



Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/219420/>

Version: Published Version

---

**Article:**

Yetis, E. and Ozduzen, O. (2024) Anti-genderism in Turkey: masculinist entrenchment through cultural intimacies. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 107. 103014. ISSN: 0277-5395

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2024.103014>

---

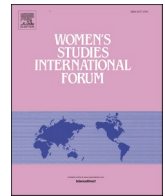
**Reuse**

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



## Anti-genderism in Turkey: Masculinist entrenchment through cultural intimacies

Erman Örsan Yetiş<sup>a,\*</sup>, Özge Özdüzen<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Politics and International Relations, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

<sup>b</sup> Department of Sociological Studies, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Anti-gender movements  
Cultural intimacy  
Masculinist restoration  
Masculinist entrenchment  
Swashbuckling masculinity  
Turkey

### ABSTRACT

Anti-gender movements jeopardise the rights of minoritised groups including women and LGBTQ+ people. Examining the existing literature on anti-genderism and the context in Turkey, this paper relates neoliberal conservative social policies and anti-rights front to top-down masculinist entrenchment, mainly operationalising cultural intimacies. The paper examines the main beneficiaries of anti-genderism in Turkey, articulated into top-down masculinist entrenchment aligned with self-preservation, victimhood discourses and the performance of swashbuckling masculinity. Anti-gender politics mainly operate as part of a top-down social engineering project drawing on the logic of masculinist protection and their reception at the grassroots level is predicated on cultural intimacies forged through mutual recognition and reciprocal relationships, which also maintains hegemonic authoritarian political and neoliberal economic order. Although outright support for anti-genderism is still limited in society, the current majoritarian-authoritarian-securitarian political agenda might exacerbate this in future. Hence, we present a comprehensive analysis of how top-down anti-gender politics are negotiated through cultural intimacies in wider society.

### Introduction

Today, anti-gender movements present a global challenge, primarily asserting that the invention of 'gender' as a concept is eradicating the natural and inevitable differences between men and women. This opposition to the so-called gender ideology contains contradictions from the very beginning and the concept of 'gender' and its use are perceived as dangerous to the extent that it exposes and criticises the existing global gender regime and the power relations established around it. Anti-gender politics pose a serious threat to the rights of women, LGBTQ+ people, migrants, refugees and minorities as the most disadvantaged segments of society (Gutiérrez Rodríguez et al., 2018). Other than preventing the targeted groups from accessing and exercising their rights, anti-gender politics can lead to overt acts of violence. However,

the reasons behind the rise and spread of these politics and movements can be explained by examining them in the context of global neoliberalism and the strengthening of the securitarian state regime (Brown, 2020). Acknowledging Turkey's poor reputation for spearheading anti-gender politics globally and implementing such policies in domestic settings (Kandiyoti, 2021), this paper shows that the pathway of anti-genderism as a political movement in Turkey differs from that of many Western countries despite sharing similarities. We argue that Turkey's social and political circumstances warrant a more in-depth assessment of this socio-political phenomenon. Despite all the efforts of the political power and ruling elites in Turkey,<sup>1</sup> who can easily be counted as actors in the global anti-gender movement, there is *still* no strong evidence to suggest that anti-genderism is either driven by or thriving as a grassroots phenomenon in Turkey. However, as we discuss

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [e.o.yetis@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:e.o.yetis@sheffield.ac.uk) (E.Ö. Yetiş), [o.ozduzen@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:o.ozduzen@sheffield.ac.uk) (Ö. Özdüzen).

<sup>1</sup> Examples of such efforts include, but are not limited to, withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, more commonly known as the Istanbul Convention, banning Pride Parades every year on the grounds that they 'threaten the institution of family' (Human Rights Watch, 2023), and the Higher Education Authority revoking its policy on gender equality by condemning the very concept of 'gender' as inappropriate to societal norms and values (Uçan Çubukçu, 2021). The condemnation of the term gender is facilitated by the fact that there is no singular word in the Turkish language as in many other Western languages (gender = *toplumsal cinsiyet*). While it's a rarity in everyday discourse, the term is primarily used by academic circles, journalists, activists, and policymakers. This also demonstrates how the top-down interventions demonise the term gender as a foreign-induced concept toxicating Turkish society and so-called authentic family values.

in this article, it rather plays a cementing role in maintaining the popular endorsement of the majoritarian-authoritarian-securitarian (MAS) political agenda rooted in *masculinist entrenchment*.

In this article, we aim to develop a robust analytical framework to comprehensively analyse the context in Turkey, grounded in various concepts such as cultural intimacy, masculinist protection, and swashbuckling masculinity. We argue that in parallel with the political, social and economic developments and transformations during the AKP (Justice and Development Party) rule, a novel concept is required to appropriately comprehend anti-genderism within this context. Thus, we analyse the context in various aspects, critically examining the existing relevant literature on ongoing anti-genderism. Accordingly, this article introduces the concept of *masculinist entrenchment*,<sup>2</sup> developed to understand the ongoing top-down imposition of anti-genderism in Turkey. The term is designed to acknowledge the deep-rooted and often institutionalised dominance of masculine norms and values and encompasses the structures, practices, and identities that reinforce and perpetuate gender inequality and gendered power dynamics in society and politics. Thus, rather than referring to the efforts that aim at reclaiming and reinstating traditional masculine roles and values that are perceived to have been lost or diminished (as suggested by the concept of masculinist restoration), masculinist entrenchment becomes pertinent where traditional masculine norms are deeply ingrained and already dominant in MAS politics. However, it is important to note that masculinist entrenchment described here is not exclusive to the gender regime in Turkey,<sup>3</sup> which is also far from being static and unchangeable, and harbours convoluted paths towards both possibilities for and challenges against gender equality and justice, as we will continue to unfold its complexity.

Converging with anti-genderism, masculinist entrenchment is ensconced in gender populism (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021), in the form of fatalistic normalisation (Yetiş & Bakırloğlu, 2023), meaning that the gendered binary division embracing hierarchies, inequalities, oppression, and exclusion is accepted as being natural or originating from divine order. We argue that, in Turkey, the discourse around the preservation of family based on gender populism takes the inequality between men and women as natural and God-given. Furthermore, a concept of gender justice derived from such gender populism is embedded in the rhetoric around the religious concept of *fitrat*, assigning 'ideally complementary' gender roles underpinned by asymmetrical and hierarchical gender relations in the patriarchal order. By confusing the concepts of equality and sameness, gender equality is interpreted as the transformation of women into men by removing them from womanhood and lowering the status and value of women in society (Arat, 2020). This perspective suggests gender equality as a zero-sum game, which could have led to an anti-rights front dominated mostly by men. Yet, it is not possible to argue that men in general have much penchant for participating in anti-gender movements in Turkey on the basis that the so-called gender ideology or gender equality poses a threat to men's interests or social order. Recent studies indicate that there is no overt or prevalent opposition to gender equality in society or particularly among men (KONDA, 2019, 2020; O'Neil & Çarkoğlu, 2022), but this does not necessarily mean that society in Turkey, and men in particular, support gender equality either. As a concept, gender equality is still discussed at an abstract level in society, and people's opinions on gender equality often reflect a perfunctory acceptance, if not a total indifference, rather

than a practical concern (Yetiş, 2019; Yetiş & Kolluoğlu, 2022). As such, this abstraction and indifference can even find resonance with ongoing masculinist entrenchment. Nevertheless, some scholars (e.g., Kancı et al., 2023; Kandiyoti, 2021; Unal, 2021) draw certain similarities between the Western examples of anti-gender movements and those in Turkey by overemphasising the influence of the movement from below. These overemphasised interpretations can be attributed to a dramatic decline in democracy, social and political rights and freedoms in tandem with the ongoing harmful impacts of neoliberal economic transformations in Turkey, as consequences of the MAS political agenda. However, we should avoid invoking over-generalisations inclined to confuse the wider repercussions of such top-down anti-genderism compounded by the MAS political agenda (e.g., withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and wider impunity in violence against women) with popular support in society in favour of anti-genderism itself (e.g., as if there was considerable public demand for the withdrawal, like the political power asserted). Instead, identifying the political agenda (i.e., MAS), mechanism, and actual beneficiaries with their extending political and economic capacities behind the ongoing top-down anti-genderism is more pivotal for understanding its cascading promotion and dissemination through certain political discourses and cultural channels. Accordingly, the AKP as the ruling party, its political allies, and a wider anti-rights front in society are the main beneficiaries of this agenda, who also actively support the mainstreaming of top-down anti-genderism.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that gender populism remains an effective political tool in Turkey so long as it serves to perpetuate the MAS status quo, which heavily relies on the normalisation of hierarchies, inequalities, oppression and exclusion embedded in wider societal, political and economic structures. Progressive gender politics are thereby condemned for being at odds with the so-called natural order and presumed to go against the will of the people interpellated as 'ingenuous and righteous defenders' of this order (Kandiyoti, 2014). However, it might be a mistake to assume that people are simply gullible to this interpellation since it provides feel-good politics as part of a populist strategy (Sauer, 2020), while involving cultural intimacy granting them access to political power and an opportunity to benefit from it. Under these circumstances, MAS political agendas create and sustain polarisation (Arat & Pamuk, 2019), which also "defies facile categorisation based on gender since both men and women may find themselves on the opposite side of this divide" (Kandiyoti, 2021, p. 215). Thus, social justice activism based on gender issues, ironically, has become a common ground for critical scholars and a wider social movement to struggle against such political agendas, favouring egalitarian, social justice-oriented, democratic transformations (Kancı et al., 2023; Özbay & Ipekci, 2024).

