



Mainstreaming, Gender and Communication in Turkey

Turkey/D5.2 Country Report

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Hasret Dikici Bilgin, Istanbul Bilgi University



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at: hasret.dikici@bilgi.edu.tr

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About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalization and polarization in Europe and beyond. It aims to identify the actors, networks, and wider social contexts driving radicalization, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualizes this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarization) with the goal of moving towards measurable evaluations of de-radicalization programmes. Our intention is to identify the building blocks of radicalization, which include a sense of being victimized; a sense of being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures; and coming under the influence of "us vs them" identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Georgia, Austria, and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad labs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs, and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation to test practical interventions geared to prevention, inclusion, and de-radicalization.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of seventeen nations and several minority nations, the project will provide a unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation-states adapt to new security challenges. The process of mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts will be crucial in uncovering strengths and weaknesses in existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad accounts for the problem that processes of radicalization often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national frameworks of justice. The participation of AI professionals in modelling, analyzing, and devising solutions to online radicalization will be central to the project's aims.

Executive Summary/Abstract

This report aims to uncover media representation and presentation of anti-gender discourse as well as the collective and ordinary displays against masculine radicalization. Its purpose is multifold. First, it shows that discrimination and attacks against non-heteronormative individuals and organizations are neither sporadic nor isolated. On the contrary, discrimination becomes organized and mobilized. The fact that the anti-LGBTQI+ march's advertisement is accepted as public service broadcasting by RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council, *Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu*) supports this argument. Hence, the expansion of anti-gender discourse is related to the overall closing of the political space and the rise of authoritarian populism. Second, this report shows with the same coin that there is an increasing awareness among the citizens and diverse oppositional groups that anti-gender discourse is related to authoritarian turn and state-led radicalization. The report elaborates on this argument by giving examples from collective agents against anti-gender radicalization and non-LGBTQI+ organizations' increasing recognition that their agendas are not mutually exclusive.

The anti-gender movement in Turkey is relatively recent, displays similarities with the movements in the other European countries and linked to the authoritarian turn. The report shows that anti-gender discourse is shaped by religious and conservative rhetoric, builds on masculine victimization and identifies non-heteronormative discourse as a direct and crucial threat to the family and the nation. This discourse is countered by the vibrant LGBTQI+ community in Turkey getting increasingly close collaboration with the opposition parties and diverse opposition groups especially of the leftist and pro-Kurdish leanings. The report also shows that there is also increasingly visible ordinary user activity on the social media to debunk the anti-gender discourse.

1. Introduction

Turkish political landscape displays an intriguing case of gender issues. On the one hand, it is one of the pioneering countries granting political and labor rights to women since the early years of the Republic. These reforms continued until recently, especially in relation to the EU harmonization packages. On the other hand, Turkey continues to be a highly conservative and patriarchal society. Female labor participation and school enrollment and attainment rates are still among the lowest within the OECD countries. Early republican period's state feminism which prevented the emergence of an autonomous feminist movement until the 1980s, now appears to be progressive in the face of the current government's gender policy which has become increasingly familial and enforces regressive regulations that violate the reproductive rights of women and especially with the annulment of Istanbul Agreement.

The situation regarding non-heteronormative sexuality also displays internal contradictions. Homosexuality has been legal since the Ottoman period, however, there is a strong anti-LGBTQI+ current against which there are no official mechanisms and/or policymaking. Anti-LGBTQI+ statements and criminalization of non-heteronormative identifiers have become part of the discourse at the top level of politics and bureaucracy. The scant legal regulations on hate crimes are not necessarily put into effect in the criminal cases against LGBTQI+ individuals, Pride Parade was since 2019 and the LGBTQI+ communities have been under increased pressure along with the closing of the political space.

This report aims to uncover media representation and presentation of anti-gender discourse as well as the collective and ordinary displays against masculine radicalization. Its purpose is multifold. First, it shows that discrimination and attacks against non-heteronormative individuals and organizations is neither sporadic nor isolated. On the contrary, discrimination becomes organized and mobilized. The fact that the anti-LGBTQI+ march's advertisement is accepted as public service broadcasting by RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council, *Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu*) supports this argument. Hence, the expansion of anti-gender discourse is related to the overall closing of the political space and the rise of authoritarian populism. Second, this report shows with the same coin that there is an increasing awareness among the citizens and diverse oppositional groups that anti-gender discourse is related to the authoritarian turn. The report elaborates on this argument by giving examples from collective agents against anti-gender radicalization and non-LGBTQI+ organizations' increasing recognition that their agendas are not mutually exclusive. In the following parts, the report starts with the methodology. It follows with the contextualization of the mediated gender representations and their relation to radicalization in Turkey. The report then continues with three sections. In each section, three cases are selected for the analysis of the media presentation, production, and circulation of collective agents of radicalization, stakeholders of deradicalization, and ordinary users against radicalization, respectively. The report concludes with a discussion of the findings.

