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Article:

Enmeshing the mundane and the political: Twitter, LGBTI+ outing and macro-political polarisation in Turkey

Abstract:

To capture the relationship between social media, anti-gender and everyday polarisation, this article identifies the ways social media platforms reflect the mundane amidst the interactions of its users over social and political issues. The paper employs textual and content analyses of reactions to ordinary events shared through hashtags and mentions. We examine a recent case of Twitter phenomena over an outing that showed vigorous debates over issues pertaining to gender and its socio-political connotations in Turkey. The outing involved a divorce and custody court case as well as a secret recording, exposing the sexual identity of a woman popstar #Intizar. It showed how micro-stories can foreground macro-political tensions online. The paper shows the ways in which Twitter facilitated conservative, homophobic, patriarchal and Islamist reactions that harnessed deep political polarisation between the AKP government's supporters and those that declared solidarity with LGBTI+ issues. The article follows how a mundane divorce and custody case exhibited the deep political tension portraying the depth of increasing polarisation over gender on a global scale, exemplified by a Turkish case.

Keywords:

1.Introduction:

Social media increasingly mirrors what is mundane or the everyday today, as much of our socialisation and everyday interactions take place on social networking sites. These interactions reflect the interconnectedness of the social, the individual as well as the political. Our article explores how mundane events reflect and enhance political polarisation, considering the interconnectedness between individual stories and deep socio-political fault lines in polarised societies. We study content and textual analyses of public reactions to everyday events shared through hashtags and mentions on Twitter. This article shows how a mundane event – an outing enforced on a woman by her ex-husband amidst the custody trial of their child after their divorce – availed the digital space to the public to express polarised sentiments deriving from Turkey's macro-political fault lines. Remarkably, the politicisation of the Turkish female popstar Intizar's

sexual identity as LGBTI+ after it was forcefully disclosed when a secret recording became public on Twitter in 2018 presents how Twitter generates publics making the mundane resonate as political. An everyday story otherwise relating to divorce and custody of a child between the Turkish popstar Mustafa Ceceli and his ex-wife Sinem Gedik, embroiled the singer Intizar into their court case as soon as the legal files disclosed a video footage of the affair between Ms. Gedik and Intizar. This video later leaked onto the Internet, showing Ms. Gedik and Intizar in their intimate moments. Ultimately, the event posed challenges to habitual gender identities in Turkey, but also went beyond them to gain – at times unrelated – political tract. Even if the discussion originated from a mundane event of the divorce and the enforced outing, the event assumed much wider macro-political tones.

The ensuing discussion reflected on how an affair between two women fell out of idealised womenness in Turkey, taking its cues from Islam, nationhood and what is expected from motherhood. Following the enforced outing, references to gender, politics, religious beliefs, occupation and even current affairs characterised the reactions garnered within the world of Twitter. We concentrate on the anxiety that enforced outing amidst a custody trial inflicted on "the secure base where identities are constructed" (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998: 25). The paper explores how social media users stick to their "habituated routines" (Giddens, 1991) online, showcasing how these everyday routines not only are an extension of their offline political camps but users also entrench their already existing political camps. The paper shows the ways in which polarisation over ideological issues seep into the mundane or the everyday on social media platforms. We qualify mundane polarisation as taking positions vis-a-vis everyday events as a reflection and extension of the wider political polarisation even when what is mundane should not have any macro-political relevance. Issues related to political polarisation such as foreign threats, terror, political leadership, and party politics were unleashed amidst a mundane divorce and custody story while an ex-husband outed his ex-wife's LGBTI+ identity.

In her article entitled 'Mundane Matters', Enloe (2011) uses mundane and 'everyday' interchangeably, positioning the mundane and everyday as opposed to the dramatic. Whitehead (2005), similarly, employs mundane in equivalence to the everyday, identifying mundane against the marvellous, while Clarke (2013) positions the mundane and everyday against the profound. Following this tradition, our article uses the mundane and everyday interchangeably to capture digital publics related to a divorce and an enforced outing, both of which are not profound,

marvellous or dramatic events but they have created vigorous macro-political polarisation. Polarisation on social media stems, on the one hand, from the delicate regular everyday interactions of people. On the other hand, polarisation also reflects the politically over-processed and government-induced political polarisation in politics, including the troll army of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government of Turkey. As such, the mundane avails a digital culture of lynching and censorship (Bulut and Yörük, 2017). Despite recognising the acts and discourses of political trolls stimulating political polarisation, our paper shows that everyday online communication and mundane polarisation become enmeshed into each other delineating macro-politics of authoritarian contexts.

Extant research increasingly takes a note of how political (Steele, 2019) is expressed in everyday sites (Åhäll, 2019) – i.e., the mundane. Amongst others, these sites can be football pitches (Åhäll, 2019), home and immediate vicinity of home (Mac Ginty, 2019), caricature, documentaries and films (Browning, 2018; Croft, 2012; Tellidis and Glomm, 2019). These interactions are based on an intersubjective understanding that creates the boundaries of the normal (Croft, 2012). In our case, a divorce and custody story encroached into what many have conceived as 'normal' in their every day. The discursive making of cleavages over these mundane events via social media has reflected the anxiety that camps felt subsequently over their ontological security (Giddens, 1991; Kinnvall, 2004; Krolikowski 2008; Mitzen 2006). While the ensuing outing was enforced by an ex-husband, the initial online reactions outcasted the femininity of the pair, away from idealised womanhood, motherhood, Muslimness and Turkishness.