However, polarisation alone cannot lead us to comprehend the grassroots reception of such top-down politics. To accomplish this, we present a rather nuanced and complex picture of Turkey by relating ongoing neoliberal conservative social policies as part of social engineering and the anti-rights front in society to top-down masculinist entrenchment forged by cultural intimacies through the enactment of swashbuckling masculinity. We situate our endeavour in feminist scholarship and believe our analysis can pave the way for a better understanding of the current drives towards the globally prevalent phenomenon of anti-genderism fortified through its locally variegated manifestations, which is a prerequisite for devising more effective feminist strategies and methods of resistance and transformation.

### Majoritarian-authoritarian-securitarian political agenda and cultural intimacies

We identify anti-gender politics in Turkey as mainly top-down and a part of wider social engineering practices and processes in the construction and persistence of MAS agendas in alignment with a neoliberal political economy. We argue that Turkey is a fitting case, and it opens up a possibility to discuss the global anti-gender movement in light of

<sup>2</sup> Inspired by Wendy Brown's (1992) work, titled "Finding the Man in the State".

<sup>3</sup> Although this manuscript does not present a comparative study, and mainly focuses on the context in Turkey, we believe *masculinist entrenchment* as an analytical concept, with its various aspects we unfold, can also be useful for analysing top-down anti-genderism in other contexts sharing authoritarian or semi-authoritarian features, including Russia, Eastern Europe and some parts of the Global South.

ongoing masculinist entrenchment, as Turkey is an epicentre of these politics. Anti-gender politics are a main pillar to help realise a MAS political agenda in three ways. Firstly, aligning with the majoritarian agenda, these politics operatively target various groups who stand up against the regime as some marginal groups and depict them as estranged from traditional social values and norms enshrined in the discourse of 'homegrown and national' [*yerli ve milli*] allegedly signifying the majority of the society (i.e. Turkish Sunni Muslim). Moreover, pro-government channels and trolls on digital platforms backed by political power facilitate the dissemination of such depictions. This also provides anti-gender movement actors with access to and visibility on social media platforms to convey their anti-gender ideologies more effectively and widely to the public (Kancı et al., 2023). Secondly, anti-gender politics are enacted based on authoritarian agenda to foster a sense of omnipotence over just about everything in society (even private issues) and to allow political power to intrude in citizens' lives with the inclusion of violence (Walby, 2023) and to act above the law. Hence, nobody's right is protected (by the rule of law) in this authoritarian agenda. Therefore, demonstrating loyalty to political power and even supporting its politics becomes crucial for reaping rewards, while expressing discontent or critique often leads to harsh punishments. Thirdly, the securitarian agenda aligns itself with majoritarian and authoritarian agendas by fabricating conspiracies that depict a threat [e.g., the LGBTQ+ communities as agents of external forces and a part of an imaginary terrorist assemblage (Aciksoz, 2024)] to society, nation, and family – the latter of which is regarded as a core unit of society and the nation. This securitarian agenda appeals to the concept of terrorism to target real or imaginary enemies, to generate political agitation based on feelings of fear and anxiety that can mobilise people towards its political agenda, and to signal to the public the boundaries set by political power to indicate what constitutes permissible and legitimate use of violence and against whom, as part of dog-whistle tactics. While it is hardly evidenced that top-down anti-gender politics are unconditionally accepted or genuinely supported by the public (KONDA, 2019; O'Neil & Çarkoğlu, 2022), it is also equally hard to claim that these politics are met with outright rejection or resistance from below, considering the government has consolidated its political power by gradually putting these politics and policies into practice since 2011.<sup>4</sup>

Following these political outcomes, we can observe some rudimentary forms of anti-gender movement in Turkey rooted in *cultural intimacies* (Herzfeld, 2016) based on these MAS agendas and through the shared discourses of sacred familialism (Akkan, 2018), self-preservation [*beka*], victimhood and the performance of swashbuckling masculinity. A sense of cultural intimacy involves recognising aspects of cultural identity that may be considered embarrassing or indecent externally; however, it can also foster a sense of belonging for insiders. Cultural intimacy thrives on imperfection, as can be seen in many familial relationships, rather than the perfection of an idealised traditional family. Therefore, if the state or political power can credibly represent the nation as a family, they can consolidate the political hegemony in part because the people know that families are flawed and learn how to hide this fact (Herzfeld, 2016) as part of a defensive strategy. The cultural intimacy constantly reproduced by political power through the rhetoric of "we are all in the same boat" is evidenced in the discourse of self-preservation (JINHA, 2022), harbouring entangled incentives of complicity in or even collaborations with political power in these top-down politics. However, cultural intimacies do not guarantee the shared meaning that can serve the same purposes. Here, anti-genderism functions as cultural intimacy conveying a conservative and nationalist moralistic message to the public while relaying and malleably

<sup>4</sup> AKP's third term from the 2011 election onwards points to an anti-democratic move, the rise of authoritarian policies and economic instability especially due to AKP building a single-party system (Aydın-Düzgüt, 2012; Öniş, 2016).

converging varying interests and goals of political power, state institutions and anti-rights front around the same *discursive opportunity* (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018).

We contend that these cultural intimacies are not limited to the relationship between rudimentary forms of anti-gender movements (which we will define as part of the anti-rights front and micro-level power foci) and political power (i.e., the ruling party and its political alliances). Instead, cultural intimacies present a much broader scope for understanding popular political acquiescence, if not outright support, behind these anti-gender politics beyond the dichotomy between state/political power and the ordinary people, who either directly support and/or promote these politics or simply condone and seemingly remain silent/indifferent to them. There are cultural intimacies that facilitate, but cannot guarantee, mutual recognition and reciprocal relationships essential to preserving the current hegemonic political and economic order.

### Masculinist entrenchment through cultural intimacies

In this article, we deploy the term *masculinist entrenchment* which strengthens the MAS agenda in Turkey through cultural intimacies, while many other scholars, instead, would prefer the term masculinist restoration to describe the same phenomenon (e.g., Kancı et al., 2023; Kandıyoti, 2021; Unal, 2021). Essentially, both terms involve the exaltation of masculine power with a permissible use of violence against their imaginary or real enemies under the pretext of being victims and defending themselves. However, masculinist restoration is accompanied by backlashes and compensation or prophylactic strategies responding to social changes towards gender equality and sexual rights (e.g., same-sex marriage, sex education and affirmative action in favour of women's empowerment), as evidenced by the increasing visibility of the anti-gender movement in some Western societies (Sauer, 2020). The defence of the so-called authentic national identity can also translate into masculine populism (Coffe et al., 2023; Eksi & Wood, 2019) with the capacity to mobilise reactionary groups against women, LGBTQ+ individuals, immigrants and ethnic minorities, and contextually changing images of 'corrupt elites'. While this mobilisation is evident in the politics of far-right populism globally, masculinist restoration mostly remains an *affective* dimension of masculinist identity politics, mainly based on the perception of endangered masculinity and the framing of a crisis of masculinity (Sauer, 2020). In Turkey, the masculinist restoration has been instrumentally enacted in some rudimentary forms of anti-gender movements that are primarily (but not exclusively) led by male groups.<sup>5</sup> Especially when it comes to women's legal rights, such as protection from violence, alimony, and custody, these male groups emphasise male victimhood as reverse victimisation to reclaim male privilege and power. Additionally, some women may be inclined to buy into the arguments of masculinist restoration when they fear losing 'secure' gender relations, which signifies traditional gender norms and expectations that emphasise men as breadwinners/providers and women as carers.

