A holistic approach to violence: Women parliamentarians' understanding of violence against women and violence in the Kurdish issue in Turkey

Ayse Betül Çelik

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What is This?

A holistic approach to violence: Women parliamentarians' understanding of violence against women and violence in the Kurdish issue in Turkey

Ayşe Betül Çelik
Sabancı University, Turkey

Abstract

While women in Turkey and around the world are commonly engaged in civic activism for peace and violence reduction, they are seriously underrepresented in formal politics; thus, not much has been written about their potential to affect decisions made to reduce violence in their societies. This study aims to understand how women politicians view violence in general and their solutions for two specific types of violence in Turkey: (1) the increasing levels of violence against women, and (2) violence created through the Kurdish issue in Turkey. Turkish politicians have become increasingly concerned about both of these issues in recent years and have designed many policies and strategies to address them. This study argues that studying the women parliamentarians' linkage (or its absence) between the two types of violence will help understand what accounts for the differences (if any) among women MPs in their understanding of different types of violence and their solutions to them.

Keywords

Holistic approach, Kurdish question, Turkish politics, violence against women, women parliamentarians

While women in Turkey and around the world are commonly engaged in civic activism for peace and violence reduction, they are seriously underrepresented in formal politics; thus, not much has been written about their potential to affect decisions made to reduce

Corresponding author:
Ayşe Betül Çelik, Sabancı University, Orhanli Tuzla, Istanbul, 34956, Turkey.
Email: bcelik@sabanciuniv.edu

violence in their societies. Expanding the literature on the continuum of violence, intersectional analysis, and the ecological model of violence, the premise of this study is that there is a link between violence against women (VAW) and violence created through the Kurdish issue in Turkey, and its aim is to examine women parliamentarians'[1] understanding of this connection. It asks whether women parliamentarians (MPs) see a link between these two types of violence in their definitions of violence and the policies they advocate to address them, and whether there are differences among them in terms of understanding this linkage (or their failure to see such a linkage). It also looks at women politicians' anti-violence agenda to determine the extent to which it covers all forms of violence or only some. It tries to determine the way and degree to which this understanding affects their imaginations of a peaceful society in Turkey and what distinguishes them in their fight against violence.

Holistic approach to violence and gender

According to Johan Galtung, violence 'is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations' (1969: 168). Besides directly targeting individuals' physical integrity, various types of violence, such as structural and cultural violence in the form of cultural teachings, institutionalizations of these norms and discrimination of various groups and individuals, can put them below their potential somatic and mental self-realizations (Galtung, 1975). Violence is 'nonlinear, productive, destructive *and reproductive*' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004: 1).

In explaining the theoretical linkages between gender identity and violence/peace some researchers have argued that women's affinity to peace is natural and rooted in their reproductive capacities (Daly, 1984; Elshtain, 1987) and 'maternal thinking' (Ruddick, 1989), while others have challenged this, arguing that pacifism is not inherent, but rather is a result of socialization (Brock-Utne, 1985; Sylvester, 1989). Both approaches, thus, characterize women's identity as being different from that of men in that women address violence constructively. Contrary to the above arguments, the existence of women warriors as well as war-cheering women shows that there is no clearly defined link between gender and positive peace (Gangoli, 2006; Korac, 2006). Women, as these and other studies show, are not simply victims, but also agents, actively involved in violent military actions or supporting violence in various forms. Consequently, the relationship between gender identity and violence, and how this relationship is perceived and used to combat violence by women politicians remains problematic and depends on their understanding of their own gender identity.

In the studies linking gender and violence, there are three dominant paradigms: the continuum of violence, intersectional analysis and the ecological model of violence. Scholars employing the 'continuum of violence' along gendered roles in societies suggest that there is a *gendered* continuum of violence that extends from (inter)personal to international; from home to battleground (Cockburn, 2012; Gangoli, 2006). Those using this concept argue that there are significant links between VAW at home, in the workplace and the public arena in *both* peace and conflict situations. The concept emphasizes an uninterrupted flow or current of violent events spanning periods of war and peace

(Cockburn, 2012), and links kinds of violence, 'scales of force (from fist to bomb), or social units (two people in a punch-up, wars between nations)' resulting in various gendered violence categories (Cockburn, 2012: 255). In other words, male VAW normalized through gender roles and cultural teachings during wartime can span through times of peace (or conversely) if institutions, norms and structures that feed violence are not eliminated. Arguing that there is a continuum that runs through 'harm by oppression and harm by physical form' (Cockburn, 2012: 255), 'continuum of violence' scholars have argued that structural violence in the form of poverty, exclusion and humiliation, for instance, 'inevitably translates into intimate and domestic violence' (Bourgois, 2004; Scheper-Hughes, 2004).