2. Methodology and methods

Analysis of the mediated gender representations and media presentation for the actors of radicalization and deradicalization requires a methodology suitable for analyzing media texts and images. Stuart Hall seminal book, *Representation: Cultural Representations and*

Signifying Practices, published in 1997, provided an essential methodology for analyzing media texts and images. It showed how visual content, language, and discourse function as cultural representation and are disseminated as signifying practices (Hall, Evans and Nixon, 1997). The report looks at anti-gender and pro-gender discourses via their visual representation according to the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA both looks at the discourse and the socio-political context in an interdisciplinary way (Fairclough, 2013; Wang, 2014).

The report, in this context, takes three media presentations from each group of enhancers and contenders of gender radicalization. Three criteria are taken into account for case selection: 1) The cases should be relevant to the contemporary political environment of radicalization and deradicalization. 2) They should belong to actors who might have an impact on the context. 3) The media images should be powerful enough to connect to the discussion of anti-gender discourse and the counter-actions against this discourse. In the first group, the report looks at the collective agents of radicalization by analyzing an anti-LGBTQI+ *khutbah* by the president of Religious Affairs, intertwining the state institutions and anti-gender policies. It also analyzes two anti-gender presentations, one from an organization that claims to advocate for women and children from a familial perspective, and the other from an organization established by divorced fathers to highlight their victimization due to child custody and divorce payment issues. This part focuses on the officially supported anti-gender discourse building on familialism, religion, male resentment, and masculine victimization. All three cases in this section on the collective agents of radicalization connect to each other by their strong anti-gender discourse and their rejection of the agency of women outside the family. The second group focuses on the media presentations of collective agents, which aim to counter radicalization, highlight discrimination and gender-based violence and bridge the LGBTQI+ issues with the broader socio-economic problems. The first media image belongs to the largest LGBTQI+ organization taken during the Gezi Protests. The second one is a documentary filmed with interviews made by the parents of the LGBTQI+ youth. The third one is a short video clip by another LGBTQI+ organization on Labor Day. All three images bridge the LGBTQI+ issues with the larger social problems rooted in socio-economic issues. In the third part, the report turns to the ordinary users' social media presence in recognition of pro-gender values and debunking anti-gender discourse. Here, a scene from a pop star's concert with the rainbow flag, a song clip by another famous singer, and a picture taken by an anonymous person during the big anti-gender march showing a rainbow. All three media images debunk the claim that the gender discourse is pursued only by the LGBTQI+ community or the radical leftists, not the ordinary people.

3. Mediated hegemonic gender presentations and its relationship to radicalization in Turkey

Turkey displays an intriguing case of gender politics characterized by internal contradictions regarding gender equality and hegemonic gender presentations. It is one of the pioneering countries for the relative empowerment of women in family matters and electoral rights, with a vibrant women's movement preceding the establishment of the republic. The Civil Code of 1926 established legal equality for men and women in both divorce and inheritance issues, followed by the extension of universal suffrage to women in the mid-1930s way earlier than many European countries. However, the state apparatus also prevented the emergence of an

autonomous women's movement. The application to establish a Women's People's Party was rejected on the grounds that the legal reforms eradicated the need for women's emancipation and the Turkish Women's Organization was closed on similar grounds. A sort of state feminism that tied the women's issues to the foundations of the republic was put into effect (Tekeli, 1992), constructing the women as mothers and agents of the secular Turkish modernization. An autonomous women's movement emerged in the mid-1980s as a reaction to the patriarchal authoritarianism in the post-1980 environment. The women's movement in this period also diversified along ideological lines such as Kemalism, socialism, liberalism, and even Islamism. From the 1990s to the mid-2000s, there have been significant gains. "Protection of the Family Act" took effect in 1998 against gender-based violence, Civil Law Reform of 2001 abolished inequality in property ownership in the family. Alongside these progressive developments, however, there remained a headscarf ban for women to enroll at universities and work in the public sector.

The Islamic women's activism against the headscarf ban and within the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi, WP*), played an important role in the ascension of the Islamist parties to power. Partly due to the significant role of women in the Islamist movement, the first period of AKP continued with progressive legal and policy arrangements, including further amendments in the Civil and Penal Code, recognition of the legal superiority of CEDAW (Convention on Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination against Women) in 2004, Labour Law Reform for protection of women at work from sexual harassment in 2003, and establishment of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men within the Turkish parliament in 2009. More importantly, Turkey hosted the meeting of the Council of Europe and played an important role in drafting the "Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence", popularly known as the Istanbul Convention in 2011.

