

WOMEN'S SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION: THE CASE OF OPPOSITION  
WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN THE GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF  
TURKEY (TBMM)

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ASSEMBLY OF TURKEY (TBMM)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **WOMEN’S SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION: THE CASE OF OPPOSITION WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN THE GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF TURKEY (TBMM)**

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The representation of women’s issues and interests in legislatures is raised as a significant issue in feminist political research on the determinants and implications of women’s inclusion in political institutions. This thesis research aims at analyzing the substantive representation of women in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) by focusing on the representative acts of opposition women MPs. The gradual increase in the numbers of women MPs (Members of Parliaments) in the last two decades in the TBMM has taken place in the context of a conservative gender climate under AKP (Justice and Development Party) governments (2002-Present). This thesis analyzes the legislative acts of women MPs from the major left-wing opposition, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the People’s Democratic Party (HDP), which project pro-women agendas and discourses. The main research question of How do opposition CHP, and HDP women MPs raise women’s labor and employment issues and articulate their interests in the TBMM? is addressed through the frame analysis to analyze the discourses of the the opposition MPs in their plenary speeches, legislative proposals, motions of the written questions, motions of

parliamentary inquiry, and commission speeches. The findings indicate that the opposition women representatives from both parties represent practical and strategic gender interests relevant to women's subordination in employment in their legislative acts owing to their leftist political identities. At the same time, their different frames in their discourses on these practical and strategic gender interests reflect ideological identities and the parties' distinct feminist perspectives.

**Keywords:** Women's substantive representation, the CHP, the HDP, women's labor and employment, frame analysis.

## ÖZ

### KADINLARIN NİTELİKSEL TEMSİLİ: TÜRKİYE BÜYÜK MİLLET MECLİSİ'NDE (TBMM) MUHALEFET KADIN MİLLETVEKİLLERİ ÖRNEĞİ

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Kadınların sorunlarının ve çıkarlarının yasama organlarında temsili, kadınların siyasi kurumlara dahil edilmesinin belirleyicileri ve sonuçları üzerine yapılan feminist siyasi araştırmalarda önemli bir konu olarak gündeme getiriliyor. Bu tez araştırması, muhalif kadın milletvekillerin temsili faaliyetlerine odaklanarak Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi'nde (TBMM) kadınların niteliksel temsiliyetini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. TBMM'de son yirmi yılda kadın milletvekili sayısında bir miktar artış olması, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) yönetimi dönemindeki (2002-Günümüz) muhafazakar toplumsal cinsiyet iklimi bağlamında gerçekleşmiştir. Bu tez çalışması, cinsiyet eşitliği konusunda politikaları ve söylemleri olan sol muhalefet Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) ve Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP) kadın milletvekillerinin yasama faaliyetlerini analiz etmektedir. Temel araştırma sorusu olan 'Muhalefet CHP ve HDP kadın milletvekilleri TBMM'de kadın emeği ve istihdamı konularındaki toplumsal cinsiyet çıkarlarını nasıl gündeme getiriyor ve ifade ediyor?' kadın vekillerin genel kurul konuşmaları, kanun teklifleri, yazılı soru önermeleri, meclis araştırma önermeleri ve komisyon konuşmalarında kullandıkları söylemlerin çerçeveleme analizi doğrultusunda cevaplanmaya çalışıyor. Elde edilen bulgular, muhalefetteki her iki partiden de kadın temsilcilerin, sol siyasi kimlikleri nedeniyle yasama faaliyetlerinde kadınların istihdamda ikincil konumuyla ilgili hem pratik hem



de stratejik toplumsal cinsiyet çıkarlarını temsil ettiğini göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, bu partilerin cinsiyet çıkarlarına ilişkin söylemlerindeki farklı çerçeveleri, kendi ideolojik kimliklerini ve farklılaşan feminist bakış açılarını yansıtmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kadınların niteliksel temsili, CHP, HDP, kadın emeđi ve istihdamı, çerçeve analizi.

*To women who resist, rebel, and struggle for gender equality*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
BDP	Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (Peace and Democracy Party)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Kadınlara Yönelik Her Türlü Ayrımcılığın Önlenmesi Sözleşmesi)
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
DEHAP	Demokratik Halk Partisi (People's Democratic Party)
DEP	Demokrasi Partisi (Democracy Party)
DTP	Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party)
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product (Gayri Safi Yurtiçi Hasıla)
GONGO	Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organization
KADEM	Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği (Women and Democracy Association)
LGBTI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex Plus People
HADEP	Halkın Demokrasi Partisi (People's Democratic Party)
HDP	Halkların Demokratik Partisi (People's Democracy Party)
HEP	Halkın Emek Partisi (People's Labor Party)
ILO	International Labor Organization (Uluslararası Çalışma Örgütü)
MPs	Members of Parliament

NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization
PM	Prime Minister
SHP	Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti (Social Democratic People's Party)
TBMM	Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (Grand National Assembly of Turkey)

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1.1. The Subject Matter, the Objectives, and the Hypotheses of the Thesis**

The lack of gender parity in most democracies in policy-making, and women's underrepresentation in elected bodies and parliaments have been problematized in gender and politics research in terms of its causes and implications. In the face of this democracy deficit, increasing women's parliamentary presence is defended on the grounds of equal citizenship, justice, the quality of decision-making and representation of interests. Nevertheless, despite the adoption of positive action measures in numerous countries thanks to the demands of the feminist movement of women within political institutions and progressive parties, and the support of some male politicians, there is still a gender gap in parliamentary representation. This is problematized in particular regarding the role of gendered political institutions and the roles of elected representatives in terms of their responsiveness to gender equality claims (Phillips 1998; Lovenduski 2005; Krook and Norris 2014). In other words, the link between women's increasing presence, and for that matter, their minority position in elected bodies and the representation of women's interests and the policy content of the issues raised politics from a gender perspective retains its significance for both theoretical and practical concerns in the feminist scholarship on the dynamics of political institutions and political life in general.

In line with the contributions of the feminist approach to political analysis, gender is raised as a crucial factor in understanding women's representative claims and

legislative acts in politics. In this context, the gendering of representation refers to the gendered structure and conditions of women's political representation as an underrepresented or minority group in politics. In patriarchal systems, this underrepresented group has specific problems, issues, needs, and interests due to most women's subordinate social positions, and women's life experiences as different from those of men's. Hence, women's parliamentary representation and their positions and roles have been a critical research subject from the perspective of their descriptive representation (presence as standing for women ideally corresponding to their demography in the population) and substantive representation (the gender content and the impact of policies in terms of acting for women's issues) and concerns (Celis 2006, 2009; Piscopo 2011; Bühlmann and Schädel 2012). However, since inclusion does not necessarily mean substantive representation for all politically marginalized social groups, regarding women's political integration into representative institutions, the opportunities and the constraints of the roles of the representatives and the gendered impact of their activities have come under sharper focus in extant research both in Turkey and elsewhere. In this context, political analysis informed by feminist perspective challenging male-dominated norms and practices of politics has approached the outcomes of representative acts by highlighting substantive representation as referring to policy content concerning gender equality.

The right to women's access to political representation was historically central to the women's movements. Organized women have struggled for their political, economic, and civil rights since the early nineteenth century. In so far as these struggles have not ended in terms of the practice of citizenship rights, the scholarship on women's political representation has shifted the focus to understanding the impact of women's integration into male-dominated parliaments and the consequences of their legislative activism toward voicing women's demands and gender equality issues. In this respect, it can be contended that the Turkish women's movement has forced political parties through democracy claims advocating simultaneously equality and different

arguments (i.e., the argument that women and men have the same political rights by virtue of equality under the law, and that women's inclusion in politics is also warranted by their special interests and problems, respectively) to endorse women's inclusion and political recruitment as deputies. More recently, Arat and Pamuk diagnosed the Turkish women's movement as a "democratizing force," which integrated women's needs, perspectives, and demands in the political arena (2019, p.228). Women's impact on mainstream politics started to be visible with the activism of the second-wave feminist women in the 1980s, and mainstream politics started to respond to their demands in the 1990s (Sirman, 1989). At that point, the impetus of the international women's movement and global feminism affected the women's movement in Turkey. The signing of and the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, and Turkey's candidacy for EU membership in the post-1999 era hugely impacted the agenda of governments and forced them to take feminist demands seriously (Aldikacti-Marshall, 2009, p.360).

Regarding political representation at the legislative level, Turkish women parliamentarians remained a minority in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM), and as such, for a long time they were largely dependent on those men who promoted their election since the 1930s (Arat, 1989, p.84). Most of these women did not display a distinctively pro-women perspective during their legislative careers. It can be contended that Turkey's male-dominated political institutions, which have shaped women's routes to elected positions along with strong party discipline constrained elected MPs' autonomy vis a vis party policy. As a minority, women MPs were not particularly keen on representing women's issues and interests. However, as political parties in Turkey started to take the problem of gender disparity in political representation seriously under the influence of the women's movement since the 1990s, there have been advances in women's numerical representation and also in the election and legislative activism of women deputies on behalf of women in view of

the gender discrimination women have been facing in the society. The institutionalization of feminism within the state structure (through women's ministries and departments) also created gender awareness in political actors. Subsequently, in the 2000s, after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power, the number of female parliamentarians in the TBMM followed an increasing trend from 4.4 percent to 17.3 percent between the 2002 and 2018 general elections. This increased descriptive (numerical) representation of women occurred as Turkey's political parties started to follow egalitarian measures (such as voluntary quotas) to promote more women in party politics. However, whether and how this numerical presence has led to progress in the representation of women's interests from different perspectives and transformation of the role of women parliamentarians in terms of acting for gender equality in legislative activities is still in need of rigorous and systematic analysis.

This thesis aims to contribute to scholarship on the role of elected women in representing women within the Turkish parliament during the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative terms, extending from 2016 to 2022 following the elections of November 2015 and June 2018 respectively. As it contextualizes the MPs' roles within the party identity and programmatic platforms of parties in the party-centered structure of Turkish parliamentary politics, it also attempts to shed light on how individual MPs reflect their parties' perspectives on specific gender equality issues. Until very recently, Turkish political parties, regardless of ideological differences, have generally approached women in the context of their domestic roles as mothers, and they have not espoused a gender equality perspective (Kabasakal-Arat, 2017). The majority of the mainstream left-wing (social democratic) and right wing (conservative) Turkish parties have also been gendered institutions where the election of women has also been characterized by gendered norms and expectations. This situation has not been favorable to the emergence of women's autonomous voices on women's issues and concerns in politics. Most parties were reluctant to involve women for a long time in politics and make them active political actors (Çakır, 2019, p.134). Nevertheless,

within this general context, regarding the political recruitment and the election of more women, almost all political parties across the ideological spectrum have also started to attach greater significance to women's representation through rhetorical appeals and affirmative action strategies, most notably through voluntary gender quotas. In addition to the governing AKP (2002-Present), which claims to implement a soft quota to nominate and elect women from its lists in general and municipal elections (Cansun 2012; Şahin-Mencutek 2015), other parties also promote the presence of women in the legislature through special measures (Celep, 2021). In this context, the center-left Republican People's Party (CHP), which historically pioneered women's suffrage, civic and political roles increased its internal gender quota from 25 percent to 33 percent for local and general elections in 2012. However, despite this women's descriptive representation in the CHP parliamentary group stands at 11,94 percent in 2022. Currently, the CHP is the third party with the highest number of female representatives in the Turkish parliament, following the AKP, which has a female ratio of 18,88 percent. The other politically significant opposition party, the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), has displayed a record high performance in women's descriptive representation in 2022, with 41,15 percent female parliamentarians in its TBMM group. This is in line with the HDP's egalitarian gender ideology which had led the party to adopt a parity (50 percent women) objective and institutionalized feminism within the party structure further through the co-presidency system since 2012. Furthermore, the HDP called itself a "women's party" in the general election manifestos in 2015 and 2018.

In the era of rising gender conservatism under the AKP period, the substantive representation of women is characterized by a gender-specific context which has seen a backsliding from gender equality understanding (Kandiyoti, 2016). In this political-ideological atmosphere, the substantive representation of women by the women MPs from opposition parties that hold a pro-women perspective is a significant issue that calls for a critical inquiry. Given the gender-conservative political context which has

deepened women's problems, the roles of women MPs from the most women-friendly opposition parties in the Turkish parliament in agenda setting, raising, and articulating women's issues in feminist terms as well as supporting and initiating legislation on women's issues and opposing those which negatively impact women's position needs to be placed under academic scrutiny. The opposition parties, CHP and HDP, are also not ideologically similar despite their women-friendly outlook, and also there has also been a difference in their performance in meeting their quota targets to promote women's parliamentary representation. The CHP is the main opposition with a social-democratic identity that comes from a tradition of women's rights reforms and a progressive stand on women's issues. The HDP is the pro-Kurdish leftist party having the most women deputies in the parliament. Today, the CHP and HDP are the two parties that project the strong pro-women and equality perspective in their program, manifestos, election declarations, and other party activities compared to other parties represented in the TBMM.

Nevertheless, there has been a significant gap in gender research on women's representative activities and discourses in terms of substantive representation of women in the Turkish parliament in the context of backtracking gender equality. Available limited studies based on quantitative research looked at such variables as women-related bills passed into law, gender differences in passing laws, and other indicators linking substantive representation to women's numerical existence in the TBMM (Güneş-Ayata and Tütüncü 2008a; Bektaş and Issever-Ekinci, 2019; Bulut and Yildirim 2020; Konak-Unal 2020). However, research on substantive representation (acting for) also calls for an analysis of those factors shaping MPs' legislative activities to reveal analytically its relations to descriptive representation (standing for).

This thesis aims at analyzing the legislative activities of opposition women MPs from the two major pro-women parties (CHP and HDP) in terms of raising and addressing



women's issues based on a qualitative analysis of their discursive framing of gender equality. To this end, the thesis inquiries into their stances on women's problems and status as they are revealed in how they approached and articulated women's problems, and the gender equality debate on selected legislation and policy area. As will be explained below, in Turkey women's subordinate employment status has been closely related to decreasing women's labor force participation and the family-centered policies under the AKP period. The issue of women's employment (with problems areas such as the gender pay gap, women's equal access to work, childcare and elderly care policies, social security legislation for women, and gendered employment patterns in the labor market) is crucial from the perspective of gender equality because women's economic independence is one of the components of women's empowerment and liberation from the patriarchal structure. Furthermore, women's equal and fair participation in the labor force is a prerequisite for economic and societal development. Therefore, it can be contended that women legislators' support for women's labor and employment rights and their criticism of government policies provides insights into the nature and the extent of substantive representation of women in the Turkish parliament. The investigation of the women's labor market issues and employment is also likely to reveal differences and similarities between women MPs from these opposition parties during the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative terms in terms of bringing relevant institutional and ideational factors shaping their pro-women activities into closer focus.

## **1.2. Research Question(s) and Hypothesis**

As the preceding account suggests, the major research problems in this thesis study relate to the roles played by the opposition women MPs from Turkey's major opposition parties (CHP and HDP) for promoting substantive representation of women on women's problems in employment in the context of the government policies. In the

post-2015 period when the gendered repercussions of a pronatalist and family-centered social policy of the government have deepened women's vulnerable labor market position. Specifically, the thesis study addresses the following research questions: 'How do opposition CHP and HDP women MPs raise issues related to women's labor and employment and articulate their interests in the TBMM?' and, 'Why and how do the discursive approaches of these two left-wing parties converge and diverge through specific framings on these issues in their women MPs' legislative activities?'

Much of the extant research on women's substantive representation in parliaments has looked at gender differences in the policy priorities and approaches of male and female representatives (Paxton and Hughes, 2017). The findings suggest that women legislators display differences in legislative priorities and views on social problems by getting more involved in issues relevant to women's experiences compared to their male counterparts. Although gender makes a significant difference in most, if not all, cases for the issue stances of legislators, studies have also demonstrated that gender interacts with other variables such as party identity, party discipline, the feminist commitment of the legislators, and incumbency or oppositional status in the parliament which shapes whether women do in fact act on their different priorities and views (Tremblay, 2015, p.173). In particular, the institutional and partisan constraints are likely to influence women's representative acts just like men (Paxton and Hughes 2017, p.219). This issue highlights the significance of party ideology and opposition status for substantive representation. However, the literature to date is also underdeveloped in understanding gendered representative claims and acts by looking at differences among women across parties because most research has taken up the male and female differences in the parliamentary activities of legislators.

The analytical identification and measurement of the substantive representation of women (acting for women in their policy context) in parliament have been complicated

since it is not as concrete and straightforward as a measurement of descriptive representation (standing for identities). Scholars have disagreed regarding whether a certain threshold of women's numerical presence would be necessary for promoting the quality of acting for women's interests (Celis, 2009). Women's presence in the Turkish parliament could not reach the critical mass of 30 percent identified in the literature as a threshold for representation of women's interests. However, there has been a relative increase in Turkish women's numerical representation; thus, it is important to consider this progress in women's numerical representation. According to Celis (2009, p.105), the "acting for more women" directly relates to "quality of representation." In this respect, she identified several criteria to evaluate the improvement in the substantive representation of women. The first is the "more support for women's interests," which attests to the responsiveness to women. The second one is widening the extent of women's interests by covering new issues in terms of women's interests that is important to cement and boost the responsiveness of substantive representation). The last criteria are ideological discussions over women's interests (Celis, 2009, p.106). These three criteria orient the research to focus on women's interests for the operationalization of substantive representation of women. In particular, as the historical trajectories of women's political inclusion in democracies have demonstrated, political ideology has played a significant role in shaping both increases in women's entrance into parliaments and the patterns of their inclusion.

Identifying women's interests is central to understanding and analyzing the substantive representation of women since it contributes to comprehending the extent of elected women's representation of women's gendered concerns in their legislative acts. For this reason, engaging with the term 'women's interests' also calls for a concrete definition to comprehend better and operationalize the indicators of substantive representation of women. In this context, for this thesis study, Molyenux's (1985) conceptual approach is adopted by unpacking the general term "women's interests"

for analyzing the role of party-related ideational factors for the representation of women's problems by women MPs on the basis of an analytical distinction between "strategic gender interests" and "practical gender interests" to further analyze the content and the significance of their representative acts.

Molyneux (1985, p.231) states that "there is no theoretically adequate and universally applicable causal explanation of women's subordination" to determine the women's interests. Nevertheless, it is apparent that women have common problems derived from their shared experiences in patriarchy, which creates consensus over women's interests in society. After all, these common interests have been the underlying reasons behind women's struggles for equal rights (Molyneux, 1985, p.231). In this respect, Molyneux's (1985, p.232) research further clarifies 'women's interests' by distinguishing between the "strategic gender interests" and "practical gender interests." Strategic gender interests refer to the formulation of alternative and favorable targets to subvert the patriarchal system which subordinates women, such as the elimination of gender-based discrimination, the emancipation of women, and ensuring gender equality in socio-cultural, political, and economic realms with legal and institutional reforms (Molyneux, 1985, p.233). According to Molyneux (1985, p.233), strategic gender interests denote "women's "real" interests," which are also referred to as "feminist interests." In other words, strategic gender interests challenge patriarchy and seek the transformation of the existing gender regimes in an egalitarian way (Molyneux, 2005, p.77); in this respect, it approaches women's interests with the aim of women's empowerment in a broader sense. Therefore, formulating the strategic gender interests process requires more systematic, meticulous work and long-term objectives so as to construct them on a feminist basis. In contrast, "practical gender interests" are relevant to the immediate and short-term responses to women's needs and demands (Molyneux, 1985, p.233). According to Molyneux (1985, p.233), practical gender interests do not challenge the women's subordinated positions, although these interests straightly emerge from women's subordination. Molyneux

formulated this distinction to analyze women's claims and activism within the feminist movement. For the purposes of the analysis in this thesis focusing on the political and gendered context shaping the actors' (parties, leaders, parliamentary groups, MPs) approach to women's issues, this distinction also makes sense for comprehending the representation of those policy content related to gender equality and issues specific to an identity group (women) in politics.

On the basis of the conceptual nuances surrounding 'women's interests,' this qualitative thesis inquires into the way in which the women MPs of the CHP and HDP agree or differ in discursively constituting women's practical and strategic interests in their parliamentary acts on women's labor and employment. The hypotheses (H1 and H2) formulated are as follows:

H1: The CHP and HDP women deputies pay attention to representing "practical gender interests" and "strategic gender interests" relevant to women's subordination in employment in their legislative acts owing to their leftist political identities prioritizing social justice and identity issues.

H2: At the same time, their different approaches to "practical and strategic gender interests" are likely to be projected and reflected in how women MPs frame gender issues and reflect their feminist approaches stemming from their ideologies.

### **1.3. The Significance of the Turkish Case**

Gender and politics scholars have problematized and analyzed various dimensions of the representative acts by women deputies in the TBMM by inquiring into the gender differences in legislative activities (e.g., Ayata and Tütüncü 2008a; Şahin-Mencutek 2014; Bektaş and Issever-Ekinci 2018; Bulut 2020; Konak-Unal 2020; Wuthrich 2020; Taşkın 2021). The first issue concerns the women parliamentarians' self-identification as representative of women as a social category. As several scholars (Ayata and Tütüncü 2008a; Konak-Unal 2020) concluded, the majority of Turkish women MPs did not identify themselves as feminists with the implication that they were largely concerned with practical gender interests. The second issue is the highly disciplined and centralized political parties, which inhibit women representatives from performing autonomous legislative behavior in parliament activities (e.g., Bektaş and Issever-Ekinci 2018; Konak-Unal 2020). Last but not least, as Bektaş and Issever-Ekinci (2018) found out, women MPs did not adequately engage in lobbying activities with the feminist movement in Turkey to represent women.

From a gender perspective, the scholars who studied the AKP's politics have drawn attention to its first term (2002-2007) and the second term (2007-2011). In the first period, the researchers broadly addressed the legal amendments and the impact of membership in the EU on the AKP's gender politics. In the second period, academics paid attention to the emergence of the AKP's conservative gender politics on the family and motherhood. The studies demonstrated that the AKP had shifted its liberal and pro-EU stance to neoliberal and religio-conservative politics (Arat 2011; Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün 2017). This shift is also politicized and popularized under the term "gender justice" by the female pseudo-intellectuals of the government (Yılmaz, 2015), which was subsequently turned into a buzzword denoting the AKP's 'family-centered' and 'anti-gender equality' politics.

However, there have been limited studies focusing on gender politics of opposition parties, the CHP and HDP, during the AKP era (e.g., Cansun 2013a, 2014a, 2014b; Çelik 2016; Burç 2018; Erel and Acik 2019; Şen 2021). As detailed in Chapter 3 of the thesis, the CHP has the longest political history in Turkey. This background witnessed different phases and politics in the party's gender politics. The HDP, the latest party in the lineage of pro-Kurdish parties since the 1990s, has been characterized by egalitarian gender politics based on feminist values with an intersectional perspective, i.e., being attentive to the problems of women from different social groups. In Turkish party politics, ideological principles and priorities are determinant factors in individual-level politics (Bektas and Issever-Ekinci, 2018). As Şen's research (2021, p.2456) indicated, the CHP and HDP (left-leaning parties) are more likely to emphasize gender equality and women's empowerment compared to the AKP and MHP (right-leaning parties), which pay attention to Islamic values, family, and patriarchal culture. In contrast, the CHP and HDP seek solutions from a class perspective and concentrate on social welfare rights in gender equality (Şen, 2021, p.2468). In this sense, this common ideological stance is likely to engender similarities between parties in their gender policies. It can be contended that beyond ideology, the parties' (pro)-feminist orientation and their representatives' feminist approaches to women's concerns are also likely to constitute another crucial variable for shaping their gender agenda and discourses.

Extant research mainly focuses on sex differences in parliamentary activities that overlook differences among women, especially in relation to their pro-feminist stances informed by party ideology and identity (see Bektaş and Issever-Ekinci 2019; Bulut and Yildirim 2020; Konak-Unal 2020). This thesis focuses on CHP and HDP's women deputies' discursive approaches in terms of broadening the gender agenda as reflected in their legislative activities regarding the problems of women in employment, an issue closely related to gender inequalities within the family and at the workplace. For example, the issues of equal pay and women's invisible labor have been one of the

issues taken up in the Turkish feminist movement. In this respect, gender-based inequalities and discrimination in private and public spheres are the root causes of women's disadvantaged positions in paid employment. Beyond religious conservatism and patriarchal family structures, changes in economic structure, economic policies, and control of women's labor by patriarchal relationships in the capitalist market (Ecevit, 2010) have been responsible for women's low levels of employment. Although the Turkish economy experienced rapid economic growth and a severe export surge in the first periods of the AKP rule, women were economically marginalized in the labor market. The "jobless growth" conceptual framework defines this high unemployment rate despite GDP growth in the economy (Telli et al. 2006; Buğra 2018). The commonality of jobless growth for female citizens revealed itself in the statistics; the female employment rate stood at 26,3% in 2012, which made Turkey the second lowest among G20 economies (Inan and Aşık, 2015, p.4). It demonstrated that GDP growth was not a sufficient condition for women's participation in employment and their economic empowerment. There is still a severe gender gap in women's employment in Turkey; the female employment rate was only 28,7% in 2019, which signals gender inequality in the economy (TÜİK, 2021). Gender inequality exists in the labor market's vertical and horizontal job segregation. Most women work in the service sector jobs and agriculture with low-paying or unpaid, part-time jobs without social security (Toksöz 2016; Toksöz and Memiş, 2018). In this respect, the main problems have been identified as flexible, part-time, and informal forms of employment; poverty and unemployment of women; insufficient home care social services; problems in access to quality and affordable childcare; problems with maternity leave for women; and the lingering gender-based division of labor. Even though all parties in the TBMM underline the significance of women's economic participation and paid labor, they are likely to approach the issue from different viewpoints. This thesis study aims at contributing to the analyses of the substantive representation of women by women MPs in Turkey on this specific problem area by tracing their legislative activities and approaches through an analysis of their



discursive articulation and framing of women's issues on the basis of a qualitative research approach highlighting their party-related features.

#### **1.4. The Feminist Research Approach and Research Concerns**

Feminist perspective in research methodology challenges the patriarchal (re)construction of 'scientific' knowledge and opens male-dominated academia's eyes to gender-blind research. According to Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002, p.15), feminist methodology characterizes normative research methods and challenges the gendered social structure. By making it possible for women's voices to be heard, and rendering gendered experiences of women visible.

The feminist research approach seeks to transcend positivist objectivity concerns and claims in its reasoning. Alternatively, the feminist perspective offers a critical approach to male-dominated disciplines. Feminist scholars have contended that at issue is not the identification of the best feminist research as procedures (Letherby, 2011, p.62); in fact, feminist researchers have been using classical research methods, such as interview research, ethnography, cross-cultural research, oral history, discourse analysis, case studies by bringing feminist perspective and methodological and ethical concerns into it. Haraway had an excellent metaphor to explain the dilemma of feminist knowledge. According to her, the feminist methodology is like "climbing the greasy pole while holding on to both ends of a pole, simultaneously or alternately" (Haraway, 1991, p.188). In this metaphor, one side of the pole represents empiricism while another edge indicates feminist knowledge.

The critical approach of the feminist research is essential to comprehending the relationship between knowledge and power (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002, p.16; Stanley and Wise, 2008, p.222). Feminist research approach care about how research methods should be implemented and how these tools should be used to do feminist research. Feminist scholars are aware of how male-dominated academia constructs male knowledge under their study's 'objectivity' and 'value-free' dimensions. In this respect, they criticized male-centric methodology and research methods in the 1970s, when women's academic numbers increased in academia with the influence of the prominent women's movement.

As Celis and her colleagues (2013, p.7) rightly emphasized, due to "male-domination in both politics and the political science discipline," gender and politics scholars began to subvert the gender blindness in this scholarship. They studied conventional political science topics, such as democracy, government, political parties, and representation within the critical eyes of feminists. The main contribution of gender and politics scholars is looking at politics inside the private sphere by challenging the public and private sphere distinction, and bringing the private sphere issues (e.g., violence against women, gendered division of labor, reproductive rights) into political research. Most political science scholars continued to define themselves as positivists (including some feminists), while feminist scholars meet the common ground with critical theorists (Celis et al., 2013, p.9). By doing so, feminist scholars expanded the definition of politics and power. The question "How is political power itself constituted by gender?" (Sawer, 2019, p.14) enabled feminist scholars to question traditional political science theories and to ask further questions such as "where are the women?" and "what difference do women make in their political participation?" These questions also informed research and scholarly debates on women's substantive representation. The qualitative research approach and methods are more likely to be preferred for understanding the substantive representation of women. It entails understanding the representation of women's interest issues through acts and discourses of the elected

representatives. Feminist political scientists have also established and employed specific variables to operationalize the substantive representation of women by women. Hence research on substantive representation is not conducted within a single research method or procedure. More importantly, it can be contended that the substantive representation of women as the research subject and a normative feminist concern has a feminist standpoint. It is also important because this research adopts a feminist research assumption in that the substantive representation of women should include acting for the ultimate objective of women's empowerment and liberation from patriarchy for all women regardless of and by taking into consideration their different experiences and social positioning.

There is no single research method or procedure associated with feminist research. Accordingly, on the basis of the feminist research approach and concerns adopted to understand the substantive representation of women by women, this thesis employs the frame analysis method procedure to analyze women MPs' legislative acts in the TBMM.

#### **1.4.1. The Frame Analysis and the Representation of Women**

This qualitative study examines the discursive frames of the women MPs from Turkey's major center-left opposition parties, the CHP and HDP, to analyze the substantive representation of women during the legislative processes on women's labor and employment issues. By taking women MPs legislative acts as the major unit of analysis, it looks at women MPs' plenary speeches, legislative proposals, motions of written questions, motions of parliamentary inquiry, and commission speeches on women's position in employment, their problems stemming from gender division of

labor in the domestic realm and at the workplace, and on their approaches and criticism of the labor policies of a conservative government which has had different consequences for men and women.

As the time scope, the period between 2016 and 2022 is chosen in particular to explore and analyze women representatives in the context of an increasingly anti-gender atmosphere spearheaded by the AKP government. The dependent variable is women parliamentarians' discursive constitution of women's interests in their policy suggestions and perspectives on women's labor and employment in the context of controversial legislative debates as reflected in their frames. These frames are likely to be projected in their plenary speeches and commission speeches raised by women deputies at the plenary meetings. Since written questions and parliamentary inquiry also reflect the legislators' preferences and role behavior (see Martin, 2011, p.259). This research analyzes the opposition women MPs' legislative acts on specific women's interest issues, women's labor, and employment. Frames and discourses denote different meanings even though they are consistent. Discourse, the use of language, is crucial in constructing societies since it creates ideology, policies, and social structures and vice versa. The paramount importance of discourse is based on its meaning-making function. In Fairclough and Wodak's words, "discourse is socially constitutive and socially shaped" (1997, p.258); thus, discourse, like gender, is based on social construction. Similarly, Triandafyllidou and Fotiou stated that "discourse is viewed as a language act through which symbolic constructs are made real" (1988, 1.1). It means that social actors (re)produce reality and form it specifically using these symbolic constructs (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou, 1988, 1.1). In the same vein, Bacchi emphasized the importance of discourse in "meaning-making in political life" (2005, p.198). From these authors' viewpoints, discourses are made up of speakers' constructions that make meanings in politics. Likewise, the term frame originated from Goffman's (1974) research in which he defined it as "schemata of interpretation" that make it possible for people "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" incidents in their

personal life and about the world. Therefore, frames give meaning to incidents and function to arrange occurrences and guide actions (Benford and Snow, 2000, p.614). Frames as “symbolic-interpretive constructs” (Triandayfyllidou and Fotiou, 1988, 2.2) make meanings in politics and social life. The meaning-making processes render framing “active and processual” (Bedford and Snow, 2000, p.614). Therefore, this analysis method helps us to comprehend how political actors use words to negotiate and (re)construct politics.

There are several reasons to opt for analysis of discourses. First, this analysis consists of non-reactive data, which are also called “cultural artifacts” (texts) (see Reinharz, 1992). In this research, the cultural artifacts are categorized under the title of artifacts produced “by women (parliamentarians), about women and for women” (Reinharz, 1992, p.147). These cultural artifacts possess two specific features: first, it is natural and already found in the data, not produced for specific research; second, these data are non-interactive; thus, they are not influenced by the research processes and researchers and/or researched group(s) (Reinharz, 1992, p.147). These non-reactive, non-obtrusive cultural artifacts are the primary resources of this thesis. The analytical unit of the thesis is individual (women) MPs whose party ideology and (pro)-feminist identities are the main constitutive components of their discursive frames to be explored in the research.

Discourses contain frames, and a specific issue’s framing also (re)produces discourses and vice versa. For instance, a representative might use a “gender-conservative frame,” using gendered phrases such as “women are responsible for child-care” or “women's priority should always be her children.” With this frame, they could adopt an anti-gender discourse of “women belong to the private sphere, men belong to the public sphere.” Political representation is intertwined with the discourses, which “constitute identities and their associated interests” (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008) (cited in

Tremblay 2015, p.174). Therefore, representative claims of women MPs constitute diverse identities of women in accordance with their “political situatedness” (Tremblay, 2015, p.174). Furthermore, in frame analysis, a researcher should take “shaping impact” (Bacchi, 2005; p.204) factors, such as political parties’ ideology and their representatives’ feminist stances, into consideration in analyzing representatives’ legislative acts. Frame theory is a particularly convenient method to study women’s substantive representation in Turkey for several reasons. First and foremost, it provides a discursive viewpoint for analyzing opposition women MPs’ approaches to women’s issues and gender-based inequalities in employment. Secondly, it enables us to analyze the (pro)-feminist commitments of the MPs by placing them in the context of their party ideologies. Beyond that, the frame analysis reveals the “conceptual prejudices” that might form policy discourses; as a result, it exposes the “latent inconsistencies” hidden in public policies (Verloo, 2007, p.38). Also, this methodology allows the researcher to expose specific issues and arguments focused on by representatives while what and who are ignored or marginalized by them (Verloo, 2007, p.38).

Another reason to use the frame analysis as a research procedure comes from a prevailing gap in the literature. There are few studies on discourse analysis on parliamentarians in the Turkish parliament, which are limited on gender issues. Nevertheless, some recent research used (feminist) critical discourse analysis or framing analysis in Turkey. For instance, Frank and Çelik (2017) had a critical frame and discourse analysis on reproductive rights debates in Turkey. This discourse analysis contributed to understanding how political and civil society actors framed the issues of abortion and cesarean birth issues. This frame analysis revealed how the AKP instrumentalized and (ab)used religion and religious institutions to justify its anti-abortion policies in the name of national and economic interests (see Frank and Çelik 2017). Similarly, Cindoğlu and Unal (2017) investigated the discourses on women’s bodies and sexuality in the AKP’s post-2011 era. It was found out that bio-political discourses are shared in Turkey’s social and political realms. In the same vein,

Kogacioglu (2004, p.129) focused on framing honor killings as “women's suicides.” The same study also illustrated how family-centered politics are constructed and integrated into their explanations of honor killings in the AKP’s politicians’ discourses. These studies contributed to understanding the ruling party’s gender politics in Turkey. Yet as most research focused on the governing party AKP’s discourses on its gender politics, there is still a gap in scholarship on women MPs and, in particular, opposition parties’ women MPs’ discourses on their gender politics in Turkey; in this respect, frame analysis on the gender politics of the legislative process would contribute to approach the representation issue from a gender perspective.

