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**THE MEDIA TREATMENT OF THE "THREE CHILDREN" DISCOURSE  
OF TURKISH PRIME MINISTER IN MEDIA TEXTS****Abstract:**

It is seen that the population policies which appear as efforts to control the population may vary depending on the location and the strategies of the countries that they had in the course of history. The population policies in Turkey from the beginning of the republic until 1965 called for an increase in population, but after that year the policies demanded that population be brought under control by reducing the population growth rate. Today it is claimed again that the population should increase.

According to data of the Turkish Statistical Institute, the population of Turkey is expected to increase at a slow rate until 2050 and reach its highest point in 2050 with 93,475, 575 people. Expected to start decreasing by 2050, the population is anticipated to fall down to 89,172,088 in 2075. If current trends in demographic indicators remain the same way, it is predicted that population in Turkey will continue ageing. This situation is marked as a problematic issue by the government; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the leader of Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Prime Minister advises that each family have at least three children.

This study is intended to put forward how the discourse of "three children" of the prime minister was presented in media texts and what kind of discourses were produced out of the three children discourse. The texts that were taken up for this analysis are all newspaper columns. Columns of four national and daily newspapers with different ideologies (Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Sabah, Yeni Şafak) were analyzed with a time period from the year 2008 when the prime minister started this discourse of three children until today.

In the study, critical discourse analysis was used in an effort to point out how the discourse of "three children" of the prime minister was depicted in newspaper columns and the types of discourse that were generated through this issue in the same columns. Critical discourse analysis provides important data in bring out the ideologies that are re-produced by way of discourse in media texts, in determining around what themes any given subject is presented in media discourse, and finally in identifying the relationships between media-government-ideology and discourse by way of analyzing ideological representation through texts.

**Keywords:**

Children, Population Policy, Three Children Discourse, Turkish Media.

## INTRODUCTION

It is known that the phenomenon of population plays a significant role in national policies. While the excessive increase of population is problematized throughout the world, there are also countries that see the slow rate of population growth as a threat (Doğan, 2011: 295). The basis of population policies, which appear as increasing, reducing or preserving the rate of population growth through legal and administrative measures (Güriz, 1971: 13) lies in controlling the population (Doğan, 2011: 294)<sup>1</sup>.

While on one hand this control is discussed in terms of the issues caused in several areas of the economic and social life, by either the plentitude or inadequacy of the population, it also is considered as a field of political interference. According to Lemke, population that is -on one hand- independent of political interference and formed by its own dynamics, yet on the other hand population, which points at a privileged example of the said autonomy, is an absolute political figure (2013: 21). It is asserted that this political interference carried out through population policies is the supervision and monitoring instrument of the power/state (Çabuklu, 2004: 67).

This study focuses on the acceptance of population as a way of interference on the part of the power and examines how the advice of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the leader of the party and Prime Minister, to the effect that every family should make “at least three children” was presented in the columns of the printed media during the period under scrutiny. Within the scope of the study the power-population relation was discussed and the population policies being implemented in Turkey were explained. It was determined how the articles of the Turkish written press approached the discourse of “three children” and how they identify the AKP government through this discourse.

## I. POWER AND POPULATION CONTROL

Population is political, as was mentioned in the Introduction (Sullivan, 2006). Population policies, which emerge due to the imbalance between the predominant demographic conditions and the attainment of determined values or goals concerning a certain magnitude of population, growth, distribution and national development, involves the policies on birth and death rates, population growth, immigration, health, urbanization and people’s distribution on the physical space (Demeny, 1975: 147; Dixon-Mueller, 1993; Sullivan, 2006). Population policies offer a mean to explain why, how and when power intervene with citizens’ lives. In his reading of Foucault, Lemke asserts that, since the seventeenth century, the new form of power has been ruling, preserving, nourishing life, disciplining the body of the individual and having a regulatory supervision on the population (2013: 54).

On the other hand, while Okumuş, who states that the interferences on bodies by the history of humanity, in a sense social orders, political powers, ideologies and religions have been historical, asserts that political systems do not have any objective other than controlling bodies, stereotyping and disciplining them (2011: 51-52), according to Lemke, in the second half of the eighteenth century, this determination to stereotype and discipline emerged as a different power technology that does not focus on individuals’ bodies, but the collective body of the population: A “communal body” that is formed by its own processes and phenomena, and that is entered into circulation with the death and birth rates, health level, length of life and production of welfare. The

instruments employed at this point are regulation and supervision, rather than discipline and monitoring (2013: 57).

World population did not have any substantial increase due to the famines, epidemics and wars experienced until the seventeenth century. In the middle ages, the church favored population growth; yet according to Çabuklu, population was a topic that did not receive much emphasize and rather “left to god” in the Western Europe until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (2004: 49). However, as a strong state in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, where the process of the establishment of nation-states had been witnessed and wars among countries increased, had started to be defined with the plentitude of its population, coupled with the effect of the enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century, population no longer remained as a phenomenon left to its own natural course, and started to evolve into an object of analysis, the subject matter of political arithmetic and science (Çabuklu, 2004: 49-50).

While Foucault interprets population as an object that can be supervised by the power (1991: 100), the nineteenth century is marked as the century when the science of population, or demographics, has turned into a tool in the hand of political power (Duden, 2010: 162)<sup>2</sup>. From the nineteenth century on, rates of death and birth, and all data concerning bodies have started to serve the bio-power desiring to bring communal bodies under control (Çabuklu, 2004: 52)<sup>3</sup>.

However, body's use as a matter of political relations is an instance that can be seen even before the industrial society. As a matter of fact, according to Arpacı, the traces of communal gender and body policies can be found in the Late Medieval. According to Arpacı, what had rendered the Late Medieval the threshold of modernity is not only a chronological adjacency, but the fact that the period handed down a significant experience to modernity in terms of communal gender and body policies. Furthermore, for the very first time the body was subjected to a penal economy in these periods. Body, is the application area of both the worldly reward and worldly punishment at the same time (2013: 132, 136, 139).

