



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Feminism as a threat to the Turkish state

A discourse analysis of Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention from a feminist poststructuralist perspective. The Istanbul Convention is described as the most comprehensive convention of its kind, aimed at preventing violence against women, protecting its victims, and prosecuting its perpetrators. However, recently the convention has become subject to the rise of anti-gender campaigns. I pose the question of how feminism is seen in relation to Turkey's withdrawal from the convention adopting a gendered lens to the construction of Turkish national identity to understand how the withdrawal was motivated. To analyze this a discourse analysis of government officials' statements has been adopted. The notion of the family appears at the center of the discourse, resulting in a misogynist representation of women's identities and the construction of the Istanbul Convention, and by extension feminism, as a threat to the Turkish state. At first glance, the opposing ideas of gender appear as the main issue, but looking at it closer - gender rhetoric and policies seem to be used to serve political purposes. This thesis concludes that Turkey's discourse on national identity is gendered and patriarchal and that Turkey participates in global anti-gender mobilization for political purposes.

Keywords: Gender, Feminism, Discourse, Turkey, Anti-gender mobilization

Language: English

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research problem

The Istanbul Convention originally named *The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (CETS No. 210), was crafted as a result of The Council of Europe's multiple years of campaigning to raise awareness of the issue of violence against women (Council of Europe, n.d). The initiative emanated from the adoption of several recommendations and resolutions that called for legally binding standards and strategies to prevent and protect women from gender-based violence, as well as to increase prosecution of violence committed against women. A need for a harmonized legal standard emerged as several reports following the campaigns illuminated the severity and the diverse national responses to gender-based violence in European countries. In response to this need, the CAHVIO (Ad Hoc Committee for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence) 2008-2010 drafted *The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (CETS No. 210). The convention infers that states are legally bound to and responsible for actively preventing and combating gender-based violence and that states are obligated to address these issues, protect victims and take measures to prosecute perpetrators (Council of Europe, n.d). States' fulfillment of the convention is inspected by the European Council's expert group, GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence). It is described as the most comprehensive convention in the area of women's human rights (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2021).

The convention opened for signatures in 2011 in Istanbul where Turkey was the first state to sign the convention which led to the nickname, the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, n.d). Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan signed the convention with the motivation that it was proof of the Turkish government's willingness to address the issue of violence against women (Cerami 2021, p. 191). Four years later, in 2014, after its 10th ratification, the convention went into force (Council of Europe, n.d). By March 2022, 34 out of 47 European Council member states have ratified the convention (European Council, 2022).

The convention has been outspokenly supported by feminists (Balogh 2020, p. 5), and has had great importance for the women's rights movement as it targets the forefront agenda of the feminist struggle: patriarchal violence. The purpose of the convention is to prevent and combat gender-based violence/violence against women, which feminist theory has identified as one of the main mechanisms that reproduce and create gender inequality, as it implicates both the causes and effects of gender inequality (Krizsán & Roggeband 2021, p. 18). The convention also acknowledges gender as socially constructed, which illuminates intersectional power hierarchies - one of the main pillars of contemporary feminist theory (Edenborg et al, 2021, p. 34).

Despite widespread concern about the rise of domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic from countless non-governmental organizations, international institutions, and nation-states around the world, Turkey decided to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. On March 20, 2021, the Turkish government in a press release declared that the state was withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention, stating the following:

“The Istanbul Convention, originally intended to promote women's rights, was hijacked by a group of people attempting to *normalize homosexuality* – which is incompatible with Türkiye's social and *family values*.” (Presidency of The Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications, 2021a)

The decision was taken through a decree that President Recep Erdoğan signed and no parliamentary debate took place in advance of the withdrawal (Cerami 2021, p. 188). The decision was met with strong reactions from several actors such as international leaders and the women's rights movement in Turkey. Josep Borell, the high representative of the European Commission, urged Turkey to reverse the decision stating that it “risks compromising the protection and fundamental rights of women and girls in Turkey.”, and that it “(..)sends a dangerous message across the world” (European Council, 2021). Borell also described the convention as a fundamental element for peace, security, human rights, and equality.

From the women's rights movement in Turkey, reactions first arose in 2020 when it was declared that Turkey was planning to withdraw. The Turkish newspaper, Hürriyet Daily News

(2020) reported about protests in Ankara from women's rights movements shouting "Femicides are political" and holding up signs stating that "the Istanbul Convention saves lives". Later when the actual withdrawal was declared in 2021, protests arose again. The Guardian (2021) reported on thousands protesting in Istanbul, carrying purple flags and shouting "We are not scared, we are not afraid. We shall not obey."

Turkey is not the only state that has expressed intentions to withdraw from the convention, in July 2020 Poland announced that they planned to withdraw from the convention (The Guardian, 2020), although this has not occurred yet. Thus, an overall backlash on women's rights has been seen in recent years in which the contestation of the Istanbul Convention has become the central site (Roggebrand & Kirzan 2020, p. 8-9). Krizsán and Roggeband (2021, p. 31), as well as Balogh (2020, p. 13), describe that the convention became a target for anti-gender campaigns, which turned the convention into something exceedingly controversial and made the ratification process considerably more difficult. Balogh (2020, p. 13) explains that the convention has been seen as a trojan horse secretly trying to include gender in legislation and politics. Balogh (2020, p. 4) also explains that the Istanbul Convention has been criticized as a "carrier for feminist ideology" by acknowledging gender as a social construct and not biological. Article 3 in the convention states:

"gender" shall mean the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men" (Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2011).

Turkey is one of many states that have expressed skepticism and hesitation toward the convention, however, it is the first state to withdraw from the convention. The convention has come to have great importance for women's rights and the feminist movement. However, it has also been critiqued and seen as too radical for going beyond protecting women's rights in the way that it addresses gender identities, which is perceived as a threat to many states. Has this in some way affected Turkey's withdrawal from the convention, and is Turkey's behavior part of a broader trend of anti-gender mobilization?

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to obtain an understanding of how the Turkish government perceives feminism to illuminate how the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention can be understood from a poststructuralist feminist perspective. This thesis will contribute to research within the study of anti-gender mobilization and gendered discourses on the national identity of the state.

1.3 Research questions

- How can Turkey's relationship to feminism be understood in relation to the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention?
 - How was the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention motivated?
 - How can the withdrawal from the convention be understood in relation to global anti-gender mobilization?

1.4 Delimitations

The time limit for the collection of material and analysis is set from 2011, when Turkey signed the convention, until the withdrawal in 2021. As mentioned earlier, Cerami (2021, p. 191) explains how Turkey was the first state to sign the convention and did it with much pride, despite this also being the first state to withdraw. It is therefore interesting to analyze this shift and investigate what has affected the decision to withdraw from the convention.

2. Literature review

This section of this study firstly introduces previous research about anti-gender campaigns and then accounts for research concerning the Turkish government's discourse on gender.

2.1 Anti-gender mobilization as a global phenomenon

Several researchers have attempted to theorize the anti-gender mobilization seeing it as a transnational phenomenon. However, different opinions prevail on whether this phenomenon should be defined as a social movement, a countermovement, or in more broad terms as campaigns opposing a feminist project.

Corredor (2019, p. 614) has analyzed this phenomenon seeing it as a transnational countermovement that uses the strategy of 'gender ideology' as a counterstrategy to oppose LGBTQIA+ and feminist movements. The author argues that seeing anti-gender mobilization as a countermovement is an effective tool for studying anti-gender mobilization and concludes that recent anti-gender activities in several parts of the world are coordinated and should not be seen as isolated events. Moreover, Corredor (2019, p. 614) determines that the rhetoric of gender ideology is mainly centered around an epistemological response to expressions about gender identity and sex. She also concludes that it is used as a political mechanism in policy development. Balogh (2020, p. 3) on the other hand, argues that it is a social movement related to populism, that has arisen since the beginning of the 2000s revolving around the nonacceptance of the so-called 'gender ideology'. The social movement is described to consist of politicians, churches, and civil society, and has over the years been seen demonstrating against same-sex marriage, abortion, and sexual education. The term 'gender ideology' has for the anti-gender movement become an empty signifier, meaning signs open to several interpretations used to serve one's interests.