Having said that, for two main reasons, anti-genderism in Turkey should not be limited to a backlash or compensation and prophylactic

<sup>5</sup> There are a few studies that specifically analyse online platforms, mainly looking at online manosphere and incel activities disseminating claims based on masculinist restoration that involve misogynist, homophobic, male supremacist discourses (Demir & Tiryaki, 2024; Uzun & Tiryaki, 2024). We regard such groups as some of the rudimentary and autonomous forms of anti-genderism. These studies are valuable in documenting and identifying the future direction of anti-genderism, which can also involve different forms of radicalised masculinist identity politics in Turkey. However, we remain cautious of problematic generalisations stemming from such studies, which can distract attention from a wider mechanism of top-down masculinist entrenchment by paving the way towards moral panic around the activities of these online groups.

strategies based on reactionary groups and masculinist identity politics. Firstly, a remarkable achievement of the political power in its first ten years was its promotion and enforcement of some improvements in gender equality, including ratifying the Istanbul Convention at the end of these ten years without an explicit reaction from below. This partly explains how political power gained international trust and support, especially from the West, by overselling an image of liberal, pluralist, and tolerant Muslim democracy while also steadily establishing its conservative political hegemony at home (Esen & Gumuscu, 2021). Nevertheless, especially after 2012, when the anti-gender movement aligned with authoritarian populism became more influential globally, especially in Western democracies, and the political power in Turkey consolidated the majority political support for the constitutional amendment in 2010, the democratic image of political power has gradually been abandoned. To further entrench its authoritarian grip, the political power has deliberately negotiated a deal with the EU on containing immigration flows. The EU then turned a blind eye, considering the so-called refugee crisis, which was deemed more important than the defence of democracy (Fassin, 2024; Korkut, 2017). A state of emergency was declared after the failed coup in 2016, resulting in massive restrictions on civil liberties. Anti-gender politics have thus become more effective at enforcing the MAS agenda, while progressive gender politics have become redundant.

Secondly, and more importantly, the political power cannot risk losing women's support by overusing a discourse of male victimisation, considering that particularly conservative and Islamist women have played a vital role in the rise and entrenchment of current political power since the 1990s (Aksoy, 2015), even though anti-gender politics have been adopted to entrench a MAS agenda. Instead, political power appeals to a discourse of female vulnerability through benevolent sexism and masculinist protection (Young, 2005), as articulated in both familialist social policies and conservative gender rhetoric promoting the ideal of “virtuous” women's motherhood and wifely duties (Akkan, 2018). These policies and rhetoric have been disseminated through state institutions such as the Directorate of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Family and Social Services, and pro-government women organisations to maintain a “women-friendly” façade while condemning women's rights activists and organisations as enemies inside (Unal, 2021). Thereby, the political power adopts a *mafia tactic* by abandoning progressive gender politics and undermining policies ensuring women's access to their rights, such as protection against gender-based violence, then posing a threat to women by leaving them unprotected, if not punishing them directly. Moreover, the mafia tactic engages in masculinist protection by remaining the only refuge from the threat, so long as women condone it. Consequently, masculinist protection entails benevolent sexism and familialism, swaying conservative women's political acquiescence—whether we call it bargaining with patriarchy or making a virtue out of necessity. The resulting cultural intimacy is an incentive for complicity in or collaboration with the ongoing masculinist entrenchment that undermines women's rights in general. Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 might reflect such mafia tactics.

It is difficult to observe the political power specifically encouraging the enactment of the discourse of male victimhood or endangered masculinity, not least because it relies heavily on maintaining an image of invincibility and virility (Bavbek & Kennedy, 2024) rather than holding onto feelings of panic or fear of losing such privileges or power. This image is reinforced through the cascading electoral victories of the political power ruling Turkey for over two decades, despite the changing forms of its political alliances. During this period, it has taken control of state institutions and resources, dismantled checks and balances, and acted above the law by portraying any obstacle (e.g., the rule of law) or resistance (e.g., political dissidents) to the reckless fortification of political power as being against the will of the “people” that must be overcome immediately and harshly (Arslantaş & Kaiser, 2023), continuing on its mafia tactics. Hence the victimhood and self-

preservation discourses perpetuate rather than restore the masculinist ideal of power. These discourses as cultural intimacies represent a will to power and privilege over the people/groups who are cast out as exploitable, disposable and punishable (e.g., workers, students, migrants and minority groups, women and LGBTQ+ people). These discourses are attracting potential supporters from different groups including the anti-rights front who wish to benefit from the status quo and the immunity provided by the political power, facilitating diverse political alliances more easily incorporated into the existing political hegemony.

Accordingly, political power appeals to the victimhood discourse strategically to enshrine its populist political claims for self-preservation [*beka*] of the so-called authentic national identity while silencing oppositional voices by employing violence and punishment against them. In parallel with anti-genderism, the discourse of self-preservation is also characterised by anti-intellectualism. For instance, the Turkish state persecuted Academics for Peace after they signed a petition against the violent repression of Kurdish civilians (Korkman, 2022). Any criticism of the political power is cunningly translated into an assault on the so-called authentic national identity, depicting the whole nation as victimised. Strategically using the victimhood discourse creates the us-them division in forming political alliances that encompass radical Islamist groups and ultra-nationalists against other groups, including secularist and Kurdish political movements. By doing so, political power has engendered strongman authoritarianism (Yolaçan, 2022), deprived the press of freedom, and undermined the constitution, all the while delivering prosperity to its proponents and demonising critical intellectuals and the press. Hence, the masculinist entrenchment in Turkey reflects path dependence on MAS agenda, which involves anti-gender politics as well as restrictions on academic freedom (Kandiyoti & Emanet, 2017) and the press, by appealing to the discourses of self-preservation and victimhood. These discourses are usually accompanied by swashbuckling masculinity, which also fosters irredentist fantasies of foreign military adventures, such as those in Syria and Libya, and boasting about recent developments in Turkey's defence industry (Elçi, 2024), to stir up patriotism at home, reflecting the will to power.

### Neoliberal conservative social policies and engineering through anti-gender politics

Today's neoliberal social policy practices result in the withdrawal of the state from public services under its responsibility while establishing a new welfare system with chauvinistic and paternalistic qualities through nepotism, favouritism and clientelism (Careja & Harris, 2022; Guogis & Rakšnyš, 2022; Magni, 2021), to balance the effects of this withdrawal in society in line with MAS agenda. Welfare chauvinism requires political endorsement in the form of voting for and consenting to the agenda of political power, and consequently, a MAS political order redistributes punishments (e.g., by incarcerating and censoring political opponents and rewarding its supporters with economic and symbolic resources). As such, cultural intimacies involve the shaping of *affective citizenship* (Fortier, 2010) that has to be related to appropriate national and gendered feelings while excluding and disrespecting others marked as not belonging to the national affective community and, thus, should be denied their rights (Sauer, 2020). Political power creates the boundaries of this affective national community through the discourse of ‘homegrown and national’ aligned with nationalist and conservative political agendas.

In this way, chauvinism transforms belonging to a certain majoritarian identity into a kind of privilege by prioritising their access to various social and economic rights and public services (Andersen & Bjørklund, 1990). When accessing rights is transformed into a kind of privilege by moving away from the understanding of social equality and justice, policies producing discrimination and exclusion are strengthened. Groups outside the ‘superior’ Turkish Sunni Muslim identity as the moral majority in society, such as ethnic and religious minority groups,

immigrants and refugees, are subjected to discrimination and social exclusion. Shifting from the secularist Republican authoritarian state to an Islamist authoritarian neoliberal patriarchal state under the AKP governments (Özdemir, 2023), paternalism is mostly visible in the dominant traditional family discourse and widespread family-oriented social policies (Akkan, 2018) aligning with pro-population politics (Pehlivanlı-Kadayıfci et al., 2020). LGBTQ+ individuals, single people, and unmarried couples living together are restricted from accessing social rights and services and are thereby excluded from the social structure. While men's position as the head of the family functions at a symbolic level, women are at the forefront as the main recipients of family-oriented social policies (Eksi & Wood, 2019). Women are thus perceived as vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, and their practical needs, along with those of other family members, are met to some degree through social assistance programs. The paternalism of family-oriented social policies and practices, however, raises both contradictions and deficiencies in long-term gender equality plans. As women's empowerment ultimately undermines the conservative social engineering project, political power strategically avoids accomplishing gender equality objectives. Due to empowerment policies limited to social assistance, women's dependence on political power and its conservative agenda is maintained by prioritising practical needs. While this illustrates that loyalty and gratitude are sought to gain political support and approval, the preferential importance of social services for families shadowing women's rights and empowerment is underscored by the eradication of any reference to women, as evident in changing the name of the Ministry of Women and Family into the Ministry of Family and Social Services. Additionally, the Directorate of Religious Affairs aligned with the conservative social engineering project in taking increasingly important roles to deliver the conservative agenda, mainly affecting women's lives and family issues.