The power acting upon life itself, developed in two main forms as from the seventeenth century. The first one to form had placed body, addressed as a machine, on the center. Disciplining this body, enhancing its capabilities, discovering its powers, parallel development of its usefulness and obedience, its integration with effective and economic supervision systems have been ensured with power methods that form disciplines: the anatomic-policy of human body. The body that the second form, which developed a bit later, in the middle of the eighteenth century, had placed on the center was the body under the influence of the mechanics of the living being and that constituted the basis of biological processes. Abounding, birth and death rates, health level, length of life and all conditions that may affect these had gained significance; and assuming the responsibility of these takes place through a series of interferences and regulatory supervision. And this is what the bio-policy of population is. Body disciplines and population regulations constitute the two poles, around which the power on life is organized (Foucault, 2007: 102-103).

According to Connell, state is involved in many ideological activities concerning gender and communal gender, from birth control to forcing women to wear burka, or increasing the number of women working in paid employment. The state tries to supervise sexuality in ways such as the criminalization of homosexuality, laws on the

age of majority, sexually transmissible diseases, AIDS etc. State interferes to gender based division of labor in ways varying from encouragement of immigration to policies of equal opportunities. It regulates workplaces and families, opens schools and builds houses (1998: 174). Construction of the communal gender takes place within the normative process of the power relations that fix the body on the categories of gender and identity (Arpacı, 2013: 131).

The shadow of the state falls on nearly all human activities. The state shapes and supervises everything from education to financial operation, from wellbeing to preservation of public health, from internal order to national defense; and if there is anything else that it cannot shape and supervise, it regulates, inspects, authorizes or bans it. Even the personal aspects of life, or those that are considered to be private (marriage, divorce, abortion, worship, etc.), are eventually subject to the authority of the state (Heywood, 2006: 123). In the establishment and reestablishment of social patterns, the state undertakes a founder role. For instance, even marriage itself is a legal action, legal relation which was defined, regulated and -to an extent- imposed by the state. Another notable interference of the state concerns the field of fertility. Pro-birth and anti-birth policies are disputed, and accordingly means of birth control are either banned or distributed to the public (Connell, 1998: 178)<sup>4</sup>.

Such attempts toward body and family brought forward regulations that leads to the state's family policy producing a new concept of population in the public, demographic techniques of measuring it, its control in terms of morality and health, and its reproduction (Balibar, 1993:125). At the end of the twentieth century, the body has become the key concept for political, social, cultural and economic interference (Hancock, Hughes, Jagger, Paterson, Russell, Tulle-Winton, Tyler, 2000: 1), and the power created an area of interference on the body by establishing political bonds between the concepts of family, marriage and sexuality (Arpacı, 2013: 139)

## II. POPULATION POLICIES IN TURKEY

In the Republic period, the matter of population has been one of the main issues that received much emphasize. While it is generally accepted that there had been no apparent population policy in Turkey before the establishment of the Republic (Baytal, 2009; 118)<sup>5</sup>, two different population policies aiming at opposing targets can be seen after the establishment of the Republic. Thus, the literature on the population policies in Turkey generally addresses population policies in two periods, as before and after the year 1965 (Kaya & Yalçınkaya, 2014: 175). Within Turkey's process of demographic transformation, while pronatalist policies that supported population growth were followed during the period from the establishment of the Republic to the 1960s, it was witnessed after this period that rather antinatalist policies that inhibited the rate of population growth were started to be followed (Akin & Aykut, 2011: Doğan, 2011: 297; Eryurt, Canpolat & Koç, 2013: 131).

It is reported that in the period from the establishment of the Republic until the mid 1950s, the birth and death rates in Turkey were very high (Kaya & Yalçınkaya, 2014: 179), and a fast rate of population growth was adopted as the solution for the reconstruction of both the economic and social lives that were rather damaged due to the decreasing population as a result of the wars experienced in that period. While government agencies and nongovernmental organizations aimed at raising the both bodily and mentally healthy generation of the future during the period from the early

years of the Republic until the mid 1960s, both the Republican People's Party and the Democrat Party, which had remained in force between 1950 to 1960 (Akın & Aykut, 2011; Baytal, 2009: 121; Eryurt, Canpolat & Koç, 2013: 131; Güriz, 1971: 14, 25). In this context, with the population policies it implemented in line with the Republic, as its modernization project, Turkey is considered to be among the countries that switched from high birth-death rates to low birth-death rates and thus configured the growth of the population (Peker, 2012: 2).

The 1960s are marked as the period of planned development. The problems such as unplanned urbanization, unemployment and economic recession that emerged in this period as consequences of the increased population due to the pronatalist policies adopted nearly by all parties and had the quality of being the "official policies of the state", caused such pronatalist population policies to be disputed also in Turkey, new policies intended to slow down the rate of population growth were brought to the agenda and included in the country's development plan (Güriz, 1971: 15, 26; Eryurt, Canpolat & Koç, 2013: 134). In the First Five-Year Development Plan it was reported that there is a close connection between the population and economic growth, that a great emphasize must be placed on population trends and policies, and it was suggested that the substantially high rates of population growth in Turkey have been hindering the efforts aimed at economic development. In the plan it was stipulated that the previously implemented policy of increasing the population as fast as possible, which had its own right causes, was no longer fit for the conditions of the day, and therefore the rate at which population grows should be decreased and the rate of child population should be reduced (Birinci Beş Yıllık Kalkınma Planı, 1963: 67, 73).