Verloo and Paternotte (2018, p. 1) see this phenomenon as campaigns that oppose something that they call 'the feminist project'. They explain that the feminist project is part of a larger project that aims for equality and justice, drawing from Sylvia Walby's definition of feminism as "a set of processes and practices in civil society that create new meanings and social goals, drawing on a range of rhetorical and material resources" (Verloo & Paternotte 2018, p. 1). Verloo & Paternotte (2018, p. 2) argue that this definition broadens the mainstream idea of a social movement as not only restricted to certain ideologies, activities, or groups. They see the definition of feminism as a project to illuminate the aim of social change as a key driving force of the movement. The authors situate the phenomena to anti-gender campaigns that oppose this

project. Verloo and Patternotte (2018, p. 3) also explain the need for 'global frames of analysis', as earlier research in the context of Europe mainly has focused on European exceptionalism and nationalism, on concepts such as democracy and the global right, and also populism. In the context of the United States, attention mostly has been paid to religious rights and morality politics, developing concepts such as 'culture wars', 'movements', and 'counter-movements', which diffusion to other localities has not been further explored. The authors emphasize that current research overlooks the effect of the increase of transnational movements and globalization and also excludes the role of local actors and local contexts.

2.2 Gender ideology and strategies for mobilization

Current research on the topic of anti-gender mobilization investigates the origins, mechanisms, and rhetorics of groups and flows of ideas that opposes feminism and gender theory. I have chosen to focus on the works of Paternotte and Kuhar (2018) and Corredor (2019), who have attempted to theorize how this mobilization operates. Even though the theories have a lot in common, they differ on a few points which I will account for.

Paternotte and Kuhar (2018, p.7) and Corredor (2019, p. 613) explain the background through which anti-gender mobilization has arisen. They argue that these campaigns have become more frequent in recent years but have existed since the mid-2000s. Paternotte and Kuhar (2018, p.7) account for anti-gender mobilization in Europe, describing that the earliest cases in Europe emerged in Spain in 2004, Croatia in 2006, Italy in 2007, and Slovenia in 2009. However, the tipping point of the mobilization seem to be in 2012, when huge protests arose in Paris against same-sex marriage which spread to other French cities (Paternotte & Kuhar 2018, p 8). The protests lasted for two years and are described to have had significant importance for policymaking concerning gender and sexuality. Later, these protests diffused to other European countries in varying characters depending on the political context they emerged in. Corredor (2019, p. 613-614) has accounted for anti-gender mobilization in Latin America, in countries like Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, showing the global scope of anti-gender mobilization. Commonly, Paternotte and Kuhar (2018, p.7) and Corredor (2019, p. 614) explain that a recurrent pattern can be distinguished - the identification of a common enemy and the labeling of this threat as "gender ideology".

Patternotte and Kuhar (2018) and Corredor (2019) agree on the origins of the anti-gender mobilization against 'gender ideology'. They explain that the term 'gender ideology' was created "[...] to oppose women's and LGBT rights activism as well as the scholarship deconstructing essentialist and naturalistic assumptions about gender and sexuality"(Patternotte & Kuhar 2018, p. 8) and that it derives from the catholic church and the Vatican. However, Corredor (2019, p. 623) also explains that this rhetoric has been used by other actors. It has also been used by Muslims as the Vatican and the Muslim leadership coupled up in a statement, saying that the family is holy and that it is the basis for a just society, and also that marriage only is meant for men and women. Corredor (2019) has defined the term gender ideology in the following way:

Gender ideology can thus be conceptualized as a rhetorical counterstrategy that aims, first, to refute claims concerning the hierarchical construction of the raced, gendered, and heterosexual order; second, to essentialize and delegitimize feminist and queer theories of gender; third, to frustrate global and local gender mainstreaming efforts; fourth, to thwart gender and LGBTQ1equality policies; and finally to reaffirm heteropatriarchal conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality. (Corredor 2019, p. 616)

Patternotte and Kuhar (2018, p. 9) have instead explained the meaning of the term from the perspectives of anti-gender mobilizers. They mean that according to its opponents, the term 'gender ideology' is seen as a 'covert political strategy' that attempts to impose the values of minority groups on ordinary people. They mean that 'gender ideologists'/feminists have hidden agendas that are disguised by 'nice language' and possess totalitarian influences. Similarly to Corredor (2019, p. 628-629), Patternotte and Kuhar (2018, p. 9) argue that 'gender ideology' in some contexts is seen as related to communism or Marxism, while in others as a neocolonial project with ideas that the West wants to impose on other parts of the world to secularize them. The role of international institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union in this is highlighted (Patternotte & Kuhar 2018, p. 9).

Furthermore, something that Corredor (2019, p. 626) mentions is that the Vatican and anti-gender mobilizations sometimes see certain kinds of feminism as legitimate, mainly 'Equity feminism' that implies 'sameness' and aims at reducing the notion of biological differences. However, 'Gender feminism' that is related to poststructuralism and constructivism is not

accepted and is perceived as dangerous which is not something that Patternotte and Kuhar (2018) mention.

Instead, Patternotte & Kuhar (2018, p. 8) trace common traits such as patterns of mobilization including similar strategies, discourses, and 'repertoire of action'. They find that as part of their strategy, these movements often try to portray themselves as modern and rational and claim that things have 'gone too far'(Patternotte & Kuhar 2018, p. 10). They use a strategy of self-victimization to proclaim themselves as defenders of the common people whom they see as oppressed by the elite and the lobby that advocates for 'gender ideology'. Moreover, they see themselves as saviors and defenders of national authenticity from other international powers. Thus, hiding the religious origins and inferring a professionalization and a modernization of conservative activism. Furthermore, the recurring use of portraying children's innocence is visible by stating that education about gender will make them confused about their sexuality and gender. This is used to trigger a moral panic and to legitimize and validate their claims, which often contain a presentation of 'good' and 'evil' (Patternotte & Kuhar 2018, p. 11).

Patternotte and Kuhar (2018, p. 10-11) also account for the repertoires of action and explain them as different kinds of demonstrations and lobbying, but also a production of expert knowledge and party politics. They describe that their messages are spread on social media using both traditional media, such as lectures, events, and press conferences, and non-traditional media such as social platforms.

In opposition to Balogh (2020, p. 3), Patternotte and Kuhar (2018) have attempted to situate and separate the anti-gender movement, or the anti-gender campaigns as they call it, from populism. They present the argument that the anti-gender campaigns have to a too comprehensive extent been seen as connected to populism and the 'global right' and that there is a need to see the rise of this movement as a transnational phenomenon that also is related to and affected by the local settings they appear in (Patternotte & Kuhar 2018, p. 14). On the other hand, the authors emphasize that these two phenomena interact with each other, which proclaims the need for their separation from each other. Patternotte and Kuhar present four arguments for why a distinction should be made between the concepts of populism and anti-gender campaigns; 1)The two phenomena originate from different sources. The anti-gender

campaigns stem from the 'Catholic project' and concerns raised by the church, while populism does not have a connection to religion (Patternotte & Kuhar 2018, p. 13); 2) Populists do not always disagree with claims for gender equality, which anti-gender campaigns do. An example presented is that in northern Europe, populists sometimes embrace LGBTQI rights to stigmatize migrants and more concretely people with Muslim origins to serve their interests (Patternotte & Kuhar 2018, p. 13); 3) Populism is described to appear in Europe to a wider extent than the anti-gender campaigns, which is a more globalized phenomenon (Patternotte & Kuhar 2018, p. 13); 4) Populism tend to more often be related to the right side of politics, while anti-gender campaigns can appear on both sides in politics (Patternotte & Kuhar 2018, p. 13-14). However, Patternotte and Kuhar (2018, p. 12) confirm that the right-wing populist wave that is visible in Europe to some degree was successful because of the contribution of anti-gender campaigns. Firstly, the connection between populism and the anti-gender campaigns is visible in the way that populist parties often are the main drivers of the anti-gender campaigns. Secondly, similar discourses are adopted as populist parties are explained to often express "skepticism towards European integration, national and racial anxieties, and resistances to globalization"(Patternotte & Kuhar 2018, p. 12).