### **1.5. The Contribution and the Organization of Thesis**

The first chapter of the thesis study lays out the introduction, providing the subject matter, significance, objectives, methodology, and organization. The second chapter covers the literature review along with the theoretical framework of the thesis, and it analyzes the previous works on women’s substantive representation in both Turkey and international contexts. The next chapter examines the gender politics of the governing AKP and the platforms of the opposition parties, CHP and HDP, with particular emphasis on their (pro)-feminist orientations and stances on women’s labor and employment issues. Chapter 4, the qualitative analysis chapter, focuses on the opposition women MPs’ approach to gender equality and analyses women MPs’ legislative acts within the TBMM. Through the frame analysis, it demonstrates how opposition women MPs discursively constitute women’s interests, broaden the political debate, and offer solutions to the women’s labor and employment issues in Turkey. The last chapter sums up the significant findings of this thesis by putting it into perspective in the relevant literature on the substantive representation of women. It also offers further avenues for research on the representation of women’s interests at the legislative level in Turkey.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **WOMEN'S SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION IN THE LEGISLATURES**

Since the First Wave of feminism in the West, women's presence as elected representatives in male-dominated politics have been an indispensable component and indicator of democracy, equal citizenship, and gender equality. Parliaments lie at the heart of democratic deliberation, where different groups of citizens' interests and issues are raised and resolved through representatives' legislative activities. For this reason, women's presence and participation in legislatures are essential for realizing democratic values and principles. The suffrage movement led by organized women constituted a crucial part of women's political rights struggle from the late 19th century to the first quarter of the 20th century. Subsequently, since women remained as a minority in elected politics, and their presence has not led to the dismantling of gender inequalities, women's rights issues and political representation problems were in the international platform in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The United Nations World Conferences for Women, Convention on Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council and the Beijing Platform of Action in 1995 are turning points regarding internationally and formally recognizing women's human rights and making women's interests visible. However, due to the ongoing patriarchal structure, stereotypes, and biases towards women, women are still underrepresented in political institutions and legislatures. Cross-national differences notwithstanding, women are still politically underrepresented in most elected national assemblies, notably in the lower houses of parliaments. As of today, women parliamentarians comprise only twenty-five percent of national parliaments worldwide (IPU, 2021). In the Turkish case, women constitute only seventeen percent of all elected representatives in the Turkish Grand National



Assembly of Turkey. It is in stark contrast to some countries in the democratic world, such as Rwanda, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Mexico, and Argentina, which have reached forty percent or more female representatives in their legislative assemblies with the help of positive action policies most notably the gender quotas. For a long time, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Chile, and Morocco lagged substantially behind the gender equality threshold in politics. In these countries, there has been a “low increasing” pattern in women’s numerical representation; therefore, women have been slightly empowered in politics (Paxton and Hughes 2017; Tremblay 2015).

As will be explained below, both descriptive and substantive representation of women is crucial in order to have a holistic approach to women’s political representation. The significance attached to the descriptive representation of women (women’s presence in the representative bodies along with men as a sex category in the population) is intertwined with the issue of the substantive representation of women, which refers to the outcomes of representatives’ legislative acts on behalf of women’s interests. As this thesis research aims to analyze the relationship between women’s descriptive and substantive representation in the Turkish context, it is then necessary to provide the contours of the debate on the intricate but uneasy relationship between the descriptive and substantive representation.

## **2.1. Women’s Political Representation: The Conceptual Terrain**

In her seminal work (Hanna Pitkin, 1967, p.71), straightforwardly defined representation as “presenting of something, not present.” From this definition, we understand that the existence of a representative to present a group is a precondition for representation itself. According to Pitkin (1967), representation is divided into formalistic, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive. Dimensions of formalistic representation denote the institutional orders that are the premise of representation.

The formal relationship between the representative and represented is discussed in the framework of representatives' authority who hold power and possess an accountability duty to their represented (Pitkin, 1967). In this context, descriptive representation denotes "standing for others" that aims to reflect constituents' views by elected representatives. The standing for approach refers to the numerical existence of representatives who are expected to correspond to or resemble what they represent (Pitkin, 1967, p.60). Symbolic representation is relevant to descriptive representation's "standing for" approach. It specifically focuses on the mirror function of representation. In other words, the representatives function as the symbols of their constituents. From this perspective, both descriptive and symbolic representation emphasizes the importance of women's presence in parliaments for women's representation. The fourth dimension of representation, the substantive representation, refers to the "acting in the interest of represented in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin, 1967, p.114). In this context, gender and politics scholars use "acting for women" as a primary variable to measure women representatives' quality of representativeness and the content of legislative acts and policies. It also assumes that women are seen as a group with common needs, wants, problems, issues, and interests.

These four dimensions of the concept of representation have been central to demonstrating and analyzing women's political representation from a gender perspective. However, Pitkin formulated and discussed the term without a gender standpoint. Hence, several scholars have enriched the analytical study of the substantive representation of women as a marginalized group. The definitions of substantive representation of women generally include a bunch of nominal words such as women's interests, women's policy concerns, needs of women, and act on behalf of women (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Celis et al. 2008; Tremblay 2007; Curtin 2006) (cited Dahlerup, 2014). In light of these terms, we infer that the fundamental analytical concern is with women as a gender category and their interests, needs, and issues and acting for them. Along these lines, Wängnerud (2009, p.59) approached the

substantive representation concept to demonstrate “the extent to which the number of women elected affects women’s interests” rather than focusing on “what women do in parliaments?” The underlying concern with the link between the numerical existence of women and their impact on women’s issues calls for unpacking not only those factors which mediate the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation but also the operationalization of women’s interests and the representative acts. Although Pitkin introduced these terms in the academic literature, there was much ambiguity as to how they would exist together (Dovi 2006); the nature and the direction of the relationship between the descriptive and substantive representation of women are approached with specific methods to measure and operationalize them by gender and politics scholars. For example, Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) focused on the “process” and “outcome” of women deputies’ legislative activities for the sake of representation of women’s interests. This distinction enables researchers to observe both the capacity and limitation of women legislatures in the presence of various contextual factors such as the degree of the democratic electoral system and features of political parties. In fact, according to Childs and Krook (2009), substantive representation is largely dependent on the ‘context;’ i.e., the legislative actors’ capacity to make laws for women’s interests does not merely depend on their numerical presence.

In addition, Pitkin’s work was also criticized for its narrow in its focus on the “how” question; for this reason, scholars brought in “who” inquiry for the relationship between voters and representatives. The answer to the “Who” question is based on where you locate the representation venue. Some authors have a broader definition, and they go beyond the legislative body, the assembly of their countries and look at other venues where the representation of marginal/minority groups has been performed, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Weldon (2002, p.1153) contended that “women’s movements and women’s policy agencies” are places where the representation of women is more effective than women in the legislature. In the

same vein, Celis et al. (2008, p.99) also argued that representation is everywhere in formal political institutions. The “who” question is also related to the inclusiveness of women’s differences in their needs, problems, and interests (see Celis, 2013). In this respect, the inclusiveness of differentiation in these concerns is a significant aspect of substantive representation research.

Also, adding the “where” question into substantive representation requires looking at civil society organizations, national and international agencies, trade unions, and other groupings. From this viewpoint, scholars underlined the women’s movement to call attention to the importance of grassroots movements in representation (Cornwall and Goetz 2006; Paxton et al., 2006; Celis et al., 2008; Jaquette 2018). According to Celis et al., (2008, p.105), different venues offer opportunities for women so as to “make their voices heard” and to “articulate their claims and demands.” Beyond that, Paxton and her colleagues (2006) found out that the women’s movement’s pressure on mainstream politics positively impacted the women’s political engagement in political positions at decision-making levels. In this line, Cornwall and Goetz (2006) suggested that civil society organizations, especially feminist organizations, are significant venues to articulate gender-transformative agendas in old and newly democratic nations. In this respect, the women’s movement’s relations with mainstream political parties are crucial in reflecting women’s interests and needs in parliamentary activities. It is also necessary to develop independent feminist politics within the comprehensive participation of women in society.

## **2.2. Unpacking ‘Women’s Interests’**

Women’s unique needs, concerns, issues, and interests have been the starting point for problematizing women’s minority presence in political institutions among feminist

activists and scholars. Nevertheless, the term ‘women’s interests’ is contested for two major reasons. First, it was more likely affiliated with the interests of white middle-class women; secondly, seeing women as a category is interpreted as essentialism which renders sexes as non-changeable categories (Wängnerud, 2011, pp.137-138). Another problem is the representation of women’s interests in male-dominated politics. Women’s experiences have not been adequately and equally addressed and represented as much as men’s experiences. Since politics and policy were always presented as gender-neutral under the marginalization of women’s experiences and gender identity, the increased presence of elected women has, in time, challenged gender and politics scholars to focus on what they do in the parliaments and how they represent women’s interests. For this reason, researchers have developed several methods and definitions to deal with the vagueness and the universalist or essentialist implications of the term ‘women’s interests.’

Sapiro (1981) contended that the root of women’s issues relies on the “division of labor” and “women’s special interests” since women held different social positions from men. Consequently, these differences created special interests calling for representation (Sapiro, 1981, p.704). In the same vein, Diamond and Hartsock (1981) argued that it was the “sexual division of labor” which engendered women’s common interests because “different male and female life activity resulted in different social understanding” (1981, p.718). Similarly, Lovenduski (2001) explained women’s issues as “...those that mainly affect women, either for biological reasons (such as breast cancer screening and reproductive rights) or for social reasons (sex equality or child-care policy)” (Lovenduski, 2001, p. 745). As these scholars contended, women’s interests were based on the “gendered division of reproductive and productive labor” (Celis et al., 2014, p.153).

Celis and her friends (2009) elaborated on and unpacked women's interests definition in the light of previous empirical research on this subject. According to Celis and her colleagues (2009), there are three ways to define women's interests. The first one is relevant to women's position in the private sphere, which denotes issues on the ground of "women's bodies, sexuality, and the possibility of giving birth;" the second one is about the public sphere, where women's issues emerged in the labor market and welfare state policy (Celis et al., 2009, p.7). These issues in the framework of private and public spheres are categorized under Molyneux's (1985) argument of "practical gender interests," which is based on "gendered division of labor" (cited Celis et al., 2009, p.7). The third and last way to define women's interests derives from Molyneux's (1985) "strategic gender interests," which analyze women's issues in both private and public spheres together (Celis et al., 2009, p.7). It requires the feminist formulation of Wängnerud (2000), who determined three components "(1) recognition of women as a social category, (2) recognition of a power imbalance between men and women, and (3) commitment to implement a policy that increases the autonomy of female citizens" (cited Celis et al., 2009, p.7).

Nevertheless, the critical point is how women politicians represent women's issues and interests to improve women's status and to empower them. Celis (2009) determined several criteria to evaluate the extent of the substantive representation of women. The first refers to "more support for women's interests," which attests to the responsiveness to women (Celis, 2009, p.106). The second one is widening the extent of women's interests by covering new issues in terms of women's interests that are important to cement and boost the responsiveness of substantive representation (Celis, 2009, p.106). The last criteria are ideological discussions over women's interests (Celis, 2009, p.106). These three criteria directed the research to focus on women's interests for the operationalization of substantive representation of women. In this respect, in order to operationalize women's interests in the substantive representation of women, this thesis uses Molyneux's (1985, p.232) argument, which is based on the

separation between the “strategic gender interests” and “practical gender interests.” Strategic gender interests refer to the formulation of alternative and favorable targets to subvert the system of subordinate women, such as elimination of gender-based discrimination, the emancipation of women, and ensuring gender equality in socio-cultural, political, and economic realms in society with legal and institutional reforms (Molyneux, 1985, p.233). According to Molyneux (1985, p.233), strategic gender interests denote “women’s “real” interests,” which are also referred to as “feminist interests.” From this viewpoint, strategic gender interests challenge patriarchy and transform the system in an egalitarian way (Molyneux, 2005, p.77); in this respect, it approaches women’s interests with the aim of women’s empowerment in a broader sense. Therefore, formulating the strategic gender interests process requires more systematic, meticulous work and long-term objectives so as to construct them on a feminist basis. Practical gender interests are relevant to the immediate and short-term responses to women’s needs and demands in contrast to strategic gender interests’ comprehensive targets on gender equality (Molyneux, 1985, p.233). Practical gender interests are seen as feminine issues such as access to contraception, maternal care, economic needs and other relevant ones. According to Molyneux (1985, p.233), practical gender interests do not challenge women’s subordinated positions, although these interests straightly emerge from women’s subordination. Nevertheless, practical interests have “strategic implications” since the former has the potential for politicization for collective action (Craske, 1999, p.19).

### **2.3. Linking Descriptive Representation to Substantive Representation**

Substantive representation and descriptive representation are not mutually exclusive, since the former implicitly suggests a connection between identity and public policies or decisions. This was also indicated in Article No.181 of the Beijing Platform Action which stated that, “women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a

demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account" (cited in Tremblay 2015, p. 171). For this reason, the following parts of this chapter interrogate the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation by reviewing the theoretical debates and summing up previous research on this subject.

### **2.3.1. The Case for Descriptive Representation and Its Limitations**

In the feminist scholarship, the equality and difference arguments are critical regarding women's descriptive representation as a minority group. Although these perspectives have a common purpose of gender equality, their explanations and solutions for gender inequality differ. The equality argument together with the justice notion, in general, highlights similarities between women and men. From this perspective, women's descriptive representation is justified by the need to provide political equality between females and males as a principle of democracy. In contrast, the difference argument claims that there are essential differences between the two sexes; they assert that women and femininity were subordinated and undervalued because of exaggerated masculine values (Dea, 2016, p.153). The difference argument also concentrates on "differences amongst women" (Randall, 1996, p.374). It supports the descriptive representation of women to voice women's special and unique problems and interests, which are different from men. On the bases of both equality and difference argument perspectives, the descriptive representation of women is one of the controversial topics among gender and politics scholars regarding its necessity for women's political representation. For instance, Phillips (1998) upholds women's descriptive representation on the grounds of "role model, overlooked interests, and revitalized democracy" arguments. The role model argument supports the presence of women representatives to encourage other women to realize their capabilities for political



roles, and this situation subverts stereotypes about the roles of women and men (Phillips, 1998, p.228). The research of Wollbrecht and Campbell (2007), and Bühlman and Schädel (2012) also supported this argument by claiming that the presence of women politicians has a positive impact on other girls' and women's willingness to participate in politics while simultaneously the elected women politicians actively participate and enrich the discussions in the political arena. The overlooked interests argument holds that women's historically invisible interests and issues should be visible for democratic representation. This argument was tested by researcher Walsh (2002), who found that the women representatives speak on behalf of marginalized groups, as occurred in the case of welfare reform and the abortion issue in the U.S. Congress. In the same vein, Argentinian women MPs represented women's special interests relevant to sexual health in their legislative speeches (Piscopo, 2011). The revitalized democracy argument, on the other hand, put forward the idea of empowerment of democratic values by increasing women's political participation. This argument claims that descriptive representation of the diverse group of women is necessary to revitalize democracy. This argument was supported by Siim's (1994) research on Scandinavia countries where more elected women politicians have an impact on supporting civil and social rights such as wages, caring services, and women's political rights. Nevertheless, other research argued that increasing women's descriptive representation does not guarantee the revitalized democracy in the country. For example, Hassim's (1999) research on the South African case proved that although South African women constitute nearly half of the national parliament (46%) through voluntary party quotas today, the first period of democratization in South Africa women's political activism against apartheid did not result in gender breakthroughs in political participation in the transition of democracy. As Tremblay (2007) argued, factors other than democratization affect women's legislative representation, such as the "length of the democratic experiment" and the voting system (political factors), which conditioned advances in women's descriptive representation (Tremblay, 2007). Nevertheless, the "gender roles" (cultural and socio-economic factors) continue to prevent women's election even in well-established

democracies (Tremblay, 2007). These different outcomes from different countries indicate that democracy and its principles are not the only explanation for evaluating women's descriptive representation; other factors should be considered in addressing women's legislative representation. In the same vein, Cornwall and Goetz (2006) argued that women's descriptive representation was insufficient to improve democratic values in a country, and they highlighted the importance of substantive representation for the feminization of legislatures.

The inclusion of women as disadvantaged groups in the political sphere on behalf of democratic citizenship is a common ground for supporters of descriptive representation. In this sense, they support multiple institutional reforms such as the quota system, caucus, women's branches, and other democratic procedures to accelerate the descriptive representation level of historically and socio-culturally underrepresented groups through justice argument. It raises the issue of implementation and the policy impact of various gender quota systems in national parliaments. Numerous studies explored the positive impact of gender quotas in increasing women's descriptive representation in national assemblies (see Baldez 2004; Jones 2004; Meier 2004; Kittilson 2005). Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2011) summarized the arguments for and against electoral gender quota systems. The arguments for quotas are based on several common ideas. First and foremost, women constitute half of the world's population; thus, they ought to share fifty percent of the positions in decision-making venues. Secondly, democracy requires equal representation within the equality and justice arguments. In addition, quotas are not a discriminatory system; instead, they are mechanisms to eliminate invisible barriers against women's political participation by supporting that women are as qualified as men for politics. Moreover, women politicians can represent women due to their shared experiences, interests, and issues. In this way, quotas are quick mechanisms to raise women's presence in decision-making bodies. As a result, women's political involvement might accelerate democratization and empower democratic values. On

the other hand, there have also been strong arguments against gender quotas. According to Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2011, p.26), political representation was seen as a “representation of ideas and interests,” not a representation of gender or other social groups. The quota system is also seen as against the equality principle because it harms the merit value of the candidate selection procedures; it also restricts the candidate selection list since politically unwilling women are pushed to get involved in politics (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2011, p.26). More importantly, the gender quota systems have been criticized for being insufficient so as to bring about the representation of women’s interests and issues. In other words, the assumed link and positive correlation between the advances in descriptive representation of women and the rise of substantive representation of women have also been a hotly debated issue in the quota context.

The gender quota debate in this respect brings about a new question regarding its impact on the substantive representation of women. The literature on this subject proved that quota laws positively impacted the representation of women’s interests in the legislative bodies (Xydias, 2007; Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008; Clayton et al., 2017). Existing research found that the increasing number of women through gender quota implementation increases the responsiveness of women’s interests in the legislative bodies. In other words, women politicians speak more about women’s issues than male politicians. In contrast, some scholars are cautious about the positive relationship between increasing numbers of women and the representation of women’s interests (Trimble 1993; Tremblay 1998; 2015). According to these scholars, even though women’s presence in the parliament is crucial for political representation, it does not guarantee the generation of gender-equal-based policies due to other institutional and bureaucratic limitations. From this viewpoint, the gender quota and increasing descriptive representation through gender quota is a controversial subject matter that needs detailed research in different contexts.

### **2.3.2. Factors Conditioning the Substantive Representation of Women in Parliaments**

The link between descriptive and substantive representation was first proposed by the nineteenth-century Enlightenment thinker John Stuart Mill “in the absence of its natural defenders, the interest of the omitted is always in danger of being overlooked; and when looked at, is seen with very different eyes from those of the persons whom it directly concerns” (Mill, 1967 [1861], p.22). As Mill argued, the physical existence of a group is a prerequisite for representing its constituents; thus, according to him, there is a positive relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. It has been a long time since Mill’s argument, so are there any arguments supporting Mill’s view in today’s world? Since the 2000s, many Western scholars have paid attention to the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation and produced quantitative and qualitative research on this topic because elected female representatives have grown in national parliaments.

Descriptive representation refers to women’s presence measured by their share of seats in the parliament, while substantive representation refers to the pro-women outcome of women MPs’ activities (Tremblay, 2015, pp.170-171). The relationship between descriptive and substantive representation is central to understanding women’s political representation in establishing women politicians’ differences from their male counterparts’ legislative activities, behavior, and discourse in politics. In other words, this relationship is crucial in understanding the numerical increase of elected women’s impact on representing women’s interests. Making a difference by women representatives is not a straightforward process; several factors affect the possibilities and limitations of the emergence of gender-friendly politics in decision-making bodies. ‘The political party institutions, electoral systems, the impact of women’s movement in politics, and factors related to women politicians’ political careers, and

whether they possess and project or outlook feminist identity are likely to impact women representatives' legislative stances, activities, and ultimately shape the overall level of substantive representation of women (Tremblay, 2015, p.173). More importantly, the gender of representatives is expected to be the major determinant in making gender-sensitive politics; however, the relationship between being a woman and engaging in women's issues and pro-women policies has still been controversial. At that point, gender and politics scholarship and research have come up with mixed evidence regarding the relationship's direction and nature.

The first group of scholars who support a positive correlation between descriptive and substantive representation of women in their quantitative and qualitative research found out that the presence of women highly corresponds with the substantive representation of women's interests (see Bratton and Ray 2002; Childs and Withey 2004; Celis 2008; Lowande et al., 2019). The second group, doubtful about the positive relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation, claimed no or minor sex differences in legislative activities for the parliamentarians under specific contexts (see Trimble 1998; Htun and Jones 2002; Chaney 2006).

In the British case, Childs and Withey (2004) found that Labour Party's female representatives positively affected the generation of women-friendly policies in early day motion. They found out that there was a sex gap between female and male MPs in signing the "feminist women's early day motions" that include reproductive rights, violence against women, parental leave, and other issues (Childs and Withey, 2004, pp.556-557). This research confirmed the positive relationship between descriptive and substantive representation owing to the addition of 101 women to the Labour Party in the British Parliament and its impact on early-day motions. On the other hand, Htun and Jones' (2002) case studies on gender quotas in Latin American countries demonstrated that getting more women in the parliament did not necessarily result in

active legislative participation by women representatives. The passive position of Argentinean Congress women was attributed to their constituents' unresponsiveness to the women's agenda in politics, party loyalty that surpasses gender identity in politics, and the existence of conservative women politicians supporting traditional gender roles (Htun and Jones, 2002, p.49).

In order to inquire into descriptive representation's effect on substantive representation, the features of women representatives themselves are important regarding their ways of making politics and their affiliation with the party. By analyzing budget debates, Celis (2008) investigated the positive relationship between descriptive representation and substantive representation in the Belgian Lower House between 1900 and 1979. She found out that women MPs were the most efficient representatives and developed a particular way to represent women by expanding the women's interest definitions (Celis, 2008). Alternatively, Chaney (2006) argued that the identity and the background of representatives 'were far more important than their numbers regarding the substantive representation of women.' According to his research on the National Assembly for Wales, the numbers did not guarantee substantive outcomes because factors such as "legal, constitutional and power relations in party politics aspects" were obstacles to realizing substantive representation (Chaney, 2006, p.699). The same research asked whether women representatives were more likely to intervene on women's issues in plenary debates; nevertheless, the critical point was still who those women were. It was found out that the "equality champions" are politicians who have a background in the feminist movement and have similar personal experiences about women's issues on the agenda (2006, p. 702). This research also suggested that the 'critical mass' of women in legislatures<sup>1</sup>, and "equality champions" were simultaneously necessary for the effective substantive representation of women.

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<sup>1</sup> Critical mass theorists argued that the rising number of elected women to public office increases substantive representation through introducing more women-friendly bills and performing legislative acts for women's interests. Kanter (1977) and Dahlerup (1988), two leading proponents of the critical

Another recent study by Tremblay (2015) offered a more nuanced reflection about the relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation. Tremblay's answers to the "do women represent women?" question was both "yes" and "no." A "yes" answer to explain symbolic and descriptive representation's impact on women's representation. It means that all former female politicians represented women. On the other hand, women did not represent women on the line of formal and substantive representation models, which rely on ideas instead of the presence of women (Tremblay, 2015, p.172). According to Tremblay (2015), although several studies found that female politicians were more responsive to specific women's issues than their male colleagues, there was no cause-and-effect nexus between the number of women and politics seeking women's interests. She noted that "the parties, their programs, and their electoral opportunities; the impact of the women's movement on the political class; and women politicians' political career, and feminist identity" and party discipline were affecting female politicians' (pro)-women legislative activities (Tremblay, 2015, p.173, 177). As a result, gender was not the only explanation for women politicians' representation because other factors complicated the substantive representativeness of female representatives.

The party ideology is a critical determinant for women's substantive representation because ideology indicates opportunities and limitations. In this sense, the left-wing ideologies conventionally have more room for gender-friendly politics and quota policies (Henig and Henig, 2001, p.48). Based on the social justice principle, the left-wing parties were historically more likely to encourage hiring female politicians and supporting feminist values and principles. Nevertheless, available research also

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mass idea, contended that when the number of females passes the threshold of 30 percent in elected assembly, they make a difference on behalf of women's interests. However, empirical research demonstrated that critical mass does not guarantee the representation of women's interests (see Trimble 1993; Beckwith 2007; Bekwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007). In the Turkish case, as Güneş-Ayata and Tütüncü (2008a,p.461) found that women's substantive representation was possible even if they were a small group in the assembly at certain conjectures where "state machinery, women's machinery, and supra-national agencies" provided proper conditions for women parliamentarians.

indicated that ideology was not a straightforward explanatory factor for substantive representation; instead, party ideology has had a complex dynamic in affecting women's substantive representation (Erzeel and Celis, 2016). It was argued that the impact of ideology on women's substantive representation requires a new theoretical model based on transcending the left-right division and distinguishing "economic left/right" and "post-from the materialist left/right" ideologies (Erzeel and Celis, 2016, p.578). The "economic (old type socialist) left" refers to the active role of government in the economy. On the other hand, the "economic right" denotes the decline in the economic role of government, and the "post-materialist left" indicates the "expansion of individual freedoms on post-materialist issues" whereas the "post-materialist right" promotes the "order and tradition" (Erzeel and Celis, 2016, p.578). Left-wing ideologies tended to be more supportive of women's substantive representation. Their research on fourteen European countries revealed that the left ideology groups were more encouraging in representing women's interests (Erzeel and Celis, 2016, p.582). The same research also confirmed that left-wing parties contributed to a feminist substantive representation (Erzeel and Celis, 2016, p.582). The third premise was based on the "level of descriptive party feminization" (Childs and Webb, 2012) which referred to the high percentage of female representatives in the party, which provided a higher level of substantive representation of women (cited Erzeel and Celis, 2016, p.578). The research confirmed the positive relationship between a high descriptive representation of women and a higher level of women's substantive representation.

The feminist identity of women representatives was an important determinant in making gender-sensitive politics. Mansbridge's "feminist accountability" idea is helpful in understanding the impact of the feminist approach on women representatives. According to this idea, feminist politicians were more concerned about women-related bills (Mansbridge, 1995). Mansbridge (1995, p.29) argued that "the discursively created women's movement inspires its activists, and these people feel accountable." However, she added that self-identifying as a feminist was



insufficient to act in a feminist way; thus, feminist accountability required “personal experiences, transformation, and continuing interaction” (Mansbridge, 1995, p.29). The empirical studies support Mansbridge’s “feminist accountability” idea (e.g., Carroll 2003; Curtin 2008; Kelly and Gauchat 2015; Lloren 2015). Dahlerup (2014, p.70) recommended that conducting empirical research, instead of reflecting on what constitutes women’s interests, is the most appropriate approach for women’s substantive representation by considering the alliances between women’s organizations’ programs and legislative activities. In this context, this thesis considers the framings surrounding the issues raised in women MPs’ legislative activities on women’s labor and employment issues could be evaluated on the bases of party positions and ideologies impacting their feminist understandings.

### **2.3.3. Operationalizing Substantive Representation**

The operationalization process is one of the most complex parts of research on substantive representation. As Wängnerud (2009, p.52) defined, research on substantive representation was “less mature” than descriptive representation research. Similarly, Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2014) held that the most problematic part of the substantive representation of women’s research was the lack of standards for its operationalization. Additionally, multiple definitions of women’s interests complicate its operationalization. These conditions make the operationalization of substantive representation harder than descriptive representation research. Nevertheless, there are rich resources on substantive representation research in gender and politics. These would help operationalize substantive representation research.

Some researchers take public opinion data as an indicator of substantive representation of women in order to observe congruence between the political behavior of female representatives and female citizens (e.g., Campbell et al., 2009). Still, others looked at process indicators such as compatibility between the women's movements' claims and agendas and the women's deputies' politics (e.g., Dove 2002; Waylen 2008). Other gender and politics scholars preferred to choose a specific women's issue to analyze how women representatives build women-centered legislative policies (e.g., Mackay 2006; Sawer 2012). Most substantive representation research turned attention to understanding shifts in the culture of legislatures (see Dahlerup 1988; Thomas 1991; Lovenduski 2001; Grey 2002; Childs 2004) and observable changes in political outcomes (see Thomas and Welch 1991; Kathlene 1994; Lovenduski and Norris 2003) in order to comprehend the difference made by women politicians in politics.

Most of the above-mentioned research focused on Western democracies; there is still limited research on the substantive representation of women in non-western countries like Turkey. Although Turkey could not reach the critical mass of women in the national assembly, the country is a sample for a 'low increasing' pattern of women's parliamentary representation. It means that there is a change over time in women's descriptive representation; however, there is neither a steady increase nor a drastic rise that ends up with a considerable percentage of female representatives (Paxton and Hughes, 2016, p.79). The slight increase in women's descriptive representation in the TBMM directs the research to investigate its impact on the representation of women's interests by opposition women representatives. In this research, I look at the legislative acts of women MPs from the CHP and HDP in their 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative periods in order to investigate the substantive representation of women in Turkey in terms of their legislative acts (plenary speeches, bills, written parliamentary questions, parliamentary inquiry proposals, and commission speeches). The textual analysis of parliamentary speeches and other relevant acts would be necessary to shed light on

how elected women representatives perform the substantive representation of women in the framework of women's labor and employment issues.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE GENDER POLITICS OF THE AKP, CHP AND HDP IN TURKEY

With the increasing visibility of the gender equality demands of the Turkish women's movement in civil society in the 2000s, most of the Turkish political parties also began to get engaged in women's rights and gender issues in their programs, official documents, as well as in the discourses of male and female politicians. As reflected in the party documents and the politicians' speeches, political parties across the ideological spectrum tend to have different perspectives on women's rights issues and women's practical concerns (Kabasakal-Arat, 2017). Hence, the official documents (statutes of political parties, party programs, election manifestos, and publications of the Women's Branches) and the speeches and declarations of politicians in the parliament and on various media platforms constitute the sources for understanding and analyzing gender politics to provide a background for analyzing the substantive representation of women by the CHP and HDP n women MPs.

Since it came to power in 2002, the AKP's gender policies and approach to women's issues have been subjected to analysis and research which deal with different aspects of its policies. The AKP had a conservative reformist agenda in its first term of government while having a distinctive approach to gender equality. Nevertheless, the AKP's long-lasting twenty-year governance attests to different phases of the party's gender politics, which evolved into prominent conservative, neoliberal and anti-gender politics. However, there is still a research gap on the gender platforms and approaches of other political parties (e.g., CHP and HDP). Hence, the analysis of the gender politics of CHP and HDP is critical to uncovering their perspectives on gender equality and women's rights or interest issues. It is also to analyze how these

parties have been challenging the AKP's gender politics to provide the basis for making sense of women MPs' attitudes and approaches to specific women's issues by contextualizing these on the basis of their party's identities. Moreover, the analysis of parties' gender politics agenda is likely to shed light on the relationship or any discrepancies between their official stances and practices of parties' women politicians, which is significant for the analysis of the next chapter on women MPs' legislative acts on women's labor and employment issues. Last but not least, analyzing the gender politics of the two main opposition parties would also be important in filling the extant gap in the literature.

### **3.1. The Gender Politics of the Justice and Development Party (AKP): From 'Conservative Democracy' to a 'Gender Justice' Platform**

The AKP has, from the beginning, self-identified itself as a 'conservative democratic' party in order to differentiate itself from its Islamist precedents. The party also projected a reformist identity by embracing a moderate attitude towards the West and the European Union in its first terms as a ruling regime (Güneş-Ayata and Tütüncü 2008b; Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011; Arat and Pamuk 2020). In this respect, Turkey's candidacy for Union membership was one of the pivotal motivations and strategies in the first era of the AKP governance. Nevertheless, the AKP, from the beginning, has a conservative and family-centered perspective on women. In this respect, the party considered women and family under the same umbrella. In its first election manifesto in 2002 women's name was only mentioned along with the subtitles of "Empowerment of Family" and "Women's Problems" under the "Family, Women and Youth" main subject. The important point is here even though the AKP mentioned economic concerns, access to education, health care issues, problems of social security, and domestic violence as the main concerns of women. They highlighted the amelioration of women's position in the family as indispensable for healthy generations and happy

families (AKP, 2002, p.84). The headscarf is another critical issue in understanding the AKP's gender politics due to its conservative Islamic background and ideology. The party approached the headscarf issue in the context of human rights, freedom of choice, and religious freedom in the first governance years. In other words, The AKP did not unequivocally touch upon this issue until 2008, when Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan talked about lifting the ban of the headscarf in universities during his visit to Spain (Hürriyet, 2008). A legislative attempt followed in the TBMM, as the AKP government submitted a bill for a constitutional amendment to remove legal obstacles to women with a headscarf in public sphere in alliance with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) in the same year. These attempts were supported by conservative women for expanding their access to education and employment.

Meanwhile, during its first term in power, several crucial legal and constitutional reforms were enacted by the AKP-dominated parliament in the context of the EU membership prospects conditionality. These EU-led reforms were significant also for meeting the demands of the women's movement by integrating them into mainstream politics in Turkey. The legal outcomes of the feminist movement's demands were mainly the Turkish Penal Code; amendments in Articles (10, 41, and 90) of the Constitution which stipulated that equality between sexes is guaranteed under the national law; the preparation of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2008-2013); the formation of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men in the Parliament (2009); Prime Minister Circular 2010/14 on Increasing Women's Employment and Achieving Equality of Opportunity; the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (2011); and the enactment of the national law Law on Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women<sup>2</sup>. However, it has been argued

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<sup>2</sup> The domestic violence legislation was first enacted as the Law on Protection of Family (Act No.4320) in 1998. This law was later amended in 2012 as the Law on Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women (Act No.6284) with input from numerous women's rights organizations.

that these legal improvements did not entirely contribute to gender equality in Turkey (Cosar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011; Kandiyoti & Heinen 2012; Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün 2017); violence against women, femicide, underrepresentation of women in decision-making mechanisms, and gender-based inequalities in the labor market have remained as pressing problems. Throughout its successive terms in power as the dominant political actor in party politics, the AKP has overseen critical transformations in Turkey's politics, while at the same time, it has undergone specific shifts in its policies and discourses. According to Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün (2017, p.6), the conservative gender climate, which consists of religion, custom, and tradition, was the main reason for the ineffectiveness of legal amendments for gender equality in Turkey. In addition, according to Arat's (2010) democratic paradox argument, religious freedoms that merely include Islamic religious women's rights threatened developments against gender equality in Turkey. In other words, the Islamic worldview understanding of traditional gender roles inhibited women's right to choose while excluding them from public realms (Arat, 2010).

Ultimately the AKP, which started with a pro-liberal and reformist platform on women's rights, has shifted toward a less women-friendly perspective and policies as it increasingly drifted into authoritarian governance. This transformation of the AKP is interpreted as the two phases of AKP rule; first is the center-right party understanding of neoliberal capitalist politics in the first two governance periods, and nationalist-populist politics with electoral-authoritarianism after the 2010s (Özkazanç, 2020). This new phase excluded and alienated women's rights advocates by adopting a specific gender-conservative platform replacing equality emphasis with an ambiguous gender justice term. According to Arat (2021, p.3), "the AKP instrumentalized women's rights" to justify its political change based on its changing needs and to sustain its power. The reinterpretation of women's legal rights (e.g., promotion of religious marriage by expanding the authority of the Directorate of Religious Affairs) and establishment of conservative institutions for women

(Association of Women and Democracy-KADEM) are the stages of this instrumentalization of women's rights within democratic backsliding after 2010 (Arat, 2021).

In the post-2011 era, when the AKP consolidated and guaranteed its power in the state's legislative, executive, and judicial branches, they became less tolerant toward the opposition. It should be noted that this democratic backsliding and anti-gender politics do not silence opposition forces, especially women oppositions and activists. In contrast, opposition have become more vocal against the anti-gender politics of the ruling regime. The culmination of this opposition movement was a legally dubious withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention through a presidential decree in July 2021. Women from different groups and some political parties have come together on various women's platforms to voice their oppositional stance against this withdrawal decision and struggle to advocate the Istanbul Convention and fight against the rising anti-gender politics of the AKP regime.

The transformation of the AKP's gender politics has even led some scholars (e.g., Güneş-Ayata & Tütüncü 2008b; Güneş Ayata & Doğangün 2017; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu 2011) to emphasize the implicit politics held by the AKP to conceal its real Islamist identity until guaranteeing its political power. These arguments make sense to understand the AKP's gender politics changes, especially after the slowdown in the EU membership process.