Scholars linking gender inequality and militarism have shown that 'gender inequality increases the likelihood that a state will experience internal conflict' (Caprioli, 2005: 171) and international war (Regan and Paskeviciute, 2003). Others have found a correlation between a state's level of militarism and stereotyped gender roles (Altınay, 2004; Elshtain, 1987; Reardon, 1993; Ruddick, 1989). These anti-militarist feminist analyses have demonstrated that traditional images of masculinity and femininity reinforce both sexism and militarism (Burguieres, 1990).

Although 'continuum of violence' literature has contributed significantly to understanding the relationship between gendered violence in private and public, and spillover of national and international wars to the domestic arena, it nonetheless fails to provide a holistic understanding of violence in societies. This is because it suggests a causality running from violence created by war to VAW (or vice versa) rather than interlinking them as root causes of violence, thus, it falls short of explaining the 'non-linear and reproductive' characteristics of violence.

Approaching the linkage between gender and violence from a different perspective, intersectional analysis of power has also revealed how different dimensions of power, such as capitalism, ethno-national domination and patriarchy, reinforce each other. The intersectionality of various social divisions, such as class, gender, ethnicity and race, enhances the already existing forms of discrimination and oppression, resulting in not only poorer representation of minority women (Hughes, 2013; Weldon, 2006), but also more oppression. According to intersectional analysis, patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society through these social divisions (Collins, 2000).

As argued by Yuval-Davis, in most intersectional analysis, 'different levels of analysis are conflated together and reduced to "identities" ' (2006: 197). Even though these identities are greater than their sum, intersectional analysis is still limited to the link between intersections of identities and violence. While ideologies such as racism, sexism and nationalism are interwoven in societies, there is more to violence than the intersections of these ideologies. Intersectional analysis, while explaining how identities interact on multiple and simultaneous levels, leading to oppression and violence, fails to refer to violence as a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among various factors.

Studying the causal factors influencing violence in what she calls an 'ecological model', Moser, on the other hand, argues that an integrated framework of violence should identify and combine four different levels: structural, institutional, interpersonal/

community and individual since 'no single causal level in itself determines violence, but that each, when combined with one or more additional causal variables, may yield a situation where violence occurs' (2001: 39). Different from the continuum of violence model, in the ecological model, violence is rooted in multiple layers of society (Heise, 1998). Following scholars using the ecological model and Galtung, but adding to their analysis, this article argues that there are broad and interlinked personal, socio-economic, cultural, political, psychological root causes of violence in societies as well as a reinforcing intersection of inequalities. Thus, one requires a larger perspective in order to understand violence in general. Such a generalization makes it possible to see the intersectionality of various axes of inequality (such as ethnicity and gender, gender and poverty, etc.), identifying grounds of violence exercised at various levels (interpersonal, intergroup and international) by different social and political actors, and transitions between various forms and levels of violence.

The approach suggested here, rather than being limited to a gendered analysis of power (in the 'continuum model'), or to intersectionality, extends one's understanding of violence whereby it is seen as stemming from all forms of abuse of power inequalities. According to the report issued by the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group in 1983, various forms of societal violence are both *engendered and normalized* by cultural and institutional inequality. Thus, linking various forms of violence not only requires analyzing gender roles, but also adopting a more extensive perspective that equips one to see the kinds of socio-cultural, political and economic inequalities abused by individuals, groups or states, along with intersections of inequalities and continuum of violence, thus allowing one to see that violence is 'a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational and socio-cultural factors' (Heise, 1998: 263–264). Therefore, through this model, one acknowledges that there are interlinkages and continuity between different forms of violence along a dimension (e.g. gender) as in the continuum of violence debates. However, it also recognizes that different forms of violence can be rooted in various levels of factors, and that understanding these on a broader scale can also help us see the injustices and power inequalities rooted in other types of violence.