2.3 Gender and Turkish politics

Some research focuses on the discourse practices of the Turkish government and how this impacts women's rights. Cindoglu and Unal (2017), as well as Eslen-Ziya (2021), have examined Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party's (AKP) family politics and reproductive rights. Akyüz (2012) have instead of investigating women's representation examined how different masculinities are represented in discourses by government officials and has similarly to Eslen-Ziya (2021) and Cindoglu and Unal (2017) found that the sight of the heterosexual nuclear family and the division between the public and private is used to promote a gendered hegemonic discourse.

Eslen-Ziya (2021) focuses on the promotion of the family institution that concludes that women are portrayed as saviors of the Turkish state using reproductive politics, while Cindoglu and Unal (2017) examine the impacts of the national discourse on women's morality and self-

regulating in reproduction. Eslen-Ziya (2021, p. 127) has analyzed discourse during political debates linked to population policy and describes that "[i]n the new Turkey gender policy was shaped by a religious-nativist nationalist and right-wing authoritarianism in which patriarchal values were strengthened" (Eslen-Ziya 2021, p. 137), and that women's identities are renegotiated within the framework of the family institution. This is something that Cindoglu and Unal (2017, p. 41) also mention, stating that the rise of authoritarianism after 2011 intensified the conservative gender discourse based on the morals of women's bodies and reproductive rights, as well as their position within the family. It is further explained that during the modernization of Turkey in the 2000s, women's bodies and sexuality have been a central part in maintaining moral authenticity and spiritual values in the political and social spheres (Cindoglu & Unal 2017, p. 40). This is expressed through discursive dichotomies that distinguish the private from the public. Cindoglu and Unal (2017, p. 40) believe that women's bodies and sexuality have become the main tool for establishing and maintaining a conservative gender regime and that the heterosexual nuclear family has become the main scene for promoting and strengthening the hegemonic discourse. Meanwhile, Eslen-Ziya (2021, p. 128) illuminates how reproduction is a product of the relationship between state and citizen as the state controls the accessibility to contraception, abortion, and adoption Eslen-Ziya. Thus, concludes that the state governs and controls societies through the bodies of women. The AKP has expressed population growth as stagnant and problematic and has therefore criminalized abortion and pursued a family-friendly policy.

Akyüz (2012, p.iii) has investigated the discourses of Turkish politics in election manifests and party programs using Pierre Bourdieu's theories (Akyüz 2012, p. 17-18). The masculinities examined are (1) Neo-Muslim, (2) Kemalist/secular, and lastly (3) Nationalist. The author concludes, by using Bourdieu's theory of accumulation of capital and habitus, that Turkish politics reproduces "dominant masculinist strategies", and that the strategy of being a man appears to be used to a broader extent than ideological strategies (Akyüz 2012, p.iii). Akyüz (2012, p. 200) determines that boundaries of masculinity have changed and been redefined because of globalization and social changes in the 2000s. Factors specific to the Turkish context, such as ethnicity, class, and religion have in relation to globalization influenced the construction of the new masculinities and resulted in a destabilization of the patriarchal order

(Akyün 2012, p. 201). Neo-Muslim masculinity has become more visible and nationalist influences have increased, emphasizing solidarity and the father-nation by idealizing the ideals of duty, courage, and bravery. The current representation of masculinity in Turkey is influenced by the political culture that uses symbols and discourses in an antagonistic way and is explained to not leave any room for other masculinities (Akyün 2012, p. 204). Furthermore, Akyün (2012, p. 201) argues that party programs and election manifests are gendered and mirror the political culture of the society as parties glorify family structures which in turn confine women to the private sphere, while men are seen as the protectors, promoting a gendered hegemonic discourse.

3. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework adopted to investigate the research questions. The theoretical framework is based on poststructuralism theory and feminist approaches to gender and nation, such as the concept of patriarchy, Judith Butler's theory on performativity, and Iris Marion Young's theory of the logic of masculinist protection. Initially, an account is given for the poststructuralist perspective on a broader level, to then focus more deeply on the feminist poststructuralist approach to gender. Thereafter follows a description of performativity, the concept of patriarchy, and lastly the logic of masculinist protection.

3.1 Poststructuralism

The poststructuralist theory is useful if one wants to understand how language creates meaning and makes sense of the world we live in. It questions other theories' claims of having access to the 'truth', claiming that truth does not exist without a social setting and is conflicted with the concept of power (Owens, Baylis & Smith 2020, p. 11). As there is no truth, poststructuralists perceive the world as constructed and reproduced by human action, and therefore changeable throughout time (Hansen 2020, p. 178). They shed light on the relationship between power and knowledge, arguing that power produces knowledge and vice versa (Owens, Baylis & Smith 2020, p. 11). Poststructuralism aims to examine *how* meaning is produced rather than *why* (Åhäll 2017, p. 90). Discourses can display how knowledge and meaning are produced, and how some constructions enable certain practices while others are disabled. Power is described

as both relational and discursive, producing knowledge, subjective, institutions, and cultures that inform relations of power between individuals, groups, and societies. Discourse accounts for what has been established as the normal and the *common sense*, as meaning has become fixed and as particular knowledge has been agreed as truth (Åhäll 2017, p. 90). According to poststructuralists, language illuminates how we make sense of the world, inferring a set of shared codes that transmits messages and produces meaning (Owens, Baylis & Smith 2020, p. 11). Foucault has established the concept of discourse that acknowledges the role of language which is defined as “a linguistic system that orders statements and concepts” (Hansen 2020, p. 180). Language is described as a transmitter and something that is not neutral and therefore able to assign meaning to events.

Hansen (2006, p. 1) explains that the understanding of the national identity is created when states are exposed to crises, threats, and security problems as the identity of both self and others are created. The relational concept of the poststructuralist approach infers that identity always is created as opposed to something else that it is not (Hansen 2006, p. 6). States assign meaning to an event and construct its objects assigning them identities that are constructed through discourses. Furthermore, Hansen (2006, p. 5) argues that a state’s statements directed to a foreign audience are unique in the way that the representation of identity can formulate issues that lead to the formulation of consequences which also implicates actions and responses concerning this issue.

Connecting poststructuralism to feminism, feminist theorists have concluded that knowledge produced perceived as objective in fact is made from men’s perspective (Edenborg et al, 2021, p. 40). Adopting a feminist poststructuralist perspective therefore means seeing this produced knowledge as related to gendered power structures constituting reality. This gendered reality will be elaborated on in the following subchapter.

3.2 Feminism

Parashar et al (2018) shed light on the state from a gender lens. They define gender as:

”(..) a practice that is fluid and constantly changing with implications for people’s everyday lives. (..)gender is a relationship of unequal power that intersects with other forms of oppressions such as race, class, caste, and ethnicity.”(Parashar et al, 2018, p. 6).

Gender identity and gender binaries are central to when states try to gain legitimate authority and achieve state-making (Parashar et al, 2018, p. 7). True (2018, p. 32) argues that masculine domination is a structural pattern that possibly existed long before the system of the states, but that the separation of the feminine into the private sphere and the masculine into the public sphere, is something that rather emerged within the modern European and postcolonial states. Kirby (2020, p. 277) describes how the representation of states and their population tends to be gender-specific and based on an idealized picture of how the inhabitants should behave. Furthermore, gender structures shapes and constitutes states, what it is and what it is not, as the gender binaries, ”(..)male and female, masculine and feminine, rational and emotional, public and private” are mutually constitutive and are stated as crucial for states identity-formation (True 2018, p. 33). Kirby (2020, p. 277) describes the state-formation project as dependent on idealized gender order, and historically the nation has been portrayed both as motherland and fatherland. These petitions have in common that they both gained legitimacy through the representation of the family and that their political hierarchy was made natural. At the same time, a similar language is used when describing states as when describing the traditional household with the nuclear family - the contrast between the public and the private - where the man appears in public, and the women and children are at home.

A poststructuralist feminist understanding of gender infers acknowledging that gender is a social construction of sex, examining how it is created and how it impacts relations of power focusing on how language constitutes gender and creates gendered knowledge (Kinsella, 2020 p. 156). This will be explored further in the following subchapter.