However, according to Akın and Aykut, this was not an easy change. Because, the criticism that considered population planning as an interference of the state on families and individuals concerning childbearing was brought along. Changing the pronatalist population policy took a considerably long time and was only possible with the efforts of various sectors, individuals and nongovernmental organizations. In order to change the implemented policy, the collaboration of the media, scientific communities, opinion leaders, the Ministry of Health, associations on obstetrics and gynecology and public health experts had been necessary to apply joint pressure on the decision makers (2011).

The concept of "family planning" was included in the Constitution after the period following 1980. The 41st article of the 1982 Constitution reads as "The state takes the necessary measures and makes the organization to ensure that the peace and wellbeing of the family and particularly the mother and the children are protected" (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası, 2009: 24).

The discourse that encouraged high fertility as opposed to the decreasing fertility, that has started to be raised after 2002 by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, brought along long-winded controversies. According to the data of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), Turkey's population will reach 84 247 088 in 2023. Until the year 2050, the population will exhibit a slow growth and will reach its highest at that year with a value of 93 475 575. After 2050, the population is expected to decrease and fall back to 89 172 088 by the year 2075. In case that the present tendencies in demographic indicators continue, it is foreseen that the population of Turkey will continue to get older. In 2012, the old population (65 years of age and older) was 5,7 million people, which consisted the 7,5% of the total population. By 2023, this

population is expected to reach 8,6 million with a rate of 10,2% (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2013).

This projection is marked as a problematic area by the political power, and with the assertion that a population that rapidly gets older towards the year 2050 would be risky for the country, the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan tries to popularize the opinion that population growth should be supported and recommends every family to have at least three children. The discourse of the Justice and Development Party, which has come to be known as “three children”, is interpreted as a strategic perspective that aims to keep Turkey’s fertility rate at a certain level and to sustain the advantage brought in by the young population ([www.akparti.org.tr](http://www.akparti.org.tr)). However, in the evaluations made on the varying solution suggestions concerning the issues of Turkey’s population in the 2000s, it is asserted that “the measures brought in for the problems concerning yesterday no longer are useful today”. According to Peker, trying to alter the number of children today’s Turkish family has embraced, considered ideal, wants to give birth to and has stabilized, with “a discourse that has no scientific grounds and that would increase the population of the country” would serve for nothing but to create new problematic areas concerning Turkey’s population (2012: 3).

### III. METHODOLOGY

In the present study, it was examined how the articles in the press approach the opinion of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Prime Minister of Turkey and the chairperson of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), concerning that the country’s rapidly aging population should be grown, and therefore every family should have at least three children.

Within the scope of the study, it was tried to be revealed how the Prime Minister’s discourse of “three children” is represented through media articles, and what discourses are generated from this discourse. The relationship between the reality created on the topics the Prime Minister argues within the frame of three children and his ways to justify it, and the social reality created in press articles in relation with the topic was examined. The articles examined within the scope of the study are newspaper columns. Four national newspapers that have different ideologies and published on a daily basis in Turkey (*Cumhuriyet*, *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, *Yeni Şafak*)<sup>6</sup>, have been examined from 2008, when the Prime Minister initially put the discourse of three children to words, until today. From the total 251 articles found, 187 articles as 67 from *Cumhuriyet*, 89 from *Hürriyet*, 22 from *Sabah* and 9 from *Yeni Şafak* were analyzed. The texts that were examined are those directly related to the subject.

In order to set forth how the Prime Minister’s discourse of “three children” is reflected on newspaper articles and the discourses developed regarding this matter in articles, the method of critical discourse analysis was utilized. Critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1989: 49-50; Fairclough, 1993: 135) prevents valuable data for setting forth the ideologies generated through discourses in press articles, determining the themes through which the matter at hand is presented, and for determining the relationships between discourse and media, power, and ideology by analyzing ideological representations on the articles. Van Dijk thinks that in the discourse-ideology relationship, ideologies are not confined to domination, power, or struggle; that is, not only the dominant groups manufacture consent and position ideology as something that legitimize their power, but also the oppositional groups have also an ideology and

effectively organize social representations that are needed for change and resistance. His starting point is that professionals (such as journalists), institutions, and many groups in society have also ideologies (1995: 139-140). Van Dijk thinks that the symbolic elites (such as journalists, columnists, and artists) that control the media contents are those elites who have a partial control over ideological reproduction in society (1989: 21-27).

#### **IV. WAYS THE PRIME MINISTER'S DISCOURSE OF "AT LEAST THREE CHILDREN IS DISCUSSED BY THE TURKISH PRESS**

##### **A. YOUNG POPULATION: ASSISTANCE OR HINDRANCE?**

While concerns over the aging of the population mostly rise in European countries, the phenomenon has become a global problem that has serious consequences for developing countries (Suntoo, 2012: 2). Countries' relations of economy and demographic growth constitute a topic of many controversies, the milestone of which is accepted to be the book Malthus wrote on population. On one hand, it is asserted in line with Malthus' forecast (see 1798) that population grows geometrically and eventually it will be impossible to meet its needs, that the rate of population growth inhibits socioeconomic development, causes problems in social security policies, the old population weigh on the state and in order to ensure socio-economic development governments have to slow down population growth (Boland, 1995: 1258; Sullivan, 2006; Rees, Van der Gaag, De Beer & Heins, 2012: 386). While on the other hand, it is suggested that capitalist formation and technological developments would negate the problematic aspect of population growth, on the contrary the population may support economic development and that the effect of a large population of working age may be evolved into prosperity (Bloom, Canning & Sevilla, 2001: 2).