Women in policy-making in Turkey in an increasingly violent atmosphere

Turkey held national elections on 12 June 2011, which resulted in 79 women MPs (14.41%)[2] being elected to parliament (TBMM, 2011); this was the first time in history where the number of women MPs rose above 10%. The environment that led to this increase in numbers was largely shaped by the new identity movements in the 1990s, a period marked by the crystallization of identity politics in Turkish politics (Ayata, 1997; Diner and Toktaş, 2010) and one that became a platform for the struggle against different forms of discrimination in society. The 1990s saw not only an increase in women's organizations, but also a diversification within the feminist movement itself based on divergent identities of women – Islamist, Kurdish nationalist and LGBT movements, to name a few (Diner and Toktaş, 2010). Parallel to these developments, the percentage of women MPs increased from 1.8 % to 4% in 1999, going up to 4.4% in the 2002 and 9.1% in the 2007 elections (KGSM, 2008).

The 1990s were also significant in the sense that the Kurdish issue witnessed its most violent phase in the form of village evacuations, human rights abuses, as well as state–PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan – Kurdistan Workers' Party) confrontations in south-eastern Turkey. In 1999, with the capture of the PKK leader Öcalan and acceptance of Turkey's EU candidacy, the Kurdish issue took a new turn. Despite a continuation of sporadic violence in all parts of the country, there were new laws and reforms, and hopes rose for a peaceful resolution of the conflict after the 'Kurdish Opening' in 2009. Unfortunately, it failed shortly thereafter following the increased number of deaths among the Turkish military and the PKK, which led to increasing social polarization between Turks and Kurds. In January 2013, the government initiated another democratic phase. Despite hopeful anticipation, women have not yet been significantly incorporated into the peace process. While women have experienced the conflict in many different ways (Çelik, 2005), they have thus far only been perceived as 'mothers who suffered', i.e. victims and not active participants in a peace process (Çağlayan, 2010).

The 2000s were also a negative turning point in terms of visualizations of VAW. Not only was this violence presented more graphically on TV and in newspapers, but there was also a drastic increase in the number of women killed. According to Ministry of Justice statistics, the number of women killed violently increased by 1400% between 2004 and 2011 (*Siyaset Dergisi*, 2011). Although there have been some positive changes in how this issue is being addressed, including both the signing of international documents[3] and amendments to domestic laws,[4] the last two governments formed by the ruling party AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – Justice and Development Party) have been criticized for having concentrated their efforts on the family, rather than on women per se, and thus limiting women's role purely to motherhood.[5]

Interlinking forms of violence in the Turkish context

Although it may initially seem like the two types of violence are unrelated, one stemming from gender relations and the other being an ethnic conflict arising from the state–PKK armed confrontation, both deploy inequalities and injustices in different forms. VAW is marked by gender inequality between men and women and by socio-cultural institutions and teachings that perpetuate this understanding. Violence in the Kurdish issue in Turkey is a result of historical discrimination against Kurds in Turkey, the exercise of violent oppression by the Turkish state especially in the southeast following the 1980 coup d'état (Kıbrıs, 2014; Saatçi, 2002) *and* the emergence of the PKK as a violent actor.

The Kurdish issue can also be analyzed through the intersection of gender and ethnicity. One of the most famous studies on the effect of military service in eastern and southeastern Anatolia in the 1990s, where violence reached brutal proportions, shows that soldiers who did their military service in these regions were traumatized and were more inclined towards violence in their post-military lives (Mater, 1999). Similarly, the results of a study released by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in March 2013 shows that around 20,000 arms had been confiscated in the preceding year. More interestingly, one out of four of the men whose arms were confiscated, either because they had used violence against their partners or could not manage their anger, were either policemen or

members of the military (*Radikal*, 2013). The conflict was gendered in the way that security forces, more specifically the village guards, were involved in violent acts towards women in the long-lasting war. According to data released by the Diyarbakir Human Rights Association, village guards committed various crimes, some of which included the harassment and rape of women (IHD, 2013). Although few in number, several publications have documented the sexual violation of women prisoners (Keskin and Yurtsever, 2006; Kutschera, 1993) and the sexual mutilation of female guerilla fighters (Wolf, cited in Weiss, 2010). The sudden mass displacement of Kurds to city centers also led to increasing suicide rates among Kurdish women (Halis, 2001) and forced prostitution (Sümbül, 2004).

