The Role of Anti-Gender Discourses, Mobilizations, and Politics in Democratic Breakdown and the Gendered Autocratization in Turkey[1]

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Abstract

Portraying itself as if fighting with the "gender ideology," "genderization" or the "gender lobby" (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018), the anti-gender constellation is now capable of channeling the political anxiety of the disenfranchised and impoverished masses in favor of autocrats against the progressive social justice movements. Gender has now become the normative binding of the autocrat playbook and the pole star of their future-oriented citizenship projects. Anti-genderism intersecting with democratic breakdown is now a globally experienced pattern as seen in Latin America, US, Europe, Russia, Turkey, India, Philippines cutting across the North-South and West-East divides. Dangerously under-studied by both the main-stream de-democratization and anti-feminist backlash accounts, the anti-democratic turns have become almost always gendered. In this paper, I address the question of how we observe the regime transformations if we look at them through the lens of contemporary anti-genderism. Through a critical analysis of recent Turkish politics, I examine the interplay of global anti-gender politics and their local reiterations in Turkey with the process of regime change in three episodes.

Keywords: gender ideology, anti-genderism, anti-gender and anti-feminist backlash, democratic breakdown, de-democratization, anti-democratic transformation, gendered autocratization, Turkey

Introduction

In this article, I limit the usage of "backlash" lens to gender-equality policy backsliding or dismantling, and to frontal attacks against former gender equality progress and gen-

der equality activists. However, to capture the more diverse, vague, and elusive angles of contemporary reiterations of misogyny and their relation to the de-democratization processes, I introduce a broader term as anti-genderism. I refer to the bundle of vague and conspiratorial policies, discourses, and actions which oppose gender equality and gender as a social construct as anti-genderism. Gender equality politics and activism is tied to an alleged international gender lobby (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017; Graff, 2014; Korolzcuk & Graff, 2017; Korolzcuk & Graff, 2018). In the anti-gender project, the separation of sex and gender, gender being a historical and social construct, is degradingly referred to as "genderism" or "the gender ideology."

Anti-gender and anti-feminist backlash has the capacity to rebuke the actual or potential gender-equality gains and the status-quo changes in society as many scholars of "backlash" have diagnosed (Faludi, 2006; Mansbridge & Shames, 2008; Jordan, 2016; Townsend-Bell, 2020). As seen in contemporary cases like the Texas abortion ban, such backlash may even successfully overhaul the reproductive justice policies in so-called advanced or consolidated democracies. However, beyond its rebuttal capacity in terms of gender-equality progress, anti-genderism also catalyzes regime transformations, by guiding the reconstruction of the idealized future citizen, people, polity, and the state.

As summarized above, first, anti-genderism is vehemently against the separation of biological sex and gender. Mayer and Sauer summarize this chain of essentialist equations as "gender is sex is nature" (2018, pp. 29-30). I tie one more step to this chain, "nature is God"; hence, the separation of gender and sex is the main source of animosity and aggression toward progressive gender equality movements and gender non-conforming individuals.

Second, the anti-gender actors and discourses align body, family, and nation as "sacred" confines and communities based on traditional gender roles. A conservative campaign is launched to rescue family and nation from the "gender ideology" which is a byproduct of bringing sex and gender together on essentialist grounds, as the "natural" order. A Manichean understanding of the world sees friends and enemies everywhere; the gender notions of family and nationhood are presented as though trapped between internal-gendered-enemies and the external threat of the global gender ideology. This rhetoric in return is instrumentalized to justify annulment of the international covenants that support gender equality or the crackdown on transnational and intersectional feminist movements. Paradoxically, while the anti-gender actors are globally connected to each other on multiple levels (inspirational, ideological, or financial), they swiftly and decisively become anti-universalist when it comes to the transnational feminist and gender equality movements.