These disputes can be seen also in the articles examined within the scope of the present study. The topic of population in Turkey, which is frequently discussed in comparison with the population of European countries, is being interpreted to be relatively young yet at the verge on aging. In the way the topic is reflected in the articles, in addition to the establishment of the fact that the population is aging, it is pointed out that also the rapidly growing population is problematic. However, it is set forth that before advising families to breed rather rapidly, some incentive policies should have been implemented, and families that had at least three children should have been provided with some advantages, that in its current state the campaign does not have any social provision, and that the Prime Minister contents with merely asking families to have three children instead of giving the instruction for the creation of such incentive policies. Concerns on the government's ability to comprehend the changes and transformation of the family are mentioned (*Cumhuriyet*, Işıl Özgentürk, 2008.11.17; *Yeni Şafak*, Fatma Barbarasoğlu, 2010.06.18; *Sabah*, Emre Aköz, 2013.01.05). For instance, it is alleged that when it is the education issue in question the government, which has been exclusively in force for a long period, does not have anything to talk about except the "headscarf problem", and that similarly it exhibits an indifferent attitude concerning what the three children will be doing when they grow older (*Hürriyet*, Mehmet Y. Yılmaz, 2008.06.16).

The articles mark the population issue as an important topic and express the opinion that the suggestion to increase young population does not have any scientific grounds. With the words of Taha Akyol; "The matter of population is so important that it cannot

be left to the sole discretion of Tayyip Erdoğan; yet, it is also not a problem that can be overlooked for the sake of opposing Erdoğan.” As a matter of fact, according to Akyol, aging of the population concerns Turkey’s future and “population is absolutely a matter of utmost importance, and should be discussed earnestly without giving way to political biases” (*Hürriyet*, 2012.11.02). On the other hand, while *Hürriyet*’s author Ömür Gedik’s states that there is a overpopulation in the country with the words “one child, or if one is not enough, two children are enough; there is no need for any further crowd” (2010.07.13), Ayşe Özek Karasu explains that “the idea set forth by the Prime Minister to have every family have at least three children in order to prevent the young population to decrease, is not only a social and economic problem, it also totally lacks any scientific aspect” (*Hürriyet*, 2008.03.14). Similarly, in his column, Ahmet Hakan relays Professor Serdar Sayan’s opinion that it is neither possible nor necessary to prevent the aging of the population, and that “the young and dynamic population is not a thing more than a myth” (*Hürriyet*, 2013.02.10).

Within this frame, while the idea that the increase in the working age population would support economic growth is adopted, in some articles population growth is reflected as a problematic phenomenon. Scrutinizing the relation between young population and economy, Mahmut Övür states his opinion as follows: “China will overtake the USA and become the world’s largest economy. India, on the other hand, is expected to overtake the USA by 2050. One of the factors that affect this growth is pointed out to be the “increase in the working age population”; or in other words to have a young population. China and India are the locomotives of the growth of E7 countries... However, in time China’s growth will slow down at a faster rate. The reason for this is shown as the “single child” policy of China. As for Turkey, in 2050 Turkey will be the 12th biggest economy of the world. Concerning the role of population in growth, the following should be underlined: I believe the fact that the Prime Minister Erdoğan persistently talk about the “three children” issue due to such forecasts (*Sabah*, 2011.01.23). At the same time, it is asserted that the international campaign stating that there is an inverse relationship between the rate of population growth and economic development targets countries such as Turkey, that the developed countries try to increase the rate at which their own populations grow while imposing such campaigns to Turkey, and that “all that are being said concerning the relationship between development and population are nothing but made-up data just to hinder the growth of our population” (*Yeni Şafak*, Yasin Aktay, 2013.02.16).

While opposing opinions agree that population policies naturally are closely related with economic parameters and high rates of population growth damages most of the developing countries, it is also stated that “high rates of population growth can only result in political, economic and social instability” (*Hürriyet*, İlater Türkmen, 2008.03.25). It is asserted that the populations of most of the developed countries are stable (*Cumhuriyet*, Oral Çalışlar, 2008.03.09), that a faster growth of population would result in more “unemployment”, “economic problems” and “street urchins”, that the Prime Minister is unaware of the conditions the poor live in (*Hürriyet*, Mehmet Y. Yılmaz, 2012.04.10), and that it is an expensive life being lived (*Sabah*, Erdal Şafak, 2008.04.2; Hıncal Uluç, 2009.03.05; *Hürriyet*, Yılmaz Özdil, 2010.04.07; *Cumhuriyet*, Yakup Kepenek, 2012.06.25; Oktay Akbal 2012.06.14).

In the articles asserting that the number of abandoned children will increase, it will be not possible to school numerous children in good conditions or nourish them properly and children will be forced to work due to the Prime Minister Erdoğan’s beliefs that



“children bring along the means to sustain them” or “Allah provides children’s sustenance” in opposition of the principle of having “as many children as one can afford” (*Hürriyet*, Gila Benmayor, 2008.04.08) it is set forth that the AKP government desires to create “a community that has lost all its value and ability to think in the grip of unemployment, poverty and hunger, that can barely live with the food and fuel aids provided by the government, in return of which the only obligation they must carry out is to vote for the governing party” (*Cumhuriyet*, Ümit Zileli, 2008.03.13).

## **B. THE TYPOLOGY OF POWER GENERATED FROM THE DISCOURSE OF THREE CHILDREN**

Besides the interpretations on the relation between population growth and economic development, in some of the articles there were also comments stating that the ruling party’s advice of “at least three children” has some ulterior political purposes. Within the frame of this theme, in this section the power definitions made in the articles were separated and the visible type of power type was determined.

Although it was mentioned in some of the examined newspaper articles that the advice of three children was being made ironically, in order to hinder the already crowded families living particularly in the Eastern part of Turkey from having more children (*Sabah*, Hıncal Uluç, 2008.04.01), or that the Prime Minister came to his senses after his advise in the past of “Breed with all you have got” (*Hürriyet*, Ahmet Hakan, 2008.03.09), it is frequently underlined that the Prime Minister Erdoğan is fueled from “Nationalistic” or “Islamic” discourses and aspires after “absolute power”. It is alleged that the aspiration of the ruling party for proliferation is an outcome of the strategy to strengthen its force by creating an “unquestioning mass”. In the articles it is emphasized that the will to breed is a resistance in Erdoğan’s world of thought, since according to Erdoğan the family planning and birth control population policies that had been implemented in Turkey in the past were “treacherous policies” and were the “project” of those that desired to destroy Turkish nation. As a matter of fact, according to Calhoun, the nationalist discourse sees the future of the nation in population growth and usually emphasizes on reproduction (2007: 157).

