1992–2010) made many declarations on the subject. For instance, at the 66th anniversary of Turkish women’s getting the right to vote and to run for office, Baykal emphasized the fact that “politics need women and women need politics more than ever”.³⁵ According to Baykal, youth, women and the society had grown distant from politics, and Turkey would solve its problems only after their return. As he put it, “the women’s movement has a special place in social democracy”³⁶. “Women can solve their problems only through participation in politics”.³⁷ Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the CHP’s chairman since May 2010, is also sensitive to women’s political participation. It is under his

³⁴ Interview conducted on December 27, 2006 in Istanbul.

³⁵ “Siyasetin kadına ihtiyacı var” (Politics needs women), *Halk* N° 47 (December 10, 2000), p.4; “Türkiye’ye sahip çıkıyoruz” (We look after Turkey), *Halk* N°59 (March 27, 2001), p. 2.

³⁶ “Maço değil feminen” (Not macho but feminine), *Gündem* N°51–52 (January 22, 2001), p. 6.

³⁷ “Manavgat Kadın Kolları Ankara’da” (The women’s branches of Manavgat are in Ankara), *Gündem* N°.104 (March 2003), p. 5.

presidency that the party’s gender quota has risen from 25 percent to 33 percent.

The CHP is supportive of female intellectuals and Kemalists (ardent followers of Atatürk and secular values), wholeheartedly welcome them and allow them to advance in the party hierarchy. For example, the party welcomed the organizers of *Cumhuriyet Mitingleri* (the Republic Protests) in 2007. Nur Serter and Necla Arat, protestors with a public profile and university professors with Kemalist beliefs, became first CHP candidates for the parliament and later were elected deputies. Güldal Mumcu, spouse of Uğur Mumcu (1942–1993), a Kemalist investigative journalist for *Cumhuriyet* daily, who had been assassinated by radical Islamists, became a CHP deputy and has been vice-president of the parliament since 2007.³⁸

The CHP supports more than just well-known women. In fact, in contrast to the AKP, whose female members remain outside of decision-making mechanisms, the CHP has a long tradition of active female membership and participation. For example, a woman by the name of Leyla Atakan is featured in a story about various men and women who are active in local politics.³⁹ Atakan became member of the municipal council in Kocaeli, an industrial city in the Marmara region of western Turkey, in the 1960s. In 1963, she became the provincial party leader. The fact that Atakan is mentioned among the important figures of local politics in the 1960s shows the importance that the CHP gives to women.

Interviewed CHP members in their sixties who have been with the party since their youth pointed out that even before gender quotas were established in 1989, women could always be found in important

³⁸ “Meclisi 34 yıl sonra ilk kez CHP’li kadın başkan vekili Güldal Mumcu yönetti” (After 34 years, Güldal Mumcu, a female vice-president of the CHP directs the Parliament), *Halk* N°90 (November 1, 2007), p. 1.

³⁹ “CHP’nin örnek belediye başkanları: Atakan, Erten, Alyanak, İsvan” (Some examples of CHP mayors: Atakan, Alyanak, İsvan), *Halk* N°87 (September 15, 2007), p. 11.

elected positions. Tüner Ercan, the local party leader in the Kadıköy district of İstanbul, who comes from the youth branches of the party, mentioned that before the coup d’état in 1980, Çağlayan Ege, a prominent activist of the time, was elected local party leader in the Silivri district of Istanbul. Solmaz Gönül was a senator while the republic had an upper house (1961–1980). Still, these examples are not enough to qualify the CHP as an egalitarian party in terms of women’s representation within the party. This is an idea put forward by the political scientist Ayşe Güneş-Ayata, according to whom while the CHP wants to position itself as a distinctively pro-women party, it is unsuccessful in terms of women’s rates within the party’s decision-making mechanisms.⁴⁰ We can easily make the same comment by looking at the rates of women’s presence in the decision-making mechanisms of both the so-called ‘social democratic’ CHP and the ‘conservative’ AKP.

The interviewees from both parties mentioned particularly the impact of mentality and the Turkish familial structure on Turkey’s low rates of female participation in politics. At the AKP, the president of the district level women’s branches (31 years old, high school graduate) thinks that “Turkish society is patriarchal, men work and bring home what to eat, while women take care of home and children”.⁴¹

CHP members emphasize the same points. Female politicians in particular talked about how society pushes women to marry and make children. This is what causes the lack of intellectual development for women and their distant position from politics. Members of both parties mentioned the necessity of “comprehensive husbands” as a

⁴⁰ Ayşe Güneş-Ayata, “Laiklik, Güç ve Katılım Üçgeninde Türkiye’de Kadın ve Siyaset” (Women and politics in the triangle of laicism, power and participation), *75 yılda kadınlar ve erkekler* (75 years of women and men), Ayşe Berktaş-Hacımirzaoğlu (ed.), (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), p. 237-248.