Third, religious nationalism as an increasingly popular amalgamation becomes an inseparable companion of anti-genderism - its content depending on the geographical context. As opposed to what is suggested in modern accounts of nation and nationhood as a novel cultural (Anderson, 1991) or ethnic (Gellner & Breuilly, 1983) construct, religious nationalism summons the religiosity patterns that were not swept at all by the Modernity (Grzymala-Busse, 2019, p. 7). In some contexts, like that of Turkey, religious nationalism will be a fragile and contentious marriage without the so-called "gender ideology"; gender is the much-needed common enemy of this amalgamation. Hence gender by itself, or through the fusions it catalyzed like religious-nationalism, may hold together unlikely political coalitions amongst the fractions of the right. Also, in such contexts the policy changes around gender status quo have been increasingly framed as "moral issues" and they become more difficult to be contested (Grzymala-Busse, 2015, pp. 9-11).

In sum, with an erroneous jump from the particular to general, the anti-genderism takes only one part of the culture and the nation that is traditional, conservative, and dominant and they represent that particular component as if it were the general, the authentic, and the true culture of the whole. Agnieszka Graff similarly calls this pattern "as rendering the conservative as the local and the authentic" (Graff et al. 2019). With this move then, the "proper" or "preferred" citizenry body is painted with patriarchal, atavistic, heteronormative, and nativist hues rendering anything different as "foreign."

I claim that anti-genderism becomes an intrinsic part of autocratic turns first by way of defining the individual, family, society, and nation on essentialist and absolutist grounds – with no exits, or no room for personalized interpretations and differences, nor for transformation from within – and secondly, by way of enhancing coalitions and ideological convergences amongst right-wing actors. Turkey, in particular, provides a critical case to this phenomenon as gendered Autocratization. The anti-gender politics, mobilizations, and discourses have been integral to the recent autocratic transformation in Turkey in the last two decades, under the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) rule. One should remember that the Turkish regime change is gradual and protracted; it did not happen overnight nor in large and mighty waves. It happened through steady drops throughout two decades. During this time, AKP as the ruling party evolved by changing its key personnel, politics, and public image many times. Hence, the anti-genderism adopted and implemented by the party looks differently at different stages of the party's internal evolution echoing with the slow and gradual transformation of the regime.

Second to that, the interplay of the anti-genderism and institutional transformation of the regime is not linear; quite the contrary this relationship is curvilinear and cyclical. On one hand, the Autocratization process negatively affects women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and gender equality. So, once more commonly diagnosed indicators of democratic breakdown are present (such as the elimination of parliamentary authority and immunities, judiciary and media independence, etc.), it is not surprising to expect a regression in women's and LGBTQI+ rights, withdrawal from international covenants that support gender equality, and crushing down on feminist civil society. However, the reverse is also true. Anti-gender discourses, movements, and politics may not only precede the deployment of autocratic interventions on the regime institutions, but they may even instigate, accelerate and shield such autocratic processes. Hence, I suggest an eventful history – instead of a linear causality – to lay out the anatomy of a gendered Autocratization. In the following pages I focus on the stages of anti-genderism's interplay with anti-democratic transformation while treating Turkey as a critical and an illuminating case.

Phase One of the Gendered Regime Change: Gender Dissonance

Turkey, now, is an advance case of anti-genderism due to the development of anti-feminist, anti-LGBTI+ mainstreaming in the official government policy in a directly violent way. However, during the ruling party's early years in power, one might not easily notice their nascent anti-gender and anti-feminist discourses and politics, as there is not yet an observable backlash. On the outset the party might even look pro-women because of their initiatives to empower women. My interlocutors suggest in this section that pro-natalist, pro-family discourses and essentialist gender roles are still prevalent in the formative years of the party and their rule even though they are not yet on the surface and mobilized. These discourses are instrumentalized to soothe neoliberalism's destructive impacts on society. Besides, even the pro-women initiatives of this era were not fully enacted, and they lacked an encompassing gender equality perspective. Glancing at this period also shows what sort of gendered political culture was later going to be picked up and accentuated by the global wake of anti-genderism.

Yeğenoğlu and Coşar (2014) describe the particular and elusive rationale of the early AKP years in Turkey from their formation in 2001 until the brutal crush of the Gezi Movement in 2013 as a period of "silent violence." During these early years the gender policies of the government are, at best, discordant. On one hand, the AKP took some positive steps to eliminate obstacles that hamper women's political and economic development. The best example of this is reaching out to women through the party's women's branches and listing women candidates both for local and general elections amongst leading women in their local constituency. They reversed the headscarf prohibition in public offices and public education institutions.[2] Furthermore, the AKP took initiatives in the parliament to combat domestic violence. For example, a change in law meant that administrative units with a population at above 50,000 were required to open a women's shelter (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011).