There have been numerous incidences of such social media confrontations over mundane events or gender issues in the recent years in Turkey, but our article shows how this particular media event around a mundane story was significant involving immediately polarised digital publics. We argue that the online reactions to the event also owe back to the recent rise of anti-gender movements on a global scale (Köttig, Bitzan and Petõ, 2017), which is not exclusive to Turkey or Turkishness. Since 2012, several European countries such as Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary or Poland have seen the rise of conservative and partly fundamentalist social movements against the perceived threat of what they call 'gender ideology', which are frequently understood as conservative backlash against the achieved levels of equality between women and men and/or LGBTI+ rights in the context of the rise of populist right (Kováts, 2018: 530). For

instance, Catholic groups in Italy with pro-life and pro-family agendas have created a large anti-gender movement across the country (Lavizzarri and Prearo, 2019). In the same period, the rise of Islamic education along with already existing gender regime mainstreamed anti-gender mobilisations in Turkey.

The paper locates the resulting online political polarisation as a consequence of and response to the mainstreaming of anti-gender mobilisation online when pro- and anti-feminist/LGBTI+ agents confront each other. It associates polarisation via these reactions, considering how users challenge the 'ontological security' of each other with their posts, comments, retweets, and replies. We identify ontological security as "the maintenance of largely habituated routines" (Giddens, 1991: 39-41 in Browning, 2018: 248-249). On the Internet, these routines prevail, while users discuss politics within their like-minded enclaves. They are challenged when the opinion climate becomes prone to trigger anxieties (Strandberg et al., 2019) over the safety of their routines. The associative verbal links within and between the polarised communities reflect this polarisation rhetorically insomuch as they encroach into each other's ontological security. We concentrate on the digital sphere since it is where the mundane becomes a regular talking point.

As such, we trace the references such as the Gezi Park protests, the Istanbul Pride and the July 15 coup attempt that Twitter users entangled with their online reactions to this outing. Henceforth, while one camp undermined the sexual orientation of the women foregrounding references to Turkishness, Islam and the Turkish political regime, the other used #Intizar at times along with the hashtag #LoveWins in order to raise an awareness of LGBTI+ people's rights, love and co-existence. Departing from this media event, the first part of our article lays out the methodology relying on interpretive, content and rhetorical political analysis while the next section captures political and cultural aspects of polarisation in relation to the gender regime in Turkey under the AKP period. The following section delineates Twitter's roles and functions to consolidate polarisation. The final part analyses public discourse that the individual tweets hosted with political references embroiling the mundane and the macro-political.

2.Methodology

The interpretive analysis informs our rhetorical political analysis, consisting of a case study and content analysis of user reactions on Twitter. Following Martin (2013: 1-2), we explore

rhetoric to grasp common ways in which techniques of persuasion operate in political life and how argumentative strategies are employed to shape judgements. This reveals the character of the political. The interpretive approach to study social media also provides our methodological approach with the strength to reject "the superiority of numerical data over other forms of data" (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2015: xxi). "Rhetorical political analysis broadens our horizons as to the 'rationalities' on which politics is based, extending them into areas that involve the affective, the traditional, the figurative and the poetic, and which require us to examine the multiple influences on styles and strategies of political argument" (Finlayson, 2007: 560). We utilise rhetorical political analysis to decipher multiple styles and strategies on tweets so that we can account for an increasing polarisation in 'everyday', encompassing hate speech and solidarity as well as the consolidation of political camps informed by mundane events.

The paper points out that posts on social media adopt discursive and sentimental functions and appeal to emotions. Discourses create representations that not only reflect upon, but also actively construct reality by ascribing meanings to our world, identities and social relations (Author, 2015). Empirically, we follow the manifestations of digital publics whereby disciplinary gender norms are made and expressed to pass judgement on identities and roles referencing the extant political polarisation. Discourses resting on narratives, leitmotifs, and strategic metaphors in political language sustain these manifestations, affecting the forthcoming political and social representations of and appeals to collective rationalities of the public. This has an emotive aspect insomuch as appealing to emotions allows the social actors to skew the opinion of their interlocutors or audience regarding a specific matter (Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999, 92 in Reyes 2011, 785). Focusing on the events of Intizar's enforced outing, we identify an online audience that reflects everyday polarisation in Turkey deriving cues from wider debates over national, political, religious, and gender identities. On the tweets in our dataset, we trace such references as lifestyle, foreign influences, child abuse and rape, Erdoğan, social movements such as the Gezi protests and Pride Walks, and the failed coup attempt of the 15th July 2016. We note these references in italics in our quotations below. As puzzling as these references appear, they also show the capacity of both the mundane and the political to inform each other when a divorce and ensuing outing of a pop singer are the issues.