The Directorate of Religious Affairs plays a key role in disseminating these top-down anti-gender politics in two ways. First, it promotes religious family values and engenders traditional female roles by advising women to be docile, loyal, patient, and 'resilient', and not resort to divorce as their legal right, when faced with hardship in their marriages, including domestic abuse. Compatible with the conservative social engineering projects, the institution is increasingly bestowed with excessive resources and powers to provide counselling services for families, primarily women, while social work and other support services have diminished. The institution has recruited many female religious commissaries to carry out counselling, leaving the women who cannot access other services with no other choice but to turn to these religion-based counsellors (Karakas, 2022; Yetiş & Kolluoğlu, 2022). Even though some of these women, who come from conservative backgrounds and live in material poverty, may find solace in the institution's services, they are increasingly alienated from their rights. Furthermore, women have been inculcated with the saying "a broken arm stays in its sleeve" [*Kol kırılır yen içinde kalır*], which perfectly matches the securitarian agenda of the political power as part of cultural intimacy that demands women to remain silent and compliant to ensure the preservation of family, community and the nation. Endorsing masculinist protection remains the only way for women to preserve their lives, as part of *daunted managerialism* in the form of governing their precariousness (Yetiş & Bakırloğlu, 2023). This provides a framework of resilience without empowerment while making do with their negative conditions without a prospect of improvement.

Second, the institution's role of promoting and disseminating the discriminatory conservative discourse mostly adopted a religious moralistic stance targeting predominantly LGBTQ+ individuals and people with a perceived incompatibility with Islamist religious observances. These people are depicted as sinners and perverts threatening the social order and family. As an example, the institution's president, Ali Erbaş, blamed the pandemic on LGBTQ+ and HIV+ people when the government initially failed to manage the pandemic (Altay, 2022). Here, the institution acts as an ideological apparatus both covering the failures

of the government with religious rhetoric and disseminating the hostile discourse to entrench the conservative religious social engineering project in alignment with the MAS agendas. In this way, the religious rhetoric spearheaded by the institution sets the boundaries of who can/cannot be held accountable for what through cultural intimacies. The cultural intimacies through the religious rhetoric also provide immunity to political power for the shortcomings in its policies and impunity for the devastating impacts of these failed policies. Playing upon the faith is especially useful during difficult economic times and in light of the growing social and economic disparities brought about by the neoliberal economic system. This was also evident in the aftermath of the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes when the political power put forward *imams* and *müftüs* to convince the earthquake victims that these disasters were a test of their faith. Following President Erdoğan's religious rhetoric related to the earthquake, *imams* and *müftüs* asked the victims for resignation to their fate, instead of holding the government accountable for its neglect in rescuing efforts and service provision (Yetiş & Bakırloğlu, 2023). However, it would be a mistake to assume that the victims are simply credulous to such rhetoric, given that they are likely to be punished with further neglect if they show resistance, adding insult to injury. Following masculinist protection within a mafia tactic, the requested resignation to their fate here stands for compliance and is rewarded with a conditional protection. Being outside this masculinist protection means remaining unprotected and even deserving punishment for disobedience and ungratefulness when they attempt to hold the government accountable for its policies and their consequences.

Government evading accountability is evidenced by the fact that the Ministry of Family and Social Services and other social policy players sideline feminist organisations and the women's movement when decisions about women's status in Turkey are made within public institutions. At times, rights-based civil society organisations advocating for strategic objectives are subjected to exclusion and criminalisation for their activities, as they contradict the conservative policies of the political power, as exemplified through the efforts to shut down the Platform to Stop Femicide [*Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu*]. In the process leading up to the filing of the closure case against the Platform, the Platform was accused of committing the fabricated crime of destroying the family and was even associated with terrorism (Tahincioğlu, 2022). Furthermore, state-led gender-based violence is evident as part of the mafia tactic of masculinist protection. Strip-searching of women under detention or imprisonment becomes a state-inflicted sexual abuse in parallel with an increase in the number of female political prisoners. Additionally, these assaults were justified through the logic of masculinist protection, condemning and stigmatising women as immoral, thus undermining their protection and justifying punishment. State-led gender-based violence thus provides the means of controlling and oppressing women by failing to prevent violence against women and actively using this violence as a threat against them (Sarac, 2021).

This showcases how political decisions and actions regarding gender are underpinned by a punishment mechanism established and supported by political power. The main strategy here is to position LGBTQ+ people and women's rights advocates against an imagined conservative family concept upholding society's fundamental values and to accuse these groups of disrupting it. Consequently, political power can mobilise extra-legal instruments to demonise LGBTQ+ activists<sup>6</sup> and certain feminist groups by separating their political struggle from each other and other oppositional groups (Zengin, 2024). The MAS agenda is

<sup>6</sup> Demonisation and criminalisation of LGBTQ+ communities have intensified since the Gezi protests in 2013, as LGBTQ+ people are increasingly publicly visible. Consequently, state authorities semi-criminalised and banned the rainbow flag, since it symbolises perversion promoted by LGBTQ+ organisations (Zengin, 2024), and prohibited Istanbul LGBTQ+ Pride Parades and queer activities since 2015 (Özbay, 2022).

brought forward to split coalitions and gain political support by manufacturing a moral panic, where a person or group is defined as a threat to societal values and interests and presented as 'deviant' in a stylised and stereotypical way by the mass media, leading to overheated reactions by the police, conservative politicians and reactionary activist groups (Cohen, 2011; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2014). Hereby, securitarian rhetoric turns progressive policy proposals prioritising equality and justice into security problems by strategically depicting the demands for gender equality, women's empowerment, and various social rights as threats to traditional cultural values and society's integrity. This rhetoric appeals to masculinist protection within its mafia tactics, setting boundaries for a national affective community anchored around the propinquities of political power. However, instead of corresponding genuine feelings of anxiety and fear in society, the moral panic manufactured by these rhetorical devices often harbingers a precursory enactment of moral indignation with its punitive and vindictive nature, determining the redistribution of punishments and rewards.

Political power promotes moral panic through conventional and social media, which inform the public of the expectations of boundaries drawn by political power. Nevertheless, even if fabricated moral panics around self-preservation helped consolidate political power during the last presidential election in 2023 to maintain economic and political hegemony (Unal, 2024), their success is not always guaranteed. Particularly, the last local election of 2024 clarified that people are not engulfed in these discourses, evident in the overwhelming failure of political power and the election of the increased number of women mayors (especially from opposition parties) despite the ongoing anti-gender politics and rhetoric. Considering the deepening economic crisis adding up to the social injustices with increasing poverty, deprivation and hyperinflation that began in 2021, self-preservation and victimhood discourses as cultural intimacies are not capable enough to consolidate political power per se. The effectiveness of cultural intimacies hinges on dynamics of societal and economic conditions rather than being rooted in an assumed static Turkish political culture – i.e. at least 60 % of the population are natural supporters of right-wing conservatives – reflecting a nationalist and conservative self-stereotypical image deprived of sociological realities.

### Anti-rights front in Turkey and anti-genderism

A MAS agenda exists in conjunction with an anti-rights front capitalising on violence, including oppression and discrimination against others, underpinning anti-genderism that undermines the rights of women and other marginalised groups. Extending the rhetoric around the self-preservation of family to the wider community and nation, cultural intimacy becomes crucial for turning public space into a private one where violence is tolerated. The operation of cultural intimacy in this context contrasts with the civilising process (Elias, 2000); the latter assumes the state monopolising the use of violence, restricting non-state actors from using violence in public politics and regulating its use in private, whereas the former allows political power, the state and non-state actors (like micropower foci) to maintain violence without accountability for its consequences. The cultural intimacy here extends to non-state actors' use of violence in the public-political sphere beyond the private one without endangering the state's central authority. As part of ongoing mutual recognition, political power can entrench its top-down authoritarian political hegemony by condoning violence of non-state actors in private and public to some extent, if not fully legitimising it. In return for endorsing and even emulating the state's coercive power, these actors can gain more power.