⁴¹ Interview conducted on November 27, 2006 in Istanbul.

condition of women’s economic advancement and success in the political sphere. However, CHP members are more critical of the dominant social norms and mentality. Several CHP men mentioned religion as a reason behind the low political participation rates of women, but no interviewed AKP member cited religion as a source of such issues. According to Algan Hacaloğlu (63 years old, engineer), deputy of İstanbul and ex-vice-secretary general of the CHP, “In many regions of Turkey, there are feudal relations. There is a prejudice that women’s place is at home”. His view was shared by that of Muharrem İnce (44 years old, teacher), deputy of Yalova, who pointed out that “[s]ocial oppression, various societal dynamics block women”. For example, İnce visits *kahveler* (men’s cafés) without any problems, but thinks his female rivals could not do so as easily. The male character of cafés and its problematic situation for female politicians exist in other Muslim countries.

At the AKP, men tended to think that ‘women’s nature’ plays a role in the low proportion of women in politics:

I think it is useful to say it openly, men do politics better than women (...) They can commit more time, they can use their energy to the highest level (...) Women, even when they are in politics for many years, they never have self-confidence (...) They are not interested in politics, they have other centers of interest. Even the most modern girl wants to marry and have children. Certainly, the nature of a woman is less strong (male, 28 years old, high school graduate, civil servant, president of the youth branches in Beykoz district, AKP).⁴²

As in the case of the above, the majority of AKP members believe Turkish women make the choice to live for their families, and that this is why they are not numerous in politics. This idea of connecting the nature of men to power and management is thus not surprising, because this is a universal schema. The French anthropologists Françoise Héritier and Georges Balandier, among others, have shown

⁴² Interview conducted on November 7, 2006 in İstanbul.

that “in almost all societies, power is linked to the exercise of viril power”.⁴³

According to another conservator party member, there is a difference between the politics done in a hall and politics done on the street, and while women can enter the hall, street politics and the cafés politics are against their nature:

In Turkey, there is no hall politics. There is no lobby politics. In Turkey, there is field politics. There is street politics. A woman does not have the occasion of doing street politics. It is not appropriate to her nature (...) On the streets, you scream, you dispute, you combat in order to convince people (...) you need to be present at meetings at 2 o’clock in the morning (...) Is woman’s nature appropriate to that? No! (male, 36 years old, high school graduate, tradesman, member of the municipality in Beykoz district, AKP).⁴⁴

The politician cited here talks about women’s nature but gives examples of the duties assigned to women socially and culturally. According to him, the idea of women leaving their children at nurseries and going away to realize their potential would be inappropriate to the norms of Turkish society. This approach could be perceived as conservative or even Islamist.

Another AKP man asks himself whether women’s political participation would constitute a step forward or not:

Do we have data on the fact that the increase in women’s economic and political activities would procure positive values? This is what my question is (...) Are there statistics?” (male, 29 years old, college graduate, vice-president of the youth branches in İstanbul, AKP).⁴⁵

This politician wonders whether Turks might one day view the promotion of women’s political participation as a mistake. The same

⁴³ Derville, Grégory & Pionchon, Sylvie, “La femme invisible. Sur l’imaginaire du pouvoir politique”, *Mots, Les langages du politique* N° 78 (july 2005), p. 57.

⁴⁴ Interview conducted on November 7, 2006 in İstanbul.

⁴⁵ Interview conducted on November 21, 2006 in İstanbul.

man, in other parts of his interview, asked who would raise children if not women. He thinks that men are incapable of taking care of children.

Finally, one grassroots politician wants the political arena to stay a masculine domain. He is totally against women’s political participation: “women should not be everywhere. They should not intervene in politics either” (male, 28 years old, high school graduate, office boy in the party district, AKP).⁴⁶ This party member does not want to lose his privileges vis-à-vis women in the public space. According to him, women should leave the economic and political arena to men. In fact, in other parts of his interview, he expressed that women should put aside their careers and take care of children.

AKP women, rather than linking the low rates of political participation to their nature, find other reasons for it. For example, the president of the women’s branches in Beykoz district (31 years old, high school graduate) thinks that cultural and traditional factors prevent women from entering/practicing politics. “Men with limited vision say that women should stay home to take care of children and to cook”.⁴⁷ According to Güldal Akşit (54 years old, lawyer), the former minister in charge of women and family, the low numbers of female politicians are due to the fact that “men like the political arena”, “men think that every woman blocks a man’s way”.⁴⁸

Güldal Akşit draws attention to a set of accepted political realities common around the world. Male politicians do not want women to enter politics because every woman takes the place of a man. French researchers Derville and Pionchon use the term ‘job stealers’ to this end. “In politics, one woman more means, one man less; in the eyes of male colleagues, a female politician is then a rival, an intruder, a job

⁴⁶ Interview conducted on November 8, 2006 in Istanbul.