We reached a total of 72,206 tweets immediately after the divorce and enforced outing, containing the word "Intizar" as a hashtag and/or mention between 14 July and 23 July 2018 via Twitter's API with Webometric Analyst and Mozdeh (http://mozdeh.wlv.ac.uk/). We used Mozdeh to collect Tweets and Webometric Analyst to download 989 images along with the Tweets. Initially, we aimed to use the collected images for our analysis, but most of the images collected were individual photos of the three main actors in the events. We therefore did not include visual analysis in our study, except for a brief analysis of the second most shared image of the announcement by Poll Production that they were laying off #Intizar following the events. 65,574 of these Tweets were from the 14th of July when the leaked video and the event of outing were the trending topic on Google Trends and Twitter Trends (https://trends24.in/turkey/). To analyse the data collected on Twitter through hashtags and mentions, we first overviewed the Tweets on Excel to grasp the broader picture, employing content analysis. We coded a total of 10,030 Tweets for the purposes of content analysis in relation to sentiments towards LGBT+ identity and women to capture hate speech and solidarity for the individuals or the communities in question. We identified hate speech as texts that use sexist, homophobic and/or racist terms and grouped them as 'negative', where we identified messages that communicated solidarity with #Intizar or LGBTI+ identities as 'positive'. The sample thus consisted of 61% positive (6144 Tweets), 12% negative (1171 Tweets) and 27% neutral or unrelated (2713 Tweets) sentiments. Following users' initial condemnation of the lesbian affair between Intizar and Gedik on the first day (the14th of July, 2018), growing numbers of users responded by posting solidarity messages or questioning the general tendency of gender-based discrimination in Turkey.

For our textual analysis, we then used Nvivo with the following keywords Turk (Turkish), morality (ahlak), twisted (carpik), disgusting (igrenc), pervert/perverted (sapkin), Pride (onur), marauder (çapulcu), terror (terror), homeland (vatan) and go (git) in order to code the data. We grouped Tweets with Intizar hashtags and mentions in four clusters: national identity, religion, political orientation and sexual orientation (see Table 1). This allowed us to depict how Tweets sustain the dimensions of macro-political polarisation inherent in the Turkish society. We disregarded the informative Tweets that simply shared news stories or stated what had happened, but instead focused on the ones that have evaluative, positive and negative

sentiments. We then translated randomly selected Tweets in our sample from Turkish to English and removed the usernames whilst keeping the dates.

Table 1. Main features of digital polarisation

Sexual Orientation	National Identity	Religious Belief	Political Orientation
• Straight Normal vs • Gay • Lesbian • Perverse • Abnormal	• Proud of being a Turk • Protecting pure Turkish identity against internal and external enemies vs • Non-Turkish • External	• Muslim • appropriate vs • Non-Muslim (atheists, Alevi, Christians etc.) • abnormal	• Statist • Supportive of the governing party AKP vs • *Çapulcu/marauder* • Terrorist • Marginal

3.The Turkish context, polarisation and anti-gender voice:

Turkey has always been a polarised society based on the divisions between Turkish/non-Turkish or secular/Islamists. "The state and ruling elites used polarising politics to mobilise the Turkish-speaking Sunni Muslim majority population and to justify policies against other groups" (Somer, 2019: 47). Kaya and Sunar (2015: 397) identified Turkey as a country "torn" due to being Muslim and Western as well as secular and conservative at the same time. For the past two decades, polarisation has widened and deepened in parallel to the President Erdoğan's consolidation of his regime. Tansel (2018: 198) argued that "two periods of AKP corresponding to the 2003–2007/10 period and from 2011 (particularly 2013 onwards) are not diametrically opposed regimes with contradicting modalities of rule but are interlinked nodes on the spectrum of authoritarianism". While in the former period, AKP presented itself as a democratic party with an intention to revive the Turkish economy through democratic reforms, in the latter period it turned into a hegemonic force that relies increasingly on 'coercion' rather than 'consent' to enforce its policies, and shape an ever-increasing portion of the everyday lives of Turkey's residents.

The socio-political polarisation has intensified following the Gezi protests and deepened further after the coup attempt in 2016. Following the Gezi protests, Erdoğan's speeches and

actions reinforced the existing divisions in Turkish society such as those between the Sunni and Alevi, Turkish and Kurdish, *çapulcu* and *non-çapulcu,* which was a term Erdoğan used to depict the Gezi protestors, has then been deconstructed by the protestors to imply 'fighting for your rights'. The most evident example of such binarism originated during the 2010 referendum campaign, when Erdoğan repetitively declared 'you are either on the right side or the wrong side of history' during mass rallies and interviews, consolidating the political polarisation between those in favour of and those oppose his politics (Selçuk, 2016: 577-578). The binarism characterising political environment dictates looking always for new 'others' on both offline and online platforms, in order to keep the extant camps mobilised, and to repetitively distinguish the good from the evil, such as 'my brothers' vs terrorists, 'my police' vs marauders, 'my head-scarfed sister' vs alcoholics, as qualifiers affecting everyday debates in Turkey.