It can be observed that the prominent theme of the articles is that the Prime Minister Erdoğan and his party acts with the desire of having the “absolute power” and that the Erdoğan is declared a “dictator”. Orhan Bursalı’s article in the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* renders this emphasize visible with the words “Pro-autocracy leaders such as Erdoğan and their parties, desires the increase of the masses that would follow them even with the most ordinary speeches! Remember the dictate-enthusiast leaders of the past...” (2008.03.13). While the campaign carried out on advising every family to have at least three children is being interpreted as a clear indicator of the “intervening mindset” of the Prime Minister (*Hürriyet*, Sedat Ergin, 2010.07.22), it was also stated that “Whatever that leaves the Prime Minister’s mouth becomes a law the next day” (*Cumhuriyet*, Bekir Coşkun, 2012.06.01). In the articles it is uncovered that the strategy of the government is built on creating the “average Turk”: “There will be numerous ‘average Turks’: Millions of ‘average Turks’ that appeal to hadjis and hodjas since they have consumed all their hopes related to this world, that forget the woman’s hand they failed to hold in this world with the dream of the virgins that will meet them in heaven, and that get happy with a box of food aid left in front of their doors before elections and in Ramadan! And the ‘average politicians’ elected by these average Turks will make sure that this order is maintained. Average Turks, average politicians,

and an average life!" (*Hürriyet*, Mehmet Y. Yılmaz, 2008.05.09). Also according to Ali Sirmen, this mass of people that are characterized with the statement "as if listening to the piper..." (*Cumhuriyet*, Bekir Coşkun, 2013.01.05), are indeed "Tayyip Erdoğan's voters" and "the least educated, worst nourished, most desperate section of the society that begs for the charity economy" (*Cumhuriyet*, 2008.03.14). On the other hand, the party mass that is tried to be generated through the government's three children policy is being associated with "the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu": "The aim of the dictator Ceausescu was to raise generations that were loyal to his ideology and that were to rule the country with steal wrists. Ceausescu even gave a name to his population project: 'The New Human'. Romania's 'New Human' generations were not to be 'Muslims and spiteful' but strict communists..." (*Cumhuriyet*, Mine G. Kırıkkanat, 2012.06.20).

In the articles that are in the opinion that the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan perceives the family planning or birth control methods implemented particularly after the 1960s in Turkey as the "traps" of "those who are determined to eradicate the Turkish nation", it is evaluated that this approach belongs to the "nationalist" discourse (*Hürriyet*, Mehmet Y. Yılmaz, 2008.03.10; 2010.10.27).

On the other hand, Hasan Celal Güzel, who sees the Prime Minister Erdoğan's statement that "if they do not want our population to diminish, every family has to have at least three children" as the farsightedness of a "National Prime Minister" that has the passion for the ideal of "Great Turkey" reports that; "if serious measures are not taken, we will join the 'elder club' of Europe and lose our claim of being a 'global power'. For centuries, the people of this modest nation have been being stabbed by both foreign and domestic sources. Those that do not want Turkey to grow and develop, have at first tried to prevent our population from growing. Particularly the Marxist planners that dominated the State Planning Institute, which had been established after 1960, reflected the growth rate of the population as Turkey's greatest dilemma. Later on, economists that pretend to be liberals joined them. As for their real supporters, they were the prominent international organizations with the World Bank taking the first place... Do not forget, our target is the 'Great Turkey' of 100 million population. We believe that we will achieve this target by means of our well educated youth that is loyal to its nation and country and that has ideals and faith in God" (*Sabah*, 2012.11.15).

On the other hand, Emre Aköz writes as "nationalist mentality works in the way that Large Population equals to Strong Turkey". "However, this is an outdated idea as old as the World War I. That was a period where armies fought each other face to face, where the side that was superior in numbers usually won... It has been a long time since the advanced technology and nuclear weaponry have broken this correlation. Can you dominate the sky, the space or the cyber space (the internet, viruses, etc.)? This is the main question. It is a known that the Republic, which was established as a nation-state by the Kemalists, is based on Turkish nationalism. The whole education system, political-ideological symbols and the policies followed on various fields are based on this. However, not it has been clearly understood that the Kurds, the existence of which is tried to be melted within the nation -if not totally denied- by the nation state, constitute and will continue to constitute a 'problem' in terms of population. One day, the discourse of the 'dominant nation' that ensures legitimacy will be no more. That day, the minority will be ruling the majority" (*Sabah*, 2012.06.06). Emre Aköz, who explains his opinion that the Prime Minister Erdoğan's call to families

to have at least three children is an appropriate advice from the “nationalist” point of view, attributes this approach to the concept of “nation progressing through the history”: “In short, the Prime Minister’s slogan of three children is a nationalist advice” (*Sabah*, 2010.11.26). Criticizing Şerif Mardin’s evaluation that the call for three children is an “Islamic based recommendation”, Emre Akgöz repeats that “the advice of the Prime Minister is not an Islamic call, but a nationalist one”, and emphasizes on an unmentioned aspect of the topic. According to Aköz, the topic has an “ethnic” dimension: “The population of Kurds grows faster than that of Turks. This, in turn worries Turkish nationalists” (*Sabah*, 2011.10.21).