In this regard, more nuanced analyses looked at the connections between cultural orientations and the party's political and ideological identity. According to Güneş-Ayata and Tütüncü (2008b), the AKP government had a dilemma between Western-type liberal politics and conservative Islamic politics in their party's politics. This



opted for Islamist patriarchy in procedural and legal requirements on gender issues on behalf of conserving culture (Güneş-Ayata and Tütüncü, 2008b). In addition, according to Güneş-Ayata and Tütüncü (2008b, p.383), the AKP approached women as a group who was at “the hearth of Islamist tradition” on the basis of “religious patriarchy” ideology. It established women’s auxiliaries in mainly each province of the country to disseminate their politics and attract women voters (Ayata and Tütüncü, 2008b). As Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011) contended the AKP’s neoliberal-conservative version patriarchy upheld a hostile attitude to feminist activism. However, AKP’s mode of patriarchy has a common point with liberal patriarchy in inviting women to the paid labor force and prioritizing their domestic chores and family responsibilities (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011). Along these lines, similar accounts have underlined the interaction between neoliberalism and neoconservative rationalities in AKP’s politics, which regulate public and private spheres under its family-centered gender politics (Acar and Altunok, 2013; Altunok 2016). Cindoglu and Unal (2016) underlined the alliance between neoliberalism and neoconservatism as the most important threat to women’s rights and gender equality due to their emphasis on motherhood and paternalistic family unity. The AKP’s social policies on gender-related issues indicate how the party’s gender politics has evolved into family-centered conservative and neoliberal policies.

### **3.1.1. The Evolution of Social Policies of the AKP: From Moderate Position to Neoconservative and Neoliberal Gender Politics**

The AKP conducted several social policies with projects and institutional reforms on family and women’s employment prior to the rise of gender justice politics in 2013. The National Action Plan for Combatting Violence Against Women (2007-2010), and amendments in the Labor Law (2003) promote women’s employment with the legal

frameworks of the prevention of sexual discrimination at work and “equal pay for equal work” principle (Yarar, 2020, p. 124) are prominent policies in the AKP’s first term’s gender politics. Even though there has been a slight increase in the women’s employment rate under the AKP’s government as a result of these social policies, this increase has not made progress on women’s economic empowerment. The precarious and informal types of employment dominate the job opportunities for women workers. It was a consequence of the neoliberal and conservative employment policies, which held that women sustain the household and care work even though they work in paid employment (Toksöz, 2016, p.64). In this way, scholars (Ecevit 2013; Buğra 2018) highlight that social policies focus on preserving women’s existing status and gender roles in both private and public spheres, consolidating gender inequalities in society. As Buğra (2018, p.327) stated the AKP’s social care policies relied on the social assistance mentality in line with its conservative politics. The political discourses of the AKP politicians portrayed women as a group in need of special protection (Buğra, 2018, p.327). As a result of this mentality, the gendered character of the Turkish welfare system, which renders women more dependent on social assistance that normalizes women’s poverty status (Buğra and Yakut-Cakar, 2010). Women’s involvement in budget-generating activities was perceived as a contribution to household income (Buğra and Yakut-Cakar, 2010). Gökovalı’s (2013) found out that women who received social assistance suffered more from poverty.<sup>3</sup>

In the context of women’s employment, the AKP’s social policies to increase women’s employment, the new Labor Law (2003), the Prime Ministry’s Circular on Observing Gender Equality Principles (2004), and the government circular to establish a National Team for Coordination and Observation of Female Employment (2010), have not been successful in accelerating and ameliorating the women’s positions in the paid labor

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<sup>3</sup> The failure of politics to alleviate women’s poverty originated from the developmental approach of the AKP, which is based on a particularistic trend focusing on women from the Southeast Anatolia region instead of a holistic perspective on women’s poverty prevalent in Turkey (Gökovalı, 2013, p.69).

market since they were unrealistic policies to practice in the existing structure (Dedeoğlu, 2012, pp.280-281). Women's unequal distribution of labor in the household and care activities is the primary reason for women's disadvantageous and secondary position in both participation in and working in the paid labor force (Cindoglu and Unal, 2016; Toksöz and Memiş, 2018; İlkkaracan 2019). For example, the high minimum retirement age for women, introduced in the new Social Security and General Health Insurance Law (2006), was ineffective in the absence of policies eliminating inequalities in women's household responsibilities (Dedeoğlu, 2012, p. 281). Furthermore, other social policies of the AKP, such as the conditional cash transfer for caregivers (most of them are women) under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies without granting sufficient social security coverage (Toksöz, 2016, p.78), were cited as the examples of unrealistic policies to increase women's employment. In addition, the severance payment for women who quit their jobs (Kılıç, 2008), small-scale entrepreneurship with micro-credits, and policies for the support for reconciliation of work and family life (Dedeoğlu, 2000) were not sufficient for increasing women's presence in the labor market.

Beyond social policies, patriarchal gender roles in domestic work and care labor are still determinant in women's position and participation in the labor market because this gendered perspective shapes social policies of the state (Buğra, 2018, p.236). In particular, the limited, deficient, and costly public and private care services also discourage women from participating in the paid labor market (Buğra, 2018, pp.326-327). As Kandiyoti (2016, p.106) stated, the AKP governments strengthened the "Turkish type of family" discourse while diminishing the state's roles in social services for its citizens. These policies force women to work in temporary and informal jobs without social security coverage and in less qualified, low status, and low-wage jobs. They also inhibit women from being in the decision-making positions and stratify the existing gender inequalities in both household and labor market (Toksöz and Memiş, 2018, p.35-37).

The family-centered conservative policies of the ruling regime have accelerated within the deceleration in the EU membership progress (Toksöz, 2016, p.75; Ilkkaracan 2019, p.202). These conservative policies take an important place in the AKP's official documents, National Development Plan (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>), and the National Employment Strategy (2014-2023). Toksöz (2016, p.76) held that the struggle for gender equality regarding women's equal and fair participation in paid labor is not the first and foremost target in these texts. These Development Plans mainly aim at dispersing flexible employment and supporting women's entrepreneurship through micro-credit programs (Toksöz, 2016, p.76). These policies generate informal and low wages work for women besides continuity of reproduction of care and household works (Toksöz, 2016, p.76). The conservative policies also force women to work in paid employment until marriage under Labor Law which encourages women to terminate their job and receive severance pay when they get married (Ecevit, 2013, p.2).

The AKP also accelerated its conservative policies by replacing the State Ministry for Women with the Ministry of the Family and Social Policies in 2011 (Ilkkaracan, 2019, p.203, Mutluer 2019, p.109). This change was indicative of family-centered policies for the sake of family unity rather than focusing on women as individuals. The change in the Ministry's official name is significant because it is "restructuring the relations between family, society, market, and state" (Mutluer, 2019, p.108). In this way, the AKP's gender politics also intervened in women's bodies and reproductive choices. The attempt to ban the abortion right of women in 2012 is one of these conservative politics under the demographic concern of the AKP. Although this attempt was not legalized, it affects public health procedures that limit practicing abortion right in public hospitals (Ilkkaracan, 2019, p.203, Mutluer 2019, p.109). As a result, the 'three-

children' policy<sup>4</sup> of the AKP government is one of the most commonly conducted policies to safeguard the country's young population.

Neoliberal policies appear in the form of flexible and part-time employment with fixed-term contracts and temporary work through private employment agencies (Toksöz, 2016, p.77) and the reconciliation of work and family life policy of the AKP government. The policy of family and work-life reconciliation officially began with the Prime Ministry Circular on "Increasing Women's Employment Package" in 2011 and consolidated through National Employment Strategies official documents, AKP's election manifestos, and their members' discourses. This policy primarily popularizes flexible, part-time, and informal forms of employment in Turkey. These policies aim to sustain women's double burden in paid labor and household. Flexible employment also urges women to have at least three children against decreasing the fertility rate by diminishing care-services facilities (Toksöz, 2016, p.77). As a result, this flexible part-time work model does not work to the advantage of women because the dilemma of "at least three children policy" and women's participation in paid labor stratifies women's inferior position and double workload in the paid labor market and unpaid domestic work.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, conservative women who acted as allies of the government have played a critical role by employing a women's human rights framing in defending the official gender perspective and challenging the feminist stances. For example, conservative women have always supported women's participation in paid labor provided that women could also realize their motherhood and wifeness roles (Çakıl-Dinçer, 2020,

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<sup>4</sup> The 'three-children politics' of the AKP rely on its pro-natalist policies, which force women to give at least three children to increase the Turkish population without considering problems stemming from gender inequality.

<sup>5</sup> The AKP's employment policies for women commonly cover unpaid maternity and parental leave; and impose women to integrate part-time and home-based work (Ilkcaracan, 2019, p.204).

pp.243-244). Therefore, most conservative women's organizations supported the AKP's headscarf politics. For instance, the Capital City Women's Platform and the Association of Women's Rights against Discrimination (AKDER) supported the amendment to the 'Dress Code for Civil Servants Regulation' to support headscarf-wearing women's right to access to higher education and public employment.

### **3.1.2. The Rising Anti-Gender Agenda**

As part of AKP's anti-gender stance, the party also began to turn away from its initial cooperative relationship with women's rights advocacy organizations and negatively reacted to feminist demands, such as a hostile attitude toward quota demands of women (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011, p.564). In particular, the AKP started to confront the feminist movement over the problem of its domestication policies, i.e., discourses and policies to consolidate traditional gender roles via pro-natalist perspective and family-centered social policies and labor regime, especially after 2011. According to Kandiyoti (2016), the alliance of neoliberal and neoconservative politics restricted opposition opinions and lifestyles. This policy's main intention is to standardize the family institution within the unity of heterosexual, Muslim families with at least three children.

Women's reproductive roles are components of AKP's neoliberal and neoconservative gender politics (Cindoglu and Unal, 2016; Doğançün 2019). On the basis of the pro-natalist policies of the gender regime of the AKP with respect to reproductive policies, several critical changes in state institutions were directed towards implementing family-centered policies by strengthening patriarchal gender division of labor centering on women's motherhood role and identity. For example, the General

Directorate of Women's Status and Problems, established in 1991 as part of the CEDAW requirements, was abolished in 2011. It was replaced with the Ministry of the Family and Social Policies. This new Ministry focuses on children, the elderly, and disabled people's needs and demands with patriarchal rules without a gender perspective on women's issues in contrast to the General Directorate of Women's Status and Problems. The 2015 Election Manifesto of AKP emphasized strengthening the family, and targeted to preserve 'the dynamic population' in the society. Women were foremost responsible for protecting family unity. The discourses of the AKP politicians are also critical components of these pro-natalist and family-centered policies. On many occasions, in party meetings or direct appeals to the citizens, Prime Minister Erdoğan (2008) urged families to have at least three children to protect the young population. AKP politicians tried to frame this policy with reference to sociological trends, as in the case of Fatma Şahin (2011), who served as the Minister of Family and Social Policies between 2011 and 2013. She contended that in view of the aging population, the idea of producing "at least three children" was not a "conservative understanding of men," but it was a scientific approach in her speech during a budget debate in the parliament. Some AKP members even held a more radical and indeed misogynist views on the pro-natalist policies of their party's opposition to women's reproductive rights. For instance, in 2012, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commission Üstün stated that "women who were raped should also give birth." In the same vein, the head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Mehmet Görmez (2012), supported anti-abortion discourses claiming "abortion is haram (forbidden by Islamic law) and murderous, it is murder." These framings demonstrate the conservative family-centered gender ideology constructed and consolidated through various actors and institutions under the AKP politics who came to rely increasingly on Islamic themes and discourses to appeal to the conservative sectors. Thus, as Acar-Savran (2018, p.8) argued, the "institutionalization of family politics" is the main strategy of the AKP regime's neoconservative gender politics. One of the outstanding discourses that produced the institutionalization of family politics belonged to former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who said,

“Motherhood is a sacred duty just like patriotic duty” (T24, 2015). At the same time, the Minister of Health, Mehmet Müezzinoğlu, said that “women should not focus on any career other than motherhood” (Diken, 2015). This outlook and politicians’ discourses inhibit to make gender-sensitive politics while reproducing gender inequalities. In this context, the neoconservative discourses of gender politics emphasized ‘sacred motherhood’ and ‘family institution.’ The anti-gender politics heralded by this approach through controlling public and private spheres by the AKP governments. These discourses were based on a gender justice ideology that stigmatized women who chose not to have children as “deficient and imperfect” (Acar-Savran, 2018, p.11).

Moreover, the growing centrality of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) within the state structure was also accompanied by more significant roles accorded to this institution in consolidating conservative family policies, especially after 2010 and most notably with the introduction of the presidential system. The Directorate started to circulate religious references to women’s traditional roles more strongly. The head of Religious Affairs, Erbaş, highlighted women’s traditional roles and said, “We need to develop and strengthen our population structure, quantitatively and qualitatively, by improving the number of children to three to four.” Meanwhile, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and Directorate of Religious Affairs signed a cooperation protocol that protects Islamic family values and empower family unity with social service projects (Mutluer, 2019, p.108). Besides the emphasis on the motherhood role of the women, the Directorate also interfered with women’s bodies and sexuality by dictating that women wear a headscarf and supporting President Erdoğan’s assault on abortion (Arat and Pamuk, 2020, p.256). For example, a member of the Religious Affairs High Council, Prof. Dr. Karşlı, stated that “a woman’s body is an ornament” and “women should be covered” (Kurtaran, 2013). In the same vein, the head of the Religious Affairs Directorate, Mehmet Görmez, also embraced pro-natalist discourses on the abortion right of women. He said, “All divine religions, all moral systems say that



abortion means ending human life. The fetus in the womb has the right to life” (CNN Türk, 2012). The Directorate was also endowed with the authority to marry off couples through procedures at mufti offices since 2017. It was argued that these steps also indicated the legitimization and expansion of Directorate authority while infringing the values of laicism, separation of state, and religion. Besides, it threatened women’s rights due to disseminating and dominating Islamic values and orders in the public sphere.

The AKP has been justifying its gender politics and is tied to monopolizing women’s rights issues through government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) (Çağatay, 2015). Women and Democracy Association (KADEM)<sup>6</sup>, the prominent women’s GONGO sponsored by the government, was instrumental in the rise of ‘gender justice’ in 2015. The conservative women’s platform, notably KADEM, has used ‘gender justice’ as an alternative framing to oppose ‘gender equality’ of the women’s movement by relying on the complementary essence of both sexes (female and male). Emphasizing equivalence instead of “equality between sexes,” this framework epitomized the anti-gender standpoint on women’s rights. Women’s issues have been referred to in the content of the Islamic-inspired term, *fitrat* which means attributions of humans originated from their nature and creation. It was also taken up by AKP Prime Minister (PM) Erdoğan’s appeals to women in order to endorse and consolidate his family centered neoconservative policies. Feminists rightly argued that this emphasis on ‘*fitrat*’ restrained women in a private realm where women’s first and foremost responsibilities are perceived as being good wives and mothers. This anti-gender ideology rendered women invisible under the guise of universal citizenship while ignoring women’s specific and concrete needs stemming from patriarchal oppression (Acar-Savran, 2018, p.11).

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<sup>6</sup> KADEM was established in March 2013 as a civil society organization by conservative women who have an organic relationship with the AKP.

Nevertheless, there has also been substantial electoral support from women for Erdoğan, despite its infringement on women's rights and authoritarian and populist governance. For instance, 55 percent of women, as opposed to 48 percent of men in the voter population, voted for Erdoğan in the presidential election in 2014 (Tremblay, 2014). However, women also increasingly voiced their opposition against gender inequality and regression in women's rights, especially regarding violence against women, women's employment, and women's poverty in both streets and the parliament. One of the most tangible legal challenges of feminists was the withdrawal decision from the Istanbul Convention by filing a suit at the Council of State. In this process, opposition women MPs have explicitly supported feminists' resistance against this presidential decree. At the same time, opposition women MPs have forcefully resisted the AKP government's anti-gender perspective and conservative policies.<sup>7</sup>

### **3.2. Gender Politics of the Republican People's Party (CHP): The Shift from a Modernizing Gender-Regime to Women's Practical Concerns**

The CHP was the first political party in Turkey that oversaw the proclamation of the Turkish Republic and, subsequently, Kemalist reforms. This background of the CHP as the state and nation founder party has also been reflected in the different phases of its institutional transformation with significant repercussions on its gender politics.

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<sup>7</sup> Both the CHP and HDP women MPs challenged and criticized the withdrawal decision of the Istanbul Convention by applying to the Council of State by the CHP Women's Branch with the leadership of Chair Aylin Nazlıaka in 2021 (<https://chp.org.tr/haberler/chp-kadin-kollari-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-fesih-kararini-danistaya-tasidi>), and advocating the Convention by one of the prominent HDP women MPs lawyer Meral Daniş Beştaş in the Council of State in 2022 (<https://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplumsal-cinsiyet/262932-hdp-danistay-da-istanbul-sozlesmesini-savunacak>).

In the early period of the CHP, which dominated politics as a single party until 1950, it propagated a modernizing and westernizing worldview. The CHP administration granted Turkish women the right to vote first in municipal elections in 1930 and then in national parliamentary elections in 1934. The party incorporated the principle of ‘equality between sexes’ in the context of citizens’ rights and duties in its Program in 1935 (Kabasakal-Arat, 2017, p.244). Nevertheless, the CHP has not followed a high profile on women’s rights until the 1990s. In the post-coup era<sup>8</sup>, it was re-established first as the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP) and then took over its original name as CHP in 1995. The post-social democratic identity also started to incorporate the social justice demands of the society, including the rising feminist movement in 1980 in Turkey. In this period, the CEDAW Convention was signed and ratified in Turkey (in 1981 and 1985, respectively), and feminist discourses began to affect all political parties, particularly left-leaning parties’ programs with a more comprehensive perspective on gender equality and women’s rights. They addressed gender inequalities in public and private spheres with emphasis on the gender gap in employment, payment, and politics (Kabasakal-Arat, 2017, p.252). The CHP’s predecessor, SHP, was also a pioneer party in adopting a 25 percent gender quota for internal party positions in 1993, which was later extended to candidate lists with 33 percent in the CHP’s statute in 2012.

Today, the CHP has been predominant among the opposition parties in posing effective criticism against the AKP’s increasingly gender-conservative, family-oriented policies on women. However, although CHP emphasizes women’s rights and gender equality, the Party Program and Statutes are characterized by a human-rights-based equality understanding without compartmentalizing discrimination based on group identities. In this context, it approaches the equality between women and men

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<sup>8</sup> The political parties were closed down by the decision of military courts after the 1980 coup of military forces, which took over the political governance until the constitutional amendment referendum on September 6, 1987, in Turkey.

as an issue of democracy and human rights. As the togetherness of ‘democracy and women’s rights’ retain its significance in the 2015 election manifesto, the CHP pledges to bring democracy on the basis of human rights, and advocates women’s rights together with women themselves (CHP, 2015, p.21). The party considers equal opportunities for women as a pre-condition for having a modern secular democratic republic. To some extent, this perspective on women’s equality issues as an indispensable part of Turkey’s general socioeconomic and political problems reflects the modernizing perspective of the early Republic era with a strong collectivist ethos, thereby downplaying the systematic impact of patriarchy on women. Sancar (2012, p.306) argued that the gender regime of the Turkish modernization was “family-centered modernization” in the first decades of the Republic of Turkey, which institutionalized women’s rights in favor of societal development and the general welfare of society. In this regard, women’s primary duty was nurturing modern families, while men were responsible for modernization reforms in building a state (Sancar, 2012, pp.206-207). Obviously, maternalist understanding which characterized state feminism<sup>9</sup> of the 1930s in Turkey has for a long time instrumentalized women’s rights for the community’s long-term interests and for a democratic regime (Tekeli, 1992).

This particular party ideology reflected a connection with a liberal feminist perspective for a long time. Today, the party publications indicate that the CHP pays special attention to the education of girls and women as well as to the economic independence of women (CHP, 2015; 2018a). Hence, positive discrimination and equal opportunities for girls in education and a gender-sensitive education system are the main objectives of the women’s education policies of the CHP. In addition, its Program makes it clear

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<sup>9</sup> Even though Mazur and McBride (2008, p.252) defined “state feminism” as an ability to bring women’s movement’s demands into government politics, which aimed to achieve feminist outcomes, it was not applicable for each case. As Tekeli (1992, p.140) explained state feminism in Turkey meant that on the state-led equality reforms (suffrage and the Civil Code) fostered a “myth that Turkish women had full equal rights with men, that they acquired these rights before women in many other European nations and that consequently there was no more need for women’s organizations.”

that the CHP recognizes equal access to education and educational attainment as the most important means of women's liberation. It is held that education liberates women from societal oppression and the pressure from feudal structures by weakening social structures and cultural problems. The egalitarian education system of the Party Program relies on education that eliminates discriminatory discourses and biases on equality principle in education; increasing schooling rates of girls at all levels of education in accordance with international conventions and documents such as Beijing+5; improving centers for women's vocational training opportunities, expansion of evening and summer schools for girls and for women who dropped out of compulsory primary education; and engaging with NGOs' activities in the field of education and women (CHP, n.d., pp.53-54). These targets on women's education demonstrate that CHP has adopted liberal feminism's prioritization of education in women's empowerment and gender equality.

Regarding women's employment and economic independence, the party supports equal participation of women and men in the private and public spheres and sharing responsibilities in their policies (Cansun, 2013b, p.163). In this respect, the elected female representatives of the CHP have criticized AKP's notion of liberty for women in the sense of access to university education with a headscarf (Cansun, 2013b, p.164). Moreover, the CHP women MPs challenged AKP in its passive politics about gender-based discrimination in workplaces, such as "glass ceiling" and gender-based occupational segregation, which inhibit women's economic autonomy (Cansun, 2013b, pp.174-175). As a result of these criticisms, we observe that CHP's recent election manifestos (2015; 2018a) focused on women's subordinate labor position, domestic labor, and gendered employment issues. The guarantee of social security rights of women, support of women's entrepreneurship and women's cooperatives, gender quota in increasing the number of women employees, increasing women's rate in the decision making positions, establishment of the Ministry of Women, combat gender-based discrimination in workplaces along with legal sanctions, amelioration of

transportation and security, acting with the principle of ‘equal pay for equal work,’ removing the barriers in front of trade unionization rights, providing breastfeeding/parental leave, and offering qualified and free childcare services are the main tenets of the gender policy of the CHP in terms of women’s labor and employment.

However, reflecting a predominantly liberal feminist understanding, it proposes a reformist agenda without a comprehensive critique of patriarchal dynamics in all spheres of life. The CHP does not integrate a noticeable gender perspective in each aspect of women’s employment policies mentioned in these documents. A case in point is a section on the trade unions in Party Program, which does not include ILO 190 Convention, which is essential to eliminate violence and harassment in workplaces. On the other hand, one of the most noticeable reform items in the CHP platform has been the Family Insurance Program which occupies a central place in the Party Program and the recent Election Manifestos (CHP, 2015; 2018a). The party embraces social democratic welfare state policy in the fight against unemployment, poverty, and income inequalities, and under the Family Insurance Program, financial support to needy families is prioritized. The main target of the Family Insurance Program is to fight against national poverty by giving monthly family salaries to each household whose social security rights are guaranteed through the state’s payment of their security insurance premiums. The prominent feature of this insurance is based on the policy that a monthly stipend will be deposited into women’s bank accounts in the family. It is a significant attempt for women’s role as a decision-maker in the household’s financial expenditure and feels powerful. Nevertheless, this program cannot be the only and most effective policy for women’s economic empowerment, contrary to what CHP aims for. Since the offered stipend amount (approximately 750 Turkish Liras in 2015 and 1000 Turkish Liras in 2018) is insufficient to empower women (CHP, 2015; 2018a). Moreover, providing a certain amount of money, as a social aid mentality, is not equivalent to social and economic support and political

empowerment of women. Beyond that, putting the program's name as 'family insurance' and starting child support during pregnancy identifies women with motherhood in the family. It also does not fundamentally challenge the AKP's family-centered policies, which consider women's position as a wife and mothers in the household. This Program also includes plans to promote women aspiring to transform their skills into entrepreneurship centered on home economics and handcraft practices. However, it can also be contended that this planned support is likely to reproduce traditional gender roles for women's participation in the labor market rather than facilitating women's economic independence as a means to gender equality.

The CHP also address policies for the struggle against violence against women and the problem of women's political participation and representation as part of their gender policy agenda. Its policies on violence against women is marked by 'protection' and 'prosecution' policies rather than 'prevention' policies in the Program. The Program includes that women are generally vulnerable to violence because they are not sufficiently informed about the legal ways to be followed in the case of violence and due to the insufficiency of shelters. The policies for preventing violence also depend on girls' and women's education. According to this policy, youth will be responsive to violence against women through education, including preventing domestic violence and honor killings, protecting equality between sexes, and the dignity of all family members (CHP, n.d., p.55). In the 2015 Election Manifesto, CHP's liberal feminist understanding is also reflected in policies against violence against women by adopting 'zero tolerance' to violence against women with the implementation of legal sanctions such as regulating violence as a serious crime in the Turkish Penal Code and carrying out the Istanbul Convention's requirements. In addition, the party aims to initiate social awareness activities to generate democratic family understanding and implement campaigns to inform women about their rights when exposed to violence. In its 2018 Election Manifesto, the CHP approaches the prevention of violence against women as a "state policy" besides its support for the Istanbul Convention (CHP,

2018a, p.182). Moreover, CHP pledges to establish a special unit to combat violence, consisting of representatives of all relevant public institutions and non-governmental organizations (CHP, 2018a, p.182). This policy is crucial for producing feminist policies if the party collaborates with feminist civil society organizations for this special unit. It is also significant regarding preventive policies in the fight against male violence against women.

Furthermore, the party documents indicate that the CHP try to embrace a holistic perspective regarding women's political participation and representation. In this sense, the party's 2015 and 2018 Election Manifestos pledge to engage women in local and national decision-making mechanisms involving trade unions and civil society organizations and proliferate women assemblies in city councils at local levels (CHP, 2015, 2018a). In this respect, we infer that CHP pays specific attention to women's participation in politics at different levels and with different means.

These policies on violence against women and women's political participation and representation are mainly directed toward the elimination of gender-based discrimination and the empowerment of women in public spheres.

### **3.2.1. Changes in the Gender Politics of the CHP under the AKP Governments' Gender Conservative Policies**

It can be contended that the CHP has been committed to liberal feminism's tenets whereby it perceived women as equal citizens to men, and has prioritized the right to vote and education rights as the means for women's modernization. However, the



emphasis on motherhood roles to promote societal welfare meant that it endorsed “maternalism”<sup>10</sup> until the last quarter of the twentieth century (see Kabasakal-Arat, 2017). Nevertheless, over the past two decades, the CHP has started to embrace more women-centered policies, particularly by addressing violence against women, employment issues, and women’s political representation, which directly relate to women’s daily realities and concerns in patriarchal societies beyond motherhood. Also, it has become more active in challenging the AKP policies on gender issues and endorsing women’s rights against the authoritarian encroachments and liberties from the government. In this respect, the CHP strictly challenges the government’s discourses and policies on reproductive rights, authorization of religious officials (mufti) to marry couples, and the AKP’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention.<sup>11</sup> In other words, it can be contended that the gender policy platform and approach have become more inclusionary of women’s concerns embracing both practical and strategic gender interests. This new approach can also be observed in its elected representatives’ discourses. In particular, this approach is related to three aspects of gender policies defending the rights of LGBTI+, the activation of the Women’s Branch in the design and projection of gender policies, and mobilization of women. The Branch has become more visible in the party organization structure. Lastly, there has been an increasing engagement of the legislative acts of female and male deputies on women’s labor and employment issues from a feminist framing. As explained, the rest chapter looks at women MPs’ legislative acts on these issues in detail to analyze the substantive representation of women in the TBMM.

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<sup>10</sup> Maternalism refers to the notion that motherhood is the primary role of women which impacts on the perceptions and regulation of women’s public roles “linking mothering and social reproduction” (Craske, 1999. p.83).

<sup>11</sup><https://www.evrensel.net/haber/335904/senal-sarihan-kadinlar-icin-simdi-yeni-bir-mucadele-basladi>  
<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/chpli-altioktan-bekir-bozdaga-muftu-nikahi-yaniti-793304>  
<https://www.politikyol.com/chpli-emecan-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-feshi-hukuk-en-yok-hukmunderir/>  
<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/chpli-nazliakadan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-tepkisi-yil-donumunu-kutlamamiz-gerekirken-uygulanmasi-icin-mucadele-1963938>

As the party expands its gender agenda, its elected representatives have also included the defense of LGBTI+ individuals' rights in their legislative acts. Through a predominantly heteronormative framing in their official discourses and party documents, LGBTI+ identities and their rights were not so far integrated into its gender equality agenda until recently. This reflected an essentialist approach underlying its gender approach, downplaying discrimination against other sexual identities. For instance, in 2015, CHP deputy Tanal (2015) submitted a legislative proposal that provided the regulations on LGBTI+ rights through an amendment in Act No. 6284 (The Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women), 3924 (Regulation on Employment of Social Aid Beneficiaries) and 2828 (Law on Social Services) based on universal human rights criteria. More recently, CHP declared on their billboards that "sexual orientation will be removed from being a disadvantage by law" (KAOS GL, 2022)<sup>12</sup>.

Secondly, the selection of former CHP deputy Aylin Nazlıaka as a chairperson at the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CHP Women's Branch held in 2020 has ushered in a shift in its gender politics by reactivating the women's units. Nazlıaka is a former elected deputy who was on duty between the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Legislative Terms in TBMM. Before Nazlıaka, the CHP Women's Branch chairs could not produce independent feminist women politics from CHP's headquarters. In this respect, she initiated several projects on violence against women, namely "Right to Live" (Yaşam Hak) (T24, 2022), and organized an event for women's employment, namely "Meeting for Women's Employment," in order to generate solutions with different women groups in 2022 (T24, 2022a). Nazlıaka has projected a more high-profile role in energizing the Women's Branches as a younger, more popular, dynamic, and more mediatic figure

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<sup>12</sup> At the local government level, such CHP municipalities (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, İstanbul Kadıköy and Şişli Municipalities) signed LGBT+ friendly protocols. At the individual level, CHP deputy Tanrıku supported LGBT+ individuals' freedom struggle and celebrated Pride Day (Tanrıku, 2018). Similarly, the CHP İstanbul Provincial President, Canan Kaftancıoğlu, congratulated Pride Day by referring to "a world where hate speech is eliminated, discrimination disappears, and continuation of equality and freedom is possible" (Kaftancıoğlu, 2021).

than the former chairs of the Women's Branch. As she expressed her objectives in an interview, "The CHP Women's Branch will never be seen as an auxiliary tool of politics from now on... We will make everyone feel how strong the CHP women's organizations are" (Lıcalı, 2020). Nazlıaka also pointed to the changing strategy of the Women's Branch to be more influential in the party by establishing "closer ties with women's associations, platforms, and international organizations in the field of gender equality" (Lıcalı, 2020). The new emphasis on forging viable relations with women's organizations has become more important than ever for the Branch to generate and implement feminist policy. In other words, the CHP has been trying to transform the role of the Women's Branch to render it more visible and influential in women's issues, parallel to the increasing voice and visibility of women's and feminist movements. The chair of the Branch Nazlıaka closely follows the agenda of the women's movement, which is important for promoting autonomy from the headquarters of the CHP.

Another meaningful change that the CHP has made in women's policies is the inclusion of women's invisible domestic labor in the party's official reports and their MPs' discourses. CHP's current reports put up its official websites to demonstrate that the party has begun to give importance to women's issues from a gender perspective. In particular, The Unemployment and Poverty Bulletins (CHP, 2018b), and the Report of Invisible Workers: "De" valued Domestic Work (CHP, 2021), and "Domestic Workers in 7 Question" (CHP, 2021a) emphasize that most unemployed women are unemployed due to their domestic work responsibilities. CHP problematized women's unpaid care and domestic labor, which were perceived as women's natural responsibility. This resulted in women's home-based domestic work as the main subject of unemployment and poverty (CHP, 2021). This report and report of "Domestic Workers in Seven Questions" problematized unregistered employment, low rate of regular income, deficiency of social security rights of domestic workers (unemployment allowance, job security, and health insurance), non-ratification of ILO

189 and ILO 201 Regulations, and unlicensed consulting companies that act as intermediaries for domestic workers (CHP, 2021, 2021a). This criticism by the CHP demonstrates its awareness of concrete concerns of the women-dominated work-sector of domestic work. These criticisms also illustrated that the party did not explicitly criticize the AKP's policies; instead, they implicitly criticized their policies' outputs for women's labor. The crucial contribution of these reports is offering solutions to these problems of domestic workers. Within this regard, CHP pledged to guarantee the paid domestic workers' social security rights in the scope of Labor Law, eliminate informal employment of paid domestic workers, and remove the barriers to the trade unionization of paid domestic workers. Furthermore, as will be detailed in the next chapter, CHP deputies have been engaged in legislative acts on domestic workers' rights. They have legislative proposals to make Labor Law amendments to these workers' benefit from social security rights. In addition, CHP Deputy Chairperson Veli Ağbaba held a press conference with women domestic workers in order to bring up the state's agenda (CHP, April 2021b). In his speech, he highlighted the high number of domestic workers who work in unregistered and insecure work conditions and leave them in starvation in pandemic; and criticized the AKP governance in terms of the allocated budget for social security coverage of workers. In addition, The CHP Women's Branch organized an event, "Meeting for Women's Employment," to explain their road map to increase women's employment (T24, 2022a). The event's program mainly covered the topics of women's position in employment, the fight against informal employment, and women's employment on the basis of health and social rights, which were discussed by women from civil society organizations, trade unions, and academics. Moreover, women from different regions of Turkey participated in this meeting as speakers who shared their experiences about their working circumstances in agriculture, low pay, poverty, and other issues (BirGün, 2022). Participation of these women in this event is vital in terms of hearing the voices of women from different groups, reflecting a feminist perspective on women's experiences.

Another notable change in CHP's gender politics is related to the male deputies' legislative activities about women's labor and employment. Their legislative proposals also indicated a gender-sensitive approach to these issues. For instance, in 2015, CHP deputy Akın prepared a legislative proposal to make it mandatory for all municipalities to open creches and daycare services, regardless of their population, to remove obstacles to women's employment (Tafolar, 2015). Similarly, the CHP deputy Çakırözer submitted a parliamentary question to the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services, asking the numbers of people who could benefit from the free-kindergarten, daycare center, and children's club with the support of the ministry (Birgün, 2019). Likewise, the CHP deputy chairperson (Ağbaba 2022) stated that nearly ten million women in Turkey could not take part in employment due to household/homemaking responsibilities; thus, he drew attention to the number of women working informally and identified housework as the main obstacle to women's participation in employment (Yıldızalp, 2022). In the context of the pandemic period, CHP deputy Tanrikulu claimed that the pandemic affected women more negatively than men in the workforce. He put forward a motion for opening a parliamentary inquiry "to implement policies that will provide secure and permanent employment to women, take deterrent measures by developing control mechanisms against unregistered employment and long working hours, and make arrangements based on gender equality in collective agreements" (T24, 2021). These legislative activities demonstrate that CHP-elected male representatives have also begun to have gender sensitivity to women's issues and raise them as part of their legislative agenda. As the labor policies during the AKP period continued to adversely affect both working women and women as full-time homemakers through family-based policies, this issue has become the major criticism directed from the CHP to the government to defend the rights of working women and homemakers.

As the subject matter of this thesis study, the analysis of women MPs' discursive frames in their representative acts on these issues and gendered concerns is likely to shed further light on these shifts in CHP policies.

### **3.2.2. Women's Recruitment and Representation within the CHP**

Regarding women's political participation, we can contend that the CHP approach has transcended the "rhetorical strategies" approach to women's political recruitment. This strategic approach refers to using women's political participation in the campaign rhetoric while being less enthusiastic about strategies for increasing women's political participation (Lovenduski, 1993, p.8).

The CHP, as a long-term member of the Socialist International, attaches significance to institutional mechanisms to foster women's societal and political participation, especially in political decision-making mechanisms and civil society organizations in official documents (see CHP, n.d., pp. 57 and 77; 2015, p.43; 2018, p.183). Even though CHP introduced voting rights for women in its reformist history, the female representation rate, which had been low for many years in the party's parliament, has only recently begun to increase in the TBMM. The current data indicate that CHP female deputies comprise 11.8 percent of its total representation after the 2018 elections (in the recent parliamentary term).

Although several feminist women could find a place in the candidate lists in the past, decision-makers pay little attention to feminism due to its low voting potential. Women party members are largely confined to Women's Branches which does not

promote women's full integration and candidacy within the party (Drechselova, 2019, p.11). According to Cansun's research (2013c), CHP members attribute the low rate of women's political participation to cultural norms and practices of the Turkish familial structure, men's desire to hold control over the domain of power, women's lack of involvement in political activities, and women's economic dependence on men. In the same vein, Çakır (2019) argued that perception of women as apolitical, bias against women due to their gender roles, sexist division of labor, women's position in the family, and women's education are the societal, cultural, and economic factors that inhibit women's political participation. Çakır (2019) also claimed that the political factors, participation in political parties, the process of candidacy, relationship with the party's leader, women's organization in the party, and women's branch also prevent women's high-level participation into mainstream political life.