The breaking point in Turkey's gender politics interestingly emerged in the same period after the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the AKP's third landslide victory in the 2011 elections. There were indeed indicators that the AKP's seemingly progressive gender politics was more tactical than policy-driven since the beginning of the estrangement between Turkey and the EU since 2007 (Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün, 2017; 615). Top-level government officials' statements increasingly underlined that the role of women in society pertains to the maintenance of the family and the nation, pointing out to the dangers of women working outside the house to the family establishment. In the meantime, women's reproductive rights have been curtailed. Although the government's attempt to make abortion illegal failed, regulations for restricting birth by c-section and voluntary abortion put into effect (Unal, 2019).

It should be noted that this type of anti-gender approach is new to Turkey. Obviously, before 2012, which may be the turning point for the rise of anti-gender politics, there were obstacles in front of the autonomous women's movement and continued legal predicaments for full gender equality, and a lack of sufficient support for working women. However, the official designation of the women's role as the modernizing agents of the republic prevented the emergence of a state-led or autonomous anti-gender movement. It should be remembered that it was the military establishment that legalized abortion in 1983. AKP's first period in power from 2002 to 2007, continued with legal and policy reforms which started in the previous period along with the EU harmonization packages. Then, how can we explain the dynamics of the downturn?

The answer to this question lies in the historical construction of the secular-Islamist cleavage along gender lines. Depiction of women as modern mothers and modest citizens of

the republic has long been seen as the symbolic presentation of women in the republican secularism (Mutluer, 2019, p. 102). As the Islamic movement rose, the veiled women became a signifier in the gaze of secular politicians and bureaucrats to point out to the dangers of Islamism to the modern life of the Turkish nation. The first period of the AKP, in this context, with the continuation of the progressive reforms and high visibility of women politicians in the party, can be interpreted as a measure against the secular criticisms while the threat of a possible military intervention loomed over the government. However, the developments in the second term of the party in government (2007-2011), including the elimination of the institutionalized powers of the military and the gradual estrangement of Turkey from the EU especially following the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, that headscarf ban cannot be considered as a human rights violation in 2004 might have undermined the motivations for the government to continue with a progressive agenda. In DRad's IGAP spectrum, this turn of gendered authoritarianism overlaps with the notion of polarization at multiple levels. Anti-gender movement and politics hence "interweaved pro-Islamism, neoliberalism, authoritarianism and conservatism" (Ozduzen and Korkut, 2020; 498).

The anti-gender politics in Turkey, which has been flourishing since 2012, displays similarities with the Eastern and Central European countries' right-wing governments and movements. At its core, lies familialism and pronatalism. This emphasis on the key place of family in policies and the designation of the rights also connotes a religious element. The transformed and increased role of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) in general and especially in the making of social policy has overlapped with desecularization and enabled *Diyanet* to redefine the role of women and the issues related to the family along the religious lines (Adak, 2021;202). This new policy enmeshes sexism and misogyny with homophobia making anti-LGBTQI+ politics an integral part of familialism through identifying homosexuality as the subjective enemy of the family, religion and nation. The presidential decree pertaining to Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 was allegedly justified on the grounds that the convention legitimized LGBTQI+ which was not compatible with the Turkish values (*Yeni Şafak*, 2020).

The new anti-queer element in Turkey points out to another internal contraction of Turkish politics. Homosexuality has never been illegal in Turkey. Surprisingly, homosexuality was legally recognized in the Ottoman period in 1858 (Mendos *et al.*, 2020) and was not overturned in the republican period to this date. AKP in its first term in a similar vein to its general gender policies, adopted a lenient approach towards the LGBTQI+ community. One of the first explicitly anti-LGBTQI+ statements came from the party in 2010, when a prominent minister openly declared homosexuality as a disease in need of treatment. Consequent declarations from the ministries on family and health ironically approached homosexuality along health and biological lines while top-level government representatives and *Diyanet* formulated their objections on the basis of the integrity of family and religious principles. Although homosexuality is still not a legally punishable act, several individuals have been laid off from public sector employment after being exposed of their sexual orientation. Government's assaults on the LGBTQI+ community took a new turn in 2015 after the party won the elections for the fourth time and became an integral part of the official party policy. The opposition parties' policies and civil society organizations were criminalized in terms of their support for sexual orientation freedoms (*Bianet*, 2015). Violence against the LGBTQI+ community increased dramatically since then. The Pride Parade, which were somehow held despite political pressure since 1990s, was finally prohibited in 2019.