⁴⁷ Interview conducted on November 7, 2006 in Istanbul.

⁴⁸ Interview conducted on February 13, 2007 in Ankara.

stealer”.⁴⁹

CHP members also approach the issue as one of men not wanting to cede the political arena to women because it is a domain of power. Clientelism and the advantages of parliamentary immunity are elements that make the political arena attractive for them. According to a male provincial party leader (44 years old, architect), “whenever there is an issue about politics and the sharing of public resources, men do not leave space for women. This is what the problem is all about”.⁵⁰ According to female deputy Nevin Gaye Erbatur, also a university professor, the fact that politics is seen as a domain of power is the principal reason for women’s low rates of political participation. She thinks that “To open politics to women in Turkey, we should first erase the parliamentary immunity” (58 years old, chemistry professor, deputy from Adana, CHP).⁵¹

It is CHP women who formulate the sharpest criticisms on why women are so few in the political arena. They cite in particular women’s economic dependence on men as a problem. Deputy Nevin Gaye Erbatur, who had worked on gender issues in academia, emphasized men and women’s different socialization, which channels men toward men to the political arena and women away from it. According to Erbatur, women do not have a culture of working together. This is a valuable remark regarding female politicians of all countries. Sabine de Béthune, vice-president of the Belgian Senate, mentions “the revolving door effect” among women who do not stay in politics for long, arguing that women are not familiar with the rules of the political game, and this is why they cannot survive there.⁵² Politics is a game, and women do not seem to have thoroughly internalized the

⁴⁹ Derville & Pionchon, p. 55.

⁵⁰ Interview conducted on December 25, 2006 in İstanbul.

⁵¹ Interview conducted on February 14, 2007 in Ankara.

⁵² Sabine De Béthune, “Changer les mentalités”, *Les femmes, mais qu’est-ce qu’elles veulent?*, Henry Lelièvre (ed.) (Paris: Editions Complexe, 2001), p. 292.

rules.

The interviews show that AKP women resemble the CHP more closely than their male counterparts on this issue. The table below makes a significant point. All of the interviewees agree that it is mentality in Turkey that makes female politicians an exception rather than a rule.

TABLE N°4. Why do women not enter politics

	AKP		CHP	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Mentality*	12	12	10	15
The financial conditions of women	1	5	3	4
Lack of education	2	4	4	6
Politics is a male domain	4	6	3	3
Number of interviews	12	16	10	15

*Under “mentality” the following explanations are grouped: “Husbands expect too many things from their spouses. Women are not the only party responsible for housework. Husbands are jealous of their young wives and do not let them enter the political arena. Housework leaves women no free time. Our society is a patriarchal society. Women are perceived as second-class citizens. Men do not want to share in family life and housework. Women do not have self-confidence (mentioned only by four AKP men) Women are not interested in politics. Politics in Turkey is done on the streets, women cannot do such politics. Men do not want female politicians. The impact of patriarchy and tradition. Our society is apolitical. The political sphere is perceived as a dirty arena”.

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Behind the low rates of women in politics, there is the mentality/culture factor. Regarding ‘mentality’, party members repeated two points most frequently. First, men (i.e. husbands, fathers and brothers) do not want to share housework and childcare responsibilities with women. Hence, women are obligated to make sacrifices in their professional and political lives. Second, men are jealous of “their” spouses who work in predominantly male arenas. These men feel responsible for their spouses’ “honor” and put a pressure on them not to go into politics. The research findings indicate that behind women’s low political participation and presence in decision-making mechanisms in Turkey is particularly the impact of the concept of honor, which draws boundaries around women’s domain of manoeuvre, their ability to be

financially independent, and their ability to penetrate the patriarchal political culture.

Conclusions

Both the AKP and the CHP perceive women’s political participation as a necessity of democracy. They seem to support the political participation of women even though sometimes, we have doubts as to how or to what extent this has been internalized by the men of the AKP. The two parties are similar with respect to gender quotas. The CHP has had quotas in its statutes since 1989, while the AKP has ‘soft quotas’ which turn into practice. The soft quotas practice demonstrates that the AKP has broken away from its Islamist past.

Despite similarities between their approaches, there are two main differences. Firstly, AKP women idealize their chairman and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan for his support towards female politicians. Although the CHP party chairman also supports female politicians, none of the members finds this important enough to praise their party chairman. Secondly, AKP men are more conservative than both the female members of their own party and the members of the CHP. We can see that particularly in the interviews. Some of the conservative men pointed to women’s natures, saying that they preferred home and children to public and political life. They think that men do politics better than women and that women should not intervene. They may also question whether the political participation of women is really a source of progress. No one opposes women’s political participation in the CHP.

This paper shows that, despite ideological differences between the AKP and the CHP, there is no significant difference in terms of women’s rates within the decision-making mechanisms of the two parties. The paper supports the literature that argues that left-wing parties may no longer be alone in their support of women as political representatives.

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