Beyond that, the gender quota system of the CHP does not work in practice due to adding man candidates to the list allocated for the gender quota system in its Party Assembly election (Bianet, 2014). The candidacy of male candidates prevented the selection of two women candidates whose votes were below these two male candidates in this election (Bianet, 2014). Another reason for the non-functionality of gender quota is based on the high numbers of election regions where women candidates were not shown as candidates by the CHP in the 2015 and 2018 General Elections (women were not shown as candidates in 41 regions out of 85 regions in 2015 and 32 regions out of 87 regions in 2018). Moreover, CHP only nominated twenty-four women candidates and seventeen women candidates in the top two places of the candidate list in respectively 2015 and 2018 general elections (Kadın Koalisyonu, 2015; 2019). These statistics demonstrate that CHP does not precisely implement the gender quota pledge in its Party Statute. Overall, it can be inferred from the above examples that, as a left-wing party, CHP has not fully implemented women-friendly policies based on a genuine commitment to equality in women's political participation.

Nevertheless, more recently, party chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who took over party chairpersonship in 2010, endorsed the parity system for equal representation of men and women through a legislative proposal, including the zipper system<sup>13</sup>, after consulting with the women’s associations about the issue (Duvar, 2021b). His to this proposal indicated that he supports women’s rights in politics, as reflected in his declarations and speeches. Yet after this legislative proposal was rejected by the votes of conservative parties AKP and MHP, Kılıçdaroğlu declared that “Women ask: Why are we not in politics? Why is politics male-dominated? Before this legislative proposal, we held an online meeting with 306 women’s organizations. They suggested the parity quota system. Now I am asking: Will you stand up for this legislative proposal? If they vote against the gender quota system, you must teach them a lesson in the election” (quoted in Pehlivan, 2021). It was argued that in this particular way of putting the issue by addressing women to give responsibility to women, equality claims are still instrumentalized for vote gains for the party in the next general election.<sup>14</sup>

### **3.3. The Gender Politics of the People’s Democracy Party (HDP)**

The HDP (People’s Democratic Party) is a pro-Kurdish leftist opposition party that won 10 percent and 11 percent of the votes, respectively, in the general elections of

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<sup>13</sup> The zipper system stipulates to nominate both women and men candidates on the candidate lists to create a gender-balanced legislative system.

<sup>14</sup> In terms of the gender quota history of the CHP, Cansun (2012) had noted that all CHP women supported gender quota with a feminist perspective. For instance, one of the CHP women MPs used the Kemalist framing to illustrate how Republican reforms supported women’s political participation without a gender quota system, while another CHP women deputy argued that the gender quota system underestimated women’s capacity and skills (Cansun, 2012, pp.86-87). Nevertheless, this situation has been altered by the CHP women deputies recently who interpret gender quota as a means for gender equality, eliminating inequalities and bringing egalitarian understanding to the TBMM (Cumhuriyet, 2021).



November 2015 and June 2018 in Turkey. The HDP's elected women representative rate was 32.5 percent in 2015 and currently stands at 41 percent in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term following the 2018 elections. This is indicative of the outstanding performance of the party in terms of nominating and electing the highest number of women in the national parliament. Although the HDP was founded in 2013 and entered the TBMM in 2015, it is the successor to the former pro-Kurdish parties, which had previously been closed down by the Constitutional Court on the grounds of ethnic separatism (HEP (People's Labor Party), DEP (Democracy Party), HADEP (People's Democratic Party), DEHAP (People's Democratic Party), DTP (Democratic Society Party), and BDP (Peace and Democracy Party)). Throughout its institutional development, the pro-Kurdish parties have also made noticeable progress in gender equality platforms and women's recruitment from the Kurdish movement, party politics and civil society (Çağlayan, 2020).

### **3.3.1. The Background of the HDP and the Feminization of Kurdish Parties**

Kurdish women have been active participants in politics since the 1990s by joining the Kurdish nationalist movement and human rights organizations and they were first started to be elected into the TBMM in the 1991 General Election.<sup>15</sup> Leyla Zana, the founder of the Democracy Party (DEP), was a notable leader by being the only Kurdish woman in the party in the leadership position. Beyond that, she had important roles in shaping and transforming the traditional political arena within the effect of feminist consciousness based on the involvement of the women's movement and her minority rights based on her ethnic origin. Nevertheless, pro-Kurdish parties did not conventionally possess a feminist gender equality perspective in their intra- and

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<sup>15</sup> The state prosecuted People's Labor Party (HEP) for vowing in Kurdish in the 19th legislative term's inauguration in parliament.

national politics. In the 1990s, women were not involved in the parties' decision-making mechanisms, and party programs were gender-blind through underestimating gender equality principles in their party practices (Çağlayan 2020). Women's confinement to the back of the lists, for example, diminished their election prospects to TBMM (Çağlayan, 2020, p.202). Although former pro-Kurdish parties (DEP, HADEP, DEHAP) projected a progressive perspective in their programs toward gender equality, they ultimately embraced gendered norms and roles for women's motherhood as "a social and natural duty" (Kabasakal-Arat, 2017, p.251), i.e., a maternalist perspective. Moreover, pro-Kurdish parties' dominant identity of leftism and traditions of male-dominated ethnic-based political movements fed into sexism in their party politics.

The turning point in the gender politics of pro-Kurdish party politics was the 1999 local elections in which Kurdish women politicians made the final decision about the female candidates, and HADEP's (People's Democracy Party) election campaigns consisted of pledges of promoting women's political and social involvement, supporting women's cooperatives, and launching free childcare-services (Çağlayan, 2020, p.102). In retrospect, the Kurdish women's involvement in the feminist movement was critical in the emergence of a feminist consciousness, which led to demands to integrate feminist politics into their parties. In fact, DEHAP and DTP began to refer to women's freedom (Kabasakal-Arat, 2017, p.250) and approached gender inequality as one of the main concerns for generating solutions to the Kurdish issue since the early 2000s (Erel and Acik, 2019, p.9). In this respect, the candidate gender quotas of 25 percent, 35 percent, and 40 percent were applied by HADEP in 2000, DEHAP in 2003, and DTP in 2005. The DTP was also the first pro-Kurdish party to apply the co-chair system on the basis of equal representation in party

administration, and this was subsequently extended to local administrations held by the party by its successor BDP<sup>16</sup> (Çağlayan, 2020, p.97).

The HDP has been significant in terms of its distinct party structure, which has been inclusive of various social groups and movements, including “socialists, the labor movement, feminists, LGBTI+ individuals, environmentalists, other ethnic and religious minorities, and youth organizations” (Yörük, 2017, p.3). Towards the 2015 elections, HDP became an umbrella organization to host Turkey’s democratic opposition groups and sustain alliances among previous pro-Kurdish parties (Çağlayan, 2020, p.99). The party’s emphasis on gender equality and equal participation of women and LGBTI+ individuals in the party structure has been attributed to the history of women’s empowerment in the Kurdish movement (Yörük, 2017, p.6). In this respect as Çağlayan (2012) contended that the Kurdish movement politicized Kurdish women for the sake of ‘preserving their homeland and building a new society’ (cited in Yörük, 2017, p. 6).

At the decision-making level, besides the gender quota and co-chair system, the HDP also possesses autonomous Women’s Assemblies at national and local government levels. These Assemblies have authority on decisions on women’s policies and also on the candidate lists. In the HDP’s Statute, Article 40 defines the objective of the Women’s Assembly as solving women’s concerns and carrying out work for women’s problems (HDP, 2014). Moreover, the gender quota application works to achieve having the highest number of women politicians in both pro-Kurdish parties and the elections to the TBMM. The co-chair system helps to consolidate the cooperative and less hierarchical gender-equal administrative system (Erel and Acik, 2019, p.15). The

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<sup>16</sup> The co-chair system was prosecuted due to a lack of legal recognition in the Turkish legal system. However, in 2014, this system was legalized under Turkey’s “democratizing package” (Drechselova, 2019a, p.31).

works of the autonomous Women's Assemblies are essential for the local level of women's political participation. Overall, the grass-root party structure encourages women to participate in politics at the local governance level (Burç, 2018, p.2). These three components of HDP politics are significant for the integration of and the recruitment of women and for challenging the "masculine state structure and its politics" (Burç, 2018, p.2).

### **3.3.2. The HDP as a Feminist Political Party**

The HDP officially defines its identity as a "women's party" along with a participatory, egalitarian, and libertarian identity in its women's election manifestos (HDP, 2015; 2018). Its Statute, Program, and Election Manifestos underline its objectives as the elimination of all oppression, exploitation, and discrimination against women and LGBTI+ individuals. The fight for the elimination of the male-dominated system and violence against women has also been presented as specific objectives in these official documents. Explicit references to sexism, patriarchy, heterosexism and the defense of the LGBTI+ rights differentiate the party from other political Parties in the TBMM, which do not implicitly or explicitly use these terms in the Statutes and Programs.

Nevertheless, sexist practices have also continued in the pro-Kurdish parties, where Kurdish women politicians have fought against this gender-based discrimination. For instance, HDP's Statute does not directly implement a penalty of definitive dismissal from membership for those who do any kinds of violence, humiliation, and domination against women and LGBTI+ individuals (HDP, 2014). Instead, the repetition of this violence is the reason for definitive dismissal from the party's membership (HDP,

2014). Hence, the HDP women politicians continue their struggle for gender equality in intra-party politics. In this regard, the HDP is the one party which most commonly uses feminist slogans such as “our body, our identity, our labor is ours” in their political discourses in its official documents (HDP, 2015; 2015a; 2018; 2018a). The HDP women MPs also use feminist slogans in their speeches on media platforms. For example, co-chairperson Pervin Buldan (2021) took inspiration from the feminist author Emma Goldman’s statement, “If I cannot dance, it is not my revolution,” about the struggle of women resisting against misogynistic policies of male-dominated governments and especially the administrations under the control right-wing populist leaders. In the same vein, HDP parliamentary group vice-chair Kerestecioğlu (2018), a feminist lawyer, used the feminist slogan “our body, our labor, our identity, women to solidarity!” to indicate her support for a common platform for women’s emancipation against the threats of femicide, rape, abuse, women’s poverty, and other women-related concerns.

Beyond women’s issues and practical concerns, the Party Program focuses on the struggle for equality and freedom for women and the fight against all sexist relations and sexist language as prerequisites for women’s liberation. In this respect, the party’s belief in collaboration with women’s organizations is seen as the main force in the struggle for women’s liberation and freedom<sup>17</sup> (HDP, 2015; 2018). The main aim of the pro-Kurdish party’s policy is challenging the AKP regime’s sexist, racist policies and state-male violence along with raising the voices of women in the streets (see Kemalbey, 2017; Yüksekdağ, 2018). HDP women politicians, the Women’s Council

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<sup>17</sup> The HDP also urged to reopen the women’s associations and foundations closed under the state of emergency after the 15 July 2016 aborted coup.

spokesperson Acar-Başaran's<sup>18</sup> and the women deputy Taşdemir's<sup>19</sup> discourses on women's alliances are crucial discourses projecting the engagement of HDP's strategic gender interests politics. In order to politicize and concrete these discourses on women's alliances, the HDP Women's Assembly launched a campaign, "Women's Struggle Everywhere," to raise publicity to protect women's rights on the street, in the TBMM, at work, and in every aspect of life. They visited several prominent women's organizations (Progressive Women, Women's Defense Network, TMMOB Istanbul Women's Commission, Purple Solidarity Association, Feminist Women, and 'We Will Stop the Femicide Platform') and established platforms in several cities for solidarity with women of different ethnicities and faiths (Acar-Başaran, 2020b).

Furthermore, it is clear then from the party's official documents and discourses of women politicians that the HDP holds an intersectional perspective on their gender politics; it criticizes not only patriarchy but also ethnic oppression, fascism, and militarism which they held responsible for women's oppression and subjection. From this viewpoint, the HDP Women's Assembly 2018 manifesto underlined the party's aim to change the fascist male-dominated system and the one-man regime restricting women's rights and freedoms under the AKP's administration. HDP also has been vocal about the problems of harassment, rape, and violence directed against Kurdish women due to fascism in Kurdish provinces. For instance, former HDP women deputy Güven (2018) underlined that as Kurdish women, they were fighting both a national liberation struggle and the women's struggle against militarism. HDP women MPs also considered the armed conflict in Southeast Turkey as a critical component of the male violence against women, and a severe threat to women's rights and emancipation. As Acar-Başaran (2021) held that "provoked masculinity" was a reflection of war

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<sup>18</sup> Acar-Başaran (2020a) stated that they will fight for a stronger women's alliance in the new period and said, "No ban can deter women from their insistence on freedom and determination to fight" in her interview with Mesopotamia Agency in 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Taşdemir (2020a) indicated that women's international struggle is necessary because "women insist on freedom, and we are determined to struggle" in her interview with JINNEWS.

politics and militarism, which works through gendered dynamics. In the same vein, Kerestecioğlu (2018) drew attention to anti-war and anti-militarist policies in the HDP's gender politics. These framings attest to the significance of anti-militarism in the female MPs' approach to gender politics.

Women's labor issues and employment are among the primary concerns of the HDP's gender politics as part of the attention to women's practical concerns. Election Manifestos deal with and offer solutions to women's invisible domestic labor and women's employment. The HDP's approach to women's labor falls into two categories. The first is policies for increasing women's participation in the labor market, and the second one concerns the amelioration of women's position in workplaces. Regarding women's participation in paid labor, providing accessible and freely provided childcare services for working women are noticeable as the proposed policies. The Election Manifestos include the policies of 24-hour free kindergarten in each province regardless of their population and care services for the elderly and patients (HDP, 2015a; 2018a). Secondly, the HDP promises to implement positive discrimination in state institutions to increase female employees in decision-making positions (HDP 2015) and introduce a gender quota system in the male-dominated sectors (HDP, 2018a). The HDP also aims to establish a Ministry of Women that work on a National Action Plan for Gender Equality to include a gender-sensitive budget, increase women's employment, protect women's labor rights, and prevent the feminization of poverty. The Ministry of Women principally aims to replace the Ministry of Family and Social Policies with the Ministry of Women (HDP, 2015) and design solutions for women's concerns along with women themselves and women's organizations (HDP, 2018). These pledges demonstrate that HDP approaches the Ministry of Women's policies with the perspective of strategic gender interests. Beyond that, the party also transforms these strategic interests into practical gender interests by promising to open women's shelters in each province with a population of

above fifty thousand and support autonomous women's organizations by allocating budgets from the Ministry of Women (HDP, 2015; 2018).

In terms of women's labor issues and employment, HDP targets to improve and empower women's positions in the paid labor market. In this regard, the party promised to eliminate sexist practices (mobbing and harassment), ensure non-transferable paternity leave to enable fathers to care for their new-born and introduce the 'equal pay for equivalent work' principle at the workplaces in order to sustain and empower women in the paid labor market (HDP, 2015; 2015a; 2018; 2018a). More importantly, HDP official documents focus on women's special problems, which depend on the exploitation and subjection of women's labor. In this respect, HDP severely challenges the AKP's gender politics. As mentioned in the HDP's Election Manifestos, AKP devalues and renders invisible the women's domestic and care labor, which is perceived as women's natural roles (HDP, 2015; 2018). In this respect, HDP considers the elimination of sexist division of labor by offering accessible public care services as a significant component of societal transformation for gender equality (HDP, 2015; 2018). The HDP also challenges the AKP's employment policies which impose women to work in informal, part-time, and insecure employment without social security coverage. In this respect, the HDP promises to generate social security policy to ensure the rights of domestic workers and seasonal women workers under reforms on Trade Unions and Labor Law (HDP, 2015; 2018). In addition, HDP supports women's labor unionization rights with the pledge to remove all barriers to trade union rights and freedoms and the declaration of International Women's Day on 8<sup>th</sup> March as a paid holiday for all women workers (HDP 2015; 2018).

Overall, positive discrimination for equal participation and representation of women in all decision-making mechanisms and working spaces and the fight against the control of women's bodies, sexuality, and all forms of state and male violence are



outstanding and paramount gender policies of the party regarding being feminist objectives. In this respect, HDP is a party that goes beyond advocating practical gender interests and touches upon strategic interests along with its gender politics.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ANALYSIS OF THE OPPOSITION WOMEN MPs' LEGISLATIVE ACTS

This chapter focuses on the CHP and HDP women MPs' legislative acts on women's problems related to employment to analyze the substantive representation of women by opposition deputies in the TBMM in the context of an increasingly hostile atmosphere for women's integration into the labor force in Turkey. As explained in the previous section, both CHP and HDP have been locating themselves on the left-libertarian spectrum of Turkish politics with particular emphasis on socio-economic rights as well as cultural identity issues, albeit from different angles (with the CHP embracing secularism issues and the HDP ethnic identity issues). Regarding women's problems and gender equality, as opposed to the religiously conservative AKP, the representatives of both parties have been vocal in promoting women's rights. They have also been protecting the legal gains threatened by the government's family-centered policies which define women's work and access to social rights on the basis of their mothering roles. During the period between 2016 and 2022, various issues regarding gender inequalities in work, care labor, gendered labor market issues, and the problems of working women have been problematized, publicly debated, and raised as important issues of contention and policy discussions in the TBMM.

Accordingly, this research aims to answer the questions of 'How do opposition CHP and HDP women MPs raise and articulate women's interests on women's labor and employment issues in the TBMM?' and 'How do the discursive approaches of these two left-wing parties converge and diverge through specific framings on these issues in their women MPs' legislative activities?' In this respect, this thesis research takes

Molyneux's (1985) arguments of "strategic gender interests" and "practical gender interests" in order to answer this question. These two terms help to categorize and understand opposition women's legislative acts on the selected women's issues. Beyond that, they contribute to disentangling the convergence and difference of the CHP and HDP women MP's acts. As mentioned in Chapter 3, these two opposition parties are crucial actors in terms of their position as left-wing and pro-women parties, who are committed to egalitarian gender politics in their official documents and discourses. In this regard, the opposition women MPs have claimed to challenge the AKP's anti-gender politics which accelerate and consolidate gender-based discrimination in workplaces, increasing women's unemployment and working in informal and insecure jobs without social security coverage. This research also takes party ideology which shapes their feminist approach as determinant factors in both party-level and individual MP-level substantive representation in the Turkish legislature.

#### **4.1. Research Procedure for the Analysis**

In line with the relevant literature and extant research on the legislative roles of women in the context of substantive representation, the legislative acts taken up in this qualitative thesis research consist of plenary speeches, legislative proposals, motions of written question, motions of parliamentary inquiry, and commission speeches of the opposition women representatives in the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative terms<sup>20</sup>.

In order to first provide a general background of the opposition MP's stances and criticisms on women's status and problems at work, their general perspective on

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<sup>20</sup> All translations of legislative acts of women most notably their speeches belong to the author in this chapter.

gender equality is provided by tracing their discourses. The first part of this chapter deals with frames employed by opposition women MPs' plenary speeches and commission speeches which relate to their discourses on women's issues. The frame analysis research method is adopted because it is one of the suitable methods in the examination of written data of legislative acts which are non-reactive and non-interactive. This framing analysis aims to investigate how opposition women MPs can be compared and contrasted to each other in their perspectives of gender politics and equality issues. It also sheds light on how CHP and HDP women MPs challenge the AKP governments' gender policies and approach women's employment policies, if so, whether and what kind of a feminist framing is employed to articulate these issues.

The second part of the chapter proceeds to analyze the women MPs' legislative acts, i.e., plenary speeches, legislative proposals, motions of written questions, motions of parliamentary inquiry, and commission speeches on women's labor and employment. This part looks at the gender politics of the opposition parties under four headings, women's problems in paid employment, social security rights, women's poverty, and policy suggestions on women's problems in employment and social rights as both laborers and mothers.

This thesis research adopted purposive sampling strategy in selecting and analyzing opposition women MPs' legislative acts on women's employment and labor issues. Purposive sampling is a suitable method for unique cases, particularly in content analysis, to find specific themes (Neuman, 2000, p.274). Furthermore, this "nonrandom sample" is one of the most appropriate methods for the "cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population" (Neuman, 2000, p.274). The purposively selected sample and the universe of this thesis are the legislative acts (plenary speeches, legislative proposals, motions of written question, motions of parliamentary inquiry, and commission speeches) of opposition women MPs in this thesis. This

sample's data are collected from the official website of the TBMM, which is accessible to all internet users. The language of this data is Turkish; therefore, the translation of legislative acts belongs to the researcher. The official website also allows reaching a list of women MPs' legislative profiles with regular and recorded written data of all their legislative acts.

The second process of purposive sampling is the filtering and separating of relevant legislative acts on women's labor and employment. In this process, the researcher looks at all legislative acts step by step. The plenary and commission speeches are analyzed through a detailed reading of recorded transcripts of women MPs' speeches held in parliament. The contexts of these speeches are the determinant factors in the selection process of relevant samples. It is impossible to separate speeches according to their titles because women MPs could talk about women's labor and employment issues in different parliamentary debates. Therefore, each speech was checked and sorted out in terms of its relevance to the selected women's issue. Secondly, the legislative proposals, motions of written question, and motions of parliamentary inquiry are selected on the grounds of their titles and summaries; then, the selected ones' detailed official documents are analyzed for their relevance to women's labor and employment issues. All these filtered legislative data are archived in the second analysis process. In this step, the selected plenary and commission speeches are categorized by employing the framing analysis method, which facilitates an understanding of the dominant framings employed by women MPs (see details in the following parts of this chapter). In the second part of the analysis, the parliamentary speeches and other legislative acts (legislative proposals, motions of written question, and parliamentary inquiry) are thematically categorized, which gives insight into the most commonly debated subject with specific frames and focus.

After all, the total number of legislative acts of opposition women MPs allows us to evaluate the general profile of the selected women's issue (see the Table 1,2,3, and 4 below). The statistics of these legislative acts attest that the CHP and HDP women MPs had an equal number (64) of legislative acts in the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative term. In addition, both parties' main focus was 'women's problems in paid employment' in this term (45 legislative acts on this issue out of 64 legislative acts in CHP; and 44 legislative acts on this issue out of 64 legislative acts in HDP). In the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term, we observe a radical change in the number of legislative acts on women's labor and employment issues between both parties. While the CHP women MPs performed more than twice the legislative acts (151 legislative acts) compared to the previous period, the HDP women MPs made three times more legislative acts (221 legislative acts) than the previous period. This data demonstrate that opposition women representatives were more likely to pay attention to women's labor and employment issues than in the previous legislative term. Beyond that, the HDP women MPs are more inclined to focus on this issue than CHP women MPs which is also different from the previous term. Nevertheless, similar to the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative term, the 'women's problems in paid employment' is the most commonly discussed women's issue among opposition women MPs in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term.

Table 1: The Breakdown of Legislative Acts of the CHP Women MPs in the 26<sup>th</sup> Term

Legislative Acts	Women's Problems in Paid Employment	Women's Social Security Rights	Women's Poverty	Policy Suggestions (establishment of Ministry of Women, 8 <sup>th</sup> March as an official holiday, women's cooperatives)
Plenary Speeches	13	8	-	-
Legislative Proposals	-	3	-	1 (Ministry of Women) 1 (8 <sup>th</sup> March) 2 (Women's Cooperatives)
Motions of Written Question	12	1	-	-
Motions of Parliamentary Inquiry	5	-	-	-
Commission Speeches	15	3	-	-

Table 2: The Breakdown of Legislative Acts of the HDP Women MPs in the 26<sup>th</sup> Term

Legislative Acts	Women's Problems in Paid Employment	Women's Social Security Rights	Women's Poverty	Policy Suggestions (establishment of Ministry of Women, 8 <sup>th</sup> March as an official holiday, women's cooperatives)
Plenary Speeches	12	2	2	-
Legislative Proposals	-	-	-	4 (Ministry of Women)
Motions of Written Question	15	2	-	-
Motions of Parliamentary Inquiry	9	2	2	2 (Women's cooperatives)
Commission Speeches	8	-	3	1 (Ministry of Women)



Table 3: The Breakdown of Legislative Acts of the CHP Women MPs in the 27<sup>th</sup> Term

Legislative Acts	Women's Problems in Paid Employment	Women's Social Security Rights	Women's Poverty	Policy Suggestions (establishment of Ministry of Women, 8th March as an official holiday, women's cooperatives)
Plenary Speeches	31	2	9	2 (Women's cooperatives)
Legislative Proposals	3	10	-	1 (8 <sup>th</sup> March)
Motions of Written Question	36	4	14	-
Motions of Parliamentary Inquiry	12	-	2	-
Commission Speeches	17	1	6	1 (Women's cooperatives)

Table 4: The Breakdown of Legislative Acts of the HDP Women MPs in the 27<sup>th</sup> Term

Legislative Acts	Women's Problems in Paid Employment	Women's Social Security Rights	Women's Poverty	Policy Suggestions (establishment of Ministry of Women, 8 <sup>th</sup> March as an official holiday, women's cooperatives)
Plenary Speeches	44	2	24	3 (Women's cooperatives)
Legislative Proposals	-	11	3	3 (Ministry of Women) 18 (8 <sup>th</sup> March)
Motions of Written Question	47	5	6	1 (Women's cooperatives)
Motions of Parliamentary Inquiry	26	1	12	1 (Women's cooperatives)
Commission Speeches	6	1	9	1 (Women's cooperatives)

## **4.2. The Issues of Women’s Employment and Social Rights in the Legislative Agenda of Opposition Women MPs and Discourses**

### **4.2.1. The Dominant Framings in the CHP Women MPs’ Legislative Speeches**

The framings that CHP women deputies use predominantly in their parliamentary speeches are welfare state, state feminism, Kemalist, and Euro-centric framings. These framings indicate that CHP women deputies’ speeches addressing women’s concerns reflect the left-wing politics adopted by the party. As explained, CHP’s pro-Western vision is intertwined with egalitarian gender politics, which can also be traced back to its formation years during the early Republic era. In this sense its Kemalist background focuses on the state’s responsibility to promote women’s status both as a means for personal empowerment and also for societal development and the statist objectives. As will be explained in the next sections the framings employed by the woman MPs also tend to be strikingly different from the frames projected in the HDP women MPs’ speeches which reflects ideological differences and feminist perspectives.

Although the CHP and HDP are left-wing political parties, the “welfare state” approach, which is identified with the leftist ideology, is the dominant in the gender policies of the CHP. Hence, the CHP women MPs refer to the welfare state notion frequently in the context of the provision of care services. According to the deputies, childcare and elderly care services are the fundamental duty of a well-functioning welfare state. In this context, they hold that women’s greater participation in paid employment would be possible provided that the state invests in and offers sufficient and quality care-services. For example, in a speech CHP, MP Gamze Akkuş-İlgezdi links the necessity of the public provision of such services to women’s full integration into employment:

We, women, do not accept that the welfare state services should be restricted by saying “You have the right to part-time work” and that the whole burden should be placed on the shoulders of women.<sup>21</sup>

Another CHP MP also specifically talks about the importance of welfare state policies in relation to solving the working mother’s dilemmas and their problems regarding unpaid care labor shouldered by women in the family. She said that “It is important that governments contribute by implementing programs at the national level in child and elderly care, which is the cause of work-life conflict, especially among female employees.”<sup>22</sup>

As these speeches indicate, CHP women MPs project an awareness of the significance of care labor for women’s employment with all its adverse impact on women’s access to work. They thus hold that care provision should be a welfare state service and policy.

During the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term, CHP women MPs continued to employ welfare state framing in the context of childcare issues but with a somewhat different emphasis. Another speech of MP Suzan Şahin below demonstrates that the childcare issue can be resolved within the framework of an equal share of care labor between women and men:

It is a necessity of being a social state to regulate the concerns related to the nurseries, breastfeeding room, maternity-leave problems; childcare provision should be solved

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<sup>21</sup>Akkuş-İlgezdi, G. (2016, November 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=53254>

<sup>22</sup>Yedekçi, G. (2016, January 27). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=43878>

with the equal responsibility of both men and women, and this should be reflected in the practices.<sup>23</sup>

Besides this particular shift to the emphasis on the transformation of traditional gender roles in the context of the welfare state framing, CHP women MPs continue to underline the importance of day care facilities to be built in each neighborhood. This transformation is significant regarding the new perspectives held by CHP women representatives on care services, which reflect the CHP's shifting policy perspective on gender equality, as noted in Chapter 3.

Themes which characterize and reflect the historical background and tradition of state feminism, pioneered by the CHP in the early Republican era for the promotion of women's rights starting with the civil law and suffrage reforms, also emerge as the prominent framings emphasized by the CHP women MPs in their plenary speeches. The CHP politicians have been using this framing since the foundation of the party in the 1920s (White, 2013b). In other words, as explained in the previous chapter, state feminism is the CHP's historical gender politics determining the extent of women's liberation under state control. Moreover, state feminist understanding approach women's empowerment as an indicator and a means for the country's development and wealth generation. In other words, state feminism framing is used for two purposes: the positive consequences of women's participation in employment for the country's economy; and secondly, its contribution to the country's development and civilization level which also has symbolic and ideological connotations for the completion of Turkish revolution in terms of internalizing secularism and westernization. In this respect, the continuation of an ideological outlook can be detected in the CHP women MPs' legislative speeches. As MP Sibel Özdemir put it:

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<sup>23</sup>Şahin, S. (2020, March 12). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=86480>

Today, we have two windows of opportunity for our country to get out of the current unpredictability. The first of these is our 70 percent female population that is not included in employment. This population needs to be brought into the economy in order to revive the economy and enrich Turkey.<sup>24</sup>

MP Şahin also makes a similar point regarding the significance of rising women's employment:

It is stated that if women's labor force participation in Turkey rises to the OECD average, a 20 percent increase in national income will be achieved...women, who make up half of the population, need to be empowered and represented equally in all areas of social life, especially working life.<sup>25</sup>

As these speeches by the women deputies above indicate, the CHP women MPs frame women's participation in employment as a condition for raising the national income of the country and as a prerequisite for the interest of the country's welfare and development level, which have characterized the state feminist perspective in Turkey for a long time.

State feminism framing is also evident in the theme of women's development as an indicator of Western 'civilization' by CHP women deputies as in the following quote:

...it is obvious that countries that do not promote their women cannot catch up with civilization. When we look at Norway, Iceland and Finland...We see that countries that are neither one step behind nor one step ahead of men, but walking side by side, are progressing.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Özdemir, S. (2016, July 28). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=51392>

<sup>25</sup>Şahin, S. (2020, March 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=86162>

<sup>26</sup>Şevkin, M. (2021, October 21). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=100544>

Kemalist<sup>27</sup> themes constitute a significant part of the discursive frames of CHP women MPs, especially to commemorate the reforms introduced for Turkish women by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Party and the Republic. The emphasis also mentions what Turkish women did for their country during that period. In particular, CHP Women MPs' speeches on March 8, International Women's Day, employ relevant framings to this end. However, such a retrospective framing that credits a benevolent male-dominant elite that introduced legal reforms on women's rights offers a limited perspective for reflecting and crediting the subsequent feminist achievements for women's rights, and for contextualizing women's prevailing concerns and problems in present-day Turkey.

As exemplary of this line of articulation MP Melike Ersoy made the following speech on the International Women's Day in 2016:

I am a republican woman, daughter of Halide Edip Adivar, Black Fatmas and Türkan Saylan; I am the daughter of Elif Bacı, who draped her son's cover over bullets for her homeland. So, my dear deputies, you should all know that our republic is a great plane tree, in its roots the blood of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, İsmet İnönü, Halide Edib Adivar, Black Fatmas and our grandfathers.<sup>28</sup>

Another CHP women MP Neslihan Hancıoğlu mentioned her gratitude to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and underlined her respect to him because he ensured the Turkish women's right to participation in education, science, art and socio-economic life<sup>29</sup>. These women's expressions demonstrate that CHP women deputies refer to Atatürk's

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<sup>27</sup> Kemalism perceives women as "a symbol and tool of modernization and Westernization," which reproduces and prioritizes women's secondary position through domestic and maternalist definitions of women's roles (Arat, 1994, p. 73).

<sup>28</sup> Ersoy, M. (2016, March 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=45590>

<sup>29</sup> Hancıoğlu, N. (2022, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=105054>

words about women and use Kemalist framing by expressing their gratitude to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the historical struggles of Turkish women and expressing their admiration for their struggle. However, these speeches do not address the current problems regarding women's labor market position and empowerment problems. They are limited to mentioning the contribution of women who struggled in the founding years of the Republic and Atatürk's reforms on women's rights. In addition, the CHP women MPs frame the Republic as the only condition to guarantee the rights and freedoms of women. This framing is another indicator of the party's ideological lineage and political identity which shapes women MPs speeches through the highly disciplined party structure. As MP Nurhayat Altaca-Kayıoğlu mentioned:

I wish we could implement policies and laws that can really produce solutions here so that no woman undergoes what I am now talking about... I wish we could protect the secular, democratic republic that guarantees women's rights.<sup>30</sup>

It is significant that the employment of Kemalist framing has been dominant in 8<sup>th</sup> March parliamentary speeches in the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative term. Nevertheless, another shift in framing can also be discerned in the CHP women MPs representative acts as some CHP women MPs started to employ a more visible feminist discursive themes in their March 8, International Women's Day plenary speeches during the 27<sup>th</sup> term with references to international indicators on gender (in)equality. For instance, MP Gülizar Biçer-Karaca referred to the 8<sup>th</sup> March as a day of the struggle for women's rights that included women's struggle for equal pay for equal work, for right to life, and to prevent loss of rights in order to emphasize the gender inequality in employment, politics, health and access to education in Turkey<sup>31</sup>. Another CHP women MP Müzeyyen Şevkin mentioned pervasive gender inequalities in Turkey with concrete data on

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<sup>30</sup>Altaca-Kayıoğlu, N. (2018, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=67329>

<sup>31</sup>Biçer-Karaca, G. (2022, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=105098>



femicide, female labor force participation rate, parliamentary representation of women, and gender inequalities in universities<sup>32</sup>. It is important to note that during the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative period, CHPs' women MPs modify their Kemalist framing in their March 8 speeches; their discourses stand out with the feminist approach which frame the 8<sup>th</sup> March as a day for pushing for women's rights demands and for continuing with the struggle for gender equality. Beyond that, it is a feminist framing in that it focuses on the rights to be won, not the rights gained in the Republican era by emphasizing that the current gender inequality and secondary positions of women in all public spheres. For that reason, they emphasize the Turkish women's ongoing struggle for gender equality and women's rights. More importantly, CHP women MPs have a joint speech on 8<sup>th</sup> March, International Women's Day in 2022, criticizing the AKP's gender politics:

We have something to say outside of the agenda you impose on us. We have two words to say about the lives you see, the streets you forbid, the houses you confine, the bodies you dominate, the roles you see fit. We oppose your mentality that ignores equality by calling it "fitrat" (nature) and your judgments based on your political interests. We oppose the exploitation of our labor and gender inequality. We object to your failure to keep your promises and your failure to effectively enforce the law. We object to you pulling at least one of our sisters out of life every day. We rebel against you legitimizing the violence with masculinity and heroism. And know that there are women who will create a world without violence, war, free and equal against you, we exist.<sup>33</sup>

As this statement proves that there are significant feminist framings in the speech which include the terms "forbidden streets, confinement in the houses, dominated bodies, exploitation of labor, and sisterhood, violence, and masculinity." This feminist framing also displays an angry and rebellious sensation which imply frustration in

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<sup>32</sup>Şevkin, M. (2022, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=105078>

<sup>33</sup> All CHP women MPs have made this common explanation in the context of the 8<sup>th</sup> March, International Women's Day in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term.

addition to projecting a feminist spirit with belief in women's objections and future struggle.