As mentioned in the Turkey country report for DRad's D5.1, Turkish media landscape has been substantially monopolized by the government since 2010 and conventional and social media have become an integral mechanism for radicalization against migrants, minorities and the LGBTQI+ community. The alternative media outlets have been marginalized, and increasingly since the enactment of the Internet Law in 2007 and emergency decrees no. 667-676 took effect after the abortive July 15, 2016 coup, the government was authorized the intercept and control communication without the requirement of a court order.¹ The legal and policy framework hence transforms the social media landscape into a mechanism for radicalizing agents and audiences assaulting the LGBTQI+ community. Government officials also rely on their social media accounts frequently to reach their audience with anti-gender statements. When it was revealed that an art piece in an exhibition during the Boğaziçi University protests against the appointed rector depict a scene interweaving the portrayal of Kabe (the sacred temple in Mecca) with themes evoking homosexuality, the minister of interior declared from his Twitter account as "4 LGBTQI+ perverts who committed disrespect against the Kabe-I Muazzama at Boğaziçi University are taken under custody" (Süleyman Soyulu [@suleymansoyulu], 2021). The minister later accused the anti-government protestors of trying to undermine the Turkish nation with LGBTQI+. Such statements from public officials trigger further misogynistic and anti-gender radicalization at social media.

4. An analysis of media presence, production, and circulation of collective agents of radicalization

DRad's D3.1 and D3.2 country reports on Turkey extensively focus on the state-led radicalization which has been mediated and mainstreamed by the conventional and social media platforms as discussed in D5.1 Turkey report. The anti-gender public sphere in Turkey likewise is dominated by the government actors and pro-government media, the government organized or supported NGOs (GONGOs) and recently emerged men's organizations. DRad D5.2 report on Turkey systematically analyzed the discourses of these collective agents with respect to their media performance and presentation. The analysis puts forth that the underlying Islamist-nationalist narrative of the anti-gender movement and politics is based on an officially constructed perceived injustice through the social media performance, fitting well to DRad's IGAP (injustice, grievance, alienation and polarization) spectrum. The injustice claim relies on the alleged attacks to undermine the national and familial fabric and violate religious values through gender ideology and attempts to normalize homosexual orientation. This perceived injustice in turn is connoted as grievance through the claims of male resentment and masculine victimization. It also connotes an alleged attempt from the Western world to alienate the people with authentic and local concerns from the national and international community, finally transforming the constructed alienation into polarization along both secular/religious lines and gender/anti-gender lines. The advocacy of gender equality and sexual orientation freedoms is depicted as an act of the enemy and the other in these discourses.

¹ Please see the DRad country report for D4.1 which extensively evaluates the legal aspect of the authoritarian turn in Turkey.

4.1. Government actors and pro-government media

As mentioned above, The Turkish government mainstreamed the anti-gender agenda particularly since 2012. Although the government also took legal and policy actions such as effectively restricting reproductive rights, withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and the official ban on the Pride Parade, the anti-gender agenda is conveyed to the public more through media representation. Mainstreaming the anti-gender agenda through the mediation of media functions with two-fold strategy. On the one hand, the government puts broadcasting bans through the Radio and Television Supreme Council (*Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu*, RTÜK), and Information and Communication Technologies Authority (*Bilgi Teknolojileri ve İletişim Kurumu*, BTK) when there is perceived news coverage or media presentation against the family as an institution and normative social values. These bans are also applicable to international streaming platforms such Netflix. On the other hand, government officials use social media accounts such Twitter to convey anti-gender sentiments and policies to the public audience.

Official state institutions such as *Diyanet* makes public statements against the dangers of non-heteronormative actors and themes. Given the audience making potential of public statements by the religious authorities, these acts produce and reproduce anti-gender sentiments significantly. The president of *Diyanet's khutbah* (public preaching at the mosque following the Friday prayer) warning against the dangers in 2020 was also streamed from the official YouTube channel at the time (See Figure 4.1). Although the aforementioned *khutbah* is currently inaccessible from the official account, the subsequent visual content in support of the anti-LGBTQI+ *khutbah* continue to reach a vast audience. A Youtube account belonging to a pro-government journalist produced media content after the original *khutbah* recording was removed from *Diyanet's* channel. This media strategy is familiar. When there is substantial public reaction to a statement or an act by the government officials, the government downplays the incident and portrays it as an individual act; however, the agenda issue gets delivered to the pro-government media agents in the form of citizen reaction. DRad D5.1 report illustrates this discursive strategy in terms of the anti-refugee radicalization. Regarding the anti-LGBTQI+ *khutbah*, the video content broadcasts the *khutbah* and enmeshes it with the journalist's statements.² In this way, the official anti-gender agenda is mainstreamed into a matter of public debate and concern.