The AKP period also saw transformation in gender politics in Turkey (Cindoglu and Unal 2017: 39-40), given the current contours of the spiritual and moral realm and the strict boundaries pertaining to the private/public spheres. These are maintained through ubiquitous binaries targeting women's bodies and their sexualities: namely 'veiled versus unveiled', 'chaste, modest, decent versus sexually assertive'. This generates a complex patchwork of regulatory narratives on women's sexualities (Author, 2016). Hence, political discourses referring to women's bodies and sexualities as the marker of authenticity has increasingly characterised the AKP rule. As a reaction, the contemporary anti-feminist and anti-gender political moment in Turkey operated having interweaved pro-Islamism, neoliberalism, authoritarianism and conservatism. This sui generis patchwork of gender politics, which is composed of multiple axes of ideological frameworks and regulatory discourses, reinforces the grip of patriarchal gender politics under the AKP rule. In this context, the discourse on sexuality, identifying the heterosexual family with children as the basic moral norm and value of the society, has proliferated within the online and offline platforms (Author, 2011; Acar and Altunok, 2013; Cindoglu and Unal, 2017).

4.Polarisation, Mundane and Social Media

There is much literature on political polarisation, based on party alliances and voting behaviour and the reflections of such polarisation on the making of political systems (Kotze, 1986; Collet, 2005; Lachat, 2008; Kinsella et al., 2015). Existing research also accounts for how

political polarisation bolsters a subsequent polarisation on media, particularly expressed by press-party parallelism and news slant (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Mancini, 2012). Mancini (2012) identifies the ways elections and party politics create virtual parallels on social media. Virtual parallels imply that although social media platforms are not owned by any political parties and appear as neutral platforms, they act as campaigners of certain political ideologies, parties or leaders, as it was the case with the direct roles of Facebook, Google, Twitter and Microsoft in shaping 2016 U.S. presidential elections (Kreiss and McGregor, 2018). These tech companies create parallel support for the parties they support and enhance political polarisation through algorithms or by authorising the use of social bots (Keller and Klinger, 2019). Yet, the everyday essence of political polarisation through immediate reaction of individual users is largely missing in this literature. A recent special issue on polarisation in American Behavioural Scientist also remained circumspect to this extent as it has appropriated political entrepreneurs the role for highlighting and activating underlying cleavages in society (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer, 2018: 18). Rather than concentrating on the roles of political entrepreneurs and tech companies, however, tracing the formulation of polarisation in everyday would force us to pay due attention to ordinary folk and how they experience as an example fluidity in identity formation while shifting back and forth between their individual and social identities (Kinnvall, 2004: 750).

When we approach polarisation following the subjects' anxiety over their ontological security, that is, a habituated form of existence, we can understand how social media can encroach into such security and the eventual encampment around everyday events would nurture. In our case, this is polarisation and virtual parallelism of offline political ideologies in relation to not only an attachment to Turkish national identity, Islam, the AKP party politics and the ideology of Turkish state, but also its idealised forms of femininity and sexuality. The story of a divorce, custody and a subsequent outing entrenched Twitter communities as camps, aligning the mundane with macro-politics. Or vice-versa, taking political sides over a divorce and custody case and how Intizar's sexuality was outed made socio-political ideas more tangible and rife for the public. The general repercussions of such encampment as we discuss relate to the concept of everyday, and the ephemeral politics that it involves (Guillaume and Huysmans, 2019).

For Giddens (1991 in Croft, 2012: 21) ontological security is brought about when humans can rely on a social normality, a predictability, which then structures their practical everyday

interactions as natural, normal and common-sensical. The ontologically secure individual also has trust in particular items and individuals whereas an ontologically insecure citizen may develop as societal discourses and practices may peril the security of the individual (Croft, 2012: 22-27; Kinnvall, 2004; Krolikowski, 2008). In response, those who produce the discourse also have the power to make it true, that is, to enforce a specific reading of a threat according to which people and groups are defined (Foucault 1980 in Kinnvall, 2004: 745).

Social media unleashes such insecurities with its incursions into the routine and the 'normal'. It is a means of identity construction, as digital identities are a combination of "now-selves" and "hoped-for possible selves". While 'now-selves' are our identities currently known to others and are more 'established', hoped-for possible selves are socially desirable identities that compliment current conceptions of self-knowledge (Markus and Nurius, cited in Zhao et al. 2008). As users juggle between now-selves and possible-selves, their everyday communication may forge camps between 'us' and 'them' groups. Given the increasing ontological insecurity of users in their search for establishing individual and communal identities online, social media users in these camps attempt to securitise subjectivity with an increased search for a stable identity.

This search for identity bolsters camps towards polarisation even when the group formation may appear meaningless (Tajfel, 1982; Kinnvall, 2004) such as a divorce and an enforced outing story that become conspicuous online. Both the ingroup and outgroup "rest on subjective symbolic universe(s) that projects respective meanings into realities […]. The appearance of an alternative symbolic universe, thereby, poses a threat because its very existence demonstrates empirically that one's own universe is less than inevitable" (Berger and Luckman, 1966: 122-126). However, the negation of one's universe can also be changed into an affirmation of it. The negators' statements become meaningful only as they are translated into more 'correct' terms, that is, the terms deriving from the universe that they negate (Berger and Luckman, 1966: 133). Hence, Berger and Luckman (1966: 137) argue that a social-structural base for competition between rival definitions of reality is inevitable, and that the outcome of the rivalry will be affected by the development of competing social-structural bases.