Micropower foci (e.g., fundamentalist religious communities, tariqats, feudal and tribal networks, town notables and fellow countrymen clubs in cities) represent groups that existed even before the development of anti-gender politics, but recently, they found an exclusive opportunity to spread economic and political agendas, strengthening their power. Additionally, some pro-government companies were able to

expand their capital and acquire conventional media channels through political favouritism (Yesil, 2014), and some non-governmental and faith-based organisations supported by political power were able to expand their social power and capital by exploiting authoritarian neoliberal political circumstances (Kazanoğlu & Ketola, 2022), which weakened the right-based civil society organisations. Additionally, mafia-like organisations linked to ultra-nationalist groups whose activities rely on violence and coercion (Cengiz, 2020) line up with this anti-right front. The power of these groups relies on the preservation of the existing authoritarian regime; however, their influence over adherents and their economic resources render their support for political power essential to sustaining the MAS agenda. Within this relationship, there is mutual dependency and a win-win situation where both parties benefit from deteriorating rights and rule of law while increasing their economic and political power. These groups, however, cannot be portrayed as reactionaries; rather, they re-articulate their interests and will to power in line with the current authoritarian political climate and actively participate in the masculinist entrenchment by deploying and reproducing cultural intimacies forged between political power and themselves. Even though their diverse interests sometimes conflict with each other, these interests can be negotiated and pursued through discourses on preserving the coherent family image.

The most concrete example of an anti-gender movement is the Big Family Platform,<sup>7</sup> which organises various activities (e.g., protests) to publicise their reactions against the so-called LGBT propaganda and imposition (Ulaş, 2023). Their central claim is that there is an attempt to eradicate sexual differences in society and abolish the family, which is attributed to Western imperialist powers. These allegations are partly inspired by anti-gender movements evident in the former Eastern Bloc countries (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018), rather than being solely local reactions. In these rallies, LGBTQ+ people are defined as a national security problem and LGBTQ+ organisations are depicted as terrorist organisations; thereby, the state is urged to take precautionary measures to protect Turkish social and family values by penalising the public advocates of LGBTQ+ issues and even forcibly evicting LGBTQ+ people from Turkey (Zengin, 2024). Importantly, those participating in these activities do not constitute a politically and sociologically homogeneous and stable community but represent a fragmented minority in itself. For example, we encounter various fundamentalist religious communities side by side with a minority group that boasts their ultra-secular and ultra-nationalist worldviews advocating for the entrenchment of authoritarian state sovereignty while opposing gender as an ideology that, in this view, serves the imperialist aims of the West. The incompatibility between these two groups is not limited to the issue of secularism; while fundamentalist religious communities mobilise their demands on the protection of conservative, religious family structure from the state's intervention to entrench their micropower autonomy, the other group demands the strengthening of an authoritarian state structure and its further intervention in private life. While these contradictory demands may initially appear incompatible, the common grounds established through anti-genderism can be operationalised for their opportunistic cooperation (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021).

Turkey's more recent withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention may indicate the increasing influence of the anti-rights front and micropower foci over shaping the forms of anti-gender politics (Özbay & Ipekci, 2024). It is geared towards protecting and even strengthening the construction of a masculine understanding of power centred around protection, patronage, control and surveillance while seemingly presenting the protection of women and children as their priority. The state cooperating with micropower foci increases a control and surveillance mechanism, especially penetrating the family. The control mechanism produced by this cooperation demands that women fulfil their primary roles in the home/family, such as caring for children and ensuring the

<sup>7</sup> A group of over two hundred civil society organisations.

integrity and well-being of the family (Akkan, 2018). Policies or problems concerning women have been turned into the material of conservative populist right-wing politics centred around family, religion, and nationalism to ensure popular support for its political hegemony. Nevertheless, the state has been transformed into an authoritarian and securitarian state by rapidly moving away from the qualities of a social state and adopting a neoliberal logic, leading the state to abdicate its responsibilities towards citizens and abandon its obligation to protect their rights. The conservative right-wing policies accompanying this logic have created an environment where every opportunity is provided for the usurpation and even revocation of many acquired rights. Particularly, the state of emergency declared after the attempted coup in 2016 has led to the devaluation of the demands for rights and freedoms vis-à-vis policies carried out around a securitarian agenda. Along with other struggles for rights and freedoms, the demands of women's rights defenders have been devalued, and the pursuit of the rights and liberties itself has been criminalised. Recently, extreme police violence and violating the right to assemble and march on the 8<sup>th</sup> March International Women's Day exemplify the extent to which authoritarian security policies have reached (e.g., Adal, 2019) and are part and parcel of the political power's punitive policies. Through its instruments of force and coercion against women in pursuit of their rights, the state perpetrates punitive violence in ways similar to domestic violence in various micropower foci. Although state violence against women's rights defenders cannot be the only explanation for family/domestic violence, we can see that the underlying logic of masculinist protection, as the pillar of this punitive violence, is inherent in state violence and all forms of gender-based violence.

Some NGOs, in collusion with the anti-rights front and close to political power, are given a place in the power structure when they advocate and promote anti-gender politics. KADEM (Foundation for Women and Democracy), whose members and executives are women, constitutes a fitting example (Ayhan, 2019). In advocating anti-gender politics instigated by political power by defending a concept of justice that lacks an understanding of equality, KADEM promotes a conservative conceptualisation of gender justice based on gender populism. Nevertheless, the demands of various micropower foci clustered around the political power and far-right parties for amending Law No. 6284 on the Prevention of Violence against Women, following Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, caused KADEM discomfort and led to various objections to the proposal based on the fear that the amendment would further erode women's right to protection from violence. Writers, journalists, and politicians, mostly men and close to political power, harshly criticised these objections from KADEM and sometimes openly threatened objectors (Bianet, 2023). Although Islamist women who support the government condone top-down anti-gender politics to a certain extent in exchange for their relative control over women's issues and benefit from the resources provided by political power, undermining women's rights concomitantly results in long-term political disempowerment not only for secular but also conservative Islamist women. Political power, using the stick-and-carrot approach as its mafia tactic, tries to save its women-friendly facade while immobilising Islamist women's movements by holding them under its control (Kandiyoti, 2021). This immobilisation also takes the extent of oppression over the dissident voices of Islamist feminists even further, who oppose anti-gender politics based overwhelmingly on a patriarchal interpretation of Islam (Unal, 2022).

Accordingly, similar to political power, the anti-rights front also uses the family preservation discourse to entrench their micropower autonomy while not hesitating to outspokenly threaten women who demand and protect their rights by depicting them as enemies. Consequently, they act for masculinist protection in line with conservative and familialist social policies and the state's authoritarian political agenda that prioritises security over rights. These micropower foci demanding complete control over women's bodies and lives, view any gains in women's rights and the empowerment of women as being at the expense

of their relatively autonomous power. Since women's empowerment is seen as a threat to both the political power and micropower foci, they act together in anti-genderism. Even though the anti-rights front has not sufficiently consolidated power yet, it can gain strength by capitalising on the ongoing top-down anti-gender rhetoric and politics. Likewise, the removal of gender equality as a norm and the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention can be seen as a triumph of fundamentalist religious communities who gain influence on political power and in society as micropower foci. These groups exploit anti-genderism by aligning with, shaping and mainstreaming the MAS political agenda to promote their ultra-conservative ideology and strengthen their power. This is also evidenced in their increased clustering around the government by taking decision-making positions in crucial state institutions, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and the Supreme Court (Aviv, 2023). Moreover, the rising popularity of the New Welfare Party during the recent local elections in 2024, which is competing with AKP in anti-genderism by spearheading ultraconservative and religious discourse (Hamsici, 2024), suggests that such a front could gain more power to shape the future of Turkish politics.

### Swashbuckling masculinity through the invocation of masculinity-in-defence

A sense of righteous/entitled aggression towards others is catalysed by swashbuckling masculinity as a gendered performance reproduced by both political power and citizens who feel part of the affective community gathered around the top-down MAS political agenda. Swashbuckling masculinity is performed within mafia tactics to enact violence as a means of self-preservation and a sense of victimhood by pursuing a sense of moral indignation deemed 'righteous' for nationalist and conservative claims. In other words, the privilege of enacting violence to maintain political hegemony constitutes a main component of the MAS agenda. This tactic, however, is not limited to the use of political power and state agents since its operation still relies on cultural intimacy shared by ordinary people and the anti-rights front; otherwise, it would have failed to be successful. Yet, how it is interpreted and enacted depends on the context and varying interests of involved individuals or groups.