3.2.1 Performativity

Judith Butler has developed the theory of performativity that set the ground for queertheory. It can be used to discern how gender identities are created and what it implies. The theory infers that gender is socially constructed and something we do rather than are (Kinsella 2020, p.156).

Butler is critical of the debate on constructivism and essentialism and means that it does not raise attention to deconstruction (Edkins & Vaughan-Williams 2009, p. 117). By emphasizing the dichotomy between gender and sex and sustaining the notion of the biological body's relation to sex, the heteronormative binary is sustained. Sex has become a naturalized opposition that results in exclusion and a constraint on who counts as a human being. Thus, our sexed bodies have become a "discursive scene of gendered inscriptions" (Edkins & Vaughan-Williams 2009, p. 117). Furthermore, they explain that Butler argues that 'sex' is "the bodily effect of gender where the body materializes through regulatory gendered regimes of power/knowledge" (Edkins & Vaughan-Williams 2009, p. 118). Butler means that our bodies serve as a surface where cultural meaning is inscribed. However, this surface does not infer an already established stabilized identity where gender can be constituted (Edkins & Vaughan-Williams 2009, p. 118).

Butler (2002, p. 172) explains how social taboos have formed gender identity by imposing prohibitions and idealized heterosexuality, which has produced a stabilization of gender. Butler means that peoples' acts are a result of the desire of the internal core or the soul, that instead is produced on the surface of the body (Butler 2002, p. 173). Hence, gender is constituted through performative acts, which also infers a fabrication of reality sustained by corporeal signs. Performativity is a process that is not initiated by a subject, it is rather something that stabilizes and produces subjectivity. Furthermore, gender is a collective agreement that punishes those who do not 'do' gender in the agreed way (Butler 2002, p. 178). To sustain the established notion of gender, this agreed meaning is repeated and constantly reenacted which also legitimizes it. Performativity is described as a continuous process where the subject always is in a state of becoming (Edkins & Vaughan-Williams 2009, p. 119). However, gender is a norm that cannot be fully internalized as norms are illusions that never fully can be embodied (Butler 2002, p. 179). Butler (2002, p. 180) states that the essentialist understanding of gender, that there is a true femininity and masculinity, is a part of the strategy of gender and hides the fact that gender is performative and socially constructed from the public. What could be made possible by denaturalizing the binary between sex and gender, is a more critically understanding of feminisms and masculinities that do not have to comply with sex (Edkins & Vaughan-Williams 2009, p. 118).

3.2.2 Patriarchy

True (2018, p.35) describes patriarchy historically as a structural relationship defined as "the gender hierarchy that privileges masculinity over femininity, creating and reinforcing the division between public and private (family/home) spheres, reason and emotion, men and women." (True 2018, p. 35). Patriarchy is also explained as a pattern of a social agreement and a bargain between men and women that creates and reproduces a structural gender hierarchy within an institutional setting. It is to some extent disguised as this order of masculine domination has become normalized and taken for granted.

Cynthia Enloe's (2017, p. 16) take on patriarchy is more focused on how patriarchy permeates daily life experiences bringing up both sexism and inequality, and describes the concept as a system and a dynamic web of certain relationships and ideas whose essential core is "the privileging of particular forms of masculinity over despised masculinities and over all forms of femininity."(Enloe 2017, p. 22). Enloe (2017 p. 16) highlights the adaptable nature of patriarchy, which is constantly modernized to be sustained. The sustainability of patriarchy is what has caused it to survive for such a long time, however, it is also what has made it worthy of people's support. That something is sustainable infers that it is designed to meet long-term objectives and not only short-term ones.

Appealing beliefs and values are explained as one of the factors that sustain patriarchy and that these beliefs and values can be appealing to both men and women is what upholds and sustains the patriarchy (Enloe 2017, p. 17). *Beliefs* are how people "explain how the world works", while *values* are how we assess things, for instance, worthy/unworthy, or pleasant/distasteful. Patriarchal beliefs include the perception of sex as something that people are born with and that gender is the same as sex. It also implies the belief that men and women are 'naturally' separable because of their sex, that men are inherently rational while women are inherently emotional. Moreover, patriarchal beliefs include the perception that there is a hierarchy in a society where men and women, and different races are ranked differently, that the family is the core concept of societies and that men are the protectors of the family. Patriarchal values are described to a wider extent be present in debates and discussions with friends and family, and within political parties (Enloe 2017, p. 18). It can infer whether we assign more value to reason

than emotion, whether family loyalty is prioritized in front of other matters, and also the admiration of manly leadership or women who devote themselves to being mothers. Enloe (2017, p.18) means that states and governments are structured similarly, being ranked based on military sophistication or authority. Likewise, True (2018, p. 36) illuminates Carole Pateman's work that explains how patriarchy is hidden in the state system, and that patriarchal relations are fundamental for states. European states stem from "absolutist patriarchal states" that were based on the division of men in the public sphere with access to equal rights, while women were regulated to the private sphere and seen as property. Pateman also means that the patriarchy helped uphold the principle of sovereignty (True 2018, p. 36). This hierarchy is not something that appears only inside states, it is also visible in the international order between states. True (2018, p. 36) states in the margins of the international society can be portrayed as weak or fragile, which feminizes them.

The other factor that sustains patriarchy is *patriarchal relationships*, which Enloe (2017, p. 20-21) describes as not so visible as it must be observed over a time to be acknowledged. This relationship is for example visible in speeches and memos but does also reveal itself in absences and silences. As mentioned earlier, the essential core of patriarchy is "the privileging of particular forms of masculinity over despised masculinities and over all forms of femininity." (Enloe 2017, p. 22), which results in women internalizing "masculinized ways of thinking" (Enloe, 2017, p. 22) and some women getting selected to perform patriarchal accepted femininity that complements the masculine privilege.

Concludingly, theories about patriarchy illuminate how gender infers structural relationships in societies. In my analysis, I will adopt a poststructuralist lens when analyzing patriarchy and examine how patriarchy is discursively constructed through the notion of the family.

3.2.3 Masculinist protection

Iris Marion Young's (2009, p. 142) theory of masculinist protection is based on the notion that there is a patriarchal logic about how the security state acts. It can be used to understand how gender informs state behaviors. The state emerges in the role of masculine protector of the protected: women and children, who end up in a subordinate position of dependence. In

exchange for their protection and preservation of their security, women, and children are expected to give the state obedience and loyalty, by renouncing decision-making (Young 2009, p. 144).

Young (2003, p. 2) explains that adopting a gendered lens on security issues means

“(..)seeing how a certain logic of gendered meanings and images helps organize the way people interpret events and circumstances, along with the positions and possibilities for action within them, and sometimes provides some rationale for action.”
(Young 2003, p. 2).

Young (2003, p. 4) has developed the theory drawing from Judith Stiehm thinking, proclaiming that there are two masculinities, one which protects women, and one which women are protected from. The male domination model accounts for the already well-known masculinity that infers that masculine men are dominant, aggressive, and selfish, and wish to take sexual advantage of women. The relationship with other men is highlighted, as men bond with other men and exclude women by harassing them to perform superiority. This is the portrayal of the ‘bad’ men. The other, opposing masculinity, is the ‘good’ man, who protects women from dangers, and is responsible and brave. He watches over his family and is prepared to put himself at risk to protect his family from the ‘bad’ masculinity. However, the protector or the ‘good’ masculinity can only appear when the threat - the ‘bad’ masculinity - is present. The two masculinities are constituted by each other, by constructing each other as the ‘other’. Furthermore, the masculinist protection logic also infers a subordination of the protected, and to receive the protection the woman in the family gives away her decision-making ability. The protector is seen as the head of the household (Young 2003, p. 5). Hence, the protector is dependent on the dependent woman to sustain his status in the household. She is portrayed as positively set to the man’s role as protector, whom she adores and without any issues gives up her autonomy to receive protection. It is explained that the fact that he finds her worthy of his protection “gives substance to herself”. Young (2003, p.5) also describes that the protector is expected to provide for the household, but controls others in the household with the motivation to protect them better.