Although there is a continuum of violence spreading from battlefield to homes, especially when men increasingly commit domestic violence when they themselves face violence from the state security forces (Kuloğlu-Karslı, 2012), VAW in Turkey cannot be explained by this linkage alone or only by the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity. Besides the fact that violence became a part of many lives during the long war, there are other socio-cultural and institutional reasons, such as the 'continuum of patriarchal patterns of violence against women' (Sev'er and Yurdakul, 2001: 964) affecting both Turks and Kurds, for the existence of VAW. Altınay and Arat (2009), for example, showed that violence experienced or witnessed during childhood doubles the likelihood of violent behavior, with the greatest factor increasing physical abuse being the mother having been subject to physical violence by her father. Other factors listed are women having a higher income than men, not having family approval for marriage, and having lower educational levels. Similarly, the violence in the Kurdish issue is not only a product of gendered violence or the intersection of gender and ethnicity. It is also the consequence of social, economic and political inequalities in Turkey and the existence of violent actors (both the PKK and the Turkish security forces).

Methodology

The 24th Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) formed its 61st cabinet on 6 August 2011, with the AKP as the ruling party, the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – Republican People's Party) as the main opposition party, and the MHP (*Milliyet*çi *Hareket Partisi* – Nationalistic Action Party) and the BDP (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* – Peace and Development Party) as the other opposition parties. Table 1 shows the political composition of the TGNA as of February 2013.

This research focused on two specific types of violence, namely VAW and violence resulting from the armed conflict in Turkey. The former is a form of gender-based violence, however the latter, while containing gendered aspects, also has economic, political and social facets. Identifying intersections of various forms of inequalities, seeing violence as a continuum along gendered lines, and more importantly, detecting structural inequalities in the society, not limited to gender inequality, makes it easier to recognize how two forms of violence are interlinked. Consequently, this article aims to determine the extent to which, and why, women parliamentarians make this connection. To provide this analysis, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 28 women MPs (35% of all women MPs) between October 2011 and July 2012 (see Table 2; in addition

Table 1. Number of women MPs in the TGNA.

Party	Number of women MPs	Number of MPs in the TGNA	% of women MPs
AKP	46	326	14.11%
BDP[a]	11	35	31.42%[b]
CHP	19	134	14.17%
MHP	3	52	5.76%
Total	79	549	14.38%

[a]Two independent women MPs are also included in this group. Because of the restriction for political party membership imposed by the Constitutional Court, they have not been allowed to join BDP. However, ideologically they can be considered as part of the BDP since in fact, they are de facto BDP members.
[b]Excluding the independent MPs, the percentage is 31.03%.

Table 2. Number of women interviewed.

Party	Number of women MPs	Number of women MPs interviewed	% of women MPs interviewed
AKP	46	17	36.96%
BDP	11	3	27.27%
CHP	19	7	36.84%
MHP	3	1	33.33%
Total	79	28	35.44%

Table 3 shows membership of civil society organizations among women MPs). Among these MPs, nine were Kurdish (six from AKP, three from BDP). The aim of the interviews was to understand how MPs see their gender identity, how they perceived these two types of violence and their solutions to them. I also utilized the information about the MPs available on the TGNA website and in newspapers, and on several occasions I listened to them speak on VAW and/or the Kurdish issue.

Although the MPs provided me with their definitions of the two types of violence and violence in abstract terms, these data were used to understand whether they drew connections between the continuum of violence, the gendered aspect of violence and the ecological causes of violence.

Peaceful society: An item on women's agenda?

Most women MPs emphasized that they did not consider themselves as 'women' MPs, but rather wanted to be known as MPs representing their parties and constituents (with AKP MPs being in the majority). They gave as their reason for not emphasizing their gender the desire not to be seen as having been elected on the basis of their sex, but rather because of their skills as politicians. The majority also believed that women are different from men in many aspects, mostly stressing their innate or learned 'emotional' and 'empathic' characteristics (64%); however, a relatively smaller percentage (32%)

believed that women are more peaceful (9 out of 28). Those who argued that women are innately more peaceful showed how women in parliament usually refrain from engaging in fighting or use a different language in their address to the 'other.' They based this belief on the fact that being mothers make women less confrontational and more empathetic. However, a look at the minutes of parliamentary sessions where women MPs also attacked each other undermines this contention.

While acknowledging that women are different, most MPs still argued that political ideologies are more important than gender identity, thus there is more room for women and men to work under the same political party than there is for women from different political parties to work together. Women MPs, who did not see themselves as representing women, talked about how politics has an inherent hierarchical nature in which gendered roles can be replicated and women can be forced to choose either to 'act strongly like men' in a male-dominated world, or to exaggerate feminine characteristics to be different rather than acting like who they are (interview, CHP MP, 11 August 2011).