On the other hand, some of these legal initiatives for gender equality fell short in practice. For example, the actual number of the women shelters run by the administrative units was never met as required above (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011, p. 563).[3] Besides, when the surface of seemingly pro-women social policies and legislation is scratched, it is easy to find anti-feminist sentiments in political institutions and public discourses. Both the avoidance of phrases like "gender equality" and "feminism" in the names of parliamentary commissions that were established to explore ways to develop women's status and Erdogan's position against the gender quotas or parity are examples of this phenomenon. As early as 2004, AKP attempted to criminalize extra-marital relationships with talk of an "adultery law." This law did not pass, but the discourse that it was wrapped in is important to show the essentialist approach Erdogan and AKP elite have toward women's place in society and to signal what was about to come in the next years.

> I see certain handbills held by some vociferous women [against the punishment on adultery]. In the name of democracy, some women hold certain handbills which are not harmonious with our traditions and moral values; I feel sad for Turkish women. I cannot applaud the words that cannot fit our moral norms, because Turkish women are powerful with these norms. There is no such understanding that a certain marginal group [feminists] would assume to represent Turkish women's strength. In Turkey, 52 percent of the population are women, among whom there are the women who have set their hearts on the AKP. (Ayata & Tutuncu, 2008, p. 381)

In addition, through policy changes AKP slowly started to normalize the essentialized care-giving roles of the women in households. With a law issued in February 2007 the care of the disabled person is prioritized at home through the cash transfers to the "family" of the disabled person, instead of providing disability care at publicly funded health institutions or allocating this cash amount directly to the disabled person as a monthly minimum wage (Candaş & Silier, 2014, p. 119). Candaş and Silier accurately note that in a context like Turkey, where the women's contribution in the workplace is shockingly low compared to the region and the traditional domestic roles for the women have not yet fully shifted, such policies only incentivize more women taking up care responsibilities for the family. They suggest as an indirect consequence women might lose their only legitimate excuse to leave home which is working outside of the household for a salary (Candaş & Silier, 2014, pp. 112, 117).

The same era of early 2000s in Turkey also marks an unwavering privatization of the public sectors, increasing wealth of the secular and religious bourgeoisie, and eliminating the labor unions from the political arena. While the wealth was concentrated in the hands of a small group and the so-called Turkish economic miracle was happening, the

family's role in the society, together with the women's essentialized role in it, was accentuated. According to Yeğenoğlu and Coşar (2014), this is not a coincidence and the AKP's conservative gender politics cannot be separated from its neoliberal political economy. They indicate that the brutal violence of neoliberalism was brought to the fold of soothing narratives of conservative, traditional, family values and morality. As the party increased its electoral popularity with this neoliberal economic success, a strong political challenger within the regime became less likely. In the 2007 general elections, the party gained a sweeping victory. That means they would sink more roots in political institutions and need less of the approval stamp by the minorities and the progressive civil society. A new chapter, with anti-gender backlash becoming loud and clear and the political violence turning directly toward the civil society, was soon to open.

Phase Two: Illiberal Turn as the Leverage of Frontal Anti-Genderism

AKP started its political career as a regime outsider of the secular republic as one of the inheritors of the political-Islamist and nationalist movement. The parties preceding them had clashes with the secular constitution and with institutions of checks and balances. Kalaycioglu summarizes that at the beginning of their political career, the party was still negotiating to garner more power and dealing with a negative image due to their political roots (2012). That meant the initial steps of the party were surrounded with considerable doubt both at a societal and institutional level. As a response, "they took pains" to reinvent their political ancestry and rebrand themselves as the continuation of a center-right, economic liberal/libertarian, populist parties rather than an Islamist one (Kalaycioglu, 2012, p. 7). Erdogan famously said that they removed their National Outlook shirt and defined their party as "conservative democrats" (Yücesan-Özdemir & Coşar, 2014, p. 150). Yeşim Arat indicates that the AKP performed a pro-women image whenever and wherever it was necessary to hide from the scrutiny of their political rivals and to gain some support from their skeptics in foreign and domestic policy and in so doing to build a larger approval around them (Arat, 2022, p. 913).