Finally, a significantly Euro-centric framing is also evident in the speeches by CHP women deputies in their legislative speeches. Under this framing, women deputies criticized the low rates of women's employment and labor force participation in Turkey and took European countries as role models to adopt their policies regarding women's employment. The CHP women MPs frequently benefited from the world-ranking statistics about women's employment rate in Turkey. In this regard, they emphasized Turkey's position, which remained below the average of European countries' employment rate for women. The CHP MP Özdemir, who is the Member of the EU Harmonization Committee of Turkey and the member of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, frequently references the OECD data. In addition to statistical information on women's employment, the CHP women MPs also specifically mentioned the employment policies of the European countries. In her Parliamentary Inquiry Commission speech, MP Candan Yüceer highlighted the problems of flexible employment and the deficiencies in daycare support and expansions by referring to the situation in the European countries. Moreover, as MP Özdemir explained, these issues are also highlighted with specific examples and policy suggestions in her speech at the Plan and Budget Commission:

Childcare facilities and daycare aids should be included in the scope of Social Security Institution (SGK). There are very good policies in Europe, maybe I can bring the case of France to your attention. Maybe a daycare contribution could be introduced with a new fund to be created by deducting the tax burden a working woman with a child will pay to the state.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Özdemir, S. (2017, November 17). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeKomisyonKonusmaTutanakDetay?tutanakId=18167>

#### 4.2.2. The Maternalist Dilemma in Framings of CHP Women MPs

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the AKP has family-centered and pro-natalist politics emphasizing motherhood and other traditional gender roles of women. This conservative gender politics both strengthen and consolidate maternalism in Turkey. The maternalist ideology<sup>35</sup> as a cultural frame is the most decisive component of patriarchy and patriarchal relationships in societies like Turkey. Maternalism prioritizes and glorifies motherhood for all women not only as a domestic role and identity but also a national duty for them. This ideology is retained in both Kemalist feminists' discourses and conservative gender politics in our country.

As White (2013a, p.160) insightfully explained, “cultural associations with women’s physicality with nurturance” contribute to women’s marginalization as a national subject. Regarding women’s mothering identity and gender roles based on maternalism which impacts state policies, specific framings employed by CHP and HDP female deputies in their 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative terms’ parliamentary speeches stand out with some striking differences from each other. The CHP women MPs’ discursive frames indicate dilemmas and discursive inconsistencies in challenging the AKP’s maternalist ideology by employing both critical perspectives and family-centered framings at the same time. These inconsistent discourses do not apply to all women deputies of CHP. However, several individual women MPs also project this predicament in their parliamentary speeches and statements at different times and occasions. The critical point here is that these frames project traditional gender roles rather than those contesting AKP’s family-centered policies in the legislative acts of some CHP women deputies. Often, the narratives of individual women and their

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<sup>35</sup> Skocpol (1992, p.51) also defined maternalist ideology “as extending the moral values and social caring of the home into the larger community,” which “brings about sustaining of the highest moral values in her (women’s) roles as wife and (especially) mother.”

suffering in society are often the subject of their speeches. Often, the economically disadvantaged position of women in society is framed by referring to the sacrifices of mothers for their children. A prominent CHP MP raised the issue in the following way:

There is Birsal ,who as a mother is struggling to educate her three children; and you put this woman in front of the door on a winter day. You did not give any of them their compensation, they could not even open a case for re-employment.<sup>36</sup>

Another framing in CHP MPs' speeches where maternal themes are employed is uncritically found in the debates on maternity debt as a social security right. As the speeches of some CHP women MPs indicate motherhood as a framing is employed to justify women's access to social rights (maternity debt<sup>37</sup> and retirement benefits). In fact, the insurance right of women is presented as a right that women should have access to because they are 'mothers' instead of presenting it and framing as a social right. It is problematic from a feminist point of view. As MP Didem Engin explained:

Our mothers devoted their whole lives to their children and they live for their children. All mothers who gave birth and in need should be able to benefit from this right, and be able to retire, regardless of whether they were working or insured at the time of their birth.<sup>38</sup>

The legislative proposal on maternity debt was strongly debated in the TBMM during the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative term as the CHP women MPs raised it frequently. In this regard, another MP Fatma Kaplan-Hürriyet also commented on the urgency of this proposal in the following way "Mothers are waiting for this law to be passed as soon as possible

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<sup>36</sup>Köksal, B. (2016, January 27). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=43889>

<sup>37</sup> According to Law No.5510, passed into law in the AKP government in 2006, a woman within the scope of social insurance has the right to maternity debt. This law is criticized for not including women who are not within the scope of social insurance before giving birth.

<sup>38</sup>Engin, D. (2016, February 23). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=44616>

in order to live without needing anyone in their social life and to retire properly”<sup>39</sup> These parliamentary speeches attest that CHP women MPs focused on women’s social security coverage in a limited way by merely emphasizing mother’s social rights. In addition to this maternity framing, other women deputies often resort to the ‘sacred motherhood’ framing which is intrinsic to maternalist ideology through the discourses on care labor, emphasizing the reproductive roles of women. These discourses mirror the ideological centrality of motherhood as the primary identity and destiny for women. In other words, these discourses could not sufficiently challenge the family-centered policies of the AKP. Some CHP MPs also referred to the sacrifices of mothers by referring to the sufferings of the mothers of the martyrs (fallen soldiers) to highlight the situation of women as mothers to emphasize and dramatize the victimhood frame in the following way “To our mothers of martyrs, who were said to be under the feet of heaven every time and who sacrificed their children to terror, and who were left alone with their pains.”<sup>40</sup> The phrase “heaven is under the feet of mothers,” is frequently employed by conservative religious groups and the AKP discourses. The CHP women MPs also refer to this religious theme to make the point that women sacrifice their sons for the country to underline the importance of women’s reproductive labor for the good of the society. Such discourses are central to the Kemalist/Republican gender construction, where the articulation of motherhood in the nationalist discourse also includes mothers of soldiers and martyrs (White, 2013a, p. 157).

In another speech made on the occasion of the International Women’s Day another CHP MP also underlined the social significance of motherhood in the following way:

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<sup>39</sup>Kaplan-Hürriyet, F. (2018, January 18). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=65903>

<sup>40</sup>Altaca-Kayıoğlu, N. (2018, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=67329>

Fifty percent of our world population is women; It is a woman who gives birth to the remaining Fifty percent, raises her, fathers her, and makes a man. Women should realize their power as soon as possible and get our country out of this chaos. Happy 8 March!<sup>41</sup>

In this speech, the women MP frames women's reproductive and care roles the powering feature on by using the motherhood framing. This discourse does not fully pose a discursive challenge to AKP's pronatalist gender conservatism; on the contrary, it endorses maternalism and nurtures women's societal roles. Sumbas and Dinçer's (2022) research on the substantive representation of women MPs of the AKP demonstrated that the conservative AKP women also employed maternalist frames within the emphasis on motherhood and family to justify their support of bills on maternity leave and part-time work. It means that some CHP women MPs could not challenge this tradition of conservative women representatives in the parliament.

Nevertheless, besides these motherhood-centered maternalist frames, some CHP women deputies approach motherhood with a more critical perspective. These women, who question traditional gender roles, also criticized the social conditioning and ideological approach of the government based on the acceptance of motherhood as the only and most important role and identity for women above all other roles. In criticism of the government's conservative gender politics MP Yüceer made the following point "The male breadwinner family model is blessed. In other words, it is said that the main career, the main task of women is motherhood and for this they should be positioned in this direction."<sup>42</sup> Another women MP Akkuş-İlgezdi opposed the part-time working model promoted by the AKP government under the theme of reconciliation of work and family life. In her criticism she took up the care issue with a feminist perspective

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<sup>41</sup>Ersoy, M. (2016, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=46069>

<sup>42</sup>Yüceer, C. (2015, December 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=41965>

by emphasizing the importance of creches, which must be opened in the public and private sectors, as a right.<sup>43</sup>

Overall, a striking finding in the framings employed some CHP women MPs speeches is a visible discursive dilemma or double-discourse which simultaneously employ critical and supportive framings for the family-centered policies. This situation indicates the inconsistency in their gender politics. Some women MPs also refer to the significance of the family unity issue in the context of the rising divorce rates and problems in an increasingly precarious labor market.

We call the family “the smallest basic unit of society,” we say “the smallest social structure in society,” and we say that the upbringing of family members in a healthy and peaceful environment will directly affect social life. We all agree on this, but it is understood from the increasing divorce rates that the family structure has been seriously damaged especially in recent years and during the thirteen-year AKP rule.<sup>44</sup>

Another MP, Şevkin endorsed the family-unity understanding in her justification of contracted civil servants’ right to work in a permanent position in the public sector.<sup>45</sup>

These statements of CHP women MPs in their speeches refer to the importance and necessity of family unity within family-centered and maternalist framings. It indicates a predicament or a discursive dilemma on the part of these women MPs on how to challenge the gender politics of the AKP without underestimating the maternal roles of women for the well-being of the society. In the same speech, the same MP

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<sup>43</sup>Akkuş-İlgezdi, G. (2016, November 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=53254>

<sup>44</sup>Köksal, B. (2015, December 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=42027>

<sup>45</sup>Şevkin, M. (2019, May 30). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=78335>

BurcuKöksal<sup>46</sup> also criticizes the traditional gender roles in the family which is often justified by the AKP politicians by defining motherhood as a career on its own.<sup>47</sup> In this part of the speech, her criticism to maternalist perspective and women's confinement into private sphere were crucial reflecting feminist criticism in her legislative acts.

As another example, the CHP women MP Yüceer used the double-frame in the speeches about the family-centered topic. In her speech, she emphasized the empowerment of women for the interests of strong family-unity in the following way: “We cannot strengthen our families without empowering women and empowering women who are often in trouble in that unequal family relationship.”<sup>48</sup> In this speech, the relationship between women's empowerment and family empowerment, which is often claimed by the government, problematic in terms of confining women in the family institution. It still far from articulating a feminist perspective on women's empowerment. Beyond that this speech does not emphasize women's value as an individual citizen and empowerment conditions outside the context of the peaceful family.

However, we see that the same women MP challenges family-centered policies in another plenary speech in relation to a parliamentary inquiry proposal on the

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<sup>46</sup>Köksal, B. (2015, December 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=42027>

<sup>47</sup> Minister of Health Mehmet Müezzinoğlu, in the AKP governance, said, “Mothers should not focus on any other career apart from their motherhood career. They should grow good generations” in 2015. Retrieved from <https://t24.com.tr/haber/saglik-bakani-mehmet-muezzinoglu-annelerin-merkezinde-baska-bir-kariyer-olmamali.282277>. In addition, Minister of National Defense Vecdi Gönül, in the AKP governance, said, “Turkish women are the adornment of home and the honor of the man” in 2005. Retrieved from <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/bakan-gonul-turk-kadini-evinin-susu-110274>

<sup>48</sup>Yüceer, C. (2016, January 27). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeKomisyonKonusmaTutanakDetay?tutanakId=6643>



investigation of negative factors affecting family unity and increasing divorce rates debated in December 2015.

What does this proposal say? In short, it says: It says to women: “Your main job is motherhood. Your main job is to take care of spouses, children, elderly people, and patients. If you want to work outside the home, you can work in flexible, insecure and part-time jobs.” In other words, women are reminded of their proper role and place in society.<sup>49</sup>

In this speech, MP Yüceer criticizes the subordinated position of women in the family which contradicts her previous family-centered speech in terms of addressing women’s inability to participate in employment and the problems they encounter at work. The second speech of Yüceer also provides an important framework to challenge the government’s family-centered policies on women’s employment.

In general, the CHP women MPs could not project unequivocal feminist discursive frames in the parliamentary speeches, particularly in the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative term. Instead, their loyalty to party’s central politics is evident in their usage of ‘welfare state,’ ‘state feminism,’ and ‘Kemalist’ framings. The ‘welfare state’ framing represents practical gender interests in state-based care services. Nevertheless, state feminism and Kemalist discourses do not include discursive frames to raise strategic and practical gender interests. The CHP women MPs who employed these frames are not active participants of feminist organizations (see Appendix A). Even though some of them have been involved several civil society organizations, these organizations’ names are not indicated on the TBMM official website, some women MPs enrolled in the Association for Supporting Contemporary Life and/or Kemalist Thought Association, which aim to protect and develop Kemalist principles and revolutions in Turkey (see Appendix A). Another striking point is that the CHP women MPs’ usage of double

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<sup>49</sup>Yüceer, C. (2015, December 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=41965>

and inconsistent framings, which appear in maternalist and family-unity frames. This dilemma prevents the development of systematic and consistent challenges to the AKP's family-centered politics and maternalist ideology. Nevertheless, the framing analysis reveals the shift in CHP women's MPs' speeches in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term. Even though CHP women MPs continue to use welfare state framing in care issues, they have begun to emphasize the equal share of care labor between women and men. Furthermore, these women representatives strikingly left Kemalist framings in 8<sup>th</sup> March plenary speeches and began to use feminist framing on this special day by referring to existing problems in the labor market and expressing women's ongoing struggle to gain their rights. Beyond that, the CHP women MPs have visibly reduced their use of maternalist and family-unity framings in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative period. The CHP women representatives who held feminist perspective in their framings participated in women's organizations or other civil society organizations, such as Candan Yüceer, Gamze-Akkuş-ilgezdi, Gülizar Biçer-Karaca, Jale Nur Süllü, Suzan Şahin, Şenal Sarıhan (see Appendix A). However, it does not mean that these women employed feminist framings in each speech; in contrast, some of them (such as Candan Yüceer and Suzan Şahin) projected contradictory frames in their parliamentary speeches. It means that the participation in women's organizations and civil society organizations does not necessarily engender feminist political claims. Nevertheless, the increasing visibility and voice of the women's movement in Turkey, particularly after increasing threats to women's rights under the AKP ruling regime, highly affect the change in the CHP women MPs' frames and politics in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term. Moreover, the care crisis during the Covid-19 pandemic made women's invisible labor visible with an increasing double-burden of women in households. Thus, this situation was one of the main concerns of the feminist agenda, which resulted in the necessity of doing politics on women's domestic and care labor. Despite all these changes, when we look at the parliamentary speeches, we observe that the dominant framings used by CHP women MPs demonstrate the deficiency of feminist discourses in their parliamentary speeches. At that point, it is important to note that a high level of education and working in a high-esteem occupation do not ensure making feminist

politics in parliament. As Appendix A demonstrates although all CHP women hold a university degree and as some work as lawyers (10 women MPs), academics (6 women MPs), doctors of medicine (3 women MPs), and engineers (3 women MPs), none all of them have fully embraced a critical feminist perspective beyond maternalism in their legislative acts. This is an indication that the party (CHP) ideology and the party's feminist understanding are the main determinants in women MPs' way of doing gender politics in the TBMM.

#### **4.2.3. Dominant Framings Used by HDP Women MPs**

This research has found that HDP female deputies mainly employed three framings: 'woman as an individual,' 'holistic,' and 'collectivization of care labor' in the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative term. These women MPs diversify these frames with the addition of 'marriage of patriarchy and capitalism' and 'slavery' framings in their discursive appeals to criticize family-centered gender policies in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term.

First of all, the HDP female MPs take up a feminist framing with the expression of 'woman as an individual' to challenge the government's maternalist, family-centered approach. In this framing, HDP female deputies refer to women's autonomous well-being without referring to their mothering identity, familial status, and responsibilities. In fact, they challenge maternalism as the most critical obstacle to women's full participation in paid work. This framing challenges the maternalist ideology, and departs from the CHP women MPs' framings in their legislative acts as the HDP women MPs object to identifying women with the family institution.

Regarding the woman as an independent individual in her own right, HDP MP Burcu Çelik-Özkan criticized the maternalist ideology from the perspective of its constraining impact on women's labor in the labor market position in her plenary speech at the Income Tax Law Draft meeting in January 2016 in the following way:

In the article, women are defined only through the role of motherhood, and they are dealt with within the limits determined by the role of motherhood in the public sphere and in the paid labor force. In this sense, flexible and insecure working conditions, which are the base of capital, are imposed on the working class, starting with women workers under the pretext of birth and motherhood.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, MP Meral Daniş-Beştaş also criticized the government's policies on women's employment:

I would like to emphasize again that the political documents of the AKP Government, such as the Tenth Development Plan and the 2014-2023 National Employment Strategy, which have addressed women's employment by approaching women as a part of the family, and not addressing woman as an individual, on the basis of their own personal rights.<sup>51</sup>

These statements in their speeches are crucial in terms of posing a challenge to the AKP's maternalist stance on women's labor and employment. In other words, HDP women MPs connect these issues together by focusing on how the emphasis on motherhood adversely impacts women's right to participation in secure and full-time jobs. Beyond that, the 'woman as an individual' framing, as a feminist framing, contributes to having an inclusive and broader understanding and articulation of diversity among women. This framing is also a feminist framing because it does not impose the idea of women being a mother as the primary and most blessed role. HDP

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<sup>50</sup>Çelik-Özkan, B. (2016, January 21). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=43760>

<sup>51</sup>Daniş-Beştaş, M. (2016, February 18). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=44533>

women deputies also have a ‘holistic’ perspective in their discursive frames to emphasize the need for a more comprehensive viewpoint in explaining women’s disadvantaged positions in employment. In other words, they try to present a holistic framework on how the exploitation of women’s labor and the AKP’s “three-children” policy severely limit women’s participation in paid employment. On this particular point, the pro-natalist approach of the government is contested also with references to early marriages and the three-children policy:

Early marriage is one of the biggest problems in our country. In particular, it reinforces the unequal position of women in society and causes a decrease in women’s life opportunities and life choices. The aim of the government in the three-children policy is to encourage women to give birth, keep the workable population high, support the expansion of the labor market, and thus reduce wages. The woman at home will be both taking care of the children and ensuring survival of the household.<sup>52</sup>

As MP Çelik-Özkan makes clear in another speech, there has also been an attempt to link how the three-children policy encourages women in low-paid unskilled jobs without sufficient social security coverage. These women simultaneously undertake the care of their children while exposed to violence by their husbands.<sup>53</sup> These framings provide significant critical insights into women’s subordination in the line of socialist feminist claims by referring to the exploitation of women’s labor in the private and public spheres and analyzing policies designed and implemented on women’s reproductive labor. These HDP women deputies also hold holistic frames to explain how women’s domestic and reproductive labor, deficiency of childcare, informal employment, low wage, and loss of employment intertwined and affected each other in their 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term speeches. For instance, MP Filiz Kerestecioğlu’s

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<sup>52</sup>Çelik-Özkan, B. (2016, April 25). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=48080>

<sup>53</sup>Çelik-Özkan, B. (2016, May 5). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=48587>

following speech puts an emphasis of the complexity of women's problems in employment with reference to specific structural and cultural forces at work:

Free kindergartens and public care centers, which are the most important means of equally sharing the responsibility of care within the society, are almost non-existent... The majority of women are still in precarious, informal and temporary jobs. We get paid less even if we do the same job, not because we are incompetent, but because we are women, and in times of crisis, we are the first ones to be sacrificed.<sup>54</sup>

As these HDP women MPs' these speeches indicate, the childcare issue is problematized and prioritized as the most important issue for the problem of women's employment. Along these lines, the deputies employ the framing of 'collectivization of the care labor' offered as a solution for the above-mentioned problems. It is an important framing which is accompanied with specific solutions from feminist perspective beyond the presentation of the current situation of problems related to women's labor and employment. As Kerestecioglu continued:

It is important to allocate a budget for parental leave, kindergartens, all public services in the field of education and health that will collectivize care... In this sense, much more resources need to be allocated to childcare, but with the right policies.<sup>55</sup>

As another HDP MP explained, this feminist framing emphasizes the role of the state in holding the gendered division of in the private sphere:

Women's poverty is also increasing, and invisible women's labor is increasing too much; all housework is assigned to women, and due to this process, cleaning, cooking, childcare, patient care, unfortunately, continues to be seen as women's work only due

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<sup>54</sup>Kerestecioglu, F. (2021, May 27). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=97702>

<sup>55</sup>Kerestecioglu, F. (2016, January, 20). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=43680>

to the division of labor caused by male domination. This needs to be changed; just as the state must do its part in this regard, men also should cooperate in these matters.<sup>56</sup>

The ‘collectivization of care labor’ framing used by the HDP women representatives provides important insights into socialist feminist analysis regarding women’s invisible domestic and care labor. They underlined equal sharing of these responsibilities between sexes within the support of state-based care services.

In the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term, in their plenary speeches, HDP women MPs also started to refer to ‘marriage of patriarchy and capitalism’ framing, terms historically theorized and taken up by socialist feminists in the West. The women representatives used these terms to diagnose and criticize the exploitation of women’s labor in the labor market and in the male-dominated system together. The HDP women deputies synonymously use the words ‘patriarchy’ and ‘male-dominated system.’ Another MP refers to sexism in her statement that<sup>57</sup> which clearly implies women’s double burden in a feminist term.

Related to the above issue, MP Günay also discusses women’s exploitation in the larger context of capitalism and ecological issues:

Capitalism has led to an increasingly deepening crisis of civilization and ecology throughout the world, with the economic crisis it has created through the exploitation of labor, nature, and women all over the world.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Gülüm, Z. (2020, April 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=87343>

<sup>57</sup>Hatımoğulları-Oruç, T. (2018, November 21). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=73099>

<sup>58</sup>Günay, E. (2021, December 16). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=102840>

These expressions and articulations of the issues also attest to the feminist significance of the women MPs' speeches' which correlates with the HDP's central politics offered in the Statute, Program, and its Election Manifestos which refer to the elimination of all oppression, exploitation, and discrimination against women originating from sexism, patriarchy, and capitalism.

In line with the 'marriage of patriarchy and capitalism' framing, these HDP female deputies express the harsh working conditions of women workers with the word 'slavery' as another framing, and by emphasizing women's poverty issue. As MP Daniş-Bektaş explained:

In Turkey, where at least 20 million women are completely excluded from working life, women's employment declined to 25 percent due to the economic crisis. It was not enough, you forced women to work under slavery conditions. Thus, you have deepened women's inequality and poverty, which has accumulated for hundreds of years, as never before seen in history.<sup>59</sup>

MP Züleyha Gülüm also mentioned women workers' experiences of gender discrimination. Ms. Gülüm highlighted the harassment, mobbing and other inequalities at their workplaces, and she stated that "It (this working circumstances) is forcing the workers to work under inhumane slave conditions."<sup>60</sup>

Overall, the HDP women MPs' speeches clearly demonstrate their socialist feminist stance on women's labor and employment issues. Their socialist feminist identity is apparent in a 'holistic perspective,' 'collectivization of care labor,' 'the marriage of

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<sup>59</sup>Daniş-Bektaş, M. (2020, December 18). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=93983>

<sup>60</sup>Gülüm, Z. (2021, October 13). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=100204>



patriarchy and capitalism,’ and ‘slavery’ framings. These frames also denote the representation of strategic gender interests except ‘collectivization of care labor’ framing, which is categorized under practical gender interests regarding proposing an equal share of care responsibility with state-based care service support. Representing these strategic gender interests is crucial because they uncover the extent of patriarchy and capitalism on women’s oppression and subordination in both private and public realms. Last but not least, these frames challenge the AKP’s family-centered and pro-natalist gender politics, particularly by criticizing their maternalist ideology with the ‘woman as an individual’ framing.

It needs to be noted that the more visible and critical feminist orientation of these HDP women MPs reflected in their discursive frames can be attributed to their active participation in feminist struggle and women’s organizations. More than half of the HDP women representatives (23 women out of 40 women MPs) recorded their involvement in women’s and human rights organizations on the official website of the TBMM (see Appendix B). Moreover, some of them (Dilşat Canbaz Kaya, Fatma Kurtulan, and Züleyha Gülüm) presented themselves as feminist/women’s rights activists on the same website. The feminist struggle and civil society engagement of the HDP women representatives is more visible apparent, as seen in Appendix B, which presents the name and works of women MPs on behalf of the feminist struggle. The same table (Appendix B) also indicates that not all of the HDP women hold a university degree (24 out of 40 women MPs hold it); there are twelve women MPs with high school graduation, one woman MP with secondary school graduation, and a woman MP with primary school graduation (two women MPs education level is not known). As in the group of CHP women, the lawyers are the dominant group (9 women MPs out of 40 women MPs) (see Appendix B). In contrast to the CHP, high-education, and high-esteem occupations are not prevalent among HDP women MPs. There are women MPs from different occupations, such as nurses, self-employed persons, and a worker. This means that, as the CHP case attests, high education and working in a

high-esteem job do not necessarily bring about feminist political orientation or commitment. Instead, making feminist politics emerges from involvement in the feminist struggle and (feminist) women's organizations, together with the party's favorable approach to feminist claims and themes.

### **4.3. The Feminist Perspectives in the Discourses of the CHP and HDP Women MPs on Women's Labor, Employment, and Social Security**

The main discursive themes of the legislative acts on women's labor and employment issues of opposition women relate to women's concerns and problems in paid employment, women's social security rights, women's poverty, and policy suggestions to increase women's employment. Under these headings, CHP and HDP female deputies touched upon various policies with commonly-shared themes and framings, as well as different points of emphasis on specific problems from the diverse feminist perspectives.

#### **4.3.1. Women's Problems in Paid Employment**

The low rate of women's employment in Turkey is critical as a starting point of the criticisms of opposition women MPs on the issue of women's employment. For this reason, these women deputies frequently mentioned the statistical data on this issue in the plenary and commission speeches during the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative periods.

As CHP MP Şevkin mentioned in her plenary speech in 2020, women's marginalization in employment is the leading gender inequality issue in Turkey and it is intertwined with issues in other realms. In this respect, she interpreted women's unemployment with its consequences of deficiency of social and economic freedoms for women.<sup>61</sup> The HDP's women deputies also identify women's exclusion from paid employment as the number one problem, they proceed to mention its root causes as well in their speeches. As HDP MP Serpil Kemalbay-Pekgözegü stated in her commission speech in 2018, women's invisible labor at home is followed by working in precarious and low-wage jobs and the high rate of women's unemployment in Turkey.<sup>62</sup>

Women MPs from both parties also provided statistical data on women's employment and gendered processes and inequalities in their address to the TBMM to support their claims on women's gendered exclusion from the workforce. They criticize the family-centered policies behind women's unemployment and working women's problems. They devote a substantial part of their legislative activities in identifying and announcing the policies that caused this problem. The CHP and HDP women MPs mainly criticize the reconciliation of work and family life policy and private employment agencies, which promote flexible, insecure, informal, and part-time working model for women who are ultimately deprived of their social security rights such as descent pensions and fair retirement terms, fringe benefit health care, job security, and other social rights.

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<sup>61</sup>Şevkin, M. (2020, March 11). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=86429>

<sup>62</sup>Kemalbay-Pekgözegü, S. (2018, November 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeKomisyonKonusmaTutanakDetay?tutanakId=24195>

The private employment agencies<sup>63</sup> and flexible employment<sup>64</sup>, as the main components of AKPs' gender politics on employment, take an important part in the official documents of the 10th Development Plan and National Employment Strategies 2014-2023. These documents impose temporary and part-time work on women without social security coverage. The contract-based working system is the primary outcome of the private employment agency implementation. These workers are exposed to right infringement along with insecure, indefinite, and flexible working conditions. In other words, the AKP governments' policy brings "insecure flexibility" (Çağlayan, 2015) to hired workers. Flexible employment is also cemented by the ruling regime's 'reconciliation of work and family life' policy which is also present in these official documents. This family-centered policy urges women to work in flexible employment without disrupting their household responsibilities.

Women MPs from both parties also draw attention to women's disadvantaged positions and the long-term implications of the legal changes on the working mothers' rights and the policies to attract women to flexible work. As CHP MP Gülay Yedekçi stated in the following plenary speech on Amendment of the Income Tax Law and Other Laws in 2016:

Although it seems that there will not be any loss of rights in terms of wages and premiums during the maternity leave period, the opportunity for advancement in the profession, seniority, and management, which requires full-time work, will disappear for women in the long term. Together with the flexible employment that is desired to be introduced, the regulation that leaves female employees even more precarious

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<sup>63</sup> The private employment agencies, which entered into force in 2003 within Act No.4857 of Labor Law and Act No.4904 of Turkish Employment Agency Law, are a structure that mediates the placement of job seekers in low-skilled and insecure jobs with temporary worker positions through the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR).

<sup>64</sup> Flexible employment refers to replacing fixed-term and full-time work with indefinite and part-time work (Çağlayan, 2015), which is risky in terms of guaranteeing workers' equal and fair remuneration and social security rights.

contains provisions that will make the lives of not only women but also all workers and laborers difficult.<sup>65</sup>

Regarding the precarious position of women in the labor market, the HDP deputy Kerestecioğlu also addressed the status of women workers in the informal sector with its multiple dimensions:

Informal working means working without union rights, facing the risk of being unemployed at any time, and feeling that the ways of fighting against sexual harassment, abuse, and psychological violence are blocked. Those who have to work informally are mostly women.<sup>66</sup>

The common issues and points CHP and HDP female MPs take up and criticize about flexible and informal employment center on the infringement of working women's social rights. In this respect, the above speech texts are significant in addressing the adverse consequences of part-time and flexible working for women's social security rights. Secondly, part-time and flexible work are criticized for perpetuating women's domestic subordination on the basis of mothering and homemaking responsibilities. In this sense, this issue is also framed in the context of a criticism of maternalist ideology. As CHP MP Yüceer criticized the proposal on the establishment of a parliamentary investigation commission to investigate the causes of divorce, she contested all these issues in the following way:

What does this proposal say? In short, it tells women Your main job is motherhood. Taking care of a spouse, children, elders, and patients is your main job; if you want to work outside the home—of course, you have to do it without interrupting your main job—you can work in flexible, insecure, and part-time jobs.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Yedekçi, G. (2016, January 27). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=43878>

<sup>66</sup>Kerestecioğlu, F. (2021, October 14). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=100304>

<sup>67</sup>Yüceer, C. (2015, December 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=41965>

A HDP MP Çelik-Özkan also touched on the same issue the following year by putting forward a feminist perspective on the significance of the public and private separation behind gender inequalities:

This flexible, part-time work means women take on a full load of household chores in the remaining half time. So, in fact, housework is defined as women's work, ignoring the equality of men and women in the family. Men are defined as the subjects in the public sphere, while women are mainly defined as a subject in the private sphere, that is, only at home.<sup>68</sup>

On this issue, women MPs from both parties the role of private employment agencies in connection with part-time and flexible working is another issue that female opposition deputies vigorously discussed. The basis of this discussion emphasizes how the private employment agencies contribute to the exploitation of women's labor. In this context, CHP MP Yedekçi underlines the risks for women's further exploitation, as in the case of the plenary speech on Amendment of the Income Tax Law and Other Laws:

The regulation, which presents part-time work as a choice for women due to childbirth and maternity, paves the way for hired workers. This practice will pave the way for private employment agencies. While trying to abolish subcontracting, which has become the most basic means of exploitation of workers, now it is tried to spread subcontracted work much more in the light of flexible working.<sup>69</sup>

On this issue, the HDP MPs' criticism of women workers' subordination is also framed in socialist terms beyond the term "exploitation" and also linking public-private sphere inequalities:

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<sup>68</sup>Çelik-Özkan, B. (2016, May 5). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=48587>

<sup>69</sup>Yedekçi, G. (2016, January 27). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=43878>

In fact, at present, laborers and workers are enslaved and traded as a commodity under special laws, under the name of “private employment agencies” by these laws. With these omnibus bills, we see that workers and laborers, especially women, are confined to their homes, and even their rights are taken away.<sup>70</sup>

The CHP women deputies submitted the motions of written question regarding women’s employment problems during the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative period. One of these motions is about women’s labor force participation to question any policy to increase women’s employment rates.<sup>71</sup> Another written question is about the working conditions of female workers working in the textile sector.<sup>72</sup> This motion interrogates the number of female workers, the death rate of unregistered female workers as a result of work accidents, the improvement of working conditions, and the training for workers to learn about their social and economic rights. During the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative terms, CHP women deputies also put forward the motions of parliamentary inquiry on women’s unemployment rates and the problems women face in the workplace. In the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative period, CHP women MPs addressed the policies to be implemented on women’s unemployment and also on the problems related to working women and on the policy measures to be taken to those ends.<sup>73</sup> During the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term, they concentrated on the causes of the unregistered employment problem and to determine solutions<sup>74</sup>, as well as the problems issues of women

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<sup>70</sup>Demirel, Ç. (2016, May 2). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=48330>

<sup>71</sup>Altıok, Z. (2017, February 17). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/209494>

<sup>72</sup>Akkuş-İlgezdi, G. (2016, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/197379>

<sup>73</sup>Doğan-Türkmen, E. (2016, July 1). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/203052>  
Yüceer, C. (2017, March 1). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/210269>

<sup>74</sup>Şevkin, M. (2020, June 12). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/275697>

farmers<sup>75</sup> and domestic workers<sup>76</sup>, and on the necessary measures and work to determine what needs to be done to increase the women's employment and improve the working condition<sup>77</sup> in their motions of parliamentary inquiry.

In the same vein, HDP women deputies submitted motions of written questions and parliamentary inquiry in the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative terms regarding women's problems in employment and gender-based inequalities. In this respect, women MPs inquired about working conditions and concerns of women workers from different occupations (domestic<sup>78</sup>, seasonal<sup>79</sup>, home-based<sup>80</sup>, women workers in production sectors<sup>81</sup>), and addressed obstacles to women's participation in business life, and

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<sup>75</sup>Karabiyik, L. (2020, June 12). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/275718>

<sup>76</sup>Biçer-Karaca, G. (2021, April 21). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/293027>

<sup>77</sup>Biçer-Karaca, G. (2022, March 7). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/311860>

Şevkin, M. (2020, June 12). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/275696>

Karabiyik, L. (2020, March 11). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/270591>

Şahin, S. (2019, April, 1). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/247247>

Şahin, S. (2021, February, 11). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/288622>

<sup>78</sup>Demirel, Ç. (2016, June 16). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/202057>

Kerestecioğlu, F. (2016, June 16). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/202056>

Taşdemir, D. D. (2019, May 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/248981>

<sup>79</sup>Danış-Beştaş, M. (2016, August 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/203483>

İrmez, A. (2017, July 11). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/213936>

Dundar, P. (2018, December 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/241403>

Dundar, P. (2021, May 31). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/295399>

Dundar, P. (2022, January 14). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/308396>

Dundar, P. (2018, December 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/240994>

Danış-Beştaş, M. (2019, January 29). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/244157>

Gülüm, Z. (2021, March 5). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/290434>

<sup>80</sup>Yıldırım, G. (2016, March 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/197384>

Yıldırım, G. (2016, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/196284>

Dundar, P. (2022, January 19). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/308655>

Danış-Beştaş, M. (2021, June 30). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/296902>

<sup>81</sup>Taşdemir, D. D. (2016, April 21). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/200265>

Taşdemir, D. D. (2017, April 17). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/214187>



gender equality in employment<sup>82</sup> in their motions of written question and parliamentary inquiry. More specifically, HDP women MPs touched upon the issues of gender pay gap<sup>83</sup>, discrimination and violence (physical violence, sexual and psychological harassment, and mobbing) against women in workplaces<sup>84</sup>, unregistered employment of women workers<sup>85</sup>, discriminatory behaviors against pregnant women workers<sup>86</sup> and the closure of the women's open-air markets in the southeast region's municipalities where trustees were appointed by the government<sup>87</sup>, and job security<sup>88</sup> in their motions of written question and motions of a parliamentary inquiry in the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative terms. Last but not least, when we look at the number of these

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Taşdemir, D. D. (2018, February 13). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/226282>  
Dundar, P. (2022, January 17). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/308398>

<sup>82</sup>Acar-Başaran, A. (2016, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/196140>  
Hatimoğulları-Oruç, T. (2021, March 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/290428>

<sup>83</sup>Yiğitalp, S. (2016, March 7). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/196131>

<sup>84</sup>Taşdemir, D.D. (2018, March 14). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/228727>  
Acar-Başaran, A. (2021, May 6). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/294037>  
Güzel, S. (2019, November 28). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/261118>  
Tosun, R. (2022, April 27). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/316105>  
Orhan-Işık, M. (2020, March 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/271691>  
Ersoy, O. (2022, February 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/309451>  
Gülüm, Z. (2021, March 12). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/291276>  
Hatimoğulları-Oruç, T. (2018, November 19). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/240545>  
Gülüm, Z. (2021, February 23). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/289475>  
Gülüm, Z. (2020, March 6). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/270569>

<sup>85</sup>Danış-Beştaş, M. (2016, February 24). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/196784>  
Danış-Beştaş, M. (2016, December 1). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/206366>

<sup>86</sup>Danış-Beştaş, M. (2018, February 28). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/227933>

<sup>87</sup>Yiğitalp, S. (2017, August 22). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/215998>

<sup>88</sup>Danış-Beştaş, M. (2016, October 7). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/204984>  
Danış-Beştaş, M. (2018, December 5). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/241013>

proposals regarding women's concerns in employment, HDP women MPs submitted more motions of written questions and parliamentary inquiry than CHP women MPs. In this respect, we infer that the subject that HDP women deputies focus mostly on their proposal on more inclusive issues regarding different women groups' concerns related to employment.