5.Discursive Analysis of Online Polarisation through the Mundane

Existing research on the politicisation of the mundane or the everyday so far revolves around the notion of 'personal is political' focusing on the practices and experiences of women, ethnic or religious minorities, activists, LGBTI+ communities that reveals how politics penetrate the intimate or the intimate shapes the political (Weinstein, 2014). Twitter operates as a discursive space (Ogola, 2015) reflecting those produced in dominant media discourse (Lindgren and Lundström, 2011). Mundane polarisation also delineates configuration and transmission of digital identities, and online communities gaining foothold into intimacies through social media. While our research does not capture the dynamics that create communities as such, our findings show that the discourses used by polarised groups reflecting on an online mundane event reflect and further inform macro-politics showing the fault lines resting on conservative, homophobic, patriarchal and Islamist discourses vis-à-vis discourses that relate to everyday existence of LGBTI+ individuals and women.

5A.Abnormality and Perversion

The public discourse in Turkey commonly depicts homosexuality as abnormality and perversion resonating with other anti-gender movements globally. Most initial tweets following the event were derogatory and insulted lesbians and LGBTI+ individuals in order to safeguard the long-habituated heteronormative ideal and order. In this framework, the discourses over the outing of a lesbian and/or bisexual relationship between 'a mother' and 'another' woman ranged from 'abnormal' to 'disgusting'. Moreover, the anti-#Intizar camp targeted those that endorsed the revealed identity and relationship.

> Those who embrace the #intizar news, which praise *modern perversions* like
> lesbianism and homosexuality that *degenerates* the society's belief in individual
> and marriage as a way to show respect to these imbeciles' lifestyle is nothing but an
> example of *moral degeneration*. We do not show respect to this. 14 July 2018

Resorting to qualifications such as imbecile, abnormal, perversion and degeneration, these tweets aim to set disciplinary norms and target homosexuality, whilst threatening other members of LGBTI+ communities as onlookers. These norms remain embedded in public discourse gaining political references, and later circulated for public deliberation. These tweets also qualify #intizar's sexuality not as sexual orientation, but as a lifestyle issue – a term that has otherwise gained much resonance, showing the chasm between the secular and pious publics in Turkey. As

there is also a child embroiled in this enforced coming out, most Tweets also qualified family and familial values related to children as the following tweet exemplifies:

> This society has turned out to be such a society that everything appears as *normal* to people and our kids will grow up into this and it is no good. Yes, I am a bigot and illiterate, but I don't want to raise my kid in *perversion*. 14 July 2018

Throughout our sample, exemplified by the above tweet, we identified a clear reproduction of heteronormative (and heterosexist) constructions of sexuality and gendered relations. Raising children within heterosexual or queer families was one of the many aspects of polarisation following the leaked video showing the two women's relationship. This divided the Twitter publics on the events across two poles such as the commonly shared tweet below representing the other camp:

> According to American Psychological Association's (APA) studies, the kids homosexual couples raise do not have any difference to those heterosexual couples raise and they do not have additional traumas due to the *sexual orientation* of their parents. 16 July 2018

In their aim to lend support to the idea that LGBTI+ communities can equally raise healthy kids, the pro-#Intizar camp neither denigrate the former camp's lifestyle or beliefs nor use emotional words and examples to appeal for the public's attention. While the anti-#Intizar group presents its ideas via vocal emotional responses, using strong words like perversion or imbecile, the latter justifies its stance referring to past research by scientific institutions such as APA. As such, the anti-#Intizar group engages in antagonistic comments resting on hate, while the responses by the pro-#Intizar group aims for a robust exchange of claims (O'Loughlin et al., 2017). The responses to tweets that qualify sexuality as a lifestyle issue, the above tweet and many other similar tweets also widely used the phrase 'sexual orientation' to create awareness on its difference from biological sex, social gender roles and gender identity.

5B. Homosexuality against Islam

In addition to qualifications of societal 'normality' and 'norms' and denigrating discourses on homosexuality as 'perversion', how homosexuality could affect the future generations appear as a subject of a polarised discussion, allegedly deriving references from Islam and its commands.

In those Tweets, perversion and abnormality were paragons of discourses against homosexual relationships and their wider implications for society:

> I have read Intizar hashtags with *dread*. Look here ladies and gentlemen! This is a game played by *foreign forces*, they want to play with *our codes* as *Muslim Turks*. While homosexuality is being *normalised*, people here lynch those who react to this! #intizar
> 14 July 2018

In addition to the discourses on the alleged abnormality of homosexuality, the most essential identity of Turks is depicted as Muslim in the face of the so-called threat that 'foreign forces', i.e. *dış mihraklar* (external powers – a notorious but inconspicuous culprit for all that go wrong in Turkey) pose. This highly-politicised term has been entrenched into Turkish political discourse as a ghoulish phenomenon, resonating "among intellectuals, ordinary citizens, and politicians of various and otherwise highly different persuasions" (Çaylı, 2018: 261) and so far served to consolidate the political camp of the Republican nationalist ideal. Its nationalist appeal particularly, however, has also thrived in the AKP political discourse. Polat (2010: 58) argues that the fear of external and internal 'enemies' run deep in Turkish nation's psychology, fuelling a language of 'external powers' that constantly work against Turkey. It is highly puzzling that these ghoulish forces came to the forefront following a mundane event outcasting two people's love and a divorced couple's quest for custody of a child.