As the party sank roots in the regime and the society, following their landslide victory in the 2007 general elections, their turn against feminist organizations and LGBTI+ got only harsher in time. This phase of gendered Autocratization is marked by the switch of essentialist gender roles and discourses from a societal plane to an institutional and political one. The anti-gender backlash and breakdown of the fragile democratic regime unfolded synchronously in Turkey and the two trajectories, one institutional and the other ideational regarding gender-equality, aligned at the end of 2011. The anti-abortion campaign that is suddenly thrown to the public and the c-sections being demonized marked that critical turn.

At the end of December 2011, Turkish air forces conducted a deadly attack on the Iraqi – Turkish border town Uludere. Human rights organizations revealed the following morning that the attack caused the death of 34 Kurdish civilians who were smuggling, 28 of whom were from the same family, and 19 of them were underage. The unforgettable public speech of Erdogan, which reframed abortion as systemic murder to be tackled by the state, came right after this deadly attack, known as Uludere Massacre (Kamer, 2021). When held accountable as the head of the government, Erdogan claimed, "every abortion is murder" and the public opinion should be concerned more about abortion than it is with Uludere (Bianet, 2012):

> I am against both abortion and the C-section; from here I want to address those circles and the media personnel who disagree with me: Day in and day out it is Uludere nowadays what you are talking about. But no one talks about abortion. Abor-

> tion is murder. Each abortion is the equal of Uludere in my opinion. I'm asking you what the difference is between the murder of an already born child and the unborn baby in his/her mom's belly. We have to carry the struggle for this together, we have to acknowledge that there is a cunning plan to wipe our nation off the surface of earth, and we shouldn't allow these plans (a chance).

Hence, we had an abortion issue as the Turkish public, out of nowhere with no prior public debate on abortion or any large-scale opposition against it. To some it was nothing more than a discursive maneuver and a cunning distraction. I disagree with this interpretation as the anti-abortion campaign fits perfectly with the trajectory of decaying gender equality in Turkey. Even though this polemic's timing might be improvisational, and it might have served to manipulate the public debate, its content is not accidental. The anti-abortion campaign, and vilification of cesarian, are magnifying glasses of an already brewing anti-gender politics.

The timing of the attack on abortion and c-section is critical as it follows a series of events that meant consolidating Erdogan's power within the regime following his second general election victory in 2007: Amongst them arresting secular army generals with the highly politicized Ergenekon Trials, the co-optation of the Judiciary Branch and eliminating Judicial independence as a result of the constitutional referendum of 2010, and weeding out the opposition within the AKP should be counted first. Illiberalism and the pronatalist turn met at a crossroads, for with the elimination of judiciary independence, there is little left to protect the constitutional rights of the citizens. The abortion debate also preceded a series of arrests and investigations targeting the intellectuals who were previously involved in the Kurdish political movement or became a part of conflict resolution and peace building to end the ongoing guerilla war in the southeast of Turkey (Pen America, 2012). This shows that feminists, and women especially if they are invested in ethnic equality and social justice, were no longer necessary and equal partners of building consensus in the society. They were the first in line and soon to be followed by LGBTI+ activists. Afterward, crushing Gezi protests in 2013 meant intimidating and forcefully controlling the civil society, indicating that violence would no longer be exercised "silently" even when the protests had a civil and democratic character.

The establishment of Women and Democracy Association (Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği, KADEM) – a government organized women's NGO – traces back to the same year. According to Arat (2022), KADEM replaced the existing networks, organizations, and functions of the feminist civil society by replacing them as well as mobilizing women to the party lines "finally establishing a conservative women's organization to mobilize a conservative female constituency" (Arat, 2022 p. 937). Coupled with the consolidation of power and the violent crush of the protest field, the replacement of civil society eliminated two sources of criticism, one domestic and the other international, as KADEM nominated representatives to stand for Turkey in many international organizations and observatory committees, as it happened in the Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, GREVIO, of the Council of Europe which is an independent commission that observes the enactment of the Istanbul Convention.