However, unlike HDP women deputies, CHP women MPs carried out various legislative activities to raise the problems of sexist practices and discriminations in specific areas of employment. In this respect, one of the CHP women MPs mentioned sexist practices against women academics. For example, a MP addressed women's problems in hiring for academic positions:

If a female assistant makes an application to the position research assistant, "Well, there is maternity leave, she will take care of her child, it will be like this, it will be like this, we can't get efficiency." They say, and if there are few such candidates if the last job in that evaluation system is up to the interview.<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, in a commission speech, a CHP woman MP Yüceer also criticized Clause (b) of Article 7 of 'Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey' bill presented in the Committee on Equal Opportunity for Women and Men (KEFEK) for creating gender segregation in employment<sup>90</sup> by saying that "This bill is sexist" because, as MP Yüceer implicated, it includes the statement of a "situation that requires the employment of only a certain gender."

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<sup>89</sup>Karabiyik, L. (2016, January 14). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeKomisyonKonusmaTutanakDetay?tutanakId=7467>

<sup>90</sup>Yüceer, C. (2016, February 16). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeKomisyonKonusmaTutanakDetay?tutanakId=6700>

CHP women deputies also questioned sexist practices in employment in their motions of written question. One of these motions was about a private company that hired only male workers<sup>91</sup>, and the second was a limited quota for women in recruitment for police force<sup>92</sup>. These written questions are important regarding their focus on sexist practices and gender-based roles in employment. The low numbers of women in decision-making positions were also taken up by CHP women deputies who asked questions about decision-making positions in local<sup>93</sup> and national<sup>94</sup> level institutions and ministries in the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative terms. CHP women MPs also put forward motions of written questions on the necessary policies to overcome gender-based inequalities, and specifically issues such as discrimination against pregnant civil servants<sup>95</sup>, and women workers who were dismissed on the grounds of Code-29<sup>96</sup> in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative period.

In the same vein, HDP women MPs inquired about women's positions in employment in their 27<sup>th</sup> term's motions of written question. These women representatives question

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<sup>91</sup>Doğan-Türkmen, E. (2017, May 30). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/212661>

<sup>92</sup>Özdemir, S. (2016, September 27). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/204268>

<sup>93</sup>Doğan-Türkmen, E. (2017, June 14). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/213332>

<sup>94</sup>Ersoy, M. (2018, March 29). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/230289>

<sup>95</sup>Özdemir, S. (2021, December 29). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/306900>

Erdan-Kılıç, S. (2020, June 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/275422>

<sup>96</sup> Code-29 is a legal regulation that allows the employer to dismiss the employee by depriving her/his of all rights (e.g., severance pay and unemployment benefits) by accusing them based on ambiguous moral rules.

the total number of women working in public institutions<sup>97</sup>, the number of women in senior positions<sup>98</sup>, and the number of female athletes<sup>99</sup>, directors, and producers<sup>100</sup>.

Another common problem and gendered issue taken up by the CHP and HDP female MPs regarding the women's position in employment relate to the unfair dismissal of workers, especially women workers, during the Covid-19 pandemic period in Turkey. In this respect, both parties were attentive to and focused on the women's loss of employment during the pandemic in their legislative activities since 2020. As a CHP MP Sahin raised the issue in her plenary speech:

The inequality and discrimination that women face in all areas of life, along with Covid-19, women's unemployment and loss of employment became even worse. The female workforce decreased by 8.2 percent in the last year. The number of homeless women increased by 171 percent, and the number of time-related underemployment among women increased by 47.2 percent in the last year<sup>101</sup>.

Similarly, the HDP deputies also addressed the gendered aspect of the recent period under adverse conditions during the pandemic conditions in employment:

We are going through a period in which unemployment for women deepens the most and is more exposed during the pandemic period...the poverty and unemployment among women will increase more. That is, gender inequality in wages has increased;

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<sup>97</sup>Tosun, R. (2019, January 7). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/242928>

<sup>98</sup>Orhan-Işık, M. (2020, March 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/271072>

<sup>99</sup>Orhan-Işık, M. (2020, March 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/271077>

<sup>100</sup>Orhan-Işık, M. (2020, March 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/271077>

<sup>101</sup>Şahin, S. (2021, March 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=96077>

female workers were forced to work for a lower wage despite the imposition of unpaid leave.<sup>102</sup>

The HDP women MPs also submitted motions of written questions in order to prevent the misuse of the Code-29 implementation to the disadvantage of women workers.<sup>103</sup> Last but not least, opposition women MPs have started sharing the narratives of women's experiences to highlight their problems in employment. It is an important point that distinguishes the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term's plenary speeches from the previous period. It is also a crucial development in terms of feminist politics. For example, in their plenary speeches, women deputies from CHP and HDP talked about women workers' problems regarding their trade unionization rights by specifically referring to women's experiences and discriminations. As CHP MP Özdemir criticized the Minister of Family and Social Services:

Mr. Minister, six out of 500 workers in the Sinbo factory operating in Istanbul Avcılar, three women, have been taken on mandatory unpaid leave because they are union members. Especially female employees who are in a tough situation and want to return to their jobs. Will you be working on this?<sup>104</sup>

The HDP deputy Gülüm also explained how women union members were penalized through dismissal from their jobs:

Women working at the VIP Clothing Factory in Gebze Darıca were dismissed because they used their constitutional rights at work to become unionized. When the workplace

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<sup>102</sup>Canbaz-Kaya, D. (2020, December 16). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=93708>

<sup>103</sup>Acar-Başaran, A. (2020, September 30). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/280394>

Acar-Başaran, A. (2021, February 26). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/289701>  
Hatimoğulları-Oruç, T. (2021, February 23). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/289559>

<sup>104</sup>Özdemir, S. (2020, December 17). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=93837>

management found about the union activities that started at the workplace, pressure and intimidation did not stop; ten female workers were dismissed because they only participated in union activities...130 female workers were forced to resign from the DERİTEKS union.<sup>105</sup>

In addition to their right to unionize, the MPs also mentioned the daily experiences of women workers. Both parties criticized dismissal of women workers without compensation due to the Code-29 application during the pandemic. Therefore, both CHP and HDP MPs were equally sensitive to the violations of women workers rights. In this respect, both CHP women MP Özdemir<sup>106</sup> and HDP women MP Semra Güzel<sup>107</sup> mentioned the case of a woman worker, Dilbent Türker's dismissal from her job on the basis on Code-29 in the plenary speeches.

All these speeches demonstrate that opposition women MPs employ feminist framing with their narrative about and their reflections of different women's experiences in the employment. They brought these women's experiences to the attention of the parliament related to the current issues in pandemic and trade unionization rights.

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<sup>105</sup>Gülüm, Z. (2020, March 11). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=86457>

<sup>106</sup>Özdemir, S. (2021, February 24). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=95527>

<sup>107</sup>Güzel, S. (2021, February 25). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=95620>

### 4.3.2. Women's Social Security Rights

Changes in women's social security rights in the labor code (most notably, maternity leave, maternity debt, breastfeeding leave, retirement rights, registration in the scope of general social insurance) are critical issues regarding women's labor and employment status in Turkey; for this reason, opposition women deputies covered this issue in their various legislative activities. As this analysis of women deputies from opposition parties indicates, while the CHP women deputies focused more on maternity leave, maternity debt, and breastfeeding leave in the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative period, the HDP women deputies did not specifically offer a policy for social security rights in their legislative activities in this period. Nevertheless, HDP women MPs held a critical approach, especially on paid maternity leave rights in terms of women's integration into employment from diverse sectors.

This issue of maternity leave has been controversial from a woman's perspective since subsequent legal changes introduced by the AKP government in 2016, including several problematic parts regarding gender equality. Firstly, according to this regulation, women, only civil servants in the public sector, can benefit from paid maternity leave. It excludes other women workers from different occupational sectors. Moreover, parental leave does not extend to paternity leave; paternity leave is granted in the case of the mother's death. More importantly, the right to part-time work timeline is regulated according to the birth number. The part-time work time is sixty days at first birth, a hundred twenty days in the second birth, and a hundred eight days in subsequent births. On this issue as CHP MP Köksal elaborated the problem in the following way "why give it two months for the first birth, four months for the second birth, and six months for the other? Can't all births be given an equal period?"<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>Köksal, B. (2016, January 20). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=43682>

Another CHP MP also underlined the problems with the legal regulations and implementation creating differences in women's maternity leave:

Unfortunately, there are different periods of maternity leave for women employed under the Civil Servants Law and those employed under the Labor Law, and these periods are arranged against the mothers employed under the Labor Law.<sup>109</sup>

As CHP women MPs' speeches indicate maternity leave is supported as women's social right, and they largely address implementation problems. In contrast, the HDP women MPs criticize the flexible and insecure working conditions imposed on women which was promoted by the misuse of maternity leave regulations by the employers. Maternity leave was also taken up in a broader critical feminist light and as the following quote indicate they criticized the reproduction of the notion of childcare as the mother's responsibility, as a major bastion of maternalist ideology. The MP Bedia Özgökçe-Ertan stated their objections against flexible and insecure employment under the name of maternity leave.<sup>110</sup> This perspective is supported by another HDP women MP in her plenary speech on Draft Law and Proposal on Amending the Income Tax and Other Laws, in 2016, by stating that maternity leave should be considered as 'parental leave' and should be evaluated as an equal share of childcare labor.<sup>111</sup>

Regarding women workers' rights, the CHP women representatives supported the maternity debt and breastfeeding leave rights as women's social rights. The critical point here is their emphasis on the social significance of women's maternal roles

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<sup>109</sup>Doğan-Türkmen, E. (2018, February 14). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=66582>

<sup>110</sup>Özgökçe-Ertan, B. (2016, January 20). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=43677>

<sup>111</sup>Hezer-Öztürk, T. (2016, January 27). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=43899>



without offering a sufficiently critical analysis or discursive framing to challenge conventional gender roles which subordinate women's employment prospects and minimize their gains despite these legal reforms. The CHP MP Engin used maternalist framing in the justification for maternity debt in her plenary speech by saying that "Our mothers dedicate their whole lives to their children and families, they work for years, but they cannot get retired because their insurance did not start at all or because it started too late."<sup>112</sup> These social rights, supported by the motherhood framing used by CHP women deputies, offer a limited perspective on women's employment. The main reason is that women's employment-related social rights only cover female employees who are mothers in the government's scheme. This situation is problematic as it does not perceive a woman as an individual and entrenches maternalism for women's gendered presence in work.

Nevertheless, besides the plenary speech, CHP women deputies have also submitted legislative proposals about women's social rights. First part of these legislative proposals<sup>113</sup> and one motion of written question<sup>114</sup> aimed at introducing women the right to maternity debt (to facilitate their retirement,) to obtain their social insurance rights, and not to lose their retirement rights. In these proposals, as in the plenary speeches, the insurance right of women who are mothers are defended with maternalist framing. Another legislative proposal aims at reducing the number of unemployment insurance premium days that women have to pay in order to receive unemployment benefits by presenting a law proposal to amend the unemployment insurance law

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<sup>112</sup>Engin, D. (2016, May 3). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=48349>

<sup>113</sup>Yüceer, C. (2017, November 16). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/218435>  
Yüceer, C. (2020, December 22). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/284246>  
Kaplan-Hürriyet, F. (2018, January 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/222483>  
Kaplan-Hürriyet, F. (2018, July 30). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/237564>  
Şahin, S. (2019, February 28). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/247219>

<sup>114</sup>Köksal, B. (2019, October 7). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/258038>

regarding women's social rights.<sup>115</sup> Unlike the maternity debt proposal, this proposal was sensitive to inclusion of women from different groups such as young women and from employment sectors. In the same way, another CHP MP submitted a motion of written question against the circular of the Ministry of Health on allowance deduction from the state capital during the breastfeeding leave which states that women 'do not work' during their breastfeeding leave<sup>116</sup>. This motion is important because the deputy criticized this decision based on infringement of social rights and gender-based discrimination.

Nevertheless, the legislative activities of women MPs from both parties on social security rights have also shifted its focus during the 27<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term. When we analyze the legislative proposals in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative period, one of the most critical problems of women regarding employment, and social security rights, are on the agenda of CHP and HDP female deputies. Some CHP women MPs have left embracing the maternalist framing to justify their legislative acts for women's social rights, yet others have still used maternalist framing. For instance, there are different justifications in CHP women MPs' legislative bills on maternity leave issues. One of the MPs contended that the duration of maternity leave should be extended for the baby's health and well-being rather than for the purpose of ensuring women's sustainability in employment.<sup>117</sup> However, another CHP female representative drew up a feminist framing by contending that childcare was one of the most significant barriers to women's employment since motherhood and caregiver drive women to take all care responsibility of children which is the main reason of exclusion of women from employment.<sup>118</sup> Another significant shift in the CHP women MP's legislative act

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<sup>115</sup>Sarihan, Ş. (2016, March 11). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/197665>

<sup>116</sup>Yüceer, C. (2016, June 14). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/202167>

<sup>117</sup> Şahin, S. (2020, March 11). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/270638>

<sup>118</sup>Akkuş-İlgezdi, G. (2019, May 13). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/249044>

is evident in one of the MP's legislative proposals on addressing mobbing and psychological harassment to women within the scope of health insurance regulations.<sup>119</sup> This legislative proposal draws a feminist framing by taking one of the critical gender-based discrimination practices, mobbing, and harassment issue, into consideration. All in all, the context and justification of some legislative proposals demonstrate the usage of feminist framing by CHP women MPs, while some CHP women still use maternalist framing in women's issues.

The women deputies of both parties take up the social security rights of women domestic workers. Since domestic workers are not covered within the scope of Labor Law No. 4857 and Occupational Safety Law No. 6331, they are disadvantaged in benefit from their social rights (retirement right, access to state-based health services, job security, equal and fair remuneration). In addition, domestic workers employed within the scope of the Social Security and General Health Insurance Law No. 5510 are classified into two groups as beneficiaries of rights comprising as the first groups those with ten or more working days calculated according to the working hours in the month, and as the second group those who work less than ten days. It was argued that this division creates problems in accessing their social rights. To address this issue, CHP and HDP female deputies proposed that the insurance rights of domestic workers be guaranteed in the form of a law proposal. The legislative proposals for the insurance rights of domestic workers were submitted once by a CHP female deputy<sup>120</sup> and three times by a HDP women deputy<sup>121</sup>. The HDP MP also proposed legislative proposals

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<sup>119</sup>Akkuş-İlgezdi, G. (2019, January, 24). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/246472>

<sup>120</sup>Bıçer-Karaca, G. (2021, June 2). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/294941>

<sup>121</sup>Kemalbey-Pekgözegü, S. (2019, March 7). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/247722>  
Kemalbey-Pekgözegü, S. (2020, December 15). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/284140>  
Kemalbey-Pekgözegü, S. (2022, March 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311191>

on the insurance rights of home-based women workers<sup>122</sup> and housewives<sup>123</sup>. The HDP women deputies also concentrate on the same issue of health insurance rights<sup>124</sup> and other insurance rights<sup>125</sup> (the retirement right, and insurance premiums) of women workers of home-based, domestic, and seasonal agricultural workers in their motions of written question as well. One of the CHP women MPs submitted also a legislative proposal on the insurance rights of women working in agriculture<sup>126</sup>, one of the sectors with the highest concentration of women in Turkey. With this legislative proposal, the objective was to make sure that the insurance premium debts of women who work independently on their behalf and their account be covered by the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services. Those women who are not insured, who live in rural areas, and who are farming over the age of 50 would also be entitled for retirement. Overall, these legislative proposals cover the issues of retirement, the right to benefit from health services, work accidents, occupational disease, and the start and the end of insurance within the scope of insurance rights for women workers.

### 4.3.3. Women's Poverty

It should be noted that during the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative period, women's poverty occupied a priority place in the legislative agenda of the opposition women MPs' agendas as a

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<sup>122</sup>Kemalbey-Pekgözegü, S. (2022, March 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311679>

<sup>123</sup>Kemalbey-Pekgözegü, S. (2020, December 21). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/284239>

Kemalbey-Pekgözegü, S. (2020, March 3). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/269634>

<sup>124</sup>Orhan-Işık, M. (2020, March 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/271142>

<sup>125</sup>Ersoy, O. (2022, January 28). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/309097>

Gülüm, Z. (2021, April 1). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/292273>

<sup>126</sup> Köksal, B. (2020, July 14). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/277131>

critical gendered issue corresponding to practical gender interests. Nevertheless, both parties address women's poverty in relation to women's economic exploitation with specific framings, at times offering somewhat different perspectives.

Statements of women MPs in their legislative activities on the issue of women's poverty take a more prominent place among the representative acts by HDP women deputies compared to CHP female representatives during both legislative periods under study. While the CHP women MPs have not been active or vocal in any legislative activity regarding the issue of women's poverty in the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative period, the HDP women MPs consistently and substantially were active on this subject. For this reason, the commission speeches made by HDP women MPs have been significant regarding their account of the causes and the remedial policies. Women's poverty is also attributed to women's precarious and subordinate position in employment. For example, the HDP MP Özgökçe-Ertan highlighted in her commission speech that women were the most affected group by poverty; in this sense, the poverty issue should be evaluated within its gendered dimensions and dynamics of poverty by referring to the concept of "feminization of poverty"<sup>127</sup>. In the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term, the HDP women deputies actively submitted motions of parliamentary inquiry on women's poverty. With these proposals, they wanted to inquire into the root causes of women's poverty, and as well as solutions to eliminate the factors that cause this poverty<sup>128</sup>. In this sense, HDP MPs framed the issue as

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<sup>127</sup>Özgökçe-Ertan, B. (2017, October 30). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeKomisyonKonusmaTutanakDetay?tutanakId=17399>

<sup>128</sup>Kerestecioğlu, F. (2021, May 27). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/294455>

Kerestecioğlu, F. (2018, October 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/238134>

Taşdemir, D. D. (2019, May 17). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/249353>

Acar-Başaran, A. (2021, April 20). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/293013>

Dağ, D. (2022, March 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/311899>

Gülüm, Z. (2021, September 29). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/301560>

“feminization of poverty” to indicate how poverty is experienced differently by men and women. Thus, they drew attention to the fact that the nature and level of how poverty experienced differs according to gender, especially in women’s access to food, education, and health. As a result, they employed a feminist framework to problematize gender division of labor in that men at home are obliged to find the necessary financial means to support the family, and women are responsible from reproductive works in household. The HDP women MPs also made a connection between women’s unemployment and women’s poverty which was particularly evident during the Covid-19 Pandemic. In this context, some HDP MPs took up women’s unemployment and women’s poverty together, which is crucial to comprehend their impact on each other in their motions of the parliamentary inquiry<sup>129</sup>. MP Dilşat Canbaz-Kaya analyzed the women’s situation in the context of the differential gendered impact of the pandemic with the “feminization of poverty” term in the following way:

With the pandemic, the female workforce decreased by 11 percent and female employment by 9 percent...the AKP follows a policy that focuses on saving the day, not poverty eradication. The definition of women as “poverty of the poor” and the concept of “feminization of poverty” are closely related to social deprivations and inequalities.<sup>130</sup>

The CHP women MPs have also stated to perceive women’s poverty by employing the “feminization of poverty” in the context of a feminist concept. As a CHP deputy stated that “Today, in relation to the economic weakness of women, the feminization of poverty rather than women’s poverty is in circulation, as a terminology<sup>131</sup>.” This

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Kemalbey-Pekgözegü, S. (2020, June 3). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/275312>

<sup>129</sup>Güzel, S. (2021, February, 15). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/288667>  
Günay, E. (2021, May 26). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MecelisArastirmaOnergesi/294449>

<sup>130</sup>Canbaz-Kaya, D. (2020, December 16). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=93708>

speech also demonstrate how feminist terminology has begun to disperse in the TBMM by left-wing political parties' women representatives. Some CHP women MPs also pay attention to women's poverty issue in the context of women's economic independence. A CHP women representative put the significance of this relationship in the following way:

One of the most important problems for women is the lack of economic independence in this society. While this situation forces the woman to continue the marriages she does not want under some conditions, ...it also confines women to the position of mother and wife...The only condition for this and the only condition for women's economic empowerment is their participation in work.<sup>132</sup>

As these speeches attest, women MP from both parties try to draw a comprehensive perspective on women's economic dependence on men at home; this is the result of their exclusion from paid work outside the home and this is also identified as the root cause of women's poverty.

Moreover, in the speeches of deputies in the general assembly, the subject of women's poverty is explained by sharing the personal and real-life experiences of women in Turkish society exposing their dilemmas and subjective conditions. For example, CHP MP Biçer-Karaca talked about Ayten hanım:

Ayten Hanım, mother of 6 children, called me from Erzurum. I was heart-broken with her story. Two of her six children graduated from university but are now unemployed. Ms. Ayten says: "My children grew up without knowing the taste of fruit and vegetables, and I am ashamed to say this."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>Süllü, S. J. (2018, October 17). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=71882>

<sup>132</sup>Süllü, N. J. (2018, October 17). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=71882>

<sup>133</sup>Biçer-Karaca, G. (2021, December 15). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=102610>

HDP deputies also raised the real-life sufferings of poor women:

Bilge is a 33-year-old woman, mother of 2 daughters, one four years old and the other five months old. She lives in Istanbul, Esenyurt. She spent the best years of her childhood, like her peers, at the factory, not at the school desk. Bilge's husband also works for the minimum wage. Do you know how they survive on 2,020 Turkish liras? Jale is a divorced mother of two struggling with poverty; she worked in markets for low wages until midnight. She says that her electricity and water were cut off...There are countless Jales in this country, did you know?<sup>134</sup>

These speeches are crucial regarding their feminist concerns of rendering women's experiences in the private sphere visible. In this respect, both parties' women MPs have been sensitive to reflecting the consequences of women's poverty with concrete samples.

Nevertheless, as analyzed above, there is one issue that HDP women deputies differ from CHP women deputies in their articulation of women's economic conditions. The HDP Women Assembly visited different cities in the country, listened to women's experiences, and then raised their concerns in the Parliament as an outcome of their campaign of "No to Women's Poverty" in 2021. Although the CHP Women's Branch also visited women in different cities, they did not share their experiences within the scope of a systematic campaign or project. There were references to the "No to Women's Poverty" in HDP women's MPs' parliamentary speeches, as exemplified in MPs Semra Güzel's<sup>135</sup> and Dirayet Dilan Taşdemir's<sup>136</sup> speeches. Both deputies mention this campaign and reflect the home-based women workers', domestic

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<sup>134</sup>Gülüm, Z. (2019, December 12). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=83360>

<sup>135</sup>Güzel, S. (2021, November 5). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeKomisyonKonusmaTutanakDetay?tutanakId=46392>

<sup>136</sup>Taşdemir, D. D. (2021, June 30). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=98811>



workers', seasonal women workers' working conditions and their demands to ameliorate their circumstances.

HDP women deputies also discussed women's poverty in relation to violence against women which is exacerbated through women's economic insecurity. This approach paves the way for an intersectional perspective to women's issues which is crucial for developing policies on eliminating violence against women stemming from women's poverty. The MP Ayşe Acar-Başaran referenced one of the women's organization's research, the Rosa Women's Association, on women's poverty and highlighted the relationship between violence and poverty in her plenary speech in 2020.<sup>137</sup> In the same vein, deputy Kerestecioğlu emphasized how economic insecurity compels women to endure domestic violence<sup>138</sup>. Overall, these statements reveal critical interpretations bringing feminist insight into violence against women and women's poverty to indicate how they intertwined, affected, and maintained each other as a vicious circle.

Apart from the plenary and commission speeches, women deputies from the CHP and HDP also submitted motions of parliamentary inquiry on women's poverty in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term. One of the CHP women MPs submitted these motions regarding the increasing poverty of divorced women and drawing attention to the alimony right of women to overcome women's poverty after divorce<sup>139</sup>. Another CHP women deputy submitted a motion of parliamentary inquiry to examine the factors that cause

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<sup>137</sup>Acar-Başaran, A. (2020, December 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=93071>

<sup>138</sup>Kerestecioğlu, F. (2021, May 27). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=97702>

<sup>139</sup>Şevkin, M. (2022, March 31). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/313540>

women's poverty and minimize it<sup>140</sup>. In this proposal, they state that the two main reasons for women's poverty are women's positions in the public sphere and their disadvantaged access to educational opportunities. Similarly, HDP female deputies submitted motions of parliamentary inquiry on women's poverty, including to the problems related to the divorced women's right to alimony<sup>141</sup> and the socio-economic problems of Syrian women under temporary protection status<sup>142</sup>. The motion on the alimony right, just like the CHP deputy's motion of parliamentary inquiry, aimed at identifying the problems on access to alimony. It was perceived as a measure to prevent the impoverishment of one of the parties due to divorce. The parliamentary inquiry on Syrian women's socio-economic problems focused on Syrian women's isolation from business life due to lack of education, language barrier and social roles assigned to them. This reflected a concern with integrating Syrian women into economic activities to prevent the undesirable marriage and working in sex work.

#### **4.3.4. The Opposition Women MPs' Policy Suggestions on Women's Labor and Employment**

Opposition women deputies have also offered concrete suggestions in legislative activities to promote the visibility of women's unpaid and undervalued productive and reproductive labor in the domestic realm and labor market, to increase women's participation in employment, and to minimize women's poverty. In this respect, the

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<sup>140</sup>Bıçer-Karaca, G. (2021, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/290384>

<sup>141</sup>Kerestecioğlu, F. (2018, October 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/238134>

<sup>142</sup>Canbaz-Kaya, D. (2020, November 25). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/283498>

CHP and the HDP women deputies commonly devoted their attention to the public provision of childcare, the establishment of a Ministry of Women, the proclamation of March 8, International Women Day as an official public day in Turkey, and the establishment of women's cooperatives for the recognition of for the women's labor and their empowerment of women in the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative periods.

#### **4.3.4.1. Establishment of Ministry of Women**

Both CHP and HDP women MPs have submitted legislative proposals for the establishment of the Ministry of Women. With this proposal, they aim at promoting gender equality between women and men and to empower women in their social, economic, political and cultural positions. More specifically, CHP women MPs support a separate Ministry for policies to ensure that men and women have a shared responsibility in childcare; to design and implement effective policies in the field of education and culture in order to eliminate the barriers arising from sociological origins in the employment of women, and to improve the vocational training opportunities of women and to expand childcare services in workplaces<sup>143</sup>.

The HDP women representatives' legislative proposals<sup>144</sup> for the establishment of the Ministry of Women specifically touched upon the barriers that women face at the stage of employment and promotion in business, equal pay for equal work concern, exclusion from decision-making mechanisms, and their confinement to flexible and insecure employment. In this sense, establishing a ministry would be functional in the

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<sup>143</sup>Akkuş-Ilgezdi, G. (2015, December 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/193646>

<sup>144</sup>Konca, B. (2016, January, 11). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/194521>  
Taşdemir, D. D. (2018, November 22). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/241025>  
Orhan-Işık, M. (2021, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/290335>  
Sürücü, A. (2022, March 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311192>

combat violence and discrimination against women and LGBTI+ people in all social, political, economic, and cultural fields and develop women's rights and freedoms. The HDP women deputies also prepared separate legislative proposals for the establishment of the Ministry of Women in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative period with the mission to end discrimination in social, economic, cultural and political life based on gender inequality.

#### **4.3.4.2. The Proclamation of the 8<sup>th</sup> March International Women's Day as a Public Holiday**

The explanations of the CHP and HDP women deputies to justify their legislative proposals on the proclamation of the announcement of the 8<sup>th</sup> March International Women's Day as a Public Holiday in Turkey have also had a distinct framing. The CHP discourse is closer to celebrating womanhood to provide for a civic significance of this day, whereas the HPD MPs tend to reflect a political claim with feminist themes. In this context, for example, CHP MP Engin, whose legislative proposal on proclamation of the 8<sup>th</sup> March as an official holiday, did not have gender sensitive and feminist perspective to it. Instead, she stated that this official holiday will enable our women to spare time for themselves and get together with their loved ones, participate in events and feel the importance of their individual existence more strongly.<sup>145</sup>

One of the HDP woman MPs, on the other hand, justified her legislative in the following way:

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<sup>145</sup> Engin, D. (2018, March 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/227237>

...the 8th March, dedicated to the women who lost their lives in the struggle for rights and equality, is recognized as the symbol of the struggle against the exploitation and oppression of all women wherever they are, regardless of their class.<sup>146</sup>

As can be seen in the legislative proposal's justification of CHP deputy Engin, the 8<sup>th</sup> March should be a public day as a "celebration" atmosphere and touch on the "individual" empowerment of women, while HDP representative reminds the historical background of the 8<sup>th</sup> March as a feminist struggle, and demands this public holiday for women's organizations.

Then, during the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative period, the CHP and HDP women deputies submitted legislative proposals to declare the 8<sup>th</sup> March International Women's Day as an official holiday. Only one CHP women deputy submitted this proposal, and she aimed at raising awareness and creating positive awareness with this proposal by drawing attention to issues related to gender inequality<sup>147</sup>. Unlike the CHP's legislative proposals, the most common legislative proposal by HDP women deputies is about the declaration of the 8<sup>th</sup> March International Women's Day as an official holiday. Almost all HDP women deputies (eighteen out of twenty-three women MPs) submitted a legislative bill on this issue during this period<sup>148</sup>. When we look at the justifications of

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<sup>146</sup>Taşdemir, D. D. (2022, March 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311678>

<sup>147</sup>Taşçier, G. (2019, March 7). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/247210>

<sup>148</sup>Kerestecioglu, F. (2018, July 31). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/237594>  
Canbaz-Kaya, D. (2020, March 5). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/270097>  
İmir, N. (2020, March 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/270080>  
Güzel, S. (2021, March 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/289793>  
İmir, N. (2021, March 5). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/290037>  
Kılıç-Koçyiğit, G. (2021, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/290334>  
Kılıç-Koçyiğit, G. (2021, March 15). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/290661>  
Danış-Beştaş, M. (2021, December 3). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/305261>  
Tosun, R. (2019, February 7). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/246455>  
Gülüm, Z. (2022, March 3). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311154>  
Acar-Başaran, A. (2022, March 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311190>  
İmir, N. (2022, March 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311193>  
Sürücü, A. (2022, March 4). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311192>

these legislative proposals, we see that they were mostly intended to increase the visibility of women's labor and women's problems in employment.

At that point, the HDP women MPs' feminist identity emerges as a crucial factor in their plenary speeches. In these speeches, most HDP representatives mentioned the feminist movement and shared their experiences during the feminist march on International Women's Day.

A well-known feminist lawyer, MP Kerestecioğlu, stated her gratitude to feminist movement in the following way:

On 8<sup>th</sup> March, thousands of women were on the streets. This means a lot. Maybe you closed a street to us, but we filled all the streets. I would like to send a greeting to the feminist struggle not only in Turkey but also in the world from this podium.<sup>149</sup>

Another HDP MP has used "we" language while she was talking about 8<sup>th</sup> March:

Yes, we were on the streets on March 8; We were on the streets to demand an account of our sisters who were murdered, injured, kept under physical and psychological attack, raped...We were on the streets, resisting those who regulate social life according to religious rules through women with the Diyanet's fatwas, and for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and Law No. 6284 to stop femicides and prevent violence against women.<sup>150</sup>

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Hatimoğullar-Oruç, T. (2022, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311669>

Ersoy, O. (2022, March 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311677>

Kemalbey-Pekgözegü, S. (2022, March 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311674>

Taşdemir, D. D. (2022, March 9). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311678>

Coşkun, Ş. (2022, March 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/311850>

<sup>149</sup>Kerestecioğlu, F. (2020, March 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=86277>

<sup>150</sup>Ersoy, O. (2020, March 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=86302>

In the same vein, HDP representative Gülüm, who comes from feminist activism, has used “we” language while sharing her experiences belong to the 8<sup>th</sup> March:

Our struggle against male domination and patriarchy continues uninterruptedly. On March 8, we were on the streets, in the squares, in the fields, in fact, we were everywhere; We left our homes, we left our workplaces, we flocked to the squares and fields with our laughter and dances...Long live March 8, long live our struggle!<sup>151</sup>

These plenary speeches differentiate HDP women MPs from CHP women representatives. As mentioned in the dominant framings in the CHP women MPs’ legislative speeches, even though CHP women deputies’ frames have shifted from the usage of Kemalist framing to feminist framing in the 8<sup>th</sup> March plenary speeches, they do not share their own experiences within the context of feminist struggle in Turkey. In other words, CHP women MPs do not use “we” language or reference to feminism when they refer to women’s problems, concerns, and struggles in Turkey.

#### **4.3.4.3. Women’s Cooperatives as Economic Empowerment Instruments**

Women’s cooperatives are another common policy suggestion of opposition women MPs as a means to women’s economic empowerment. As several research contends, women have encountered several problems, such as legal and financial challenges, in women’s cooperatives in Turkey (Ozdemir, 2013; Duguid et. al, 2015; Cinar et. al., 2021). Within this regard, the financial burden (mainly tax payment) of cooperatives requires legal amendments on tax reduction for women’s cooperatives. As one of the prominent women CHP deputy and economist Selin Sayek-Böke have put forward two

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<sup>151</sup>Gülüm, Z. (2020, March 10). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=86324>

specific legislative proposals<sup>152</sup> aiming at promoting women's economic empowerment by exempting the local, national and international women's cooperatives from corporate tax and value added tax. Another CHP women MP has also presented a motion of parliamentary inquiry for supporting women entrepreneurs<sup>153</sup>. This proposal inquired about the problems of women entrepreneurs, and the necessary measures to be taken to overcome them. In its justification, they indicated that the Parliament should identify shortcomings of the entrepreneurship support program and similar supports carried out by KOSGEB. It was argued that there was a need for identifying the needs of women entrepreneurs so that they could more easily benefit from these support program with positive discrimination. In this regard, some CHP women MPs touched upon the women's cooperatives issue regarding its financial difficulties in their plenary speeches as well. As CHP MP Şevkin stated that:

...women have difficulty in accessing these funds (by Ministries of Trade and Agriculture, Development Agencies and the European Union) because taxes are collected even if they are used completely for the purpose.<sup>154</sup>

The MP Şevkin also highlighted the necessity of special mechanisms to support women's cooperatives in the following way:

There is a need for a special agreement and recognition of women's cooperatives for social and economic purposes. Unless an integrative and supportive mechanism is implemented, women's cooperatives will only continue to struggle to survive and unfortunately will not be able to develop.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>Sayek-Böke, S. (2016, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/197257>  
Sayek-Böke, S. (2016a, March 8). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Yasama/KanunTeklifi/197662>

<sup>153</sup>Doğan-Türkmen, E. (2016, October 13). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/205005>

<sup>154</sup>Sevkin, M. (2021, October 21). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=100544>

<sup>155</sup>Sevkin, M. (2021, October 21). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=100544>



In the same vein, one of the HDP women deputies also submitted motions of parliamentary inquiry<sup>156</sup> about support of women's cooperatives in order to participate in these cooperatives into paid employment in the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative term. In the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term, HDP women deputies more intensely continued to support women's cooperatives. As one of the HDP deputies put it:

Cooperatives should be established where women come together and take the production and decision-making processes together. Like many independent, popular women's cooperatives, more cooperatives where women are visible in both production and management need to be established and supported.<sup>157</sup>

Another HDP MP supported women's cooperatives owing to their positive impact on women's empowerment as the following statement:

In particular, social cooperatives have an important potential for the participation of the poor, women and the disabled in employment. The number of women's cooperatives in our country is more than 200, these cooperatives are trying to reach an average of more than 20 thousand women in 61 provinces per year. Of course, women's cooperatives are important for women's employment and participation in social life.<sup>158</sup>

One of the HDP women representatives also put forward motions of written question on the expansion of women's cooperatives and submitted a motion of parliamentary inquiry to that end<sup>159</sup>. In the written question, she interrogated the initiatives of the Ministry to remove the complicated procedures in front of cooperatives and initiatives

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<sup>156</sup>Taşdemir, D. D. (2016, March 21). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/197958>

<sup>157</sup>Canbaz-Kaya, D. (2021, October 21). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=100512>

<sup>158</sup>Taşdemir, D. D. (2021, October 20). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=100455>

<sup>159</sup>Dundar, P. (2022, January 25). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/YaziliSoruOnergesi/309096>

to create market areas where women working in women's cooperatives can sell their productions. Another HDP MP submitted a motion of parliamentary inquiry about the capacity of women's cooperatives to create a change towards women's participation in social life and reducing women's poverty through their participation in production and employment<sup>160</sup>. As in the motion of written question, the emphasis was on the legal obstacles in front of women's cooperatives.