The reference to foreign forces shows how the public, in order to vouchsafe for their habituated routine, make use of an expressively political issue, that is, the dirty game of external powers to meddle in to change the Turkish and Islamic identity of Turkey. As such, these tweets brought religious identity and Islam more to forefront:

> In our country there are some retards that think Muslims defend rape. No! We are against rape, homosexuality, child abuse. Get this through your *marginal* heads!
> #intizar 14 July 2018

This tweet, likewise, undermines homosexuality and associates it with being 'marginal', which has been a common discourse targeting protestors or dissidents in Turkey. With its reference to the marginal, rape, and child abuse, the mundane reaches out to the political in order to respond to the secular camp in Turkey. The AKP and other conservative MPs in Turkey supported a bill to free child rapists if they marry their victim in 2016. Following the debates and approval of the bill, the hashtag #TecavuzMesrulastirilamaz (#RapeCannotBeLegitimised) became a trending

topic on Twitter when users turned to social media to show their disapproval. Some of the Tweets, like the above one, was a response to the previous anti-religious and/or anti-conservative messages on the #TecavuzMesrulastirilamaz hashtags. Using an antagonistic approach, these tweets praised Islamic identity, Islamic child upbringing and/or Islamic family rules, while undermining any other alternative ways of child upbringing or forming 'families'. We identify child upbringing as an issue of ontological security. Those feeling anxious and insecure depict homosexuality with references to rape and child abuse. These references substantiate efforts to shame one's imagined foes and allude to politics as well.

The pro-#Intizar camp also remarked the issue of rape in their tweets against the initial negative responses to the enforced outing of #Intizar, such as this one:

When a little girl is raped, it does not hit Twitter. When #sinemgedik cheats on her ex-
husband with #Intizar, it creates a public outcry. This is sad and concerning! 15 July 2018
With their tweets, pro-#Intizar users linked the ascendance of Islamic practices and the religion's increasing presence within state politics with the legitimisation of a 'culture of rape' and the wider silencing mechanisms in Turkish society. The pro-#Intizar camp also compared the subsequent media event with other 'less important' events that has not triggered extensive reactions on Twitter, such as a rape story involving a minor. Similar to our previous discussions on pro-#Intizar user's tweets, the above tweet also does not use a hostile approach and degrade any other positions, but it rather aims to question the reasons why this mundane event became a trending topic.

5C. Erdoğan as father figure

As central as he is to everything in Turkey, Erdoğan is also allocated a place in the enforced outing story. Notwithstanding his ever-apparent presence in Turkish politics, this is also a case of mundane meeting the political for no clear reason. Alongside the AKP having entrenched its dominance in Turkey, "the primordial imagery of the 'father'" also served "as the masculine ideal around which coercion and domination are structured" (Somay, 2018). "As a masculine figure, the leader is coded as a warrior. In the view of his followers, the leader is a father, brother, lover, knight, saviour, conqueror and hero, which in Turkey, is embodied by Erdoğan, who has a symbolic political significance" (Bahadir Turk, 2017: 615). Substantiating our claim, many tweets in our dataset called the President of Turkey to act for defeating and potentially

expelling LGBTI+ communities from Turkey – a further virtual sign of the mundane seeping into the political and polarise society, while demanding the expulsion of the very other:

> #intizar I am calling out to you our beloved president, can you please expel these faggots running amok from our country… 14 July 2018
>
> Our beloved President, based on the #Intizar scandal, you might need to increase your fight with porn, LGBT and drug consumption. If family dissolves, Turkey is extinct. We need to fight to death for putting an end to those detrimental to our social order. 14 July 2018

The expulsion of minorities has been the major essence of state-making in Republican Turkey and the homeland's extinction remains a major anxiety that would surely threaten the ontological security of the self. Therefore, when terror and homeland inform public discussions over the mundane – particularly regarding a divorce involving custody and an enforced outing alongside, we can see how the self and the state seek to perform anxiety facing the other. The discourses such as 'go to another country if you don't like Turkey' or 'get out of Turkey' have been commonly used on digital platforms for Kurdish people or non-Muslim minorities for years as well as the Gezi protestors and other dissident communities more recently such as with the following hashtag #GezicilerFransaya (#GeziProtestorsGoToFrance). Yet, this trope also featured amidst the enforced outing of a female celebrity.

The other camp replied to these Tweets using #Erdoğan hashtags and by pointing out people's right to privacy in their everyday lives:

> We are not good at education and the same holds for football. One dollar is already 5 Turkish liras. But we are the best in interfering the bedrooms and personal lives of people, bravo! #Erdoğan #intizar #sinemgedik 14 July 2018

While these tweets highlighted the importance to keep people's rights to privacy, they were equally critical of Turkey's education system, economy and even less political domains such as football. Rather than disseminating direct and radical messages on sexuality and gender identity and addressing the growing anti-gender politics, such tweets used an ironic rhetoric and less-radical stance against the government and the implications of governmental ideology on Twitter.

5D.Pride Walks and Gezi Park Protests

Although radical social movements in physical public spaces are on decline given the authoritarian turn in Turkey, Twitter continuously serves as an arena whereby citizens could remain engaged with politics and social life. The recent widespread social movements in Turkey, namely the Gezi Park protests and the Pride walks have challenged the patriarchal, heteronormative and the Islamist regime in Turkey. As such, some of these tweets related the Intizar story to Pride walks and LGBTI+ visibility and social movements, considering the event as an encroachment to their habituated routine to face 'the other' and 'the other's political agency' against the safety of 'the self'.