A great majority of women MPs acknowledged that the Kurdish issue is a question of human rights and democracy (24 out of 28), and all of them argued that VAW is an important issue that needs to be handled and addressed by changing both individuals and the structures that fuel violence. Yet, they diverged on the reasons that gave rise to it in the first place and the policies required to overcome it. The following section examines which MPs see violence holistically or separately and then discusses the factors that shape this perception.

Violence as separate categories

Women MPs who defined violence predominantly as direct violence, such as rape, beatings, killings of women, etc., asserted that violence stems from one's physical superiority/inferiority and from the lack of institutions that 'protect' the victim from the abuse of this power inequality. For these MPs, violence was a result of women being physically inferior and not sufficiently educated to overcome the social structures that create this inequality. As additional factors they cited issues like cultural teachings, problems in the educational system, poverty and underdevelopment. They were strong supporters of changes in laws and the educational system, and the reduction of poverty, as well as increasing punishments to deal with VAW. They maintained that if women were not empowered with the means to resist these equalities, they would continue to be seen as victims.

However, in explaining the violence related to the Kurdish issue, they argued that the reasons for violence was the emergence of the PKK as a 'terrorist' organization and its 'manipulation' of Kurds that led to violent confrontation between the state and the PKK, along with the underdevelopment of the Kurdish region. The PKK's use of violence as a way to address the Kurdish issue 'justified' their separation of these two types of violence since, they argued, women did not and could not utilize violence against men. Whereas VAW was seen as stemming from structural gender inequalities, violence in the Kurdish issue was blamed on the PKK as a violent actor. Consequently, while VAW could be resolved through empowering women, the Kurdish issue could be resolved through enlarging the scope of individual rights, not necessarily recognizing Kurds as a

cultural group and granting them cultural and political rights as a group per se. It is interesting to note that both approaches hold an inherent belief that violence can be solved from above (e.g. by the state), and that the solution does not have to include those affected by the process as active agents.

It is also interesting to note that the majority of women MPs in this category were from the ruling party, the AKP (15 out of 17 AKP MPs were in this category), whose election slogan was 'we are all brothers/sisters no matter what'.[6] This is reflected in the definition employed by these MPs for the two types of violence. For example, a woman MP argued that:

> [referring to the reasons for VAW] I believe that economic factors constitute the main reason. If everybody had jobs, not necessarily one that one enjoys … I do not think that he would have the energy to yell at [her], I believe. We all need to work hard to protect the nuclear family. (interview, 18 January 2012)

Underlying this rhetoric is the belief that women exist within the family and VAW is linked to men's economic insufficiency. Similarly, according to this MP, there was no need to talk about people's ethnic identities since everybody was foremost a human being and there was no discrimination based on identities in Turkey:

> [referring to the reasons for the Kurdish issue] First of all, I respect human beings because they are humans. I do not differentiate between a Turk, Kurd, Alevi, Sunni or Arab. I love all because they have been created by Allah. I believe there is no Turkish–Kurdish problem. There is a PKK problem in Turkey … Many investments have been made in the east during the past several years. We, those of us who live in the west, want something to be done there. What a pity! Let the ones in the east have jobs, too. (interview, 18 January 2012)

As these quotations show, those who see violence in terms of disparate categories derived primarily from individual behavior and economic factors tended to minimize these differences through a discourse of 'humanity'. No matter how humanistic and well-intentioned this may first appear, this kind of discourse can actually contribute to the existing problems rather than propose solutions for a non-violent society since it rejects coexistence by accepting difference. Such 'transcendental universalism'[7] (Bennett, 1993) minimizes differences while also imposing the universality of one's own beliefs.

Also significant in these definitions shared by other AKP MPs was that violence was perceived to stem from the dissolution of the nuclear family and the rise of ethnic nationalism; thus, a peaceful society was imagined to be the result of strengthening *family* and *nation*. Finally, there was a strong emphasis on the need for developing the economic conditions of the Kurdish region, to attenuate violence arising from the Kurdish issue, and improving the economic wellbeing of families and raising the educational level of individuals, to lessen the incidence of VAW.