On the women's cooperatives issue, the HDP women were specifically concerned about women's cooperatives in Southeast Turkey, where the Kurdish population is the majority in some provinces. In this respect, some HDP MPs mentioned the closure of cooperatives after the appointment of trustees to the administration of HDP municipalities in their parliamentary speeches<sup>161</sup>. It indicates that HDP women MPs also dealt with practical gender interests of Kurdish women in line with their party's vision on gender politics which also emphasized the identity issue.

#### 4.4. Comparing and Contrasting the Opposition Women MPs' Frames

The CHP and HDP women MPs have different framings on their approach to gender issues regardless of the subject matters of the women's issue. The historical combination of left-wing ideology and pro-Western vision of the CHP appears in its women representatives' way of doing gender politics. Along with the employment of the welfare state, state feminism, and Kemalist framings, the state is perceived as the first and foremost responsible for gender equality and justice in society. In contrast to

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<sup>160</sup>Taşdemir, D. D. (2018, December 5). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Denetim/MeclisArastirmaOnergesi/241012>

<sup>161</sup>Hatimoğulları-Oruç, T. (2020, November 23). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeKomisyonKonusmaTutanakDetay?tutanakId=38841>

Coşkun, Ş. (2021, October 21). <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/milletvekili/UyeGenelKurulKonusmalariDetay?eid=100524>

the CHP, the HDP women MPs adopt left-wing ideology by embracing socialist feminism's tenets and values in their gender politics along with the prominent framings of collectivization of care labor and marriage of patriarchy and capitalism. These dominant framings used by the opposition women MPs also differentiate them in challenging the AKP's anti-gender politics. The CHP women MPs did not develop feminist framings until the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term; instead, they conserved their party's central politics, and more critically, they also endorsed the maternalist ideology of the AKP by not abandoning maternalist and family-unity framings in their parliamentary speeches in this period. Nevertheless, the CHP women MPs have begun to shift from Kemalist framing to feminist framing particularly in their plenary speech on 8<sup>th</sup> March, International Women's Day. The HDP women deputies, on the other hand, challenged the AKP's maternalist ideology with the 'woman as an individual' framing. This framing mainly criticizes the AKP's pro-natalist and family-centered gender politics. They also emphasize the holistic perspective in challenging the AKP politics on women's employment by taking the pro-natalist policy of the ruling regime into consideration.

The analysis of opposition women MPs' legislative activities also provides insights on major aspects of their acts on women and work issues. The CHP and HDP women representatives had a common focus on the themes of women's secondary and disadvantaged position in employment, the deficiency of women's social security rights, and women's poverty in the context of feminization of poverty, albeit with different nuances.

As explained in Chapter 1, the distinction between "practical gender interests" and "strategic gender interests" was originally raised in the context of women's movements. Introduced by Molyneux in 1985, these terms were used to point to a qualitative difference underlying the strategies of including and politicizing women's

issues into the policy agenda by women's rights advocates. Strategic gender interests are those issues that relate to and aim at improving women's subordinate positions. In contrast, practical gender interests are those urgent issues that directly touch on women's daily concerns and survival needs stemming from their gender roles, such as women's needs and concerns as mothers (as such, they do not entail immediate emancipation or gender equality). However, strategic gender interests are feminist demands because they are strategically formulated to confront 'institutionalized forms of discrimination;' as such, they pave the way for empowerment and the transformation of patriarchal gender roles.

Demonstrating the facts about women's unemployment and the low rate of women's employment in Turkey is the primary policy item of both parties' women MPs. In this respect, opposition women representatives challenge the AKP's family-centered, part-time and flexible employment policies. Both the CHP and HDP women MPs specifically touched upon the policy to increase women's employment rate, working circumstances, widespread unregistered employment among women workers, and the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on women workers in their motions of written questions and parliamentary inquiry. The opposition women MPs also narrated the real women's experiences to highlight their problems in employment. Nevertheless, the HDP women deputies also focused on the gender pay gap, gender-based discrimination and violence, and job security in their motions of written question and parliamentary inquiry. In contrast, the CHP women interrogated the sexist practices in different sectors. Overall, we observe that the HDP women MPs submitted more legislative proposals than the CHP women MPs related to the women's concerns in employment. This means that oppositional women representatives raise the practical gender interests; however, the HDP women MPs are more concerned about practical gender interests related to women's problems in employment.

Women's social security rights, as another practical gender interest, are common concerns of opposition women representatives. Nevertheless, they tended to have different perspectives on maternity/breastfeeding leave and maternity debt issues in the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative term. The CHP women MPs feverishly touched upon these social rights in their legislative proposals with maternalist framing; however, the HDP women MPs had a critical approach to these social rights due to its risk of endorsing maternalist ideology and its implications on women's integration into employment. The HDP women representatives, on the other hand, could not go beyond their criticism, and they could not put forward concrete suggestions in their legislative acts on women's social insurance in this period. In the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative period, opposition women representatives more actively focused on women's social security rights. In this context, the CHP women MPs submitted fewer legislative proposals on maternity/breastfeeding leave and maternity debt with maternalist framing. They also started to interpret childcare as the most significant obstacle to women's participation in the paid labor market. Addressing mobbing and psychological harassment as a women's concern in employment is another turning point for the CHP gender politics which signifies a feminist perspective. Both the CHP and HDP women MPs submitted legislative proposals on different women workers' social security rights. In this sense, both focused on domestic women workers' social rights. The HDP women MPs additionally focused on the home-based workers' and homemakers' social security rights, while the CHP women MPs concentrated on women farmers' rights differently.

As a strategic gender interest, women's poverty is another component of opposition to women MPs' legislative acts related to women's labor and employment. This issue has been on the agenda of the CHP and the HDP women representatives in the context of feminization of poverty in Turkey. Within this term, they aimed to highlight the gendered dimension of poverty and problematize the gendered division of labor (care labor and reproductive roles of women), which result in women's poverty. At that point, both oppositional parties' women representatives drew attention to real

women's experiences and reflected their stories on poverty in their plenary speeches. Nevertheless, it should be noted that although both parties concentrated on women's poverty as the strategic gender interest, the HDP women MPs pursued a more activist profile on it. In other words, they systematically approached women's poverty, and they launched a campaign "No to Women's Poverty" under the HDP Women's Assembly. Beyond that, they also dealt with women's poverty within the context of violence against women, which led them to reflect an intersectional perspective on women's issues and developing policies in this context.

Lastly, opposition women MPs submitted policy suggestions on women's labor and employment issues along with several legislative proposals. These suggestions mainly consist of establishing the Ministry of Women, the proclamation of the 8<sup>th</sup> March, International Women's Day as a public holiday, and women's cooperatives as economic empowerment instruments. In this context, the Ministry of Women and the 8<sup>th</sup> March as a public holiday are considered strategic gender interests, while the women's cooperatives are practical gender interests. The main target of establishing the Ministry of Women is economically, politically, and socially empowerment of women. Here, the major issues are equal shares of care labor between men and women, equal pay for equal work, involvement of women in decision-making positions, and secure and formal employment for women in the context of women's labor and employment issues. Even though both CHP and HDP women MPs submitted legislative proposals on the proclamation of 8<sup>th</sup> March as a public holiday, we observe that HDP representatives were more inclined to approach this special day with a feminist perspective along with their personal feminist experiences in the streets. In this context, the HDP women representatives submitted strikingly more legislative proposals on this issue. As a last component of the policy suggestion, the women's cooperatives are perceived as a way to empower women economically as both an practical and strategic gender interest. In this regard, the opposition women MPs'

common aim emerges as the to eradication of women's financial deprivations through the necessary and proposed legal amendments.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Women's political underrepresentation has been both an indicator of gender inequality and the democratic deficit in some countries, including Turkey, in their national and local governance mechanisms. Nevertheless, women's relentless struggle for equal representation and participation in decision-making, along with their success in institutionalizing equality mechanisms, have resulted in the increasing presence and visibility of women politicians in legislative assemblies. The improvement in women's descriptive (numerical) representation has also raised a question on the political representation of women's interests as a social category with distinct needs and problems within the patriarchal social structure. As underlined in this thesis, for socially and politically marginalized groups, inclusion in political institutions does not mean representation in terms of generating a qualitative impact on the content of political debate, laws, and policies produced, i.e., political outcomes. In the gender and politics scholarship, this issue is related to the process of substantive representation of women (acting for women by elected representatives), which brings into focus the gendered dynamics and those factors impacting the legislative acts of representatives. In this context, the extant literature and the plentiful empirical research and studies, especially in Western countries, have predominantly looked at the gendered representative claims and acts in elected bodies to analyze gender differences in the representative acts of male and female legislators as well as their determinants. In the Turkish case, there has been a dearth of empirical studies on the extent, determinants, and gender differences in the substantive representation in the parliament. The thesis sets out to fill the literature gap about women's substantive representation in the Turkish parliament by looking at the impact of the party's ideology and the reflection of the parties' pro-feminist approaches and claims' on their women MPs' legislative



acts on a specific theme impacting on women's public and private position. The analysis engaged in a comparative analysis of the discursive frames of women MPs from two major opposition parties contesting the gender- conservative policies of the government on women's labor and employment issues. The universe of this qualitative research is based on the MP's plenary speeches, legislative proposals, motions of written questions, motions of parliamentary inquiry, and commission speeches that fall into the operationalizations of substantive representation. As the research compares and contrasts two left/center-left opposition political parties, their women MPs' legislative activities shed light on the relationship between the politics of presence (descriptive representation) and the quality of representation from a feminist perspective. It underlies the weight of ideational and party-institutional factors shaping women's representative claims and their discourses on gender issues, as these discourses constitute identities and interests.

In the relevant literature, the major questions raised were whether women legislators, as opposed to men, tended to see women as a distinct constituency to represent; whether and to what extent they held different and pro-women perspectives or priorities on social issues, and on those issues defined as women's issues; last but not least, whether female legislators have made a difference in terms of supporting women's rights and acting for them in their legislative activities and legislative styles (ranging from speeches to supporting and sponsoring legislative proposals) (Paxton and Hughes 2017). Most research focused on male-female differences in legislative acts understanding the links between descriptive and substantive representation to look for women's differences in politics. However, from a feminist perspective, gender identity as a social category and its impact are conditioned by other social forces. The research on gender and substantive representation also found that various factors have impacted women politicians' roles, motivations, and capacity to represent women. The political context is the parliament as an institution with its norms and gendered dynamics, and women, just like male representatives, are subject to specific constraints

such as party affiliation, party discipline, electoral motivation in their legislative careers, which impact their views on women's issues and their policy priorities (Paxton and Hughes, 2017, p.221).

Extant research suggested that women legislators in democratically elected legislatures were more likely to consider and approach women constituencies by prioritizing their problems and issues, which creates a gender difference in terms of their views and legislative acts. As Celis (2009, p. 102) stated, increasing women's legislative presence paves the way for a greater impact of 'the life experiences and perspectives of different groups of women and diverging ideological stances' on substantive representation. In terms of party politics, ideology is more important for substantive representation than descriptive representation, as evidenced by left-wing parties that are more open to the gender equality agenda (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019). Recent research on the Turkish case have also suggested that Turkish women deputies were more attentive to gender equality issues in parliamentary speeches (Konak-Unal 2020), and they also had a greater propensity to sponsor bills on women's rights compared to men (Bektas and Issever-Ekinci 2019). Needless to say, not even a day passes without a woman MP, particularly from the opposition, who makes a statement on women's issues and equality debates outside of the parliament especially given the process of backtracking from equal rights (as in the case of withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021). It attests to the significance of substantive representation by women deputies outside of the institutional context.

For substantive representation to take place, the needs, demands, and interests of women need to be addressed in the legislative process in terms of broadening the political agenda through plenary and commission speeches, motions of written questions and parliamentary inquiry, and also through legislative input in terms of sponsoring and supporting legislative proposals favorable to women (Celis, 2009,

p.97). The thesis adopted Molyneux's (1985) theoretical separation between the "strategic gender interests" (which refers to the feminist conception of women's issues and problems challenging dominant gender constructions) and "practical gender interests" (which relate to feminine issues as women's traditional concerns.) which expands our analytical lens in order to assess the extent and the nature of substantive representation. Nevertheless, as Celis (2009) also reminds us, empirical research on the substantive representation of women's practical and strategic interests cannot be separated. Analytically they are also interrelated (Molyneux, 2005), and as Kraske (1999, pp.20-21) noted in the case of women's movements in Latin America, an engagement with practical gender interests promotes struggles for strategic gender interests. Both practical and strategic interests are involved in substantive representation, and in the Turkish case, tracing party ideological impact on similarities and differences in opposition women MP's legislative acts would be significant in evaluating their approaches to women's issues. Moreover, as mentioned, there is still a literature gap in different political parties' gender politics in the Turkish assembly, especially in the context of opposition parties' approach to the AKP's gender policies in the legislature. Hence, this thesis research aims to answer the questions 'How do opposition CHP and HDP women MPs articulate women's interests and concerns on labor and employment in the TBMM?' and 'How and why do the discursive approaches of these two left-wing parties converge and diverge through specific framings on these issues in their women MPs' legislative activities?' In answering these questions, a descriptive and explanatory research objective is adopted to inquire into the MPs' framing of issues and to identify and analyze the differences and similarities. The main findings of this thesis confirm the hypotheses of the research. The opposition women representatives both represent practical and strategic gender interests relevant to women's subordination in employment in their legislative acts owing to their leftist political identities. Nevertheless, their different frames with differences in emphasis and feminist approaches to these practical and strategic gender interests reflect these parties' ideological identities and their parties' feminist approaches.

As elaborated in Chapter 1, the methodological framework of the qualitative study in this thesis is informed by the feminist research perspective with its distinct ethical and methodological concerns in order to bring women's voices and gender dynamics into focus in explaining political processes and outcomes. The frame analysis is employed in terms of research method orienting the research procedure for collecting and analyzing the data to operationalize, identify substantive representation, and arrive at inferences about the opposition women MPs' legislative acts in the Turkish parliament. The primary data resources for the analysis of the discursive domain of the relevant legislative acts of women MPs were their plenary speeches, legislative proposals, motions of written questions and parliamentary inquiry, and commission speeches belonging to the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> legislative terms in the TBMM. These resources are selected for being non-interactive and non-obtrusive, rendering them natural, already found in data, and not influenced by the research process and researchers. As such, they were amenable to revealing the opposition women MPs' issue priorities and feminist perspectives and commitments in the framing of their legislative acts, which could then be analyzed (compared and contrasted) about their parties' ideological and feminist stances.

In this thesis, throughout chapters 3 and 4, the analysis of gender politics governing the AKP, CHP, and HDP is provided to contextualize the legislative acts of opposition parties on women's and gender equality issues. During the period covered by this study, the CHP and HDP have been the major pro-women parties in the TBMM, challenging the AKP's anti-gender politics and raising women's issues related to public and private realms. To this end, a discussion of the CHP and HDP's perspectives on gender equality, women's roles in the family, and women's empowerment as covered in the official party documents and politicians' discourses is provided as a background to comprehend their stances on women's labor and employment issues. It also provided important cues as to the impact of party identity

and its stance vis a vis feminist objectives and politics to investigate patterns in women MPs' legislative acts on the same issue.

As pro-women and opposition parties which also put into practice institutional gender equality policies (most notably gender quotas), the CHP and HDP have also been challenging this conservative gender politics of AKP and criticizing its anti-gender agenda on the basis of their left-libertarian ideological positions which took up women's rights issues and equality in their programmatic appeals, parliamentary activities and election platforms. Both oppositional parties pay attention to women's recruitment into the party in the context of women's descriptive representation. Although the CHP does not include as many women MPs as HDP does, the selected CHP women MPs do active politics in women's issues, and some of them have a close relationship with feminist women in Turkey. As a center-left party, CHP has historically propagated liberal feminist values and tenets in its gender policy platform, largely owing to its role in pioneering state feminism in the 1920s and the 1930s. The CHP also approached women's rights issues in the context of democracy and democratization, independent of the identity politics framework. In this respect, women's access to education and educational attainment is still considered the primary tool for gender equality and women's liberation from societal oppression. Nevertheless, CHP's gender politics focuses on women's empowerment and offers solutions for gender equality in the public sphere without directly engaging in patriarchy critique.

Although the CHP included feminist women in the intra-party, it was limited, and beyond that, the party could not adopt gender equality understanding in intra-party democracy and structure. One of the most concrete pieces of proof is the inactive and loyal structure of the Women's Branch of the CHP, which could not do autonomous feminist politics until the newly elected head of the Branch; and the rate of female

deputies did not reach their numerical target on women's descriptive representation in practice. Nevertheless, in the recent period, the libertarian shift in the party platform on social issues has also permeated its gender policy agenda and discourses. This shift has been evident in programmatic changes addressing women's needs and problems and the rights of the LGBTI+ individuals, along with initiatives to integrate a more activist stance to make room for independent gender politics within its Women's Branch. Moreover, there has been more attention to women's unpaid domestic labor in employment politics from a feminist perspective and male deputies' attention to women's labor in their legislative acts. Overall, as this discussion underlined, the CHP's gender policies emphasize practical gender interests (problems directly relevant to women's lives across social issues) rather than strategic gender interests.

In contrast, the pro-Kurdish HDP tends to adopt a more unequivocal feminist stand in its gender politics and platform. The gradual institutionalization of gender equality within the Kurdish parties has resulted in a rigorous implementation of the gender quotas, the introduction of the co-chair system, the existence of an autonomous Women's Assembly in the party structure. These are crucial indicators of HDP's feminist perspective on their intra-party processes, and the gender politics agenda cannot be simply explained by its left-libertarian identity. Instead, women's greater integration into the party as activists and members is connected to feminist politics and civil society owing to its trajectory as a social movement party has been a significant factor in its embracement of egalitarian outlook and in women's rights. In addition, it is the only party that explicitly and frequently uses the terms patriarchy, sexism, heterosexism, and LGBTI+ rights in its official documents and discourses. We also observe feminist slogans and references in women deputies' discourses in their speeches on media platforms. An emphasis on women's alliances in civil society engagement is another critical component of HDP's pro-women and feminist gender politics. Furthermore, the intersectional approach of the party on equality issues which emphasizes diversity with the demands of the feminist movement provides room for a

critical evaluation of patriarchy, militarism, fascism, ethnic discrimination, and authoritarianism in explaining women's oppression and subjection. It means that the HDP's gender platform is noticeable in transcending an engagement with practical gender interests to address women's daily problems and survival needs. Programmatically and in its public appeals, the party offers a gender equality agenda to transform patriarchy and promote women's empowerment in all realms.

Besides the differences mentioned above, this thesis underlined that the CHP and HDP also have common points in their politics on women's labor and employment by paying attention to the issue of women's participation in the paid labor market. Both parties addressed women's double burden through the proposed care services and measures for alleviating women's positions in the gendered employment patterns with complete social security, unionization rights, and policies to end gender-based segregation of jobs.

As it is elaborated in Chapter 4 (analysis chapter), one of the most striking differences between CHP and HDP women lies in a predicament for some of the CHP women representatives' regarding maternalism and wellbeing and the unity of the family, which highlight women's traditional gendered roles for the interests of women's social rights (maternity leave, maternity debt, and breastfeeding leave) and the welfare of the society. In contrast, other CHP women deputies criticized the maternalist emphasis by challenging the family-centered gender policies of the AKP period. Nevertheless, the CHP women MP's maternalist framing is more dominant than those frames that challenge the AKP's maternalist ideology; hence, the CHP women MP's speeches attest that as the party still adopts liberal Kemalist and state feminist framings in their gender politics while simultaneously using welfare state framing with the concern of having organic relations with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society towards egalitarian understanding in their gender politics.

The adoption of left-wing party ideology appears in CHP women MPs' employment of the welfare state notion in the issue of the public provision of care services for promoting the integration of women into employment. The state feminism (policy suggestions on women's integration into employment for the generation of the economic development and Westernization of Turkey) and Kemalist (expression of gratitude to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and to Turkish women's struggle in establishing the Turkish Republic) frames attest that CHP women representatives are loyal to their highly-disciplined party structure and ideology. Lastly, the Euro-centric framing of CHP women MPs is dominant in their statements on women's unemployment rates and their proposed solutions and demands from the government to increase women's employment rate by taking Western countries as models.

In stark contrast to the dominant frames suggesting the CHP women MPs' liberal feminist approach embracing statist and social justice themes and arguments, the data from the parliamentary speeches suggest that the HDP women MPs employ three major framings projected in the following terms: 'woman as an individual,' 'holistic,' and 'collectivization of care labor' in the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative term. During the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term, they diversify their frames by referring to the 'marriage of patriarchy and capitalism' and 'slavery' framings in their discursive appeals to criticize AKP's family-centered gender policies. The HDP women representatives opt for the term 'woman as an individual' to express their criticism of the AKP's motherhood emphasis in its gender politics. In this context, the HDP women MPs project a critical perspective on the family as an institution for forcing women to be mothers, excluding them from the paid labor force, or confining them to precarious and informal jobs. Furthermore, the HDP women deputies embrace a 'holistic' approach to emphasize the need for a more comprehensive perspective in explaining the women's disadvantaged participation in employment. In this respect, they criticize the AKP's pro-natal policies due to its exploitation of women's labor and prevention of their employment prospects. This 'holistic perspective' reverberates socialist feminists'



arguments on the exploitation of women's labor in private and public realms without the state's provision of care services. In line with a socialist feminist perspective, the third component of HDP women MPs' 'collectivization of care labor' frame is crucial; this is proposed as a solution for more women's integration into secure and formal employment. In the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term, the 'marriage of patriarchy and capitalism' framing, again one of the prominent arguments of socialist feminists, which is employed to diagnose and criticize the exploitation of women's labor in the labor market and in the patriarchal system. Along with the unity of capitalism and patriarchy as the culprit in their statements, HDP women MPs frequently take up the 'slavery' framing to draw attention to women workers' precarious and informal working circumstances. In this line, they consider diversity among women by problematizing domestic, home-based, homemaker, and seasonal women workers' concerns relevant to their labor and social rights in their legislative proposals.

The second part of the analysis chapter focuses on the perspectives in the discourses and gender politics of the CHP and HDP women MPs on women's labor, employment, and social security legislations. Women's exclusion from the workforce is a major concern of the CHP and HDP women MPs, and they support their arguments by referring to statistical data on women's employment and problematized gendered processes and inequalities in employment. At that point, women from both opposition parties challenge the AKP's employment policies for forcing women to work in flexible, insecure, informal, and part-time jobs, which keeps the gendered division of labor based on their mothering and homemaking responsibilities without social security coverage. In the motions of written questions and parliamentary inquiry, opposition women MPs questioned the government policies on women's employment, inquired about the problems women face in employment, identified the causes of unregistered employment, discussed the working conditions of women workers from different sectors, and suggested policies to solve their problems. Opposition women MPs also raised the issue of gender-based discrimination in workplaces. In this

context, for example, the CHP women deputies focus on the most common sexist practices in the hiring process, such as women academics' experiences in the universities in Turkey. The HDP women deputies concentrate on the issues of the gender pay gap, and sexual abuse, physical violence, mobbing against women in workplaces under the subject of gender-based discrimination. Furthermore, both opposition women MPs particularly problematized and submitted questions on women's position in decision-making in local and national level public institutions and ministries in the written legislative proposals. At the same time, the HDP women MPs also questioned the women's numbers and positions in different job sectors such as in sport, art, and journalism. Another common point of opposition parties' women representatives is the narratives they used to refer to real women's experiences in their plenary speeches to reflect their employment problems. Lastly, HDP women representatives differ from the CHP MPs in representing the Kurdish women's practical interests and focusing on the job security issue with a socialist feminist perspective. In terms of Kurdish women's practical interests, they focus on the problems of seasonal women workers who are mainly Kurdish women and interrogate the closure of women's open-air markets in the Southeast region's municipalities where the Kurdish population lives. In terms of job security, the HDP women MPs also posed questions about the causes of women workers' deaths and their social security rights in the case of occupational accidents.

Women's social security rights, as practical gender interests, are other subjects discussed by oppositional women MPs. The CHP women deputies were more active and vocal regarding social security coverage of women in the relevant laws and regulations compared to HDP women deputies, who did not specifically offer a policy for this issue in the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative term. In the legislative proposals and parliamentary speeches of CHP women deputies, the focus was on maternity leave, maternity debt, and breastfeeding leave which are significant concerns from a feminist perspective. However, the way some CHP women MPs framed them underlines maternalism in

their advocacy of women's social rights based on women's traditional motherhood roles under the concern of practical gender interest. However, this was changed by putting aside the maternalist framing in the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term. In contrast, HDP women MPs held a critical perspective on these issues, most notably on the problem of maternity leave for workers: they drew attention to gender discrimination because of the misuse of these rules by the employers, which ultimately serves the reproduction of traditional gender roles with childcare as women's responsibility even if she works. In the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative term, the HDP women MPs were more likely to deal with the issue of women's social security rights issues. In this term, opposition women representatives from both parties take up the social security rights of women domestic workers. Nevertheless, while the CHP women deputies paid specific attention to the social rights of women workers in the agricultural sector, HDP's female MPs focused on the social rights of homemakers and home-based women workers.

As a strategic gender interest topic, women's poverty was the third component of the opposition women MPs' legislative acts during the 27<sup>th</sup> legislative period. The CHP and HDP women deputy approach the women's poverty within the framework of women's economic independence issue. Both the CHP and HDP women deputies employ the "feminization of poverty" concept in order to highlight the gendered dimension and dynamic of poverty. Moreover, both oppositional representatives reflect women's real experiences regarding their poverty experiences in their daily lives. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the HDP women representatives discussed this issue more than the CHP women representatives in their legislative acts. Even though the CHP women MPs did not frequently use and politicize the 'women's poverty' term, they implicitly referred to the women's poverty concept to underline its impact on women's economic independence. In contrast, the HDP women MPs explicitly use 'women's poverty' as a structural and deep-rooted problem that renders women dependent on a male in the family institution. The HDP Women Assembly's official campaign, "No to Women's Poverty," raised women's poverty as a political

issue in the TBMM as one of the prominent subject matters of their legislative acts. HDP women representatives also discussed women's poverty in relation to violence against women, exacerbated by women's economic insecurity. It is crucial to approach the women's poverty issue with its consequences of women's subordination.

Opposition women MPs' legislative acts also cover concrete policy suggestions representing strategic and practical gender interests. The practical gender interest, women's cooperatives, was the topic demonstrating the positive relationship between the oppositional women MPs' legislative acts and their left-wing party ideology; the cooperatives identified with left ideology are adopted as a means for women's economic empowerment. The opposition women MPs also commonly represent the strategic gender interests by proposing the suggestions of the establishment of the Ministry of Women and the proclamation of the 8<sup>th</sup> March International Women's Day as a public holiday. In the context of the legislative proposal of the establishment of the Ministry of Women, opposition women MPs commonly aim to institutionalize women's interests and issues along with providing gender equality and empowerment of women in political, economic, and social positions. In the same vein, these women representatives demanded the proclamation of the 8<sup>th</sup> March International Women's Day as a public holiday.

In conclusion, along with the hypotheses of this research, this study argues that the CHP and HDP women representatives substantively represent the practical and strategic gender interests in labor and employment issues. However, the discursive approaches of these two left-wing parties diverge through the unemployment of different frames on these issues. The highly disciplined party structure and parties' approaches to feminism emerge as the significant determinants of this difference between the two opposition parties. Involvement in feminist activism and engagement in civil society organizations are the second factors that affect women MPs' legislative

acts at the individual level. This thesis contends that that descriptive representation of women is a prerequisite for the substantive representation of women in the legislatures shaped by party-related factors. Beyond that, it is also clear that holding a critical feminist perspective on women's issues is also necessary for the representation of women's interests and promoting and endorsing gender-sensitive political outcomes through articulating issues in strategic gender interests. As a result, more feminist women representing women from different backgrounds are essential for gender equality in the public and private spheres.

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## APPENDICES

### A. CHP WOMEN MPs' PROFILES

<b>CHP Women MPs' Name and Surname</b>	<b>Birth Year</b>	<b>Elected Legislative Term(s)</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Feminist Activism/ Civil Society Engagement</b>
Aysu Bankođlu	1989	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	-
Ayşe Gülsün Bilgehan	1957	22 <sup>th</sup> , 24 <sup>th</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lecturer, Journalist-Author	President of Socialist Women's Working Group in Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) (2011); President of the Council of Europe's Equality and Anti-Discrimination Commission (2015); General Rapporteur on Violence Against Women in PACE (2017)
Bihlun Tamalıgil	1966	22 <sup>nd</sup> , 23 <sup>th</sup> , 24 <sup>th</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Economist, Senior Executive	-
Burcu Köksal	1980	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	President of the CHP Afyonkarahisar Provincial Women's Branch; Afyonkarahisar Provincial Board Member of the Association for Supporting Contemporary Life; and participation of Kemalist Thought Association

Candan Yüceer	1973	24 <sup>th</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Doctor of Medicine	Member and chair of the Çerkezköy Kemalist Thought Association, a member of the Women's Hand Association
Didem Engin	1977	25 <sup>th</sup> and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Businesswoman	-
Elif Doğan-Türkmen	1962	25 <sup>th</sup> and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Chair of the Adana Businesswomen Association Board of Directors; the Vice Chair of the Turkish Entrepreneurship and Business Confederation Women's Commission; the Adana Provincial Member of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) Women Entrepreneurs Board; the member of the Association for Supporting and Training Women Candidates (Ka.Der); and the member of the University Women's Association and Lawyers Association.
Emine Gülizar Emecan	1968	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Civil Engineer, Occupational Safety Specialist	Member of the Association for Supporting Contemporary Life
Fatma Kaplan-Hürriyet	1982	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	-
Gamze Akkuş-İlgezdi	1969	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Dentist	Founder of the Social Transformation Foundation and the Mothers Platform
Gamze Taşçier	1982	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Pharmacist	Member of Association for Supporting Women Candidates of Ankara Branch (Ka.Der)

Gaye Usluer	1957	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Prof. Dr. in Medicine Faculty	Member of the Board of Directors of Eskişehir Branch in the Association of University Women of Turkey (2000-2002)
Gülray Yedekçi	1975	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Architect	Member of the Platform of Non-Governmental Organizations Union; deputy chair of the Stay Alive Association; former Chair of the Democratic Solidarity Association
Gülizar Biçer-Karaca	1967	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Founder of Denizli Women's Platform and Denizli Democracy Platform
Jale Nur Süllü	1962	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Doctor of communication sciences	Serving in several civil society organizations (CSOs) in Eskişehir (does not include the information of CSO's names)
Lale Karabıyık	1965	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Professor of Finance	Deputy Chair of the CHP in charge of Social Policies, Education Policies, and Women's Policies
Melike Ersoy	1978	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Civil Engineer	Denizli The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) Women Entrepreneurs Board Presidency
Müzeyyen Şevkin	1961 (61)	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Geology Engineer with M.Sc. degree	Serving in several civil society organizations (CSOs) (does not include the information of CSO's names)
Neslihan Hancıoğlu	1963	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Banker	Chair of Samsun İlkadim District CHP Women's Branch
Nurhayat Altacıkayışoğlu	1978	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Member of many non-governmental organizations. (NGOs) (does not include the

					information of NGO's names)
Selin Sayek-Böke	1972	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Economist, Faculty Member Assoc. Dr.	Founding member of the Health and Education Development Association
Selina Doğan	1977	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Involvement in trainings on NGOs and minority protection mechanisms at the Council of Europe and the UN; and volunteer experience in various social responsibility projects (does not include the projects' names)
Sibel Özdemir	1979	26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Academician	-
Sevda Erdan-Kılıç	1980	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Member of various civil society organizations (CSOs)(does not include the CSOs' names)
Suzan Şahin	1968	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Member of the Association for Supporting Contemporary Life and the Kemalist Thought Association; involvement in projects on shelters, prevention of domestic violence, civil law and women's rights (does not include the projects' names)
Şafak Pavey	1976	24 <sup>th</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup> (quit in 2017)	University Degree	Diplomat	-
Şenal Sarihan	1948	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Teacher, Lawyer	Administrative role in the Turkish Teachers' Union (TÖS) and All Teachers' Union and Solidarity Association (TÖS-DER); chair of

					the Contemporary Lawyers' Association; chair of the Contemporary Lawyers Association; co-founder and chair of the Association of Republican Women
Tur Yıldız-Biçer	1968	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Doctor of Medicine	-
Zeynep Altıok	1969	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Author, communicator	Member of the Social Memory Platform, Contemporary Life Support Association, Social Democracy Foundation, Women's Initiative for Peace, Peace Bloc; and Board Member of the Women's Works Library, Information Center Foundation



## B. HDP WOMEN MPs' PROFILES

HDP Women MPs' Name and Surname	Birth Year	Elected Legislative Term(s)	Education	Occupation	Feminist Activism/ Civil Society Engagement
Aycan İrmez	1985	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Vice President of the Human Rights Association of Şırnak Branch; involvement in work on detainees and convicts in the Women and Children's Commissions of the Şırnak Bar Association, and in the Federation of Law Solidarity Associations for Families of Detainees
Ayşe Acar Başaran	1985	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	HDP Women's Assembly Spokesperson; took part in the BDP Women's Assembly. Member of the Free Women's Congress Association; member of the Human Rights Investigation Commission; HDP Co-Chair in charge of Law and Human Rights
Ayşe Sürücü	1983	27 <sup>th</sup>	High School Graduate	Politician	Women's rights activists in TJA (Tevgera Jinên Azad/Özgür Kadın Hareketi/Free Women's Movement)
Bedia Özgökçe-Ertan	1975	26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Co-founder of the Van Branch of the Human Rights; member of the Association of Human Rights (İHD); co-founder of the Van Regional Bar Association Human

					Rights Center and Van Bar Association Women's Rights Center; member of the Central Board of the Human Rights Association
Besime Konca	1970	26 <sup>th</sup> (termination of her membership in 2017)	High School Graduate	Politician	Involvement in the Free Women's Congress Association
Burcu Çelik-Özkan	1986	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	-
Çağlar Demirel	1969	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Nurse	Involvement in the work of the Family Planning Association of Turkey, the Mother Child Education Foundation, the Association for Supporting Women Candidates, the Umut Işığı Women's Cooperative and KJA (Free Women's Congress)
Dersim Dağ	1996	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Politician	-
Dilek Öcalan	1987	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Tourism Sector	Involvement in the Women's Institution affiliated to Diyarbakır Bağlar Municipality
Dilşat Canbaz-Kaya	1973	27 <sup>th</sup>	High School Graduate	Worker	Active participation in the women's and labor struggle; co-founder of the Democratic Women's Movement (DKH); co-founder of the Federation for Democratic Rights (DHF) and the Federation of Socialist Assemblies (SMF)
Dirayet Dilan Taşdemir	1982	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Sociologist and Archaeologist	Consultant in the field of Women's Policies at Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality; took representational duties

					in the field of gender and women's studies in many national and international platforms (does not include the platforms' names); member of the Internal Affairs Commission and the Equal Opportunity Commission for Women and Men
Ebrü Günay	1982	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	-
Fatma Kurtulan	1964	27 <sup>th</sup>	High School Graduate	Politician	Founder and activist of the Adana Kırçiçek Women's Association, the chair of the Women's Branch of the People's Democracy Party (HADEP), the Co-Chair of the Peoples' Democratic Party
Feleknas Uca	1976	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Politician	Co-chair of the Foundation-Association for Children and Women's Rights and the European Yazidi Federation
Figen Yüksekdağ - Şenoğlu	1971	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup> (termination of her membership in February, 2017)	High School Graduation	Journalist, politician	Editor of the Socialist Woman Journal
Filiz Kerestecioglu	1961	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Founder of the Ahmet-Şirin Tekeli Foundation for Support of Women Lawyers and a Co-founder of the Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation. The lyricist and composer of the song "There Are Women." The producer of the documentary