> The fake Twitter accounts defending *dishonorable* LGBT *walks*, a monument of *immorality*, haunt #mustafaceceli [the husband in the story] today. Those who defend #intizar *disgrace* are as disgraceful in the eyes of the public and *Allah*. *Muslims* believe that these disgusting ways are enormous sins. 14 July 2018

The Tweets from the anti-#Intizar camp aimed to target and blacklist the Pride walks on Istiklal Street, the main thoroughfare of Istanbul. While the Pride walks took place in Taksim peacefully from 2003 onwards, they have been banned by the government since 2015. By using religious discourses, the anti-#Intizar camp targeted Intizar as much as targeting other users that potentially support Intizar, LGBTI+ communities and Pride walks. These tweets also attributed homogeneity to Islam and Muslims in their potential stance towards sexual orientation and the political agency of LGBTI+ communities.

> This camp also identifies the LGBTI+ communities as 'marauder' in these tweets – a term Erdoğan used commonly to belittle the Gezi Park protestors:

> *Marauders* are now at work on Twitter, aiming to *normalize* a *disgusting* relationship!!!!! #intizar #sinemgedik #mustafaceceli #TheNationMakesHistory 16 July 2018

> The agenda of those *marauders* who identifies the coup as a performance is the sexual life of #intizar while the agenda of *the nation* which said no to *occupation* is the *homeland*. This is the difference between us. 14 July 2018

The figure of the marauder was identified as a homogenous camp in their opposition to the AKP. In this framework, the homeland was seen as an extension of the AKP government, which was also defined as the place belonging to the heterosexuals, Turks and Sunnis. The existing polarisation that escalated during the Gezi Park protests also reached a new peak following the attempted coup of 15th of July, 2016. Even on an everyday event, homosexuality is denigrated through chauvinistic and patriarchal discourses qualifying the homeland as a place, where the self enjoys security.

The historical legacy of the Gezi protests continues to affect everyday polarisation (Author 2020). Amidst the polarisation between the AKP supporters and any dissident groups such as the Gezi supporters (those with antigovernmental views), hate speech deriving from the divorce and an enforced outing of homosexual conduct qualified further polarisation:

> Those who support you are such *inglorious and degenerated bastards*. Just because you hate religion and Erdoğan, you sold your mothers, *homeland* and honour and now you bottom! What kind of *Muslims* are you *Gezi* minded idiots! #intizar 14 July 2018

The tweets of the anti-#Intizar camp targeted dissident communities including the LGBTI+ communities through memorializing the Gezi protests. In line with the physical threats targeting dissident and LGBTI+ communities in offline spaces, such as in squares, parks or streets, the digital geographies also turned into a location for attacking and lynching homosexuality. From 2015 onwards, the Pride walks in Istanbul have forcefully been prohibited in Turkey – at times in reference to the timing of the Pride walk coinciding with the Ramadan. Far right groups, along with the government, threatened the LGBTI+ communities, and resorted to religious discourses to consolidate public support for targeting the LGBTI+ communities and their political agency. Even if the Pride walks were prohibited, LGBTI+ communities still went out to claim their rights to Taksim – the location of the Pride since 2003.

In response to the denigrating posts, the pro-#Intizar camp shared posts and circulated Intizar's songs to promote her work and identity, and resorted to the global hashtag #lovewins and its Turkish translation #askkazanacak to consolidate support and visibility. This support

extended not only to Intizar and Sinem Gedik but also other LGBTI+ individuals and communities in Turkey and beyond. By using the #lovewins hashtag alongside the #Intizar hashtag, these Twitter users participated in the global networks of solidarity and social movements, entangling the Turkish mundane to the global political struggles related to marriage equality specifically and LGBTI+ and feminist movements more generally. 'The LGBTI+ rights movement's political agenda in Turkey today is centred upon (but not limited to) the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in the legal definitions of hate crime and discrimination' (Yılmaz and Göçmen, 2016: 471). #Intizar Tweets, which aimed for the visibility of LGBTI+ communities, continued this trend:

> RT @fahrenayytt: Don't be silent, shout out! Lesbians *exist*! #loveislove #Lovewins #intizar 22 July 2018

> The woman is divorced! Maybe their unhappiness was related to not paying attention to their own *sexual orientation* before getting married. And with him! I hope they would be so happy! ♡ #LoveWins #intizar 14 July 2018

These Tweets generally engaged in the affirmation and called for social inclusion for LGBTI+ identities and love. This is not to say that the use of hashtags #lovewins or #askkazanacak demarcates the beginning of the quest for the visibility of LGBTI+ individuals or feminists in Turkey. There has always been wide-ranging feminist and LGBTI+ movements in Turkey. The late 1980s saw a gradual revival of rights movements while the transition to democracy unleashed women's movements in the 1990s, mostly in urban areas. As part of the second wave feminism, the Purple Roof Women's Shelter started in 1990 to provide consultations with women and to strengthen the fight against domestic violence (Diner and Toktaş, 2010: 46). Meanwhile, the LGBTI+ movement in Turkey has also become more visible in the 1990s. The first attempt of Pride walk took place in 1993, which has been banned by the state, followed by the foundation of the first LGBTI+ organisation KAOS GL in 1994. Various other LGBTI+ communities formed organisations and organised demonstrations in the late 1990s and 2000s, including the first actual Pride walk in 2003 in Turkey. Both feminist movements and LGBTI+ social movements were quite visible and have been at the forefront during the Gezi

protests in 2013, which sought to transform patriarchy and heteronormativity that was entrenched in the wider society including the left-wing communities. The first open gay wedding and marriage ceremony took place in September 2014 in Istanbul, though this was not a 'legally recognised' marriage.