In the articles generated through the contrast of “us” and “them”, AKP is defined with religious concepts and characterized with the concepts of “ummah”, “jihad”, “fear” and “belonging to the past”. In his article, Bekir Coşkun relays this contrast as follows: “Regardless if you notice it or not, there is a great conflict that continues slowly. While the ‘citizens’ are on one side, the ‘ummah’ is on the other side. It is the face-off of ‘tolerance’ and ‘jihad’. ‘Love’ and ‘fear’ challenge each other from their respective sides. All these are in fact the conflict of two sides. This is the confrontation between ‘condom’ and ‘at least three children’... It is the struggle between ‘yesterday’ and ‘tomorrow’. It is between the ‘past’ and the ‘future’... Look closely, we are right in the middle of a fight; a fight between the ‘light’ and the ‘dark’” (*Hürriyet*, 2008.12.26). The discourse of “us” and “them” once again is reflected in Ayşe Arman’s column with the expression she borrowed from the caricaturist Metin Ustundag: “Here is the real matter: They want to reproduce, while we want to make love! They want to remain forever in this world, while all we want is to live” (*Hürriyet*, 2008.06.21).

Similarly, Prime Minister Erdoğan’s call for three children is also associated with “theocratic” discourse. While in his article published in *Hürriyet*, Bekir Coşkun interprets the call by stating that “since theocratic governances cannot adapt their highly outdated mindset to the people of the day, they try to adapt the people to their ruling” (2009.01.29), Deniz Som announces that “we are on the path that leads to an Islamic state” (*Cumhuriyet*, 2008.03.11). Cüneyt Arcayürek explains that the AKP has long since started to implement the codes of theocratic governance by separating men from women, that with the discourse of three children in a family it stipulates for “secluding the women in their houses, waiting for their husbands” and that there are only days left for this system to be implemented (*Cumhuriyet*, 2012.03.03).

In the article with the title “On the path towards Europe with the mindset of a mullah”, AKP government is defined with the words that “we regretfully see that the mindset of the Prime Minister of the Turkish Republic, is exactly same with that of the mullahs that realized the Iranian Revolution” (*Cumhuriyet*, Nilgün Cerrahoğlu, 2008.03.10; *Hürriyet*, Mehmet Y. Yılmaz, 2010.11.23). On the other hand, stating that he does not necessarily look for a religious reference in every word of Erdoğan, Yalçın Doğan supports the opinion that the AKP government has a religious discourse by stating that “however, from time to time his words do correspond to religious references. Being somewhat optimistic, I believe that even Erdoğan momentarily forgets about the religious context, his supporters ‘come to the rescue’ and remind him and all of us that context” (*Hürriyet*, 2008.03.13).

Mine G. Kırıkkanat, on the other hand, comments on the type of children the AKP government wants by stating the following in her article: “They shape all of them as Muslims and spiteful individuals. Hoping that if children grow by fearing Allah and

respecting their fathers, men would be obedient to the power while women would be obedient to men, they seek to raise servant generations. And they teach their beloved children how to be spiteful and how to be Muslim by beating them and through the laws they pass by beating opposing members of the parliament. They teach the youth, which they order to obey, that tyranny is acceptable in order to obey the order" (*Cumhuriyet*, 2012.03.14).

### **C. DISCOURSES ON THE POSITIONING OF WOMEN WITHIN THE SOCIETY AND INTERFERENCE ON WOMEN'S BODY**

One of the most important themes that have prominence in the articles concerning the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's call to families to have at least three children is the judgments concerning women.

Within this frame, while the government's call for bearing three children is discussed within the context of interference on women's bodies, women's duty and the political plans of the government, particularly in the newspapers *Cumhuriyet* and *Hürriyet* it is asserted that the project the government has in its mind is being unveiled. It is explained in the articles published in these newspapers that the governments' insistence on three children can be read as they imply "women should stay in their homes", "women's duty is to take care for their husbands and children" and that they see women as "egg incubators" and "vote potential".

While the call for families to have at least three children is interpreted as no longer being a sincere petition but the government's "method for family planning", the discourse related with three children is equalized with the position of women in the Medieval and the attitude of the western church towards women. An article concerning women in the Medieval reads as "the Medieval is the age of establishing domination on woman's body. The way woman dresses, adorns herself, walks, sits and eventually lives are restricted. Her employment is already restricted. Her pregnancy, how she gives birth and takes care of her child are all determined. Virginity of the maiden is under control. The Medieval sees woman as an object of sin. Woman is the reason why man sins. Woman is sinful, while man is the victim. Woman must be kept under control anytime, anywhere and in all aspects" (*Cumhuriyet*, Erdal Atabek, 2012.06.04).

On the other hand, it is relayed in the articles that in a way very similar to the mindset inviting women to bear at least three children in Turkey, also the American Protestant Church campaigns for the same. Because, bearing plenty of children is not considered as a choice of women, but a phenomenon based on ideological causes. It is stated that within the population-based fight for superiority women's bodies are seen as machines, that women cannot abort even the unplanned pregnancies in case the state does not permit them and with the effort of "ensuring every pregnancy ends up with birth, even if it has been made through rape" the government tries to rule over women's bodies (*Hürriyet*, Zeynep Göğüş, 2008.10.04; Ayşe Arman, 2012.06.17; 2013.01.16).

While the controversial argument of headscarf has been maintained for years by men and through a masculine discourse, whereas now, one again men argue among each other and decide on something that is related with women's body, it is stated that what women think is being overlooked (*Hürriyet*, Banu Tuna, 2012.06.02) and it is stressed that the dominant understanding in Turkey marginalize women. According to Ayşe

Arman, "If you are a woman, you are already guilty! You are guilty if you do not bear three children, you are guilty if you attempt to have an abortion and you are guilty if you demand the application of humane conditions and require the use of narcosis while practicing your legal right to have an abortion. But why? Because, you are a woman!" (*Hürriyet*, 2013.01.10). On the other hand, according to Emre Aköz, who states that men cannot solve this matter, the right address is women: "Three children: Those with a moustache cannot solve this... The solution is to consult women" (*Sabah*, 2013.02.22).