Men's violence in anti-genderism cannot simply be explained away as reactions against the developments drawing on gender equality, women's empowerment, and destabilisation of traditional gender roles and expectations. Nevertheless, violence is overwhelmingly seen as a right granted to men and a duty they must perform when necessary, including the protection of their home, family, honour, homeland, and nation (Yetiş & Kolluoğlu, 2022). A masculinity capable of using violence is required and nurtured for the defence and protection motives of securitarian policies that legitimise violence as a tool or capital (Brown, 2020). Likewise, the roles assigned to this masculinity are defined as maintaining and ensuring order, preventing chaos and evading perceived threats. Immanent to the hegemonic formation of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), these roles are constantly entrenched through an ongoing relationship between militarism and masculinity that explains the wider social acceptance of men's 'righteous enactment of violence' (Sjoberg, 2014). It is widely expected that men are capable of resorting to violence to defend what they own and to protect, and especially to realise masculinity as a glorified value and a symbol of power (Bourdieu, 2002). In this scenario, men may resort to violence when they cannot obtain what they are entitled to or fear losing what they believe they have, which is fostered by a masculine subjectivity in defence through acclaiming victim status (Yetiş, 2020). Masculine subjectivity in defence is also provoked by right-wing populist, conservative and nationalist politics (Greig, 2019). Along with the ongoing economic crisis, the global climate and environmental crisis causes greater inequality and injustice, increasing unemployment, and precarious and poor working conditions. The decline in living standards added to the so-called global migration crisis creates an uncertain

picture, which can trigger and mobilise masculinity-in-defence. In the face of these problems, authoritarian populist governments taking refuge in securitarian politics seek to provoke this masculinity-in-defence to support their politics (Greig, 2019). State-sponsored homophobia in Turkey is an excellent example of such provocation (Özbay, 2022) to divert the anxiety and fear accumulated in society by channelling it to other areas (Butler, 2024). Accordingly, it becomes important to evaluate the recent increase in social violence along with the encouraging impunity policies of the political power. Considering the ongoing verbal abuse (Altınoluk & Koca, 2022) and lynching attempts against migrant and refugee groups in online and physical spaces, we can interpret the perceived socio-cultural and 'biological superiority' of Turks over refugees as a gendered phenomenon (Ozduzen et al., 2021) in relation to masculinity-in-defence. This is also accompanied by a general rise in incidents of violence involving firearms and knives (Umut Vakfi, 2024) as well as acts of violence against health workers, ranging from verbal to physical and sexual violence (Demirci & Uğurluoğlu, 2020). Although these incidents of violence are not necessarily directly supported by political power, the climate of violence enabled by top-down MAS politics has encouraged such incidents. Just before the 2023 presidential election, a woman expressed her support for political power by saying, "Now we can beat the doctors whenever we want. It wasn't like this before" (Mikrofondasin, 2023), illustrating the broader repercussions of endorsing violence in situations people feel aggrieved for any reason or face conflict, which is not limited to male subjects.

As an intrinsic part of anti-gender politics, this form of masculinity-in-defence has evolved into a performance of swashbuckling masculinity, which President Erdoğan also embodies by appealing to the discourse of victimhood. The discourse justifies violence and coercion, allowing him to gain/maintain power, resolve conflicts he faced, and punish dissidents by invoking and enacting the symbol of authenticity and nationality, which are constantly depicted to be threatened and need to be defended (Al-Ghazzi, 2021). However, this swashbuckling masculinity cannot be interpreted as simply a product of the sexual contract between the political power, state and male citizens (Pateman, 1988) on the enactment of violence, since the violence is targeted at women and LGBTQ+ people as well as politically dissident and marginalised men. Similarly, different groups can invoke victimhood discourse to justify violence associated with their so-called aggrieved state. Therefore, some domestic violence perpetrators have claimed that false allegations of women lead to men being victimised by the very laws aimed at protecting women from men's violence, such as the removal of the accused from home as a precaution (Yetiş & Kolluoğlu, 2022). During the campaign against the Istanbul Convention, the anti-rights front heavily promoted and circulated this argument to create a moral panic around male victimisation (Unal, 2021). However, political power has interpreted the argument as aligning with masculinist protection, where aggrieved men become violent towards their partners out of desperation and depression. In an ironic twist, this argument surrounding male victimisation was cunningly transformed into a concern for female vulnerability to justify the withdrawal from the Convention under the pretext of safeguarding women from lethal violence (Yetiş & Kolluoğlu, 2022). The opportunistic cooperation can also include the Divorced Victim Fathers Association, who allege they were alienated from their children after divorce, and the Platform for Victims of Indefinite Alimony, who claim they were victimised by paying indefinite alimony after divorce. The former group seems to align with masculinist restoration by lamenting the loss of the privilege of controlling their children and ex-wives, which they had enjoyed thanks to traditional patriarchal family institutions. The latter group claiming to be victims of alimony, however, are transformed from proud men boasting of their privileges into victimised men reluctant to pay for those privileges after divorce (Sallan Gül, 2019), which might be seen as demanding a new set of privileges in line with masculinist entrenchment capitalising on a discourse of victimisation after a divorce.

As such, the victimhood discourse can be exploited by different

groups for various purposes, especially when political power overwhelmingly uses it to justify violence and solidify its authority. Securitarian politics enshrine masculinity-in-defence, not just among men but also across society and institutions that embody masculine power. Thus far, the political power, the state and non-state agents have adeptly converged in such a performance to enact a victimised position to justify their oppression and superiority over others, thereby constituting a cultural intimacy. This effort, however, risks being futile and self-defeating since the state and political power cannot guarantee the containment of the complex and dynamic forces leading to the mobilisation of this masculinity-in-defence, which can also ultimately challenge the political power's authority and the state's sovereignty (Brown, 2020). Consequently, increasing anxiety and fear in society, transformed into anger and resentment, can reinforce relatively autonomous forms of reactionary movements around masculinist identity politics, such as racist, homophobic, misogynistic and fundamentalist grassroots organisations, that may surpass the control capacity of political power and state agents (Nicholas & Agius, 2017; Pease, 2020). Even though such radicalised masculinist identity politics organised around racism, xenophobic nationalism and anti-genderism have not yet gained traction in Turkey, we can still expect them to become more prevalent in the future.

## Conclusion

Turkey represents a unique example of the rise in anti-genderism related to top-down politics, illustrating a different course compared to that of many Western countries. We argue that anti-gender politics in Turkey are mainly top-down and a part of social engineering processes within a majoritarian-authoritarian-securitarian political agenda, whereas their limited reception at the grassroots level is predicated on cultural intimacies that facilitate mutual recognition and reciprocal relationships, serving to maintain the current hegemonic authoritarian political and neoliberal economic order. The concept of cultural intimacy allowed us to identify and co-analyse the shared discourses of sacred familialism, self-preservation [*beka*], victimhood and the performance of swashbuckling masculinity as particularly prominent and how they resonate in varying forms across society.

While many scholars claim that masculinist restoration grounds the far-right populism in Turkey, we argue that a more nuanced masculinist entrenchment underpins the top-down anti-gender politics that strategically capitalise on masculinist protection in line with the discourses of victimhood and self-preservation of the so-called authentic national identity, and through the enactment of swashbuckling masculinity to provide a sense of righteous aggression and violence to protect the family, state and nation. Cultural intimacies legitimising the enactment of violence simultaneously both in the public and private spheres do not necessarily indicate the decline of centralised state authority. Contrarily, political power entrenches its top-down authoritarian political hegemony by condoning violence of non-state actors both in private and public to some extent, and various actors in society gain power by endorsing and even emulating the state's coercive power. Anti-rights front, including micropower foci consisting of fundamentalist religious communities, ultra-nationalist groups, feudal and tribal networks, mafia-like organisations and government-organised NGOs, re-articulate their interests in line with the majoritarian-authoritarian-securitarian political agenda and actively participate in the masculinist entrenchment by deploying and reproducing cultural intimacies forged between political power and themselves. These should not be reduced to grassroots reactionaries autonomously forming the anti-gender movements; instead, the sociologically and politically heterogeneous and contradictory amalgamation of the anti-rights front in Turkey indicates opportunistic cooperation anchored around such cultural intimacies. On this basis, we believe masculinist entrenchment as an analytical concept can enable dismantling and analysing such heterogeneous, opportunistic cooperations bunched together under the politics of top-down anti-

genderism through cultural intimacies in Turkey as well as other contexts around the globe.