The video has 73K views with 1108 comments. The parts from the *khutbah* is quite close-shot of the *Diyanet* president in his official religious clothing at the minbar of one of the biggest mosques in Ankara. The president declares to the mosque audience that “the purpose of homosexuality is bringing disease and corrupting the generation”. Then, he continues with the out-of-marriage relations depicting them as *zina* (Islamically unlawful sexual intercourse, adultery) and claim that the rise of HIV is associated with these actions. The content producer comments after each excerpt from the *khutbah* engaging with the audience asking for comments and confirmation of the president's statements. He defends the president's arguments emphasizing that these are not personal views, but rather the words of the God.

² The video (*ALİ ERBAŞ'IN LGBTI+ HUTBESİ NİYE KIZDIRDI? #HadiÖzışık*, 2020) is accessible at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnrZFxlWZR0>.

He also responds to the critiques of the khutbah such as the Ankara Bar Association that their criticism stems from ignorance about the religion and becoming an enemy of their own nation.

The video reaches the audience in a controversial way. The overwhelming majority of the audience confirms the *khutbah*'s anti-LGBTQI+ stance and the content producer's follow-up. With respect to the I-GAP, the feelings of grievance against the injustices done to the religion and religious people and polarization along "us, religious people" vs "them, enemies of the umma" dominate the audience responses. As per the title of the video which states that the president is not alone, the comments follow the lead as if an invisible assailant targets the religion and the nation. Strikingly, some of the critical comments appear as similarly homophobic. One comment states that "...a person scorns what he desires most. The number of non-homophobic comments is almost negligible.

4.2. Anti-Gender GONGOs

Some organizations in Turkey, officially registered as autonomous civil society organizations, are in fact either directly organized or supported by the government as the promotion of their activities on their official websites shows them as joint actions with various state institutions. These GONGOs serve for transforming the government's anti-gender agenda into public debate and disseminate the discourse. The organizations such as Woman and Democracy Association (*Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği, KADEM*) identify their mission as the protection of women, youth, children and the integrity of the family. Their discourse builds on "gender justice" to counteract the feminist "gender equality" (Diner, 2018; 104). The notion of gender equality is depicted as foreign and alien, and the norm of gender justice fits perfectly with authentic Turkish culture. The main difference between the government and the GONGOs is that these organizations assert a more radical anti-gender agenda, appearing even critical of the government policies at the outset. In this way, the later anti-gender policies of the government if formulated as a response to public demand from below. The gender justice discourse interweaves religious principles with scientific explanations with a dominant underlying theme that the ultimate aim is the protection of the women and children (aka family) against an invisible enemy. The discursive strategy builds on the biological differences between men and women, and then formulates the family as a union between men and women with different roles ascribed by both biological differences and social-religious norms. The invisible enemy both assaults the women and children and tries to undermine the family union by trying to normalize same sex relations.

A more recent organization, founded in 2016 according to their website, the Turkish Family Assembly (*Türkiye Aile Meclisi*) comprises a striking case. The slogans and arguments of the organizations resonate well with similar anti-gender organizations in Europe (Özkazanç, 2019). They called for the annulment of the Istanbul Convention and the legislation pertaining to gender-based violence and asked for changes in the existing legal arrangements on child custody and divorce payments claiming that it distorts the gender justice. Restoration of the clause of the "head of household" to the Civil Code has been another demand. The Turkish Family Assembly has been very active on the social media through Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Although the number of followers seem to be low on the social media side, they advertise several meetings in different cities and neighborhoods. The media content on the organization's social media accounts is also abundant.

The language used in the media presentations is explicitly religious (See Figure 4.2). They depict homosexuality as *fitna* (seduction into sin and rebellion against the rule) and recite the verses from Qoran. In one media they shared from their Twitter account, the motto is “They are spreading perversion step by step, first LGBTQI+ then pedophilia”. The visual material accompanies a tweet on July 15, 2019 announcing the planned marches against the Istanbul Convention, and the attempts to convert the society to homosexuality (Türkiye Aile Meclisi Bileşenleri, 2019). There are three other visual materials in the tweet. One reads the statement of the Turkish president that the Istanbul Convention is not “nas” (clearly ordered by religion), the other is the cover of a book titled “Homosexualization Operation” (Eşcinselleştirme Operasyonu) and the calls for stopping the “Gender equality as Homosexuality Fitna” (Eşcinsellik Fitnesi Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği’ne ‘Dur’ de”. However, the image above goes beyond all of them. It shows a Pride Parade from an unknown country (not even looking like from Turkey), showing children with rainbow flags or in rainbow colored clothing. This type of media presentation is the most extreme visualization in the anti-gender discourse of these types of organizations.