This period of illiberal turn (following the 2007 land-slide victory in general elections to the crushing down on civil society following Gezi resistance in 2013) reflects most elements of the backlash frame as women's equal involvement in society, economy, and politics regressed as a result of policy dismantling anti-gender public discourses. Even though the law draft on abortion restriction never turned into legislation thanks to the nation-wide feminist protests, the public and free medical access to abortion still deteriorated

at a practical level: Research shows that only 34 public hospitals out of 431 (which constitutes 7.8% of public hospitals) provide on-demand abortion services in Turkey. Abortion is legal but not accessible to underprivileged women who cannot travel to public health care services in larger urban centers or cannot afford the same service at private hospitals (Kadir Has University, Women and Family Studies Research Center,[1] 2016). Next to that, a digital medical platform, named "Gebliz", centrally observed by the Ministry of Health, is launched to record gynecologists' abortion and C-section activities. During those days, Erdogan (back then Prime Minister) and the AKP elite promoted a pro-natalist campaign suggesting that Turkish families should have at least three children (Cumhuriyet, 2012).[4] On other fronts government silently continued to shape the citizenry through policies and manage the population in the lines of their earlier pro-family discourses, traditional and essentialist gender roles. Encouraging an early marriage age for women through state-supported "Dowry Accounts" for couples under the age of 25, and "marriage loans" for couples until the age of 27 (as of 2013), can be listed as examples of such policy portfolios. The year 2014 also marks the record-high misogynist comments in public and the media by the public elite. This marks the elevation of misogyny to the level of official public address. Among countless examples, then Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç's accusation of "women who laugh in public" as unchaste (The Guardian, 2014) and AKP Ankara Governor's arrogant comment on abortion - "Why should a child die because its mother committed adultery? That woman should die instead of the baby, she should kill herself/commit suicide" (Habertürk, 2012) - are noteworthy. In November 2014, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said, at a KADEM meeting, that men and women cannot be equals because of their different natures or fitrat (BBC News Türkçe, 2014).

Toward the end of 2014, we were looking at an AKP that consolidated its power in the party and in political institutions that no longer needed to hide their anti-genderism behind a pro-women veil right before the first popular presidential elections in Turkish history.

Phase Three: Mobilizational Impasse and the Anti-Gender Exit

In 2014, with a constitutional amendment and the presidential referendum in Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan became the first president directly elected by the popular vote. This "new" way of electing the president swiftly translated to a "new" regime type already and practically in place – so called "de facto presidency." In a constitutional democracy, elections surely have multiple roles. They check the pulse of the public and by permitting the incumbents one more term or removing them from their seat, they contribute to the checking mechanisms of the regime. Most importantly, the elections resolve the succession problem; in other words, elections define who will rule next. However, one thing the elections, by themselves, cannot and should not do in a constitutional democracy is to define or legitimize how the next person will rule and by that naming the regime: It is supposedly the constitution's job. Hence, the fait-accomplit and de-facto presidentialism launched as an extension of the popular elections was the de-facto signifier of something else: Turkey's dwindling and dying constitutional democracy. Erdogan achieved this aim of institutionalizing a strengthened presidential system after a series of events: parting ways with another religious faction, the Gulenites, in 2014; the 2015 curfew in the Southeast of Turkey; the November 2015 snap elections; the state of emergency following the failed coup attempt in 2016; and, finally, the 2017 Constitutional Referendum which did not terminate but quite the contrary extenuated the 18 articles of the state of emergency rule. With this last step, the 2017 Constitutional Referendum, the Turkish style presidency, also referred to as presidency alla turca, became the political reality that shaped our regime as well as the critical activities of civil society, media, and academics, and the content of citizenship.

The Turkish presidential system, unlike many other presidential designs in other democracies, does not only mean that the president is the popularly elected head of the executive branch. At this stage of regime transformation, the chair of Prime Minister was fully abolished while assigning the remaining duties, roles, and rights of this position to the President. The President was invested with the right to summon and lead the ministerial cabinet while also being the head of state. Parliament lost its prerogative concerning vote of confidence or to veto the government while the President assumed the power of legislating, appointing key state officials, and dissolving the entire parliament at his will through decrees and/or declaring the state of emergency. According to Turkish political theorist, Aysen Candaş, this would mean to leave the political organ, the parliament, which, at least supposedly, reflected the will of the people and represented also those who did not vote for the President, "at the whims of a single person" (Candaş, 2016, p. 250). The strengthened presidential system, where executive is superior to legislative and where the judiciary branch was already overhauled years ago, also lacks the state autonomy that would be present in a federal regime design as the Turkish republic never left a unitary nation-state model. Following the referendum, with an extra-ordinary Congress of the AKP (3rd Justice and Development Party, May 20-21, 2017), Erdogan went back to the leadership position of his party, a seat that he had temporarily left to the last prime minister of Turkey, Binali Yildirim. Hence, he reached the capacity to act as the head of his party, head of the executive branch and the head of the state, without any term restrictions.