Young (2003, p. 6) illuminates the connection between the relationship between the woman/protected/subordinated and the man/protector/superior and Michel Foucault's theory on pastoral power. Pastoral power is a relationship of power that implies that the subject is both being helped and governed at the same time (Axelsson & Qvarsebo 2017, p.73). Thus, Young (2003, p. 7) means that the logic of masculinist protection can be applied to states and the relationship with their citizens as states oftentimes motivate actions taken such as the increased deployment of police, surveillance, or even rejection of criticism by stating themselves as protectors of the state and its citizens.

4. Method

In this chapter, I present and motivate the chosen analytical method for the study as well as the selection of material that is analyzed. The decisions are taken based on the thesis' purpose and research questions.

4.1 Empirical method

The method the study will be based on is a qualitative research strategy. Bryman (2016, p. 61) describes that a qualitative research strategy is preferable when researchers want to gain an understanding of how individuals interpret, perceive, and create social reality. This study will adopt a case study approach. Bryman (2016, p. 97) describes that the case study design is suitable to use when the specific case constitutes what one wants to shed light on. It is further explained that the approach is ideographic and useful to shed light on the unique aspects of a case (Bryman 2016, p. 98). In this respect, the case concerns a certain event that has occurred, that is, Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, which is dependent on a specific time and place. The type of case that is analyzed is the 'extreme or unique case' as Turkey, being the first state to withdraw from the convention allows a unique opportunity to study anti-feminism and its relations to the convention as well as whether it is part of a bigger phenomenon of transnational campaigns and resistance towards feminism (Bryman 2016, p. 99). Bryman (2016, p. 101) explains that case studies have delimitations in their generalizability, however, this is not the purpose of this study.

4.1.2 Research material

The empirical data of the case study is based on a goal-oriented selection of news articles from The Guardian, the English-speaking Turkish newspaper Hürriyet Daily News, Balkan Insight, and also a collection of press releases given by the Turkish President Erdoğan or his press chief. Adopting a goal-oriented selection means selecting material based on the aim of the research and to be able to answer the research questions (Bryman 2016, p.498). The articles and press releases were chosen because of that they present the view of feminism and gender-related issues that the Turkish government possesses. The statements were given by the representatives of the state, both in newspapers and in press releases are directed to a foreign audience, representing the Turkish government's interests and how they want to present themselves in front of and in relation to this international audience. A total of 9 press releases and 35 news articles were chosen. To select news articles and press releases I entered the search term 'women' on the newspapers and the Turkish government's websites and chose articles that contained statements from Turkish government officials to find relevant articles and statements.

When analyzing mass media products, such as news articles, it is necessary to adopt a critical approach and be aware of potential difficulties that could impact the authenticity of the chosen material (Bryman 2016, p. 668). What could impact the study's authenticity is that information about the author could be left out, that newspapers sometimes claim to be independent but in reality, are biased, and that it is difficult to know if the person who translated a statement from Turkish to English had the knowledge they needed to make an accurate translation. However, taking this into consideration I have chosen well-established newspapers where several other newspapers have written articles containing similar descriptions and statements that strengthen their authenticity.

4.2 Analytical method

4.2.1 Discourse Analysis

According to the poststructuralist tradition, a discourse analysis of statements by Turkish government officials will be used as a method of data analysis. Bryman (2016 p. 640-641) describes that language in a discourse is seen as constituting the social reality and as strategies that people use to achieve certain purposes. Hence, discourse can be seen as a form of action and is rhetorically organized, can depict a certain image of an event (Bryman, p. 644), and is described as something that never is finished (Winther & Jørgensen, 2002 p. 2). Winther and Jørgensen (2002, p. 3) explain that the aim of discourse analysis is to investigate the process of contestation of fixed meaning-making, and how certain meanings become fixed to the extent that it is seen as natural. As a method for data analysis, a discourse analysis according to Laclau and Mouffe's tradition will be used. Laclau and Mouffe's type of analysis is based on the linguistic level - the view of language as a sign system (Boréus & Bergström p. 365). It is further described that they include both the linguistic and the non-linguistic, such as actions and objects that they believe together form the whole of a discourse (Boréus Bergström p. 364). In regard to this, it is important to acknowledge and be aware of my role as a researcher as my interpretation of the meaning of the discourse is based on my own experiences, perceptions, and biases which could impact the study's ability to be replicated and receive the same results.

I will analyze the discourse through some of the analytical tools that exist within the framework of the poststructuralist tradition. Thus, the chosen analytical tools for this study are the concepts of *chains of equivalence* and *nodal points* in combination with the tools *predication* and *subject-positioning* which Åhäll and Borg (2013, p. 198-199) have developed drawing from Roxanne Doty's (1993) theory.

A nodal point in a discourse is described as a privileged sign that does not possess a fixed meaning, it is rather assigned meaning when seen in relation to other signs (Winther & Jørgensen, 2002 p. 4). The nodal points serve as a specific point in discourse where other signs are crystallized around (Winther & Jørgensen, 2002 p. 5). It could sometimes be seen as a *floating signifier*, which means that it is a sign, apart from not having a fixed meaning, also has

become particularly open to assigned meanings as the meaning of the sign varies according to which discourse it participates in. An example mentioned is that the sign ‘body’ is a floating signifier in the competing discourses of alternative medicine and western medicine possessing different meanings in the respective discourse.

The analytical method, chains of equivalation, refers to the nodal points and the signs crystallized around identities (Winther & Jørgensen, 2002 p. 16). It can be used to discern how identities are constructed in opposition to each other. Bergström and Ekström (2018 p. 262), take a stance from the poststructuralist understanding of discourse as a system where signs acquire meaning. They mean that discourse is structured in dichotomies and that the opposition to a sign as well as its associated signs can be analyzed to make visible how identities are constructed, as well as the interpreted value or subject-position in the discourse.

Predication infers the linking of certain attributes, and qualities to a thing or a person (Åhäll & Borg 2013, p. 199). Predication is made by adverbs, adjectives, and predicates attached to subjects that construct their identities. It can imply whether the subject is provided legitimate agency or not, and what it cannot and can do. Examples of predication subjects can be ascribed as “free” or “democratic”, while others “rouge” and “failed” which can determine a state's possibilities for the legitimate agency in international politics. Subject-positioning implies who is given agency or not and sheds light on its relation to other subjects and objects by the predication ascribed to the subject or object (Åhäll & Borg 2013, p. 200). Åhäll and Borg (2013, p. 199) mean that this can examine how texts create reality by the positioning of different subjects and objects and the relations between them.

5. Analysis

5.1 Feminism as a threat to the Turkish state

In this chapter, I analyze Turkey’s proclaiming of feminism as a threat through three discursive themes, The West, The family, and Women and motherhood. These themes are interconnected and arguably, together draw the full picture of the portrayal of feminism as a threat to Turkey. I argue that Turkey uses a strategy of presenting the Convention as an attempt from the west to

colonize Turkey, which poses feminism as a threat. As mentioned in the introduction, the understanding of gender as a social construction is included in the convention and this is something that has been questioned by several European states, and also Turkey, which I will present later. I illustrate that it is, in particular, the poststructuralist feminist understanding of gender that is seen as a threat, namely Judith Butler's performative understanding of gender as a social construct. Turkey is positioning itself through this kind of anti-feminism, seeing it as an expression of the west.

5.1.1 The west and Turkey as a protector of women

In this section, I argue that the view of feminism as a threat can be seen to be illuminated when the decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention was declared. This is partly because the event of the withdrawal makes the construction of identities visible in accordance with poststructuralist theory, and partly because the convention in itself serves as a representation of feminism that West advocates for. This as it implies the understanding of gender as a social construction and because the convention also has been seen as a "carrier for feminist ideology"(Balough 2020, p. 4).

Taking stance from poststructuralist theory and the underpinnings of discourse analysis, state's identities are always constructed in opposition to something else, when what it is and what it is not is stated (Hansen 2006, p. 6). As Hansen (2006, p. 6) explains, it is when states are exposed to crises, threats, and security problems the identity of both self and others is created. Thus, the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention serves as an issue and an event that Turkey ascribes meaning to and uses to formulate its national identity. This is why the time around the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention is subject to analysis. In the following statements, a gendered construction of the West and Turkey itself is visible, relying on the logic of the west as colonialists. Worth noting is that in these statements the convention is not explicitly mentioned, they are rather stated in response to the West's critique of Turkey's decision to withdraw. The statement below is made the day after the withdrawal whereas for instance, Josep Borell made a statement criticizing the withdrawal.