Looking at the audience consumption of the social media presentations reveals a surprising situation. Although the Twitter account of the Turkish Family Assembly is abundant with the advertisement of various activities including public meetings and marches, and that the announcements are made on behalf of not only the organization but also of other organizations referred as the “Constituents” (bileşenler), there is scant follower activity. For instance, this tweet has only 8 likes and 10 retweets and one single comment. Is it because such extreme anti-gender discourse repels even the other groups and homophobic individuals? Or is it because these organizations are artificial collectivities established for propaganda purposes? Or do the people hesitate to extend their approval to an organization which was also critical of the government for not annulling the Istanbul Convention and the pro-gender equality legislation at the time?

4.3. Men’s organizations

Among the collective agents of radicalization with an anti-gender agenda, the newly emerged men’s organizations form an intriguing case with regard’s DRad’s I-GAP method. In the case of the two other collective agents, namely the government-linked actors and the GONGOs, feminism (and of course gender equality) and the LGBTQI+ community are constructed together as the enemy of the community with an imagined homogeneity in sharing the religious and nationalist concerns. In other words, the binary polarization is constructed at an ideational level. In the case of the men’s organizations, the agent/victim is solid: the divorced fathers. The enemy is also clearly defined: the women they divorced and the Civil Code in its current formulation. The perceived injustice component of the I-GAP clearly unfolds. The divorced fathers unjustly wronged. Injustice, grievance and alienation manifest in the form of male resentment and masculine victimization, which positions them in the polarization of divorced fathers and the women they divorced with legal backing. Two prominent organizations in this regard are Divorced People and Family Platform (*Boşanmış İnsanlar ve Aile Platformu*) and Children without Fathers and Fathers without Children Association (*Babasız Bırakılan Çocuklar ve Çocuksuz Babalar Derneği, BABAÇ-DER*).

BABAÇ-DER, an association formed in Izmir, is highly active on the social media from Facebook to LinkedIn. The chair of the association even made a speech at the Turkish

parliament in 2016, explaining that their main concern is the protection of the children rather than men and that the main threats to the children stem from child custody and divorce payments.³ In other words, masculine victimization occurs through the fathers' commitment and devotion to their children. The Facebook account of BABAÇ-DER is full of media presentations ranging from newspaper clippings about child poverty in Turkey to news about the suffering of children who are changing custody in the hands of the bailiff officers. More strikingly, there are numerous newspaper clippings about stories in which the mothers who physically abuse their children getting the custody. In one Facebook post, the organization shares a newspaper clipping dated 2017 (BABAÇ-DER, 2017). The visual in the newspaper clipping shows the chair of BABAÇ-DER, hugging his two children (one with a visible chromosomal condition) while crying (See Figure 4.3). At the background, there is the logo of the organization. The headline caption points out to suffering of the divorced fathers due to the inability to afford divorce payments. Despite the vibrant social media presentation, the follower activity is again very scant. How does an organization with an outreach to the national parliament and vibrant social media presence fail to reach the audience still begs answer.

5. An analysis of media presence, production, and circulation of stakeholders of de-radicalization

Turkish laws have never declared homosexuality illegal to this day, as yet another peculiarity of the highly patriarchal society and state formation. The dominant policy has been one of ignoring its existence. This attitude in fact characterizes the gender policy in general: non-action and non-regulation. Up until 2000s, the only legal recognition of the LGBTQI+ community in Turkey pertains to the compulsory legal service for every male citizen above 18 and it forms grounds for exemption as the military regulation considers homosexuality as an indicator of psychosexual disorder (Engin, 2015, p. 841). This obviously does not mean that there is no discrimination or violence against LGBTQI+ individuals. To this date, several LGBTQI+ individuals were assaulted, even murdered either by their close relatives, or other perpetrators. As discussed in DRad D4.1 report on Turkey, the amended Article 122 of the Turkish Penal Code regulates the hate crimes. It provides that a person who discriminates among people due to difference of language, race, colour, sex, political view, philosophical belief, religion, religious sect etc. shall be considered a crime and imposed upon penal sanctions. However, the article specifies only four certain crimes within the scope of hate crime: preventing the sale or rent of a property, preventing access to a service, preventing employment, and preventing ordinary economic activity due to discrimination and hatred against a certain group. Besides, the law enforcement in general downplays the crimes against the LGBTQI+ individuals as ordinary assaults rather than as cases of hate crimes (KAOS GL, 2020).

The LGBTQI+ movement emerged relatively recently in Turkey. It started as small gatherings in the metropolitan urban settlements and evolved into institutional character in 1990s. Lambdaistanbul and KAOS GL were among the first organizations reaching out to the resentment and alienation of individuals for the discrimination they experience because of their sexual orientation. Organizations such as SpoD (*Sosyal Politikalar Cinsiyet Kimliği ve*

³ The speech is accessible in the minutes of the Turkish parliament at https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/komisyon_tutanaklari.mv_goruntule?pTutanakId=7491.