Since then, ruling with presidential decrees became the norm in Turkey. With the Presidential Decree No.1 published in the Official Gazette on July 10, 2018, some institutions and organizations were directly brought under the authority of the Presidency, now rendered as offices and functionaries of the president himself and only accountable to him. Among these institutions there are the MIT - Turkish Intelligence Service, State Archives, and the Turkish Wealth Fund, etc. The Republic of Turkey, Directorate of Communications was launched under the office of the Presidency again during this time (Rodriguez Sanmartin, 2018). Ministers, university rectors, and chief executives, such as the head of the Central Bank, were appointed in or discharged over a night with the president's decrees. And decisions that will affect millions continue to be taken with one person's will, instead of a comprehensive deliberation with the equal components of the entire society; withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention with a midnight decree is one such example. All these current developments tell that Erdogan, party, regime, and state are inseparably aligned now. And it is reasonable to say that 2018 marks the closure of one chapter in the slow and incremental autocratic change and the opening of another; the regime made its totalitarian turn and from now on the global aspects of anti-genderism will carry even more importance for the AKP rule.

In most regime analysis relevant to Turkey, it is forgotten that the AKP, which spearheaded the political change in Turkey in the last 20 years, is first and foremost a mobilizational party. It has a grassroots movement background, and it inherited the practices, knowledge, and networks of the previous Islamist party trajectory, even though during their formative years they painstakingly obscured this past in their public profile (Kalaycioglu, 2012). The very paradox is that as a movement-based organization they are now cursed by the capture of the state machinery.

Movement and "the road" ahead – "yol" in Turkish - have always been an important symbol for AKP as seen in their most popular slogan since 2007 – Durmak yok, Yola Devam ("No stopping, keep moving"). The latter was maybe the most advantageous when they were carrying the struggle of poor-muslim-frontier (of the rich-secular-urban) to dismantle a vaguely defined "tutelary regime." But once they became the regime and the state,

"the road" was exhausted, and the momentum of the movement was lost. This suggests an Arendtian description of a totalitarian movement in paradox when they are in power: The movement cannot let go the state machinery which renders them invincible but at the same time becoming the state-itself costs them losing the interior drive of the movement. (Arendt, 1985, p. 389). There are two solutions to this problem of lost dynamism. The first is irridentism which is present but limited for a regional power like Turkey. The second solution is exploiting an opportunity of internal conquest which is increasingly what is happening with the demonization of sexual and gender minorities in Turkey.

The provincializing of global anti-gender discourses helps AKP to resolve its mobilizational impasse. The feminists and LGBTI+ become "the external enemy and the internal threat" that the movement should now march towards and conquer, thus expanding its frontier. The instrumentality of anti-gender discourses is undeniable especially around the times of election: They create a populist energy that galvanizes the crowds and an "opportunistic synergy" (Graff & Korolzcuk, 2022) by no means identical to right-wing partners. However, there is something more than opportunistic usage of gender politics that aims at the ballot box. Without bringing in the mobilizational element we cannot explain the up-ticking of anti-gender discourses around when the party eliminated almost all its rivals and had already made clear that they have no intention to relinquish power even when they lose (as seen in the June 2015 general elections and in the 2019 local elections). Along these lines, Arendt, in her seminal work, identifies that nothing is as essential as the category of objective enemy for the totalitarian governments:

> The category of objective enemies outlives the first ideologically determined foes of the movement; new objective enemies are discovered according to changing circumstances... The concept of the "objective opponent," whose identity changes according to the prevailing circumstances - so that, as soon as one category is liquidated, war may be declared on another - corresponds exactly to the factual situation reiterated time and again by totalitarian rulers: namely, that their regime is not a government in any traditional sense, but a movement, whose advance constantly meets with new obstacles that have to be eliminated. So far as one may speak at all of any legal thinking within the totalitarian system, the "objective opponent" is its central idea. (Arendt, 1985, pp. 424-425)