“Stressing that Türkiye's history was full of the torments, atrocities, prohibitions, and double standards of the Western **colonialist** mentality, Altun stated the following the day after the decision to withdraw was declared:

"They executed this country's prime minister in the name of democracy. They usurped this country's children's right to education in the name of secularism. As if they, themselves, were not the perpetrators of the atrocities they have caused for decades, they now shamelessly attempt to pretend to be the apostles of democracy. Despite being **hand in hand with terrorist organisations**, they shamelessly dare speak of homeland and national unity. Now they attempt to **attack** our **august nation** through matters relating to our women. If you really care about this country's women, people, and children, then the first thing you have to do is raise your voice against sexual harassment and rape cases within your ranks. After that, you have to distance yourself from terrorist organisations. Then, you come out and apologize to our nation for the oppressions you have committed in the past." (Presidency of The Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications, 2021b)

“The western world is being **shaken to its core** since it has **torn down the family institution**. Many **social problems** such as alcohol and drug addiction and **nihilism** emerge following the trivialization of the concept of family,”(Presidency of The Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications, 2021c)

“We have been able to resist the **attacks** targeting us and look to the future with confidence thanks to our **strong family structure.**” (Presidency of The Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications, 2021c)

In the statements, the Turkish government constructs the West as a gendered other. They predicate the subject of the West as *colonialist*, *shaken to its core*, and as *attacking the august nation* (meaning majestic/admirable). They also describe the *family institution* as *torn down*. This constructs the west as both brutal and failed, which can be seen to de-legitimize the west's agency while enabling Turkey's agency. Moreover, the west is described as having *social problems* and a nihilistic view of life inferring that the west is lacking morality. This constructs a chain of equivalation around the nodal point of the West in the following way:

The West – shaken to its core – torn down the family institution – social problems – attacking – hand in hand with terrorist organisations – nihilism – colonialist

Through these statements, the Turkish identity is constructed in opposition to the western identity, as resistant and prosperous by using the predicate of themselves as *looking to the future* and possessing a *strong family structure* which is something that the west is described as lacking. The emphasis on morality appears as the Turkish society is described due to their concept of family, as having “*respect and love for human beings*”, as well as “*sensitivity towards violence against women*”(Presidency of The Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications, 2020). Similarly, the highlight of the *societal structure* and the *social fabric* is stated in several texts, predicating Turkey as a welfare state:

Vice President Fuat Oktay: “We are determined to carry our sincere struggle to raise the reputation and dignity of Turkish women to the levels they deserve in the society, by preserving our traditional **social fabric**,”(Hurriyet Daily News, 2021)

Fahrettin Altun (Director of communications): “Türkiye, with all its dynamics, including particularly the **family and societal structure**, will confidently walk toward the future.”(Presidency of The Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications, 2021b)

The following chain of equivalation around the sign Turkey can be made:

Turkey – respect and love for human beings – resistant – looking to the future – August nation – social fabric – strong family structure

As a result, Turkey proclaims the core of the Turkish state as the family structure, as well as presenting itself as a caring, good state that takes care of its citizens in opposition to the west by the notion of the family. This illuminates the Turkish government’s subject-positioning as superior to the west. By predicating the Turkish identity as moral, reasonable, and knowing what is best, the Turkish government is constructing its identity in similar ways as ‘the good’ masculinity that both helps its citizens and governs them that Young (2003, p. 5) accounts for. The citizens of the state, are according to the logic of masculinist protection offered protection in exchange for their obedience (Young 2009, p. 144). In the Turkish context this can be seen

through the expectation of the citizens devotion to the family. A gendered and feminized representation of the citizens through the emphasis on family is visible, but I will return to the notion of family in the following subchapter. However, Young (2003, p. 5) mentions that ‘the good’ masculinity only appears when ‘the bad’ masculinity which the people need to be protected from is present. This is visible as the west is predicated as immoral and brutal, as well as destroying family structures, constructing the opposing masculinity as the ‘other’ that Turkey needs to be protected from. By extension, this can be seen as legitimate for Turkey’s agency to withdraw from the convention by proclaiming its intentions as good and protective.

To sum up, the Turkish government can be seen to present themselves in terms of the ‘good’ masculinity, in opposition to the west which they proclaim as the ‘bad’ masculinity. They do this by a gendered discourse of the family, where Turkey is portrayed to protect, and the West to disrupt. This is made visible through the announcement of the withdrawal and the Turkish response to the Western world’s reactions to this action. The convention serves as representing feminism which the Turkish government opposes. In the next subchapter, I elaborate on the meaning of the family in Turkey and illustrate further how feminism is seen as a threat.

5.1.2 The family

Building on the previous subchapter and elaborating on the implications of the notion of the family for the Turkish state, I argue that the convention, thus feminism, is seen as possessing the risk of disrupting the family structure which is perceived as fundamental for the Turkish state. I then argue that the fundamentality of the family for the Turkish state also illuminates the patriarchal state of Turkey, to which feminism poses a threat.

As mentioned earlier, the Turkish government can be seen to use a gendered discourse of the family to construct the Turkish national identity and the opposing Western identity, perceiving the Turkish nation as reasonable and prosperous because of its strong family structure. This while the West is seen as failed because of their lack of centrality of the family. This is in accordance with what Cindoglu and Unal (2017), Eslen-Ziya (2021), and Akyüz (2012) have found, that the heterosexual nuclear family and the division between the public and private is used to promote a gendered hegemonic discourse. However, I find that the notion of family is

not only used to construct the identity of Turkey and a gendered hegemonic discourse, the family also seems to be seen as equal to the nation of Turkey. In the statements below, the concept of the family appears essential to the survival of the state or even humanity. Thus, this further reinforces the claim of feminism as a threat to Turkey by destroying the family structure and therefore also the survival of Turkey.

“We consider every **attack** and threat made to the **family** directly as an attack on our **existence**”(Hurriyet Daily News, 2020)

“Any move which aims to **break off a woman from the family** is **targeting the humanity**”
(Hurriyet Daily News, 2019)

On the day of the declaration of the withdrawal from the convention, the following was stated: “The Istanbul Convention, originally intended to promote women’s rights, was **hijacked** by a group of people attempting to **normalize homosexuality** – which is incompatible with Türkiye’s social and **family values**.” (Presidency of The Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications, 2021a)

The earlier years of expressing the family as essential for the survival of Turkey, and years later, motivating the withdrawal as incompatible with the family makes visible to what extent the convention, and by extension feminism, is seen as a threat. However, the fundamentality of the family also illuminates the patriarchal state of Turkey. This as the emphasis on the family can be seen to sustain patriarchy by reinforcing the division between the public and private (family) sphere (True 2018, p. 35). It can be seen to reproduce what True (2018, p. 35) describes, a structural gender hierarchy within an institutional setting that has become normalized, affecting women disproportionately. Hence, risking Turkey’s family values also means risking the patriarchy that the state of Turkey is built upon. Thus, feminism is seen as a threat to the patriarchal state of Turkey. In the next subchapter, I will further analyze what the notion of the family implies for women and the meaning of feminism as a threat in this context.

5.1.3 Women and motherhood

By deconstructing the meaning of family further, I illustrate that poststructuralist feminism is seen as a threat to Turkey, as the notion of family is constructed as the cornerstone of the Turkish society, inferring that only particular gender identities are allowed. Poststructuralist feminism opposes and conflicts with the heteronormative binary of gender which is sustained by the Turkish notion of the family. Poststructuralist feminism is therefore seen as a threat by acknowledging and suggesting an alternative woman identity that exists outside the family.