Cinsel Yönelim Çalışmaları Derneği) carries the awareness raising activities to the social policy level by reaching out the politicians and the political parties. There are also student clubs in all major universities. They organize protests against discrimination and violence and mobilize the university students for the Pride Parade. The most salient characteristic of the Turkish LGBTQI+ movement is its intersectionality, particularly with the leftist and Kurdish movements. This aspect surfaces in two ways. Many LGBTQI+ organizations highlight the discrimination against their community within the wider context of neoliberal socio-economic order, militarism, conservatism and nationalism (Savc, interviewed by Şebnem Keniş and Tabur, 2019, p. 127). This is also part of an attempt to mainstream the concerns of the LGBTQI+ individuals among the leftist, women's and Kurdish politics. Turkey's brief period of improved relations with the EU in early 2000s forms a turning point in this regard in terms of both engaging the politicians and providing financial and mentoring support to the LGBTQI+ organizations (Muehlenhoff, 2019). The intersectional expansion of the LGBTQI+ activities is also related to the interactions during the Gezi Protests of 2013. Participation of LGBTQI+ individuals and organizations put them into collaboration with other oppositional groups (Ünan, 2015). Since then, some political parties including CHP and HDP established branches on the LGBTQI+ rights thanks to the decades long struggle of the community.

The increased visibility of the LGTBI+ and their public appearance and acceptance among the stakeholders of the Gezi Protest also reflected on the media presence. In a picture shared by KAOS GL,⁴ the protestors from different walks of life were depicted (See Figure 5.1). On the right side of the photo, there is the smoke rising from the police attacks, and the people with banners of various leftist political parties and organizations are side by side the rainbow flags.

The LGBTQI+ organizations are very active on social media as well as conventional outlets also routinely. One of the most famous media presence is through documentaries. LİSTAG (*Lezbiyen, Gey, Biseksüel, Trans, İnterseks + Aileleri ve Yakınları Derneği*) made a documentary, titled *Benim Çocuğum/My Child*,⁵ from the interviews with the family members of the community in 2013. Directed by Can Candan, the movie documents the compassion of the families for their children and the difficulties that they went through together. The faces of the parents were not blurred, which was a strong and bold novelty, to emphasize that the families are not ashamed of their children. The documentary also gave voice to transexual and intersexual individuals families, an issue important as these individuals sometimes suffer from dual discrimination also within the women's movement. Many of the interviewees are mothers, implying that there is still a lot to do to get the acceptance and approval of the fathers, but there are also couples and individual fathers (See Figure 5.2).

The LGBTQI+ community's increased emphasis of the intersectionality of their problems also surfaces during the important days for other disadvantaged groups in the society. A civic initiative *Velvele* operates almost only on the social media outlets, especially Instagram. *Velvele* brings together artists, intellectuals and writers and produces visual content mostly. On May 1, 2022, Labour Day, *Velvele* posted on its Instagram account a short video, with the slogan of "Protect all LGTBQ workers" (See Figure 5.3).⁶ The post celebrates Labour Day, in English, Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian and Arabic. The visual material shows individuals with

⁴ Accessible at <https://images.app.goo.gl/jUm8P44h6GbYrkVbA>

⁵ The documentary film is accessible at <https://vimeo.com/192806811> and the website of LISTAG, <https://listag.org/videolar-3/>.

⁶ Accessible at https://www.instagram.com/tv/CdAiKU2oPMY/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

different skin colors, facial structures and occupational identifiers. It is promising to note that the anonymous or ordinary homophobic assaults and discrimination is increasingly countered by the ordinary users and artists including heterosexual individuals outside of the LGBTQI+ organizations. The next section presents examples in this regard.

6. An analysis of media presence, production, and circulation of ordinary users against radicalization

Awareness raising activities and social policy initiatives of the women's and LGBTQI+ organizations are critical for policy and legal changes. However, as in the case of the other countries, absence of a favorable public opinion enables the politicians to continue with their inaction and more possibly discriminatory actions. Since 2010, there is increasingly explicit anti-LGBTQI+ statements from the government officials at the top level. There are nevertheless pro-gender discourses. Media representation of pro-gender opinions and stances contribute to deradicalization particularly if we interpret through the I-GAP lens. They show that the feeling of injustice is shared by diverse groups, and they are not indifferent to the discrimination the LGBTQI+ individuals have been going through, which may potentially ease the feelings of grievance and alienation. In turn, the bridge between the other oppositional groups and individuals and the LGBTQI+ community, may counter polarization.

One such act came from a well-known pop singer Gülşen, whose songs have never had any political content. Her love songs reached to millions of people, and she has been a well-known performer in the public concerts and music organizations. She had not made any public statements regarding the authoritarian practices before.