One of the contentious ways in which violence is understood has to do with the question of who has the legitimacy to use it and when resorting to its use can be justified. While some argue that violent revolutions are necessary for the powerless to establish a more humane society at the national level, and to free individuals from an 'inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction', at the individual level, making the

individual fearless and restoring their self-respect (Fanon, 1961: 74), others argue that violence inspired only by a short-term goal can be rational (Arendt, 1970). MPs who made a distinction between the two types of violence considered the PKK as the 'illegitimate' other and the source of violence, leaving no room for dialogue. There are two reasons for the importance in using 'terror' in this context: (a) by referring to 'terror', MPs delegitimized reasons for understanding why violence emerged; and (b) they claimed that it is because of a violent other, the PKK, that we see violence in the Kurdish issue, or that the state must have made mistakes in this matter in the past, but that this period is over. In doing so, they mostly talked about the 'sensitivities' of Turks,[8] rather than trying to understand the needs of both parties. Their discourse did not focus on an understanding of equality driven from recognition of differences, but rather maintained the belief that such a focus would divide rather than unite. Theirs was also a claim that it is the state that can legitimately use violence.

Interestingly enough, these MPs also did not express concern that men's socialization and their gender roles needed to be understood in order to appreciate the roots of violence. Moreover, they did not mention any need to include men when addressing VAW. That is perhaps why most of them referred to punishment mechanisms and laws along with education to reduce violence in society. For example, one AKP MP was a strong proponent of chemical castration to prevent rape (interview, 1 November 2011). In fact, such an approach in dealing with violence was also reflected in her understanding of the Kurdish issue. Rather than trying to understand the root causes of conflict at various interlinked levels, taking men and/or the PKK as the source of violence and punishing them was the opinion most commonly expressed by MPs in this category.

Violence as stemming from inequality

Ten MPs (3 BDP, 5 CHP and 2 AKP) characterized all forms of violence as resulting from mechanisms to establish hegemony over 'others' and rejecting different identities. For these MPs, the reasons for violence were complex and interlinked:

> I believe violence is a multi-level concept. It is being fed by many factors … However, whatever the reason is, it is obvious that our society lives within a climate of violence. It is so both at the personal and social violence level. (interview, CHP MP, 19 January 2012)

These MPs also talked about how Turkish society normalized violence through its cultural teachings, such as proverbs telling teachers to train their non-obedient students by using violence or husbands to beat their wives,[9] violent coverage by the media and the political violence experienced since the 1980s.

A stark difference was noted, however, between the responses of the pro-Kurdish BDP MPs and those from other parties. While all the MPs said that violence stems from the complex relations that lead to power inequalities between genders and ethnic groups, along with anti-democratic economic, social and political structures that feed these inequalities, they diverged in their answers on the means to reach a peaceful society. They all believed that VAW can be overcome by recognizing women as a socially constructed category, empowering them, and thus, eliminating forms of cultural and structural violence. However, when it came to evaluating the PKK's role in this process, AKP MPs and

CHP MPs argued that while its emergence could be understood, this group's continuing resort to violence was reproducing the power inequality to which it originally reacted:

> In the simplest way to understand violence, [we see that] what lies beneath violence is the drive of the various sorts of power to control the other. (written answer to interview questions, CHP MP, 1 November 2011)

> [Referring to why Kurds resort to violence] we need to understand and look at the process. You need to give them their rights before they use these kinds of violence to demand it. The state does not react until they demand their rights this way … What I am trying to say is that it is important for a state regime to foresee this problem before it leads to violence. (interview, CHP MP, 11 August 2012)

When an MP defined violence in relation to power dynamics, she could then understand why violent means could be used, even though she was against violent means as a long-term strategy:

> It was violence that brought the Kurdish issue to the place it is today, but it could only come this far. In short, the problem has not been resolved, it has only grown into one that is continuing and self-perpetuating. Continued violence leads to the loss of rights gained earlier. If we ignore all the other costs of violence even for a while, this is the deadlock of violence. Violence that claims to have originated from injustice in time can start to resonate the authority it originally opposed to, becoming its micro-copy. (written answer to interview questions, CHP MP, 1 November 2011)

As seen in the above quotes, these MPs argued that there is no legitimacy in resorting to violence even if one can possibly understand why violence became a means to seeking rights during the repressive period following the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey. Such claims resemble Galtung's argument in explaining whether violence can be a means to address physical and structural violence. Galtung argues that in contrast to the revolutionary propositions that personal violence is necessary to abolish structural violence, one should be aware of the fact that there are cases of structural changes decreasing violence without personal violence, and that indispensability of personal violence could lead to its fetishization rather than changing the structural violence (1969: 181). Similarly, Arendt (1970) argues that resorting to violence bears the potential risk of means overwhelming the end.