Although we find it hopeful that a recently growing social justice activism based on gender issues is becoming a common ground to struggle against majoritarian-authoritarian-securitarian political agenda, the anti-gender politics intrinsically provoke masculinity-in-defence constantly appealing self-preservation and victimhood discourses to justify violence and aggression in different contexts, which can also reinforce reactionary political movements including racist, homophobic, and misogynist grassroots organisations beyond the control capacity of the political power and state agents. In this sense, while an autonomous, grassroots anti-gender front similar to other countries has not yet strengthened in Turkey, it is highly likely to do so in the not-too-distant future due to ongoing top-down anti-gender politics.

## Funding

This work was supported by the UK Research and Innovation [Grant Reference: EP/X030504/1].

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Erman Örsan Yetiş:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Özge Özdoğan:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

## References

- Aciksoz, S. C. (2024). Queer terrorists, terrorist queers: The sexual politics of Turkey's war on terror. *Men and Masculinities*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X241276103>
- Adal, H. (2019, March 11). *Polis Feminist Gece Yürüyüşü'ne Gazla Saldırdı*. Bianet. <https://bianet.org/haber/polis-feminist-gece-yuruyusu-ne-gazla-saldirdi-206261>.
- Akkan, B. (2018). The politics of care in Turkey: Sacred familialism in a changing political context. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 25(1), 72–91. <https://doi.org/10.1093/SP/JXX011>
- Aksoy, H. (2015). Invigorating democracy in Turkey: The agency of organized Islamist women. *Politics & Gender*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X1500001X>
- Al-Ghazzi, O. (2021). We will be great again: Historical victimhood in populist discourse. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420985851>
- Altay, T. (2022). The pink line across digital publics: Political homophobia and the queer strategies of everyday life during COVID-19 in Turkey. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 29(1 suppl), 60S–74S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505068221076329>
- Altınoluk, D., & Koca, B. (2022). Gündelik Milliyetçiliği Şehirde Deneyimlemek: Suriye Zorunlu Göçünün İzdüşümünde Kilis. *Moment Dergi*, 9(2), 325–346. <https://doi.org/10.17572/MJ2022.2.325-346>
- Andersen, J. G., & Björklund, T. (1990). Structural changes and new cleavages: The progress parties in Denmark and Norway. *Acta Sociologica*, 33(3), 195–217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000169939003300303>
- Arat, Y. (2020, February 10). *Toplumsal cinsiyet ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği nedir, ne değildir?* Sarkaç. <https://sarkac.org/2020/02/toplumsal-cinsiyet-nedir-ne-degidir/>.
- Arat, Y., & Pamuk, Ş. (2019). *Turkey between democracy and authoritarianism*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139022385>
- Arslantaş, D., & Kaiser, A. (2023). The 'competitive authoritarian' turn in Turkey: Bandwagoning versus reality. *Third World Quarterly*, 44(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2147061>
- Aviv, E. (2023). Critically assessing the contours of relations between the AKP and Islamic movements after the July 15 coup attempt: The Furkan Vakfı case. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 59(4), 582–596. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2022.2118720>
- Aydın-Düzgün, S. (2012). No crisis, no change: The third AKP victory in the June 2011 parliamentary elections in Turkey. *South European Society and Politics*, 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2011.640426>
- Ayhan, T. (2019, April 29). *KADEM's "gender justice" or the momentum of anti-genderism in Turkey*. LSE Blog: Engenderings. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2019/04/29/kadems-gender-justice-in-turkey/>.
- Bavbek, N. Y., & Kennedy, M. D. (2024). Articulations of strongmen: A knowledge cultural sociology of recognizing autocratic practices in Russian, Turkish, and global regimes. *The American Behavioral Scientist*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642241268221>
- Bianet. (2023, March 15). *Özlem Zengin: "6284 sayılı kanun kırmızı çizgimizdir"*. Bianet. <https://bianet.org/haber/ozlem-zengin-6284-sayili-kanun-kirmizi-cizgimizdir-275709>.
- Bourdieu, P. (2002). *Masculine domination*. Stanford University Press.
- Brown, W. (1992). Finding the man in the state. *Feminist Studies*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178212>
- Brown, W. (2020). Walled states, Waning Sovereignty. In *Walled states, waning sovereignty*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv14gpj55>
- Butler, J. (2024). *Who's afraid of gender?* Allen Lane.
- Careja, R., & Harris, E. (2022). Thirty years of welfare chauvinism research: Findings and challenges. In J. Vol. 32, Issue 2. *Journal of European social policy* (pp. 212–224). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287211068796>.
- Cengiz, F.Ç. (2020). Proliferation of neopatrimonial domination in Turkey. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 47(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2018.1509693>
- Coffe, H., Fraile, M., Alexander, A., Fortin-Rittberger, J., & Banducci, S. (2023). Masculinity, sexism and populist radical right support. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 5, Article 1038659. <https://doi.org/10.3389/FPOS.2023.1038659/BIBTEX>
- Cohen, S. (2011). *Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of the mods and rockers* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829–859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>
- Demir, Y., & Tiryaki, S. (2024). "We are enemies of law and women": The manosphere and victimized masculinity on Twitter (now X). *The Journal of Men's Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10608265241279841>
- Demirci, Ş., & Uğurluoğlu, Ö. (2020). An evaluation of verbal, physical, and sexual violence against healthcare workers in Ankara, Turkey. *Journal of Forensic Nursing*, 16(4). <https://doi.org/10.1097/JFN.0000000000000286>
- Eksi, B., & Wood, E. A. (2019). Right-wing populism as gendered performance: Janus-faced masculinity in the leadership of Vladimir Putin and Recep T. Erdogan. *Theory and Society*, 48(5), 733–751. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S11186-019-09363-3/METRICS>
- Elçi, E. (2024). Authoritarian populism. In N. Lindstaedt, & J. J. J. van den Bosch (Eds.), *Research handbook on authoritarianism* (pp. 42–58). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/book/9781802204827/book-part-9781802204827-9.xml>.
- Elias, N. (2000). *The civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and psychogenetic processes*. Blackwell.
- Esen, B., & Gumuscu, S. (2021). Why did Turkish democracy collapse? A political economy account of AKP's authoritarianism. *Party Politics*, 27(6). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068820923722>
- Fassin, E. (2024). *State anti-intellectualism & the politics of gender and race: Illiberal France and beyond*. Central European University Press.
- Fortier, A. M. (2010). Proximity by design? Affective citizenship and the management of unease. *Citizenship Studies*, 14(1), 17–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020903466258>
- Goode, E., & Ben-Yehuda, N. (2014). Moral panics: Culture, politics, and social construction. In *Understanding deviance: Connecting classical and contemporary perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.20.080194.001053>
- Graff, A., & Korolczuk, E. (2021). *Anti-gender politics in the populist moment*. Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003133520>
- Greig, A. (2019). *Masculinities and the far-right: Implications for Oxfam's work on gender justice* | Oxfam.
- Grzebalska, W., & Pető, A. (2018). The gendered modus operandi of the illiberal transformation in Hungary and Poland. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 68, 164–172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.WSIF.2017.12.001>
- Guoqis, A., & Raksıny, A. V. (2022). The problem of establishing welfare state models, their values and coherence with the public administration models. *Regional Formation and Development Studies*, 29(3), 64–72. <https://doi.org/10.15181/RFDS.V29I3.1995>
- Gutiérrez Rodríguez, E., Tuzcu, P., & Winkel, H. (2018). Introduction: Feminisms in times of anti-genderism, racism and austerity. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 68, 139–141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.WSIF.2018.03.008>
- Hamsici, M. (2024, April 4). *Yeniden Refah Partisi yerel seçimlerde neden ve nasıl güçlendi?* BBC News Türkçe. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/c8033n7zn8ko>.
- Herzfeld, M. (2016). *Cultural intimacy: Social poetics and the real life of states, societies, and institutions*. Taylor and Francis.
- Human Rights Watch. (2023, June 27). Turkey: Mass detentions at pride marches [press release]. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/27/turkey-mass-detentions-pride-marches>.
- JINHA. (2022, June 22). *If we are all in the same boat, why does this oppression continue?* JINHA. <https://test.jinhaagency.com/en/actual/if-we-are-all-in-the-same-boat-why-does-this-oppression-continue-31477>.
- Kancı, T., Çelik, B., Bekki, Y. B., & Tarcan, U. (2023). The anti-gender movement in Turkey: An analysis of its reciprocal aspects. *Turkish Studies*, 24(5). <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2022.2164189>
- Kandıyoti, D. (2014, December 1). *No laughing matter: Women and the new populism in Turkey*. *OpenDemocracy*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/no-laughing-matter-women-and-new-populism-in-turkey/>.
- Kandıyoti, D. (2021). Locating gender in contentious politics. In D. Kandıyoti, N. Al-Ali, & K. Spellman Poots (Eds.), *Gender, governance and Islam* (pp. 215–218). Edinburgh University Press.
- Kandıyoti, D., & Emanet, Z. (2017). Education as battleground: The capture of minds in Turkey. *Globalizations*, 14(6), 869–876. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2017.1325170>
- Karakaş, B. (2022). *Biz Her Şeyiz: Diyanet'in İşleri*. İletişim.
- Kazanoğlu, N., & Ketola, M. (2022). Understanding the moral economy of state-civil society relationships: Islam, women's NGOs and rights-based advocacy in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2022.2033118>
- KONDA. (2019). *Türkiye'de Toplumsal Cinsiyet Raporu: Hayat Tarzları 2018 Araştırması*. <https://konda.com.tr/uploads/konda-toplumsal-cinsiyet-raporu-7d3c6633a652176d42c8d6564dc5344c17d0d58279b6f90abcf5fca8cf4d0b5.pdf>.
- KONDA. (2020). *İstanbul Sözleşmesi*. <https://konda.com.tr/rapor/11/istanbul-sozlesmesi>.