Initially, the family can be seen to constitute women's position in society. In the statements below, women can be seen as closely linked to the family. Women are mainly emphasized as mothers and their role in reproduction, using spiritual morality and promoting self-regulating, similarly to what Cindoglu and Unal (2017), and Eslen-Ziya (2021), have concluded:

“We have confidence in our women. We believe that our women, empowered by the **richness in their hearts** and their **God-given** acumen and capabilities, will spearhead a transformation that will embrace Turkey and the world. Together, we will carry on working for a more beautiful, more just, more peaceful, more secure and more livable world,” (Presidency of The Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications, 2021d)

“We are determined to carry our sincere struggle to raise the reputation and **dignity** of Turkish women to the levels they deserve in the society, by preserving our traditional **social fabric**,” (Hurriyet Daily News, 2021)

“Women are not objects but the **subject of life!**“(Presidency of The Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications, 2021e)

“Erdoğan quoted remarks attributed to Prophet Muhammad, saying “Paradise lies at the feet of mothers,” and also gave a personal anecdote: “I would kiss my mother's feet because they smelled of paradise. She would glance coyly and cry sometimes. **Motherhood** is something else.” (Hurriyet Daily News, 2014)

“Erdoğan also said that a woman has an “**exceptional**” position as a **mother**, and “it's not possible to not talk about family when talking about women.”(Hurriyet Daily News, 2019)

“Ideas that isolate women from the **nature** of their creation, from their social and **biological** realities are not defending women’s rights; to the contrary, they deprive women of their freedom and isolate them,” Erdoğan said. “One would not be achieving justice when equating **gold** with iron,” referring to women’s birth-giving as what makes her “golden.”(Hurriyet Daily News, 2016)

Furthermore, the quotes above discern the essentialist view of women, inferring that women identities are first and foremost constituted by their sex, denying that gender is socially constructed. The chain of equivalation around the sign woman looks like this:

Woman – god-given – natural – biological – richness in their hearts – subject of life – mother

Using Butler’s performativity theory, Turkey can be seen to only allow a certain gender identity of women. Turkey sustains the notion of gender as essentialist and the biological body’s relation to sex by using the signs *biological*, *motherhood*, *natural*, and *subject of life* to predicate women, resulting in reinforcing the heteronormative binary between the sexes (Edkins & Vaughan-Williams 2009, p. 117). Furthermore, the ascription of women as *god-given*, and possessing *richness in their hearts* reinforce typical traits of the essentialist understanding of women’s bodies and personalities. It restricts women to do gender in a certain way and excludes those who do not do femininity in the agreed way to the extent that it determines who counts as a human being or not. This can be seen as Erdoğan explicitly says that women who do not want to have children are *half a person*, inferring that a woman who does not want to be a mother is not a real human being:

“A woman who abstains from maternity by saying ‘I am working’ means that she is actually **denying** her femininity. This is my sincere thought. A woman who refuses maternity and gives up housekeeping faces the threats of losing her freedom. She is lacking and is a **half** [a person] no matter how successful she is in the business world”(Hurriyet Daily News, 2016b)

The centralization of women in the family as mothers can also be seen to illuminate the patriarchal society of Turkey. The dichotomy between men and women, devoting them to the public respective private sphere is visible as women’s place in the family is highlighted and

because of the emphasis on emotion and affection as mentioned earlier (True 2018, p. 35). True's understanding of patriarchy as privileging masculinity over femininity is also visible, as Erdoğan explicitly states that a woman never can be equal to men and speaks of equality between women and equality between men.

“Sometimes, here they say ‘men and women equality.’ But ‘equality among women’ and ‘equality among men’ is more correct.”(Hurriyet Daily News 2014)

Furthermore, according to Enloe, two of the three factors that sustain patriarchy can also be seen: beliefs and values. Values are used as women who devote themselves to being mothers are admired and more valued as illuminated in the earlier statements (Enloe 2017, p. 18). Beliefs that sustain patriarchy can also be observed, that men and women are inherently different because of nature (Enloe 2017, p. 18), as Erdoğan says:

“You cannot bring women and men into equal positions; that is against **nature** because **their nature** is different.”(Hurriyet Daily News, 2016)

Now that I have distinguished the Turkish construction of women, the opposing identities of feminists can be discerned. I argue that feminists are constructed as a hostile women identity, that threatens the Turkish construction of women that is based on the notion of family. In several statements, Turkish government officials proclaim that feminists reject the concept of motherhood. The most explicit statement President Erdoğan made in Hurriyet Daily News, 2014, explaining that:

““Our religion [Islam] has defined a **position** for women [in society]: **Motherhood**. Some people can understand this, while others can't. You cannot explain this to **feminists** because **they don't accept the concept of motherhood,**””(Hurriyet Daily News 2014)

Furthermore, The Guardian (2022) reported that the largest women's rights group in Turkey, We Will Stop Femicide, was dissolved by authorities because of ‘public security grounds’ when demonstrating against the withdrawal from the convention. The prosecutors stated that the group had acted ‘immorally’ by ‘*disintegrating the family structure by ignoring the*

concept of the family under the guise of defending women's rights” (The Guardian 2022-04-14). This can be seen to construct feminist identities as immoral, but also as opposing the state of Turkey which is dependent on the construction of a ‘strong family structure’, and subject-positioning them as subordinate. Feminists, and particularly the poststructuralist feminism which means that gender is socially constructed, are perceived as destroying this structure by rejecting motherhood and not accepting their place in the family. In another statement, the view of feminists as a ‘marginal people’ can be discerned, placing feminism as something marginal and deviating.

“We would never take into account the words of some **marginal** people who aim at nothing but to abuse the **values** of our **religion**, our **nation**,” (Hurriyet Daily News 2018)

A chain of equivalation can be constructed around the sign feminism:

Feminism – ignoring the concept of family – rejecting motherhood – lacking – marginal – immoral – prostitutes – half a person

Concludingly, in this subchapter, I have illustrated how feminism is presented as a threat to the construction of Turkish women by the construction of the opposing identity of feminists. Feminism is seen as a hostile identity that conflicts with the identity of the Turkish women. It is concluded by using Butler’s theory on performativity that it is particularly poststructuralist feminism that is expressed as the threat, implying that gender is socially constructed.

5.2 Part of a global phenomenon?

To answer the question of how the withdrawal from the convention relates to the anti-gender campaigns, I argue that there are several similarities with Paternotte and Kuhar’s (2018) as well as Corredor’s (2019) theorizing of the campaigns.

Initially, in the Turkish case, the mobilization can be seen to originate from other actors than the Catholic church that Paternotte and Kuhar (2018) as Turkish government officials refer to Islam which Corredor (2019, p. 623) explains as an alternative actor. The Turkish case also seems more similar to Corredor’s (2019, p. 626) understanding of anti-gender mobilization in

the way that the Turkish government only sees certain types of feminism as legitimate, however, not label them as feminism. Previously in the analysis, it has been determined that particularly poststructuralist feminist is perceived as a threat, similarly to what Corredor (2019, p. 626) explains about 'Gender feminism', that it is related to poststructuralism and constructivism is not accepted and is perceived as dangerous. The quote below discerns the view of 'Equity feminism' that Corredor (2019, p. 626) accounts for, inferring that feminism trying to achieve equality is not suitable:

"You cannot put women and men on an equal footing. Equivalence rather than equality is what women need." (Hurriyet Daily News 2014)

Moreover, Erdogan has presented himself as a protector of women's rights, implying the suggestion that women's rights to some extent are considered and could be advocated for in the 'right' way:

"Nobody can slander me or my colleagues when it is obvious how **I have personally defended the women's movement** throughout my 40-year political career" (Hurriyet Daily News 2014)

The statement "*disintegrating the family structure by ignoring the concept of the family under the guise of defending women's rights*" (The Guardian 2022-04-14) discerns the presentation of feminists as having hidden agendas, and as a marginal group of people trying to impose their values on the majority similar to Paternotte and Kuhar's (2018, p. 9) observations about anti-gender campaigns view of feminism. As mentioned in the literature review, they mean that anti-gender campaigns oftentimes see feminism as a 'covert political strategy', that attempts to impose values of minority groups on the majority, and that feminists, or as they call it, 'gender ideologists' have hidden agendas that are disguised by 'nice language' and possess totalitarian influences. This can be seen to appear in the quote mentioned from The Guardian, but also at the beginning of the chapter of analysis where I present that the west is seen as colonizers. Similarly to what Paternotte and Kuhar (2018, p. 9) , as well as Corredor (2019, p. 628-629), have explained, Turkey can be seen as seeing the convention as part of a neocolonial project consisting of ideologies and values that the West wants to impose on Turkey to secularize them.