In contrast to these arguments, BDP MPs maintained that violence is primarily the result of a repressive regime that alienates, rejects outright, and assimilates diverse identities. These MPs claim that a male-hegemonic state produces inequalities and that, thus, both types of violence are political in nature. They furthered this line of reasoning by saying that in the presence of such a state, therefore, it is legitimate to resort to violence to defend these identities and rights:

> The main reason for the violence is the repressive regime that denies identities. I mean, if you reject an entity, an identity, a gender, then it [the rejected identity group] resorts to other means to prove its existence. The Kurdish issue is like that, too. The PKK is seen as a source of the problem, but what was it that led to the formation of the PKK? It is not the reason of the Kurdish issue; it is its outcome … We still see this rejection and repression. These are the

reasons for the violence … The state has become a source of repression and assimilation. In fact, the focus should be on the people, not on the state … You should do things in the name of the people not in the name of the state. (interview, BDP MP, 20 January 2012)

In the words of this MP, we are reminded of Fanon (1961), who regarded violence as a means of liberation and a catharsis to subjugation. The fact that BDP had an organic link to the PKK makes it hard for the BDP MPs to oppose the presence of an armed group or discuss its contribution to a violent environment. In their arguments of 'legitimate self-defense' then, the PKK is an organization that guaranteed that the state would no longer push Kurds into a state of structural violence. Consequently, they argued that the PKK represents Kurds (the 'other'), thus addressing violence requires negotiating with it or with the BDP. Although they emphasized that the path to overcoming the violence in the Kurdish issue lies in establishing a dialogue in the TGNA, they also stressed that peace could only be achieved if *both* sides declared a truce.

The comparison of these two sub-groups of women interlinking forms of violence shows that especially on the issue of VAW, women MPs believed that they understand this type of violence because they themselves are women. However, it is mostly the presence of the PKK, an organization that resorts to violence that prevented women of different ideologies from understanding each other and imagining a more peaceful society. Yet, when an issue is defined as 'above party politics', it has this potential. The interviews drew attention to the fact that the continuation of violence, the presence of the PKK and the AKP's strong belief that the 'Kurdish Opening' is the sole vehicle for addressing all aspects of the conflict have combined to prevent women of different political parties from working for peace together. Concurrently, the enormous increase in crimes against women is propelling MPs to act to reduce violence. Even though the opposition parties still disagree with the governing party on its understanding of how women should be seen in the society,[10] this was somewhat set aside in policies dealing with VAW. Women MPs working on the parliamentary Woman-Man Equal Opportunity Committee argued that despite their differences, they represent the most efficient parliamentary committee in writing reports and policy drafts.

The analysis suggests that Turkish politics is primarily dominated by a government–opposition dichotomy that forestalls the collaborative efforts of like-minded MPs. Clearly, most of those MPs in the two sub-groups who did not define violence as stemming from power inequalities were affiliated with the majority party. Neither the sex nor ethnicity of the MPs defined their understanding of violence; rather, what mattered was how they viewed their gender and/or ethnic identity vis-à-vis their political identity. Kurdish MPs who chose to emphasize their 'Turkish citizenship' rather than their ethnic origins, and women MPs who emphasized their party identity rather than their gender identity were more inclined to separate the two categories of violence. Thus, intersectional analysis to understand whether women MPs link the two types of violence depends on women MPs' *perception* of their different identities. Interestingly, BDP and some CHP MPs, who are ideologically more distant from one another on their understanding of violence and peace, were actually more similar to each other than they were to the members of the governing party. Those who emphasized the need to incorporate

Table 3. Membership in civil society organizations (CSO) among interviewed MPs.

Membership	AKP	BDP	CHP	MHP
Yes	8 (6)	3 (2)	5 (1)	1 (1)
No	9	0	2	0
Member %	52.94%	100%	71.43%	100%

Average: 81%.
Numbers in parentheses show CSO membership among the women MPs interviewed. Of those women MPs belonging to a CSO, 35.71% belong to a women's organization.

women's voices in order to fight against violence and for peace emphasized 'sisterhood', disregarding ethnic and cultural differences.