On the other hand, while it is asserted that the call for bearing three children is in fact the reflection of the religious beliefs of Prime Minister Erdoğan and it is explained in an ironic discourse that Erdoğan's objective is to "have girls bear three children and thus raise generations loyal to their country, to the nation and of course to the religion!" (*Cumhuriyet*, Cüneyt Arcayürek, 2012.02.25), it is also announced that the objective of the government is based on political concerns by stating that "The Prime Minister of Turkey reminds women their 'real' duty: bear children, populate our bloodline, and while on it work for us in the municipal elections" (*Hürriyet*, Ferai Tınç, 2008.03.09). According to the articles, they try to convince women to have plenty of children by "dignifying women through discourses such as 'the heaven shall lay under the feet of mothers'" (*Cumhuriyet*, Orhan Birgit, 2008.03.11).

It is explained that what the Prime Minister Erdoğan has in mind is in fact to close women to their houses and "to seclude them from the social life and make house wives from them" (*Hürriyet*, Tufan Türeñç, 2008.03.10). In the articles while it is noted that the discourse of three children interprets women as: all of them "will be stereotype", "religious and conservative", "bear three children", "remain within the family", "never have an abortion", "either will be 'pure' by wearing scarf, or will be 'impure' by not wearing one" (*Hürriyet*, Yaşar Sökmensüer, 2008.03.09; Banu Tuna, 2012.06.02; Ayşe Arman, 2013.01.10, *Cumhuriyet*, Erdal Atabek, 2012.04.19; Zeynep Oral, 2013.06.09; Hikmet Cetinkaya, 2013.06.26) it is expressed that according to the perspective of AKP members woman's duty is to "care for her children and husband" (*Hürriyet*, Ateş Yalazan, 2011.03.11), and that they are seen as "incubators" (*Hürriyet*, Ayşe Arman, 2013.01.13).

#### **D. WHAT KIND OF A SOCIETY? QUANTITATIVE PLENTITUDE OR QUALITY?**

In the newspaper columns where the "three children" recommendation of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is evaluated, it is observed that the argument between quality and quantity stands out as an important aspect of the topic. Within the scope of the arguments made through the contrasts of maturity - ignorance, education - lack of education and healthy society - unhealthy society, a demand for a smaller society with higher quality is noted and quantitative plentitude is frequently described to be problematic.

In these arguments that can be titled as "a large population or a well versed population?" the government is criticized and emphasize is made on a well educated population. While it is stressed that by advising women to give birth to plenty of children the Prime Minister "cannot be a modern politician", that he shows how "ill-equipped and clueless" he is, and that the recommendation of 'three children' is -in itself- illogical and unscientific, the superiority of an education population over a large population is set forth. The plenty of children policy of the government is estimated to

be end up with masses of “neglected, uneducated and unloved children” (*Hürriyet*, Bekir Coşkun, 2008.03.11; *Hürriyet*, Tufan Türenç, 2008.04.07). While it is concluded that what matters for the Prime Minister is not quality but quantity (*Cumhuriyet*, Deniz Kavukcuoğlu, 2012.06.04), it is mentioned that in fact what should matter is not the magnitude of the population, but the life quality of those that constitute the population: “what is important is to live humanly without abandoning the crowds to poverty, diseases, illiteracy, misery and crime” (*Cumhuriyet*, Mümtaz Soysal, 2013.01.23).

Stating her opinion by saying that although the state’s data calls people to have many children, the main problem is: “We are called not to love our children, but to count them”, Fatma Barbarosoğlu, who considers children to be divine as “gifts from the heaven” and the “fruit of the world”, writes that “children should not be considered through figures, but through the change the family undergoes” (*Yeni Şafak*, 2013.02.06). Implying that the Prime Minister is not knowledgeable on the society, Barbarosoğlu asserts that if the Prime Minister had the chance to learn how his grandchildren spend their times and how much worried their mothers are, he would immediately organize campaigns for children libraries, and points out at the necessity of speaking the lack of opportunities children have instead of loving them through their numbers (*Yeni Şafak*, 2013.03.29).

While the argument of giving birth to many children is made within the scope of the adjectives “mature, developed or ignorant” in terms of the parents, another point of controversy is in line with the assertion that the call for families to have many children is the reflection of the culture that can be summarized as “give birth to as many children as you can”. In the articles, it is explained that the suggestion that one should “give birth to as many children as she can” is legitimized with the belief that “every child given birth to comes with his or her own sustenance”. According to Ertuğrul Özkök, “the highest numbers of unhealthy and poor street children can be found in Muslim countries where the idea that ‘every child given birth to comes with his or her own sustenance’ is most prevalent” (*Hürriyet*, 2008.03.15).

In the articles where parents that have few children are described as “mature” and those that have many children are described as “ignorant”, there are also inferences concerning the consequences of quantitative plentitude. While on one hand it is mentioned that quantitative plentitude would result in a society that lacks quality, on the other hand this idea is opposed with the argument that the most developed European countries try to increase their child population. While in his article Abdullah Muradoğlu quotes actress Ayten Gökçer’s words as “A mature person would have one or two children. Ignorants have many children. This is why Turkey is full of pickpockets and petty thieves. But why? You should not bear a child you cannot afford to raise” (*Yeni Şafak*, 2008.05.13), concerning the consequences of quantitative plentitude Bekir Coşkun writes: “How many maniacs are out there; news of violence just won’t stop.” Bekir Coşkun relates the reason for this situation with the culture adopting the ideas that “give birth and let it out to the street” or “give birth to as many children as you can”. Bekir Coşkun, who considers the unloved and neglected children -that are out of mind to the extent that the monsters in them cannot be acknowledged- as the victims, sees the those with the mindset of ‘at least three children’ as the ones to be blamed (*Hürriyet*, 2008.04.16).