					“There Are Women,” which deals with the struggle for women's rights from the Ottoman period to the present.
Gülüstan Kılıç-Koçyiğit	1979	27 <sup>th</sup>	High School Graduate	Politician	Involvement in various civil society organizations (CSOs) (does not include the CSO's names)
Gülser Yıldırım	1963	24 <sup>th</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	High School Graduate	Politician	-
Hüda Kaya	1960	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	-	Author, Activist	Involvement in many women's organizations such as IMWU (International Union of Muslim Women)
Leyla Birlik	1974	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	High School Graduate	-	-
Leyla Güven	1964	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup> (termination of her membership in June 2022)	Secondary School Graduate	Self-employment	Chair of the Konya HADEP Women's Branch; manager of the HADEP Center Women's Branch; member of the DEHAP Party Assembly; and chair of the DEHAP Adana Women's Branch
Leyla Zana	1961	19 <sup>th</sup> , 24 <sup>th</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	High School Graduate	Journalist	Involvement in the works of Human Rights Association (İHD)
Meral Danış-Beştaş	1967	25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Chair of the Diyarbakır Bar Association's Women's Rights Counseling and Implementation Center; presentation of papers on women's rights, human rights, the right to a fair trial, confronting the past and revealing the truth in many national and international platforms
Mizgin Irgat	1978	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Involvement in various works of Civil Society Organizations'

					(CSOs)(does not include the CSOs' names)
Muazzez Orhan-Işık	1972	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Business manager	Executive Board of Education and Science Workers Union (Eğitim-Sen) Van Branch
Nuran İmir	1977	27 <sup>th</sup>	-	Politician	Works on Youth and Women's issues in HADEP; and involvement in various works in the fields of women, children, diplomacy and politics (does not specifically give examples)
Nursel Aydoğan	1958	24 <sup>th</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Food engineer	Manager in All Health-Sen Health Social Workers Union and Health and Social Service Workers Union; general president of the Prisoner Families Aid Association and Federation
Oya Ersoy	1970	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Boards of directors of the Ankara and Istanbul branches of the Human Rights Association (İHD)
Pero Dundar	1971	27 <sup>th</sup>	High School Graduate	-	-
Pervin Buldan	1967	24 <sup>th</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , and 27 <sup>th</sup>	High School Graduate	Politician	Chair of the Association for Assistance and Solidarity with Families
Remziye Tosun	1981	27 <sup>th</sup>	Primary Graduate School	-	Activists in TJA (Tevgera Jinên Azad/Özgür Kadın Hareketi/Free Women's Movement)
Saadet Becerikli	1955	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	-	Chair of the Human Rights Association Batman Branch; the spokesperson at Batman Democracy and Batman Women platforms, the co-chair for Human

					Rights in the Democratic Society Party, the BDP Batman Provincial Chair
Selma İrmak	1971	24 <sup>th</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup> (termination of her membership in April 2018)	High School Graduate	Self-employment	-
Semra Güzel	1984	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Doctor of Medicine	Involvement in the Health and Social Service Workers Union; member of the Board of Directors in Diyarbakır Medical Chamber as Co-Chair
Sibel Yiğitalp	1971	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Nurse	Various positions in Local Agenda 21 Women's Assembly, Democratic Society Congress (DTK) and Health Workers' Union
Serpil Kemalbey-Pekgözgeçü	1964	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Chemical engineer	Involvement in the Socialist Solidarity Platform, which is one of the HDP components; took part the establishment of the Solidarity Houses in 1997 and the İMECE Women's Solidarity Association. Took part in the establishment of BATIS (Independent Textile Workers' Union)
Şevin Coşkun	1980	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Journalist	Participation in several studies in the field of Gender and Women's Studies (does not specifically give the name of these studies)
Tuğba Hezer-Öztürk	1989	25 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup> (termination of her membership)	University Degree	Teacher	-

		p in July 2017)			
Tülay Hatımoğulları-Oruç	1977	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Politician	Co-Chair of the Socialist Re-establishment Party, one of the components of the Peoples' Democratic Party
Züleyha Gülüm	1979	27 <sup>th</sup>	University Degree	Lawyer	Member of the Socialist Feminist Collective and the Women's Commission of the Libertarian Lawyers Platform. She also took an active role in the work of women's associations and women's cooperatives; continues to take part in the feminist struggle (does not specifically include the associations and cooperatives' names)

### C. TURKISH SUMMARY/TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Kadınların siyasi olarak yeterince temsil edilmemesi, Türkiye dahil bazı ülkelerde ulusal ve yerel yönetim mekanizmalarında hem toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliğinin hem de demokrasi açığının bir göstergesi olmuştur. Bununla birlikte, kadınların eşit temsil ve karar alma süreçlerine katılım için verdiği mücadele ve eşitlik mekanizmalarını kurumsallaştırmadaki başarıları, kadın politikacıların yasama meclislerindeki varlığını ve görünürlüğünü arttırmıştır. Kadınların nicel temsilindeki iyileşme, ataerkil toplumsal yapı içinde farklı ihtiyaçları ve sorunları olan bir toplumsal kategori olarak, kadınların çıkarlarının siyasi temsiline ilişkin soruyu da gündeme getirdi. Bu tezde vurgulandığı gibi, sosyal ve politik olarak marjinalleştirilmiş gruplar için siyasi kurumların içine dahil olmak, siyasi tartışmaların, yasaların ve üretilen politikaların içeriğinde, yani siyasi sonuçlar üzerinde niteliksel bir etki yaratma açısından temsil anlamına gelmez. Toplumsal cinsiyet ve siyaset araştırmalarında bu konu, cinsiyete dayalı dinamikleri ve temsilcilerin yasama eylemlerini etkileyen faktörleri odak noktasına getiren kadınların temsil süreciyle ilgilidir. Bu bağlamda, özellikle Batı ülkelerindeki mevcut literatür ve çok sayıda ampirik çalışma, kadın ve erkek yasa koyucuların temsili eylemlerinin yanı sıra bu eylemlerinde cinsiyet farklılıklarını analiz etmek için ağırlıklı olarak cinsiyete dayalı temsili iddialara ve seçilmiş organlardaki eylemlere bakmıştır. Türkiye örneğinde, parlamentodaki niteliksel temsilin kapsamı, belirleyicileri ve cinsiyet farklılıklarına ilişkin ampirik çalışmalar yetersizdir. Bu tez, partilerin ideolojisi ve kadın milletvekillerin feminist yaklaşımının etkisine bakarak kadınların yasama organındaki asli temsiline ilişkin literatür boşluğunu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Analiz, hükümetin kadın emeği ve istihdamı konularındaki toplumsal cinsiyet muhafazakar politikalarına karşı çıkan iki büyük muhalefet partisinden kadın milletvekillerinin söylemsel çerçevelerinin karşılaştırmalı bir analizini içeriyor. Veriler, milletvekilinin genel kurul konuşmalarına, yasa tekliflerine, yazılı soru önergelerine, meclis araştırması önergelerine ve komisyon konuşmalarına dayanmaktadır. Araştırma, muhalefetteki iki sol/merkez sol siyasi



partiyi karşılaştırırken, kadın milletvekillerinin yasama faaliyetlerinin analizi nicel temsil ile niteliksel temsil arasındaki ilişkiye feminist bir bakış açısıyla ışık tutuyor.

Literatürde, kadınların siyasi temsiline ilişkin gündeme getirilen başlıca sorular, kadın milletvekillerinin, erkek vekillerin aksine, kadınları temsil etme konusunda kadınları ayrı bir seçmen kitlesi olarak görme eğiliminde olup olmadığı; toplumsal meseleler ve kadın meselesi konularında farklı ve kadın yanlısı bakış açılarına veya önceliklere sahip olup olmadıkları ve ne ölçüde sahip oldukları; ve son olarak, kadın vekillerin yasama faaliyetlerinde kadın haklarını destekleme ve onlar için hareket etme açısından bir fark yaratıp yaratmadıkları olmuştur (Paxton ve Hughes 2017). Yapılan çoğu araştırma, kadınların siyasetteki farklılıklarını bulmak için nicel ve nitel temsil arasındaki ilişkiyi anlayan yasama faaliyetlerinde erkek ve kadın farklılıklarına odaklandı. Cinsiyet ve niteliksel temsil üzerine yapılan araştırmalar, çeşitli faktörlerin kadın politikacıların rollerini, motivasyonlarını ve kadınları temsil etme kapasitelerini etkilediğini de ortaya koydu. Politik bağlamda, normlar ve toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı dinamiklerle bağlı olan parlamentolarda kadınlar, tıpkı erkek temsilciler gibi, siyasi kariyerlerinde parti üyeliği, parti disiplini, seçim motivasyonu gibi belirli kısıtlamalara tabidir ve bu durum onların kadın haklarına ilişkin görüşlerini etkiler (Paxton ve Hughes, 2017, s.221).

Mevcut araştırmalar, demokratik olarak seçilmiş meclislerdeki kadın milletvekillerinin, kadın seçmenlerin sorunlarına öncelik vererek daha fazla dikkate aldıklarını ortaya koydu. Celis'in (2009, s. 102) belirttiği gibi, kadınların nicel temsilinin artması, 'farklı kadın gruplarının yaşam deneyimlerinin, bakış açılarının ve farklı ideolojik duruşların' niteliksel temsili üzerinde daha büyük bir etkisinin önünü açmaktadır. Parti siyaseti açısından ideoloji, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği gündemine daha açık olan sol partilerin kanıtladığı üzere nicel temsilden daha fazla niteliksel temsil için önemlidir (Kantola ve Lombardo, 2019). Türkiye örneği üzerine yakın

zamanda yapılan arařtırmalar, kadın milletvekillerinin meclis konuřmalarında toplumsal cinsiyet eřitlięi konularına daha dikkatli olduklarını (Konak-Ünal 2020) ve ayrıca kadın haklarına iliřkin yasa tekliflerini desteklemeye erkeklere kıyasla daha fazla eęilimli olduklarını ortaya koydu (Bektař ve Issever-Ekinci 2019). Türkiye’de özellikle muhalefet kadın vekilleri, kadın sorunları ve eřitlik konularında parlamento dıřı pek çok aıklamada bulunuyor; örneęin, 2021 yılında İstanbul Sözleřmesi’nden ıkılması ile muhalefet kadın vekillerin bu konuyu sık sık dile getirdiklerini görüyoruz. Bu durum Türkiye örneęi için yasama meclisinde kadınların niteliksel temsili konusunun önemini ortaya ıkartıyor. Ayrıca, Türkiye örneęinde aıklandığı üzere parti ideolojisi ve kimliği, yüksek parti disiplini ve kutuplařmış parti siyaseti milletvekillerinin faaliyetlerini etkileyen faktörlerdir. Bununla birlikte, TBMM’de göreceli olarak artış gösteren niceliksel temsilin (2018 genel seim sonrası mecliste kadın oranı yüzde 17.3) kadınların niteliksel temsiliyle olan iliřkisini inceleyen arařtırmalarda bir bořluk olduğunu görüyoruz. Aynı zamanda muhalefet kadın vekillerin muhafazakar AKP’nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarına karřı tepkileri ve yasama faaliyetlerini arařtırmak kadınların niteliksel temsilini anlamak için önemli bir konudur. Bu noktada, spesifik bir kadın sorunu konusu belirlemek bu temsili anlamak aısından faydalı olacaktır. Bu tez baęlamında, kadın emeęi ve istihdamı, kadınların özel ve kamusal alanda üreten ve yeniden üreten emeęini temel kadın sorunu ele alarak muhalefet kadın vekillerin bu hususlardaki yasama faaliyetlerini incelemeyi amalamıřtır.

Niteliksel temsilin gerekleřmesi için, tüm yasama faaliyetlerinde siyasi gündemin geniřletilmesi aısından kadınların ihtiyaç, talep ve ıkarlarının yasama sürecinde ele alınması gerekir (Celis, 2009, s.97). Bu tez, Molyneux’un (1985) “stratejik toplumsal cinsiyet ıkarları” ile “pratik toplumsal cinsiyet ıkarları” argümanları benimseyerek niteliksel temsilin kapsamını ve doęasını deęerlendirmek için analitik bakıř aısına sahip olmuřtur. Yine de Celis’in (2009) bize hatırlattığı gibi, kadınların pratik ve stratejik ıkarlarının niteliksel temsiline iliřkin ampirik arařtırmalar birbirinden

ayrılmaz. Analitik olarak da birbirleriyle ilişkilidirler (Molyneux, 2005) ve Kraske'nin (1999, s.20-21) Latin Amerika'daki kadın hareketleri örneğinde belirttiği gibi, pratik toplumsal cinsiyet çıkarlarıyla ilişki, stratejik cinsiyet çıkarları için mücadeleleri teşvik eder. Niteliksel temsilde hem pratik hem de stratejik çıkarlar söz konusudur ve Türkiye örneğinde, muhalefetteki kadın milletvekillerinin yasama eylemlerindeki benzerlikler ve farklılıklar üzerindeki partilerin ideolojik etkisinin izini sürmek, kadın sorunlarına yaklaşımlarını değerlendirmede önemli olacaktır. Ayrıca, belirtildiği gibi, Türkiye meclisindeki farklı siyasi partilerin toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarında, özellikle muhalefet partilerinin yasama organındaki AKP'nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarına yaklaşımı bağlamında, hala bir literatür boşluğu bulunmaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu tez araştırması, 'Muhalefetteki CHP ve HDP'li kadın milletvekilleri, TBMM'de kadınların emek ve istihdama ilişkin çıkarlarını ve sorunlarını nasıl dile getiriyorlar?' ve 'Bu iki sol partinin söylemsel yaklaşımları, kadın milletvekillerinin yasama faaliyetlerinde bu konulara ilişkin belirli çerçeveler aracılığıyla nasıl ve neden birleşiyor ve ayrılıyor?' sorularına cevap vermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu soruları yanıtlarken, tanımlayıcı ve açıklayıcı araştırma hedefi doğrultusunda çerçeveleme analizi kullanarak kadın vekillerin benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları tespit edilmiştir. Bu tezin temel bulguları, araştırmanın hipotezlerini doğrulamaktadır. Muhalefetteki kadın temsilciler, sol siyasi kimlikleri nedeniyle, yasama işlemlerinde kadınların istihdamdaki ikincil konumuna ilişkin pratik ve stratejik toplumsal cinsiyet çıkarlarını temsil etmektedirler. Bununla birlikte, bu pratik ve stratejik toplumsal cinsiyet çıkarlarına vurgu farklılıkları ve feminist yaklaşımları ile farklı çerçeveleri, bu partilerin ideolojik kimliklerini ve partilerinin feminist yaklaşımlarını yansıtmaktadır.

Birinci bölümde detaylandırıldığı gibi, bu tezdeki nitel çalışmanın metodolojik çerçevesi, politik süreçleri ve sonuçları açıklamada kadınların sesini ve toplumsal cinsiyet dinamiklerini odak noktasına almak için farklı etik ve metodolojik kaygıları olan feminist araştırma perspektifi ile analiz edilmiştir. Çerçeve analizi, Türkiye'deki

muhalefetteki kadın milletvekillerinin yasama faaliyetleri doğrultusunda niteliksel temsili anlamak ve analiz etmek için araştırma yöntemi olarak kullanılmıştır. Kadın milletvekillerinin ilgili yasama faaliyetlerinin söylemsel alanının analizi için birincil veri kaynakları TBMM'deki 26. ve 27. dönemlere ait genel kurul konuşmaları, kanun teklifleri, yazılı soru önermeleri ve meclis araştırma önermeleri ile komisyon konuşmalarıdır. Bu kaynaklar, etkileşimli, doğal, hali hazırda var olan ve araştırma sürecinden ve araştırmacılardan etkilenmeyecek şekilde olmasından dolayı seçilmiştir. Bu veriler kadın vekillerin önceliklerini, feminist bakış açılarını ve partilerine olan bağlılıklarını ortaya çıkarmak için faydalı kaynaklar olmuşlardır.

Bu tezin üçüncü ve dördüncü bölümlerinde, muhalefet partilerinin kadın ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği konularındaki yasama faaliyetlerini anlamlı bir analiz doğrultusunda değerlendirmek için AKP, CHP ve HDP'nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarının analizi sunulmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın kapsadığı dönemde, CHP ve HDP, AKP'nin toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı politikalarına meydan okuyan ve kadınların kamusal ve özel alanla ilgili sorunlarını gündeme getiren, TBMM'deki en önemli kadın yanlısı partiler olmuştur. Bu amaçla, CHP ve HDP'nin resmi parti dökümanlarında ve siyasetçilerin söylemlerinde yer alan toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, kadının ailedeki rolü ve kadının güçlendirilmesi konularına bakış açılarının, kadın emeği ve istihdamı konusundaki duruşlarını anlamak için bir arka plan olarak tartışması sunulmaktadır.

Kurumsal cinsiyet eşitliği politikalarını (örneğin cinsiyet kota uygulamaları) uygulamaya koyan kadın yanlısı ve muhalefet partileri olarak CHP ve HDP'de AKP'nin bu muhafazakar toplumsal cinsiyet politikasına meydan okumakta ve onun toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı gündemini sol görüşleriyle eleştirmektedir. Her iki muhalefet partisi de kadınların nicel temsili bağlamında kadınların partiye alınmalarına dikkat etmektedir. CHP, HDP kadar kadın milletvekili içermese de, seçilen CHP kadın milletvekilleri kadın meselelerinde aktif siyaset yapmakta ve bir

kısmı Türkiye'deki feminist kadınlarla yakın ilişki içindedir. Bir merkez sol parti olarak CHP, büyük ölçüde 1920'lerde ve 1930'larda devlet feminizmine öncülük etmedeki rolü nedeniyle, toplumsal cinsiyet politikası platformunda tarihsel olarak liberal feminist değerleri ve ilkeleri yaymıştır. CHP, kadın hakları meselesine de kimlik siyaseti çerçevesinden bağımsız olarak demokrasi ve demokratikleşme bağlamında yaklaşmıştır. Bu bağlamda, kadınların eğitime erişimleri toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ve kadınların toplumsal baskıdan kurtuluşu için hala birincil araç olarak kabul edilmektedir. Bununla birlikte, CHP'nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikası, kadınların güçlendirilmesine odaklanırken doğrudan ataerkil eleştiriye girmeden kamusal alanda toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği için çözümler sunar.

CHP'nin parti içi demokrasisinde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği anlayışını benimseyemediğini de gözlemlemiş bulunmaktayız. Bunun en somut kanıtları yeni seçilen Kadın Kolları başkanına kadar özerk feminist siyaset yapamayan CHP Kadın Kollarının' pasif ve sadık yapısı ile kadın milletvekili oranında hedeflenen kota oranına ulaşamamasıdır. Bununla birlikte, son dönemde, parti platformunda sosyal konulardaki özgürlükçü duruş, toplumsal cinsiyet politikası gündemine ve söylemlerine de nüfuz etmiştir. Bu değişim, kadınların ihtiyaç ve sorunlarına ve LGBTİ+ bireylerin haklarına yönelik politika değişikliklerin yanı sıra, Kadın Kolunda bağımsız toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarına yer açmak için daha aktivist bir duruşa sahip olma girişimleriyle kendini gösterdi. Ayrıca, feminist bir bakış açısıyla istihdam politikalarında kadınların ücretsiz ev içi emeğine ve erkek milletvekillerinin yasama işlemlerinde kadın emeğine daha fazla dikkat edilmiştir. Genel olarak, bu tartışmanın altını çizdiği gibi, CHP'nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikaları, stratejik cinsiyet çıkarlarından ziyade pratik cinsiyet çıkarlarını vurgulamaktadır.

Buna karşılık, HDP, toplumsal cinsiyet politikaları ve platformunda daha açık bir feminist duruş benimseme eğilimindedir. Kürt partilerinde toplumsal cinsiyet

eşitliğinin kademeli olarak kurumsallaşması, cinsiyet kotalarının sıkı bir şekilde uygulanmasına, eş başkanlık sisteminin getirilmesine, parti yapısında özerk bir Kadın Meclisi'nin varlığına neden oldu. Bunlar, HDP'nin parti içi pratiklerinde feminist bakış açısının önemli göstergeleridir. Bunun birlikte, kadınların partiye daha fazla entegrasyonu, bir sosyal hareket partisi olarak feminist siyaset ve sivil toplumla bağlantılı olması, eşitlikçi bakış açısını benimsemesi kadın haklarına ilişkin politika yapmasında önemli faktörler olmuştur. Ayrıca resmi doküman ve söylemlerinde ataerkillik, cinsiyetçilik, heteroseksizm ve LGBTİ+ haklarını açıkça ve sıklıkla kullanan partidir. Ek olarak, kadın milletvekillerinin medya platformlarındaki konuşmalarında da feminist sloganlar ve referanslar görüyoruz. Sivil toplum katılımında kadın ittifaklarına yapılan vurgu, HDP'nin kadın yanlısı ve feminist toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarının bir diğer kritik bileşenidir. Ayrıca, feminist hareketin talepleriyle çeşitliliği vurgulayan eşitlik meselelerinde partinin kesişimsel yaklaşımı, kadınların ezilmesini ve sömürülmesini açıklamada ataerkillik, militarizm, faşizm, etnik ayrımcılık ve otoriterliğin eleştirel bir değerlendirmesine yer açar. Bu, HDP'nin toplumsal cinsiyet platformunun, kadınların günlük sorunlarına ve hayatta kalma gereksinimlerine yönelik pratik toplumsal cinsiyet çıkarlarıyla olan angajmanını aşmada fark edilir olduğu anlamına geliyor. Parti, programında ve kamusal çağrılarında, ataerkilliği dönüştürmek ve kadınların her alanda güçlenmesini teşvik etmek için bir toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği gündemi de sunmaktadır.

Bu tez, yukarıda belirtilen farklılıkların yanı sıra, kadınların ücretli işgücü piyasasına katılımı konusuna dikkat çekerek, CHP ve HDP'nin kadın emeği ve istihdam konusundaki politikalarında da ortak noktalara sahip olduklarının altını çizmiştir. Her iki taraf da önerilen bakım hizmetleri ve kadınların toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı istihdam modellerindeki konumlarını sosyal güvenlik hakları, sendikalaşma hakları ve cinsiyete dayalı iş ayrımını sona erdirecek politikalarla hafifletmeye yönelik önlemler aracılığıyla kadınların çifte yükünü ele almıştır.

Dördüncü bölümde detaylandırıldığı gibi, CHP ve HDP kadınları arasındaki en çarpıcı farklardan biri, CHP kadın temsilcilerinin bazılarının annecilik, refah ve aile birliğine ilişkin çelişkili söylemlerinde yatmaktadır. Buna karşılık diğer CHP kadın vekilleri, AKP döneminin aile merkezli cinsiyet politikalarına meydan okuyarak annecilik vurguyu eleştirdiler. Bununla birlikte, CHP kadın milletvekilinin annecilik çerçevesi, AKP'nin anneci ideolojisine meydan okuyan çerçevelerden daha baskındır. Bu noktada CHP kadın milletvekillerinin yaptığı konuşmaların da gösterdiği gibi, CHP, toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarında hâlâ liberal Kemalist ve devlet feministi çerçevelenmeyi benimseyen ve aynı zamanda toplumdaki savunmasız ve dezavantajlı gruplarla organik ilişkiler kurma kaygısıyla refah devleti çerçevesini kullanan bir partidir. Sol parti ideolojisinin benimsenmesi, CHP kadın milletvekillerinin kadınların istihdama entegrasyonunu teşvik etmek için bakım hizmetlerinin kamu tarafından sunulması konusunda 'refah devleti' çerçevesinde ortaya çıkmaktadır. 'Devlet feminizmi' ve 'Kemalist' çerçeveleri ise CHP kadın temsilcilerinin son derece disiplinli parti yapısına ve ideolojisine bağlılığını kanıtlamıştır. Son olarak CHP kadın milletvekillerinin kadın işsizlik oranlarına ilişkin açıklamalarında batılı ülkeleri model alarak kadın istihdamını artırmaya yönelik çözüm önerilerinde ve taleplerinde 'Avrupa merkezli' çerçeve hakimdir.

CHP kadın milletvekillerinin devletçi ve sosyal adalet temalarını ve argümanlarını benimseyen liberal feminist yaklaşımını öne süren baskın çerçevelerin tam tersine, meclis konuşmalarından elde edilen veriler, HDP kadın milletvekillerinin 26. Yasama döneminde üç ana çerçeveyi kullandıklarını göstermektedir: 'birey olarak kadın olarak kadın,' 'bütünsel,' ve 'bakım emeğinin toplumsallaşması.' 27. yasama döneminde ise, AKP'nin aile merkezli toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarını eleştirmeye yönelik söylemsel çağrılarında 'ataerkillik ve kapitalizmin evliliği' ve 'kölelik' çerçevelerine atıfta bulunarak çerçevelerini çeşitlendiriyorlar. HDP kadın temsilcileri, AKP'nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikasındaki annelik vurgusuna yönelik eleştirilerini ifade etmek için 'birey olarak kadın' ifadesini tercih ediyor. Bu bağlamda HDP kadın milletvekillerini, kadınları

anne olmaya zorlayan, ücretli işgücünden dışlayan, güvencesiz ve kayıt dışı işlere kapatan bir kurum olarak aileye eleştirel bir bakış açısı getiriyor. Ayrıca HDP kadın milletvekilleri, kadınların istihdama dezavantajlı katılımını açıklamada daha kapsamlı bir bakış açısına ihtiyaç olduğunu vurgulamak için 'bütünsel' bir yaklaşımı benimsiyor. Bu bağlamda AKP'nin kadın emeğini istismar etmesi ve istihdam olanaklarını engellemesi nedeniyle doğum yanlısı politikalarını eleştiriyorlar. Bu 'bütünsel bakış açısı,' sosyalist feministlerin, devletin bakım hizmetleri sağlamadan özel ve kamusal alanlarda kadın emeğinin sömürülmesine ilişkin argümanlarını yansıtır. Sosyalist feminist bakış açısına uygun olarak, HDP kadın milletvekillerinin 'bakım emeğinin toplumsallaşması' çerçevesinin üçüncü bileşeni çok önemlidir; bu, daha fazla kadının güvenli ve kayıtlı istihdama entegrasyonu için bir çözüm olarak önerilmiştir. 27. yasama döneminde, kadın emeğinin emek piyasasında ve ataerkil sistemde sömürülmesini teşhis etmek ve eleştirmek için kullanılan, yine sosyalist feministlerin öne çıkan argümanlarından biri olan 'ataerkillik ve kapitalizmin evliliği' çerçevesidir. Açıklamalarında kapitalizm ve ataerkilliğin birliğinin yanı sıra, HDP kadın milletvekilleri, kadın işçilerin güvencesiz ve kayıt dışı çalışma koşullarına dikkat çekmek için sıklıkla 'kölelik' çerçevesini ele alıyor. Bu doğrultuda, yasa tekliflerinde ev içi, ev eksenli, ev hanımı ve mevsimlik kadın işçilerin çalışma ve sosyal haklarına ilişkin kaygılarını sorunsallaştırarak kadınlar arasındaki çeşitliliği dikkate almaktadırlar.

Analiz bölümünün ikinci kısmı, CHP ve HDP kadın milletvekillerinin kadın emeği, istihdamı ve sosyal güvenlik konularına ilişkin söylem ve toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarındaki bakış açılarına odaklanmaktadır. Kadınların işgücünden dışlanması CHP ve HDP kadın milletvekillerinin sorunsallaştırdığı önemli bir konu olarak cinsiyetçi pratiklere ve istihdamdaki eşitsizliklere ilişkin istatistiksel verilere atıfta bulunarak savlarını destekliyorlar. Bu noktada, her iki muhalefet partisinden de kadınlar, AKP'nin kadınları esnek, güvencesiz, kayıt dışı ve yarı zamanlı işlerde çalışmaya zorlamaya yönelik istihdam politikalarına karşı çıkıyor. Muhalefetteki



kadın milletvekilleri, yazılı soru önermeleri ve meclis araştırma önermelerinde, hükümetin kadın istihdamına ilişkin politikalarını, kadınların istihdamda yaşadıkları sorunları, kayıt dışı istihdamın nedenlerini, farklı sektörlerden kadın işçilerin çalışma koşullarını sorgulamış ve çözüm önerilerinde bulunmuşlardır. İşyerlerinde cinsiyete dayalı ayrımcılık konusunu da gündeme getirmişlerdir. Bu bağlamda örneğin CHP kadın milletvekilleri, Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde kadın akademisyenlerin deneyimlerinden yola çıkarak işe alım sürecinde en yaygın cinsiyetçi uygulamalara odaklanmışlardır. HDP kadın milletvekilleri, cinsiyete dayalı ayrımcılık başlığı altında cinsiyete dayalı ücret farkı, cinsel istismar, fiziksel şiddet, işyerlerinde kadına yönelik mobbing konularına odaklanmışlardır. Ayrıca, her iki muhalefet kadın milletvekilleri de yazılı yasa tekliflerinde özellikle yerel ve ulusal düzeydeki kamu kurumları ve bakanlıklarda kadınların karar alma süreçlerindeki konumlarını sorunsallaştırmış ve sorular yöneltmiştir. Aynı zamanda HDP kadın milletvekilleri, kadınların spor, sanat, gazetecilik gibi farklı sektörlerdeki sayılarını ve pozisyonlarını da sorgulamıştır. Muhalefet partilerinin kadın temsilcilerinin bir diğer ortak noktası da, istihdam sorunlarını yansıtmak için genel kurul konuşmalarında gerçek kadınların deneyimlerine atıfta buldukları anlatılardır. Son olarak, HDP kadın temsilcileri, Kürt kadınlarının pratik çıkarlarını temsil etme ve iş güvenliği sorununa sosyalist feminist bir bakış açısıyla odaklanma konusunda CHP milletvekillerinden ayrılmaktadır. Kürt kadınlarının pratik çıkarları açısından, ağırlıklı olarak Kürt kadınları olan mevsimlik kadın işçilerin sorunlarına odaklanıyorlar ve Kürt nüfusun yaşadığı Güneydoğu bölgesindeki belediyelerdeki kadın açık hava pazarlarının kapatılmasını sorgulamışlardır. HDP kadın milletvekilleri, iş güvenliği açısından kadın işçilerin ölüm nedenleri ve iş kazalarında sosyal güvenlik haklarına ilişkin sorular yöneltmişlerdir.

Pratik cinsiyet çıkarları olarak kadınların sosyal güvenlik hakları, muhalif kadın milletvekilleri tarafından tartışılan diğer konulardır. CHP kadın milletvekilleri, 26. yasama döneminde bu konuya özel bir politika sunmayan HDP kadın milletvekillerine

göre, ilgili yasa ve yönetmeliklerde kadınların sosyal güvenlik kapsamına alınması konusunda daha aktiflerdir. CHP kadın milletvekillerinin yasa tekliflerinde ve meclis konuşmalarında doğum izni, doğum borcu ve emzirme izni konularına odaklanmıştır. Ancak bazı CHP kadın milletvekillerinin bu konuları çerçeveleme biçimleri annecilik ideolojisine dayanmaktadır. Bu çerçeveleme biçimi fakat 27. yasama döneminde gözle görülür şekilde azalmıştır. Buna karşılık, HDP kadın milletvekilleri başta işçiler için doğum izni sorunu olmak üzere bu konulara eleştirel bir bakış açısı getirdiler: Bu izinlerin işverenler tarafından kötüye kullanılması nedeniyle oluşan toplumsal cinsiyet ayrımcılığına dikkat çekmişlerdir. 27. yasama döneminde, HDP kadın milletvekilleri daha çok kadınların sosyal güvenlik hakları konusuyla ilgilendiler. Bu dönemde her iki partiden de muhalefet kadın temsilcileri kadın ev işçilerinin sosyal güvenlik haklarını odaklanmışlardır. Bununla birlikte CHP kadın milletvekilleri tarım sektöründeki kadın işçilerin sosyal haklarına özel önem verirken, HDP kadın milletvekilleri ev hanımlarının ve ev eksenli kadın işçilerin sosyal haklarına odaklanmıştır.

Stratejik bir toplumsal cinsiyet çıkarı konusu olarak, kadın yoksulluğu, 27. yasama döneminde muhalefetteki kadın milletvekillerinin yasama faaliyetlerinin üçüncü bileşenydi. CHP ve HDP kadın milletvekilleri, kadın yoksulluğuna kadının ekonomik bağımsızlığı çerçevesinde yaklaşıyor. Hem CHP hem de HDP kadın milletvekilleri, yoksulluğun cinsiyetçi boyutunu ve dinamiğini öne çıkarmak için ‘yoksulluğun kadınlaşması’ kavramını kullanmıştır. Ayrıca her iki muhalefet temsilcisi de kadınların yoksulluk deneyimlerine ilişkin gerçek deneyimlerini günlük yaşamlarına yansıtmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, HDP kadın temsilcilerinin yasama işlemlerinde bu konuyu CHP kadın temsilcilerinden daha çarpıcı bir şekilde ele aldıklarını belirtmek gerekir. CHP kadın milletvekilleri, “kadın yoksulluğu” terimini sıklıkla kullanmasalar ve siyasallaştırmalar da, kadınların ekonomik bağımsızlığı üzerindeki etkisini vurgulamak için örtük olarak kadın yoksulluğu kavramına atıfta bulunurken buna karşılık HDP kadın milletvekilleri, kadınları aile kurumunda bir erkeğe bağımlı kılan

yapısal ve köklü bir sorun olarak açıkça ‘kadın yoksulluğunu’ kullanıyor. HDP Kadın Meclisi’nin “Kadın Yoksulluğuna Hayır” resmi kampanyası, TBMM’de siyasi bir konu olarak kadın yoksulluğunu yasama kararlarının öne çıkan konularından biri haline getirdi. Ayrıca, HDP kadın temsilcileri, kadınların ekonomik güvencesizliği nedeniyle şiddetlenen kadına yönelik şiddetle bağlantılı olarak kadın yoksulluğunu da ele almıştır.

Muhalefet kadın milletvekillerinin yasama faaliyetleri, stratejik ve pratik cinsiyet çıkarlarını temsil eden somut politika önerilerini de kapsar. Pratik cinsiyet çıkarları olarak kadın kooperatifleri, muhalif kadın milletvekillerinin yasama eylemleri ile sol parti ideolojileri arasındaki olumlu ilişkiyi gösteren konuydu. Kadın vekiller sol ideolojiyle özdeşleşen kooperatifleri kadınların ekonomik güçlenmesi için bir araç olarak benimsemiştir. Muhalefetteki kadın vekiller aynı zamanda Kadın Bakanlığı’nın kurulması ve 8 Mart Dünya Kadınlar Günü’nün resmi tatil olarak ilan edilmesi önerilerini öne sürerek stratejik cinsiyet çıkarlarını da yaygın olarak temsil ediyor.

Sonuç olarak, bu araştırmanın hipotezlerini doğrular nitelikte CHP ve HDP kadın temsilcilerinin emek ve istihdam konularında pratik ve stratejik toplumsal cinsiyet çıkarlarını önemli ölçüde temsil ettiğini bulmuştur. Ancak bu iki sol partinin söylemsel yaklaşımları, bu konularda farklı çerçeveler kullanmak suretiyle birbirlerinden ayrılmaktadır. Yüksek disiplinli parti yapısı ve partilerin feminizme yaklaşımları iki muhalefet partisi arasındaki bu farklılığın temel belirleyicileridir. Feminist aktivizme ve sivil toplum kuruluşlarına katılım, kadın milletvekillerinin yasama faaliyetlerini bireysel düzeyde etkileyen ikinci faktördür. Bu tez, kadınların nicel temsilinin, partiye bağlı faktörler tarafından şekillendirilen yasama organlarında niteliksel temsili için bir ön koşul olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Bunun ötesinde, kadın sorunlarına eleştirel bir feminist bakış açısına sahip olmanın, kadınların çıkarlarının temsil edilmesi ve konuları stratejik toplumsal cinsiyet çıkarlarına eklemeyerek toplumsal cinsiyete

duyarlı siyasi sonuçların teşvik edilmesi ve onaylanması için de gerekli olduğu açıktır. Sonuç olarak, farklı geçmişlere sahip kadınları temsil eden daha fazla feminist kadın, kamusal ve özel alanda toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği için elzemdir.

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