In a concert on August 12, 2022, someone from the audience gave a rainbow flag to the singer, which she accepted without hesitation,⁷ and replied that “we will keep it at our most beautiful place”. Display of the rainbow flag and her reply led to a commotion and fight among the audience (See Figure 6.1). This time she replied that “If there is anyone who is not comfortable with the LGBTQI+ flag, they can go to the back”. Couple of weeks after this incident, she was taken under custody on the grounds of Article 216 of the Turkish Penal Code with the allegation that she incited anger and hatred in the society. The evidence which instigated the court case was a video recorded during a previous concert months ago about a person who graduated from a clerical college. The public uproar against her incarceration led to her release a few days later.

An even bolder move came from another popular singer, Mabel Matiz, with a video clip for his song “Karakol”.⁸ The clip has 26K views and more than 42K comments. The clip depicts love and pain of two men. The lyrics are also very powerful stating how the singer suffered when he refused to disclose his lover (See Figure 6.2). The singer's outfit is also out of ordinary male pop singer dress. After the release of the song, the homophobic circles attached him with outrage. A men's magazine decided to withdraw his award in the last minute. The singer

⁷ The full video of the incident is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zviNj2Sd7CE> as well as <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gulsen-konserde-lgbtqi-bayragi-acti-haber-1577269>

⁸ Available on main social media outlets such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook; also on youtube at <https://youtu.be/ptU5VXXHA90>.

refused to back off with a lengthy post on Twitter,⁹ explaining what transpired and reminding us that accepting each other, and co-existence is the key to social life.

The actions of public figures are important. However, it is also promising that ordinary and sometimes anonymous users debunk homophobia and act on the power of humour. There was an anti-LGBTQI+ protest organization in September 2022, titled *Büyük Aile Yürüyüşü* (Grand Family March), which was organized by several anti-gender organizations and released by the RTÜK as a public service broadcasting material. One Reddit user posted a photo showing an actual rainbow on the day of the anti-LGBTQI+ march.¹⁰ The post has been in wide circulation since then on other social media outlets (See Figure 6.3). The comments follow the visual humor, turning upside down some of the famous conservative quotes such as “there is an order coming from above”, and “foreign powers are creating these rainbows”.

7. Discussion and conclusion

This report begins with depicting the legal and policy framework and the socio-political landscape regarding the gender radicalization. It shows that women’s rights and conditions of the non-heteronormative individuals are subject to increasing pressure although there are also promising pro-gender aspects. It employs critical discourse analysis to study the media presentations of collective agents of radicalization as well as pro-gender media presentations of the organized LGBTQI+ community and ordinary users. It finds that anti-gender movement in Turkey is relatively recent, displays similarities with the movements in the other European countries and linked to the authoritarian turn. The anti-gender discourse is shaped by religious and conservative rhetoric, builds on masculine victimization and identifies non-heteronormative discourse as a direct and crucial threat to the family and the nation. This discourse is countered by the vibrant LGBTQI+ community in Turkey getting increasingly close collaboration with the opposition parties and diverse opposition groups especially of the leftist and pro-Kurdish leanings. There is also increasingly visible ordinary user activity on the social media to debunk the anti-gender discourse.

Appendices

Figure 4.1. Khutbah of the Presidency of Religious Affairs

⁹ <https://twitter.com/mabelmatiz/status/1598724399661780993?s=20&t=tYQ8pWZg6f8rhYqk47T6Zg>

¹⁰

https://www.reddit.com/r/Turkey/comments/xhi85u/istanbuldaki_büyük_aile_buluşması_adlı_lgbti/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3



ALİ ERBAŞ'IN LGBT HUTBESİ NİYE KIZDIRDI? #HadiÖzişik



Hadi Özişik
187K subscribers

Join

Subscribe

3.8K



Share

Thanks

Save



73K views 2 years ago

Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Ali Erbaş'ın Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Camii'ndeki hutbesi olay oldu. Erbaş, "Allah eşcinselliği, zımayı lanetlemiştir" sözü LGBT ve destekçilerini ayağa kaldırdı. Ankara Barosu suç duyurusunda bulunarak yaptığı açıklama ile İslam dinine alenen hakaret etti. Ali Erbaş'ın hutbesi Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın da gündemindeydi. Erdoğan, Erbaş'a sahip çıktı, Ankara Barosu'nun temsilcilerine "Haddinizi bilin" çıkışı yaptı! ...more

1,108 Comments

Sort by

Figure 4.2. The Turkish Family Assembly Visuals



Figure 4.3. Men's Organizations Newspaper Clip



Figure 5.1. Gezi Protests Photo by the KAOS GL



Figure 5.2. My Child Documentary



Figure 5.3. Labour Day by Velvele



Figure 6.1. Concert of Gülşen



Figure 6.2. "Karakol" song by Mabel Matiz



Figure 6.3. Rainbow over the anti-gender march



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