Deniz Som from the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* quotes our humorist friend Cihan Demirci’s explanation that this picture was drawn by the “reactionist, racist and

uncivilized mentality that has been prevalent in the country for a long period, by continuously insisting on having many children”, and asserts that by this means the ruling party has been ensuring that the society became ignorant and therefore easy to collect their votes: The country has become full of psychopaths, maniacs and perverts. Also this winter there has been many maniacs and psychopaths in the country! We have talked about the current situation of the country all the way back in 1995 in our book ‘Good Ones Go to Madness’. Don’t be surprised if those who want to increase the number of the millions of illiterate, unemployed, unqualified and mentally ill people in the country just for the sake of getting their ‘easy votes’, those who desire for a population of useless crowd with the idea ‘the more illiterate the society gets, the more votes we get’, will soon ask for ‘at least three perverts in every family’. This is what befits them!” (2008.04.16).

In addition to the opinions that the call for families to have at least three children would create an ignorant society, and that the young population that is expected to dynamise the society would actually be the source of ignorance, unhealthiness, unemployment and instability due to underdevelopment, there are also opinions that the people will not take Prime Minister Erdoğan’s advise. Accordingly, it is asserted in the articles that “as women and their spouses learn by experience that it is not important just to give birth to children but raising ‘educated, healthy and competent’ children actually strengthens the family, they will make their plans accordingly” (*Sabah*, Mehmet Barlas, 2008.03.10), that the call for having at least three children would mean nothing to conscious parents that try to educate their children properly and provide them with good means (*Sabah*, Şelale Kadak, 2013.04.05), and that in order to increase birth rates provision of financial aids -as implemented in western countries- would constitute a solution for the mentioned problems (*Yeni Şafak*, Abdullah Muradoğlu, 2008.04.06; 2008.05.13).

## CONCLUSION

In the study that set forth how the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s call for families to make “at least three children” was represented in press articles and the types of the discourses generated in the articles through the discourse of three children, it was determined that the topic has been discussed within several contexts including the relationship between population growth and economic development, identification of the political government, the social position of women and the government’s interference on her body, and the quantity and quality aspects of the population.

It is expressed that, in comparison with European countries, although Turkey has a relatively younger population, it still is on the verge of aging, while high rates of population growth also constitute a problematic topic. In the articles where the advice for breeding was described to have no provision, that the Prime Minister is contented with “merely asking people to make children”, it is emphasized that investments concerning the future of these children are of high importance.

On the other hand, it is argued in the texts asserting that the European countries make effort to rejuvenate their old population that the thesis that population growth hinders economic development is a “fabrication” which the West imposes on countries like Turkey. It is pointed out that the goal is to reduce the population of Turkey and block the ideal of “Great Turkey”.

In these texts, while the recurrent main theme is that the AKP government's discourse of "three children" is founded on nationalist and religious discourses, especially in *Cumhuriyet* and *Hürriyet* newspapers, which explicitly criticize the policies of the ruling party, it is argued that the ruling party has a strategy that tries to create an "unquestioning mass" and to convert this mass into "vote".

It is also asserted that the reflection of the governments' world view concerning women emerges as the necessity of "ensuring women stay in their houses". It is explained in the texts which criticize the discourse of three children that the government's insistence on three children can in fact be read in terms of "women should stay home", "women's duty is to look after their husband and children", "women are incubators" and "potential voters".

Another topic being mentioned is the argument of whether a large population or a high quality population is needed. Within the scope of the arguments made through the contrasts of maturity - ignorance, education - lack of education and healthy society - unhealthy society, a demand for a smaller society with higher quality is noted and quantitative plentitude is frequently described to be problematic.

## NOTES

1 Throughout the history, it had been witnessed that factors such as wars, epidemics, and needs for manpower -for instance for agriculture- had determinative effect on the determination of population policies of countries. Substantial changes in population policies are observed particularly in post-war periods and in times when industrialization gains speed (Doğan, 2011: 294). Doğan examines the policies that are intended to decrease the rate of population growth (such as those in China and India), those that are implemented in order to increase the rate of population growth (those implemented in Sweden, Finland and Denmark), and the policies followed for the purpose of improving both the quality and quantity of the population, as it is in the case of Turkey (2011: 296).

2 According to Çabuklu, with the nineteenth century the science of population and demographics started to develop on the idea that society should be addressed as a community composed of equal sections created by the French Revolution, which negated the disunity on the basis of innate privileges (2004: 51).

3 Foucault reports that bio-politics started in the eighteenth century, when living people started to be defined as the population (1997: 73). Foucault initially used the concept of bio-politics, which is a new discourse of the intersection point of information and government, in the 1970s in order to show how the social and political power is used to control and configure human life (Liesen & Walsh, 2012: 2, 5).

4 At first glance, the term "regulation" seems to imply the institutionalization of the process that regulates people's lives. Indeed, using regulation in plural form means to acknowledge and accept these material laws, rules and policies that constitute the legal instruments, through the mediation of which people are rendered compliant to the order (Butler, 2009: 73). The phenomenon that determines the political power relationship is not the quality of those that rule and those that are ruled, but the



law/implementation relationship that is witnessed to be established in all types of society and by means of which social regulation can be established. In order to talk of political relationship, the party that carries out the request of the other party has to do so voluntarily to an extent, or in other words has to consent to being ruled. Of course, all political power relationships require oppression and enforcement, to the extent of the power relation between those ensure that the rules are followed and those that are obliged to follow the rules (Akal, 1994: 15, 16).

5 Through the four centuries between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries, the population of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey followed a stable course. The low rate of population growth in the Ottoman Empire continued during the early years of the Republic state (Tabakoğlu, 2012: 26-28).

6 *Cumhuriyet* can be described as a left newspaper, *Hürriyet* as centerist; *Sabah* as center-right, and *Yeni Şafak* as conservative right.

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