While some of the shared posts using the #lovewins hashtag simply wanted to foster awareness and show to the digital publics of Turkey that lesbians and LGBTI+ individuals do exist, others explicated the exclusionary and discriminatory politics of workspaces for LGBTI+ individuals, including a popstar:

What we need to discuss is on the year of 2018, an individual *loses their job* because of their *sexual orientation*! #lovewins #intizar 14 July 2018

Despite years of struggles, LGBTI+ individuals are not openly recognised as equal citizens and anti-discrimination legislation remains absent in Turkey (Yılmaz and Göçmen, 2016), which also has severe implications for workplaces. Intizar was also sacked out of her job by her production company following her enforced coming out. While most of the images downloaded along with the Tweets were the photos of Intizar, Sinem Gedik and Mustafa Ceceli, the image of the Poll Production's statement of firing Intizar was the second most shared image with 41 different versions of the same image among 989 images – showing yet another entrenchment of the mundane to affect the political, and the camp in favour taking sides with those asking for stronger workers' rights, following the sacking of a LGBTI+ singer by her company denouncing her on social media platforms. "Given the overwhelming cultural norms based on heteronormativity within the Turkish society, the absence of legal protection and the relative lack of organisational inclusionary policies and practices contribute to the silencing of LGBTI+ individuals at work" (Ozeren and Aydin, 2016: 201). Following the online announcement of Intizar's being laid off because of her sexual orientation, the pro-#Intizar users targeted the Poll Production with a boycott receiving an extensive online support.

6.Conclusion

In the context of increasingly populist and divisive campaigns of Bolsonaro in Brazil, Trump in USA, and the Conservative Party governments in the UK, the existing literature captures aspects of macro-political polarisation based on party alliances and voting behaviour (see Collet, 2005; Lachat 2008; Kinsella et al., 2015), the ways polarisation in political systems may

feed polarisation in the media (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Mancini, 2012) and the ways tech companies or social bots play roles (Kreiss and McGregor, 2018; Keller and Klinger, 2019). Going beyond the current remit of the top-down analysis of these existing research, our article delineated how polarisation over mundane events come to fore via social media platforms, using content and discursive analysis of a recent Twitter phenomenon related to making of women and LGBTI+ communities outcasts in Turkey.

The paper contextualised how socio-political polarisation has intensified on social media taking cues from existing divisions in society. We reflected on how the mundane debates on a divorce involving a custody fight and a subsequent enforced outing embroiled Sunni and Alevi, Turkish and Kurdish, marauder and non-marauder narratives as antagonisms and entangled them in making political camps digital. Even a failed coup attempt was dragged in discussions over such a mundane event catering for the anxiety that an outing and the related reactions have inflicted on the habituated routines of antagonistic political camps. We looked into how Twitter enabled users created two sides of a given story/event depicting the recriminations between self-defined 'us-group' and the 'them-group'" (Reyes, 2011). Through this analysis, we examined the political roots of everyday anxiety that polarised online camps felt over their ontological security.

With an interest in describing a manifestation of digital publics whereby disciplinary gender norms are made and expressed abruptly to pass judgement on gender identities and roles reflecting on extant political polarisation, we explored everyday communication on social media, particularly Twitter with a case study of #Intizar – a trending topic in July 2018. Our methodological discussion rested on narratives, leitmotifs, and strategic metaphors on online public discourse with political references. In this framework, pro-#Intizar users aimed for a robust exchange of claims (O'Loughlin et al., 2017), for instance by using the global hashtag #LoveWins along with #Intizar hashtag. However, anti-#Intizar camp used #Intizar hashtags and mentions to undermine homosexuality and defined it as a lifestyle choice whilst using sexual, national and religious references in order to denigrate LGBTI+ identities and other potentially dissident communities. Shared texts revealed discourses related to homosexuality described it as 'perversion' and 'abnormality' and identified it against Islam, Turkish nationhood, ideal family, idealised womanhood and Tayyip Erdoğan's rule. The online reaction expressed through the discourses on religion, the current regime and Turkishness outcasted the two women's femininity

away from idealised womenness in Turkish society. Although the immediate digital response to the #Intizar event mainly consisted of hate and other forms of antagonistic messages, the pro-#Intizar social media users responded widely in the upcoming hours and days to create a less polarised and more inclusive online communication.

Overall, an investigation of everyday digital polarisation in relation to gender and its socio-political expressions opened discussions in understanding the underlying discursive politics of authoritarian or 'illiberal contexts' being mirrored in the mundane that the digital sphere reflects with its everyday references and affordances**.** In this respect, online discussions following a divorce and custody story involved macro-political references as the Twitter users informed their positions with political cues. That is how polarisation over the mundane became political and the macro-political polarisation informed the mundane.

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