- Korkman, Z. K. (2022). Transnational solidarity? Academia and the politics of knowledge, translation, and (im)mobility. *Feminist Formations*, 34(1), 166–190. <https://doi.org/10.1353/FF.2022.0007>
- Korkut, U. (2017). Applying the theory of discursive analysis to governance of forced migration. *Middle East Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.12738/mejrs.2017.2.2.0113>
- Kuhar, R., & Paternotte, D. (2018). *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against equality*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Magni, G. (2021). Economic inequality, immigrants and selective solidarity: From perceived lack of opportunity to in-group favoritism. *British Journal of Political Science*, 51(4), 1357–1380. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000046>
- Mikrofonodanım. (2023, May 3). *Seçim Anketi 18. Bölüm | Samsun 56'lar Part 2 [Broadcast]*. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/rXRdQmRxN0?si=GSWJpmO-S-7owy7G&t=1701>
- Nicholas, L., & Agius, C. (2017). *The persistence of global masculinism: Discourse, gender and neo-colonial re-articulations of violence*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68360-7/COVER>
- O'Neil, M. L., & Çarkoğlu, A. (2022). Türkiye'de Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Kadın Algısı Araştırması 2022. <https://gender.khas.edu.tr/sites/gender.khas.edu.tr/files/inline-files/TTCKAA2022-5.pdf>
- Öniş, Z. (2016). Turkey's two elections: The akp comes back. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(2). <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0021>
- Özbay, C. (2022). State homophobia, sexual politics, and queering the Boğaziçi resistance. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 121(1). <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-9561657>
- Özbay, C., & Ipekci, I. C. (2024). State-led antigender politics, Islamism, and the university experiences of gender studies scholars in Turkey. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 20(1), 89–110. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-10961794>
- Özdemir, Ş. (2023). Discursive activists or patriarchal bargainers? Religion, gender, and neoliberal governance in the “new” Turkey. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 30(1). <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxab051>
- Ozduzen, O., Korkut, U., & Ozduzen, C. (2021). ‘Refugees are not welcome’: Digital racism, online place-making and the evolving categorization of Syrians in Turkey. *New Media and Society*, 23(11). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820956341>
- Pateman, C. (1988). *The sexual contract*. Stanford University Press.
- Pease, B. (2020). The rise of angry white men : Resisting populist masculinity and the backlash against gender equality. In C. Noble, & G. Ottman (Eds.), *The challenge of right-wing nationalist populism for social work* (pp. 55–68). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429056536-5>
- Pehlivanlı-Kadayıfci, E., Ziya, H. E., & Korkut, U. (2020). Discursive governance over pro-population politics in Turkey. *Sosyoloji Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 23(2), 244–283. <https://doi.org/10.18490/SOSARS.819013>
- Sallan Gül, S. (2019). *Mağrur Erkeklikten Mağdur Erkekliğe*. Kazete Internet Gazetesi. <https://www.kazete.com.tr/magrur-erkeklikten-magdur-erkekligine>
- Sarac, B. N. (2021, February 17). *How state-led political violence affects women: Turkey post the 2016 coup attempt*. LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security Blog. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2021/02/17/how-state-led-political-violence-affects-women-turkey-post-the-2016-coup-attempt/>
- Sauer, B. (2020). Authoritarian right-wing populism as masculinist identity politics. The role of affects. In *Right-wing populism and gender: European perspectives and beyond*. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839449806-002>
- Sjoberg, L. (2014). *Gender, war, and conflict*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Tahincioğlu, G. (2022, April 14). *Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu, bu yüzden kapatılmak isteniyormuş: Akıl almaz suç duyurusu, fişlemeler ve “ahlaka aykırılık” iddiası*. T24. <https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/gokcer-tahincioğlu-yuzlesme/kadin-cinayetlerini-durduracagiz-platformu-bu-yuzden-kapatilmak-isteniyormus-akil-almaz-suc-duyuru-fislemeler-ve-ahlaka-aykirlilik-iddiasi,34936>
- Uçan Çubukçu, S. (2021). *Üniversitelerde Toplumsal Cinsiyet Merkezleri*. Feminist Bellek. <https://feministbellek.org/universitelerde-toplumsal-cinsiyet-merkezleri/>
- Ulaş, F. (2023, September 17). “Büyük Aile Buluşması” sessiz yürüyüşle tamamlandı. Anadolu Ajansı. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/buyuk-aile-bulusmasi-sessiz-yuruyusle-tamamlandi/2994147>
- Umut Vakfı. (2024). Türkiye Silahlı Şiddet Haritası 2023. <https://umut.org.tr/umut-vakfi-turkiye-silahlı-siddet-haritasi-2023/>
- Unal, D. (2021). The masculinist restoration project in the rhetoric of anti-gender movements. In O. Hakola, J. Salminen, J. Turpeinen, & O. Winberg (Eds.), *The culture and politics of populist masculinities* (pp. 67–88). Lexington Books.
- Unal, D. (2022). “Are you God? Damn your family!”: The Islam–gender nexus in right-wing populism and the new generation of Muslim feminist activism in Turkey. *Religions*, 13(4). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040372>
- Unal, D. (2024). Political homophobia as a tool of creating crisis narratives and ontological insecurities in illiberal populist contexts: Lessons from the 2023 elections in Turkey. *New Perspectives on Turkey*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2024.4>
- Uzun, B., & Tiryaki, S. (2024). The construction of hegemonic masculinity and misogyny by Turkish Incels on YouTube. *Gender, Technology and Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718524.2024.2393988>
- Walby, S. (2023). Authoritarianism, violence, and varieties of gender regimes: Violence as an institutional domain. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 98, Article 102677. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.WSIF.2023.102677>
- Yesil, B. (2014). Press censorship in Turkey: Networks of state power, commercial pressures, and self-censorship. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12049>
- Yetiş, E.Ö. (2019). *Türkiye’de erkeklerin şiddet hakkında algı, düşünce ve deneyimleri* [PhD, Ankara University] <https://dspace.ankara.edu.tr/items/ebc99816-1660-42ef-abc8-0be10daa78b3/full>
- Yetiş, E.Ö. (2020). Erkeklerle Şiddeti Konuşmak: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Temelli Şiddeti Anlama ve Önlemede Erkek Katılımını Psikososyal Yaklaşımın Sunduğu İmkanlar Üzerinden Düşünmek. *Fe Dergi*, 12(2), 187–200.
- Yetiş, E.Ö., & Bakırhoğlu, Y. (2023). Fatalistic normalisation, haunted managerialism and afflictive condemnation as forms of slow violence. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 630. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02147-2>
- Yetiş, E.Ö., & Kolluoğlu, P. (2022). *Toplumsal Cinsiyet Temelli Şiddetin Çözümünde Erkekler*. Ankara: Nika.
- Yolaçan, S. (2022). Iron fist or nimble fingers?: An anatomy of Erdogan’s strongman politics. *History and Anthropology*, 33(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2021.1946048>
- Young, I. M. (2005). The logic of masculinist protection: Reflections on the current security state. In *Women and citizenship*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195175344.003.0002>
- Zengin, A. (2024). *Violent intimacies: The trans everyday and the making of an urban world*. Duke University Press.