However, a stronger effect comes from being a member of identity-based, human rights or environmental civil society organizations (CSOs), where the membership teaches 'collective struggle for similar concerns, and empathy in the case of dissimilar concerns' (written answer to interview questions, CHP MP, 1 November 2011). Unlike the top-down, ideological and hierarchical nature of Turkish politics, CSO membership teaches its members to engage in a bottom-up struggle with society itself and the need to create a common language and use empathy in order to establish dialogue that can shape policies to address violence (interview, BDP MP, 31 October 2011). One of the reasons why there is more collaboration among women MPs in addressing VAW is the fact that women MPs sit on commissions that influence the role of women in the society and the women MPs on these commissions are connected to civil society organizations that lobby these commissions (Ayata and Tütüncü, 2008). While many current MPs do have a connection with civil society, membership in women's CSOs remains limited (see note to Table 3).

Regardless of the hope that there are ways in which women could cooperate to diminish violence, in most cases, party identity clashes with gender and/or ethnic identities. Moreover, despite the increasing number of women MPs, women have still not reached a critical mass.

Conclusion

In its effort to understand the extent to which and why women politicians see interlinkages between different forms of violence in Turkish society, this research showed that there are various reasons underlying the differences between women MPs who interlink VAW and violence in the Kurdish issue and those who do not. The most important is how a politician sees different identities in society. Adapting an essentialist view of gender identity keeps women politicians from viewing these categories as constructs; thus, they treat women and ethnic minorities as subjects, sometimes as victims (in the case of VAW) and sometimes as citizens who can be manipulated (in the case of ethnic conflicts). Such a perspective also prevents women MPs from seeing how violence in one realm continues along gender lines in another and how it intersects with various axes of inequalities in society. Referring to personal and economic reasons for violence,

rather than understanding the interplay of various personal, socio-economic, political and cultural factors, and blaming the existence of a violent 'other' (men in VAW and the PKK in the Kurdish issue) restrict the perspectives of the MPs to a world where violence operates as separate categories.

Another reason preventing women parliamentarians from adopting a holistic view has to with their adherence to ideologies that emphasize similarities and 'sameness' rather than acknowledging differences. Religious conservatism, nationalism and patriarchy, through emphasizing 'unity brought by' the *nation, religion* and *family* limit women's ability to see interlinkages. Distancing oneself from these ideologies perhaps depends on the level of one's gender/ethnic identification, but also on one's perceived exposure to discrimination or violence because of one's identities. That is why MPs who strongly identify with the Kurdish movement see intersectional axes of power inequalities and develop an ecological understanding of violence but disagree with MPs who delegitimize violent means to fight against root causes of violence. It seems like it is easier for MPs to interlink these two types of violence by referring to psychological, socio-economic and institutional causes as well as intersectionality of injustices by mentioning the spillover of militarization into other forms of violence. However, as compared to an issue which can unite women by being defined as 'above party politics' (i.e. VAW) from mostly a humanitarian perspective (e.g. stopping femicide), another one which remains very controversial (the Kurdish issue) can continue dividing women on how it needs to be transformed peacefully and on whether violence can be legitimized in certain situations.

Funding

Notes

1. The usage of 'woman' as opposed to 'female' is a conscious decision. I chose the representatives based on their sexes not on their gender identity.
2. The original percentage after the 2011 elections was 14.38%. This was the percentage in February 2013.
3. In 2012, Turkey signed and ratified the Council of Europe (COE) Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.
4. Law 6284, issued on 12 March 2012, for example increased both the protection of women who experience violence and the punishment given to the aggressor.
5. On 8 June 2011, the former Ministry Responsible for Woman and Family was replaced with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. The deletion of the word 'woman' signifies that the government sees woman not as an independent individual, but one that exists in a family.
6. AKP's most commonly broadcast election song went 'Prayers are one, dances are one; we are the subjects of one Allah'.
7. Transcendental universalism is minimization of difference under the weight of cultural similarities such as some transcendental law or principle, and is a form of ethnocentrism, according to Bennett.
8. These sensitivities usually are about Turks' fear of Kurds' dividing the nation-state, and are expressed in terms of need to respect territorial integrity.

9. A famous Turkish proverb says that 'One should not leave the belly of the woman without a baby and her back without beating'.
10. For example, most debates took place between the CHP and AKP in the previous period of the TGNA when the AKP government decided to drop 'woman' from the title of the Ministry Responsible for 'Woman and Family', renaming it the Ministry of 'Family and Social Policies'. This signaled to the CHP that women in the eyes of the AKP exist only as a family member (as daughters, as sisters, as wives, as mothers), not as *individuals* with multiple identities in society.

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