Moreover, the construction of Turkey as moral and women as glorified, while feminists as immoral also relate with what Patternotte and Kuhar's (2018, p. 11) have concluded about anti-gender campaigns attempt to trigger moral panic by the presenting of 'good' and 'bad'.

Lastly, to compare with Patternotte and Kuhar's account for the distinction between populism and their concept of anti-gender campaigns as a global phenomenon it can be concluded that the Turkish case mostly differs from populism, but this is not that clear. Firstly, the Turkish case does not align with the notion that they sometimes agree with claims for gender equality as they in earlier statements have said that they want to achieve equity, not equality (Patternotte & Kuhar 2018, p. 13). Secondly, Turkey is not in Europe, which populism is described to mostly appear in. However, I believe the notion of belonging to Europe is something that does not fully stick to the territorial lines of the map, and Turkey located as a neighbor to Europe could impact the sense of belonging to Europe. This is probably something that could be further discussed and explored in future research. Lastly, the point that the Turkish case seems similar to populism is that the AKP-party is on the right-wing side of politics.

Concludingly, the Turkish government's anti-gender mobilization is to some extent similar and related to the theorizing of anti-gender campaigns and anti-gender mobilization as a countermovement, implying that the withdrawal from the convention can be seen as part of a globalized trend. However, this might not explain the full picture of the withdrawal. For instance, one can ask why Turkey adopted the convention from the very beginning, as the declaration of gender as a social construct has always been part of the convention. Perhaps, the local context and historical background need to be taken into account to be able to answer this question.

5.3 Gender as a political strategy

By looking at the shift in rhetoric from the signing and ratification of the convention in 2011 and the withdrawal from the convention in 2021, it is possible to see how Turkey has used the convention to suit national interests. In 2011-2012, AKP government officials made positive statements in relation to the adoption of the convention:

“A society’s treatment of women demonstrates the level of its democracy, Parliamentary Speaker Cemil Çiçek said Nov. 24 as he was signing a declaration at the launch of the awareness-raising campaign “Count Me In,” which is being organized by the Family and Social Policies Ministry.”(Hurriyet Daily News, 2011)

“If indicators are not going well despite improvements in the law, then we have to reconsider our policies from scratch,” Çiçek said. “The laws are certainly important in reversing negative trends, but it is obvious that inadequate education is at the core of the problem.”(Hurriyet Daily News, 2011)

“I’m grateful to all parties for the unanimous vote. This is our March 8 present to women. Protecting women from violence amounts to protecting the whole society from violence,” said Environment Minister Erdoğan Bayraktar, who took the floor on behalf of the government. (Hurriyet Daily News, 2012)

In the first statement, Çiçek can be seen to link the adoption of the convention to an increased level of democracy. This is similar to what Tripp (2022, p. 4) has found about MENA countries’ instrumentalization of women’s rights because of virtue signaling to an international audience. Tripp explains virtue signaling as states trying to reposition themselves in relation to neighboring countries to appear more progressive or democratic through the adoption of gender policies or treaties. To understand this more deeply Bodur Ün and Arıkan’s (2021, p. 4-5) work can be investigated. They explain that Turkey since the beginning of the 20th century has aspired to become a member of the European Union. Because of this, Turkey has adopted most of the United Nations’ and EU conventions, however still continuously struggled with violations of human rights and particularly women’s rights. Bodur Ün and Arıkan (2021, p. 5) describe that European Council reports between 2000-2005 emphasized problems with violence against women and urged Turkey to deal with this issue. As Turkey wanted to become an EU member, they have had to deal with this issue to be able to meet the EU-accession criteria that include that states must achieve “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities”(European Commission n.d.). Bodur Ün and Arıkan (2021, p. 5) explain that Turkey adopted several international conventions, as well as the Istanbul Convention to apply international norms. The authors then

describe that since 2011, the AKP-party won the election, Turkey has changed its position towards the EU, and rather started a de-Europeanization process (Bodur Ün & Arıkan 2021, p. 6-7). The AKP winning of the election in 2011 is explained to mark Turkey's turn to a more authoritarian path, which was further increased in relation to the Gezi Park protests in 2013, in 2016 in relation to the failed coup attempt, and in 2017 when changing to executive presidentialism, giving Erdoğan more power. Bodur Ün and Arıkan (2021, p. 7) explain that the increased authoritarianism in relation to the Arab Spring and the refugee crisis also implied the adoption of an anti-western foreign policy. This relates to the concept of virtue signaling that Tripp accounts for. Turkey can be seen to use this by first adopting the convention and appearing as progressive to women's rights, and then later in 2021, changing its international interests by announcing the withdrawal of the convention. This illuminates how women's rights and gender issues could possibly be seen as overlooked and to some extent used for political purposes.

6. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to examine Turkey's relationship with feminism in relation to the withdrawal of the convention, concluding that feminism is seen as a threat to the Turkish government. I argue that feminism is seen as a threat by the presence of three discursive themes, suggesting that Turkey uses a gendered discourse of the family to construct this threat. This discourse is used to construct both Turkey, itself and the West. The first theme constructs the West as colonizers in terms of the 'bad' masculinity that Turkey needs to be protected from. The Istanbul Convention is central in this, in the discourse about the West being portrayed as part of a western strategy to impose western values on Turkey. The convention, aimed at targeting one of the forefront agendas of the feminist movement, violence against women, but also inferring the view of gender as socially constructed, is seen as a threat. I further suggest that the convention is seen as representing feminism, because of it being declared as 'a carrier for feminist ideology' and by the feminist intersectional notion of gender as socially constructed.

The second theme, The Family, revolves around the importance of family in the construction of the Turkish national identity. I discover that Turkey to a broad extent identifies with the

notion of family, seeing it as essential to the survival of Turkey. The strong notion of the family illuminates the patriarchal state of Turkey. This brings us to the sub-research question of the motivation for the withdrawal, being that the convention risks disrupting the Family, which results in the convention, and by extension feminism, being seen as a threat to the patriarchal state of Turkey.

In the last theme, Women, and motherhood, I suggest that feminism is seen as a threat by offering a conflicting construction of women. The Turkish construction of women is centered around the notion of family, not only constituting women's position in society as only mothers, reinforcing the patriarchal state of Turkey further, but also restricting women to do gender in a certain way. I illuminate this by using Judith Butler's performativity theory, which shows how women's gender is constituted and restricted by their sexed body. I conclude that it, therefore, is particularly the poststructuralist feminism that is expressed as the threat, by opposing the essentialist notion of women's gender as biological. Feminism is constructed as an hostile identity that risk disrupting the Turkish woman identity.

By exploring the last discursive theme, I also argue that anti-feminism in Turkey can be seen as part of a global phenomenon, possessing similarities to previous research's conceptualization of the anti-gender mobilization. I conclude that anti-feminism in Turkey is an expression of a trans-national trend. In the last chapter of the analysis, I find that Turkey uses gendered rhetoric and adopts gender policies to appear progressive in the eyes of the west, which also explains the shift from accepting to rejecting the convention.

Further research should try to distinguish this phenomenon from populism to be able to gain a deeper understanding of the backlash on women's rights that are visible across the globe. There is also a need for knowledge of how to protect human rights and prevent them from becoming part of political strategies. Krizsán and Roggeband (2021, p. 19) account for the major implications of overlooking women's human rights and mean that by not preventing or articulating violence against women as a problem, states not only enable and legitimize violence in the private realm but also exacerbate violence and exclude women from the protection of the law, denying women equal citizenship in regard to men. This eventuates in systematic discrimination and subordination of women as a group, as violence committed

against women also affects women that are not directly exposed to violence, placing women as a group disproportionately at risk. More concretely, women not being valued as equal citizens results in women being restricted from participating in democratic processes and policymaking and limited to only existing in the private sphere (Krizsán & Roggeband 2021, p. 20). Krizsán and Roggeband (2021, p. 19) illuminate that women as a group are not homogeneous and that women part of ethnic minorities and sexualities are exposed to an increased risk concerning violence against women, which the convention also addresses (Council of Europe, n.d). This sheds light on the importance of protecting women's human rights, and particularly the Istanbul Convention.

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