AKP did not invent the essentialist, patriarchal, and traditional definitions of sex, gender, and family from scratch. However, the party's alignment with the global anti-gender discourses in the second decade of the 21st century provided them with an anti-universalist and pseudo decolonial rhetoric which is much needed at their mobilizational impasse. The "external-gender-threats and internal-gender-enemies" vector, formulated thanks to this encounter with the global anti-genderism, is what fills the empty metaphorical basket of objective enemy now and after all the other rivals are gotten rid of. This provides a new destination for the so-called "road" that is never to be exhausted, and a continuation of the party's autocratic deployment toward a totalitarian system even when the electoral poles and economic indicators tell the analysts that they should have lost. It is in this context of totalitarian turn and mobilizational impasse that we should interpret the demonization of LGBTI+, crushing the feminist civil society, and regulating body, sex, and sexuality in Turkey.

Tentative Conclusions, Further Lessons

To sum, without anti-gender and anti-feminist discourses regime change would not have extended to this degree and through such solid steps. Vice versa, without the executive aggrandizement and eliminating of political rivals and opposition, the anti-gender discourses would have been pushed back against and/or been prevented from turning into policies,

regulations or laws. At a more practical and pragmatic level, through anti-gender norms and goals, AKP secured political allies from other fractions of right-wing politics and ideology. Erdogan and the party elite, with the help of the supporting elements in state and society, rallied the public anxieties around gender toward large scale party popularity that may reach beyond the core AKP loyalists. The party's women auxiliaries and more importantly government-organized non-governmental organizations – i.e. GONGOs, performed recruitment functions and created the illusion as though some anti-feminist reactions and backlash is popular, widely accepted and even rooted in the society. Moreover, gender plays an essential and existential role in AKP's autocratic deployment. Gender and its discontents provide the content of an empty metaphorical category as the objective enemy without which the party and its mobilizational authoritarianism would lose its future horizon and stamina.

Furthermore, Turkey as an advanced case of anti-genderism and Autocratization grants many lessons for the novice cases of the same phenomenon. As Turkey's long-lasting, incremental, and slow Autocratization showed, early anti-gender discursive acts and the policy changes in gender regime – even more so when wrapped in a women-friendly rhetoric – should be assessed carefully. Gender is the canary in the mine which may signal soon to come autocratic deployment. Second to that, the judiciary overhaul is the critical turning point that unclogs the process of Autocratization and increases its speed. Hence, acts targeting judicial independence should be immediately interpreted as potentially threatening to women's and LGBTQI+ rights and brought to the fold of feminist concerns and progressive agendas. Third, anti-genderism is deeply imbricated in neoliberalism. It is not wrong to say that we are not experiencing the aftermath or the end of Washington Consensus, financialized capitalism, and its globalization; but we are finally experiencing neoliberalism's end-result. In that regard, policies like universal basic income should be re-interpreted not only as solutions to income inequality but as a feminist insurance against the de-democratization processes.

Lastly, gender's key role in the "convergence" among right-wing partners, whereby "these partnerships are frictional" (Farris, 2017, pp. 8-10), should not be taken lightly. It is difficult to make bulletproof predictions for the future; however, in this frictional right-wing convergence through gender, there is a cue for democratic exits as well: As a counter hegemonic response, gender equality could and should be the coalitional bridge for ousting autocrats across a large array of ideological repertoires.

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ENDNOTES

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2. A law issued by Council of Ministers in 1981 during the military regime regulated the public attire and banned religious or ethnic symbols from public offices.
3. AKP's much-applauded women's shelters initiative at local politics remained on paper and it was never fully enacted: In the same publication Yeğenoğlu and Coşar (2012) record that "the 2009 address-based census system counted 244 municipalities whose population exceeded 50,000 and there are only 19 shelters operated by the municipalities" (p.183).
4. The number increased in time, and in 2012 Erdogan claimed women could even have five children as there are laundry machines now and household conditions got easier.

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