

## **TURKISH COUP attempt:**

### **WHAT DOES RTE'S STATE OF EMERGENCY MEAN FOR WOMEN?**

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It's been 3 and a half months since the coup attempt and the emergency rule was declared shortly after.

It is of course too short a time, to talk about any social trends to make themselves apparent and being measured.

But I think, we can easily say about this period is, that, some of the already existing trends during the AKP's 14 years of power, have become noticeably stronger, and they have been doing this faster than ever.

This is happening because they can do it. They could already do almost whatever they wished for lately. But the coup attempt gave them the excuse to skip the appearances all together.

One of these trends is, excluding women out of public sphere. Pushing them out of public eye, out of public space, discarding the official modernist – Kemalist image of woman: A woman who aspired to be equals with men - at least on the paper.

Creating a new and quite different formula "good woman" -who is "more befitting to our culture and traditions" as it is very often put, by the high ranking government officials.

#### **SLIDE 3**

From the never-ending Erdoğan speeches, year after year, we are already well informed that, this woman is a mother first and foremost. She has to bear no less than 3 children. Her place is mainly home, she may work, but still her priorities do not change. Most importantly she is not equals with men and has to be ruled by men.

For the purposes of this short presentation, I think it is sufficient to say, that this new definition of women is not only an ideological fixation of a man and his political movement, it also fits very well, with the practical needs of the AKP government: to achieve absolute control over the society, culturally, politically and economically.

Now, being a journalist, I will take you through a variety of news stories and debates of the last 3,5 months, with gender perspective...

Although quite different from each other, I am hoping these pieces will form a picture about the social and political climate that makes everyday life and future prospects much tougher than they were, for women.

## **1. STREETS and CHANGING ATTITUDES:**

An increase in the number of attack on women on the streets: It is easier to humiliate, assault, attack women.

After the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, 2 attacks in İstanbul and 1 in İzmir particularly came to public attention among many.

They were all related to, what those women were wearing at the time.

You can say there is nothing new about that, and you'll be right. Women have been assaulted and harassed on the streets since the beginning of time.

But it is the reaction or rather the implicit condoning of these attacks from the top, that is different these days. This has a real impact.

In September a nurse was attacked and beaten by a man in a bus. The man was shouting "Wearing shorts should be punished by death" according to the witnesses.

There was quite an outrage in social media.

Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım reacted three days later. He said: "You may not like somebody wearing shorts, but you could mutter your displeasure (rather than attacking)".

These remarks caused another outrage, and women campaigned against it in social media under the hashtag #YouCannotMutter

## **2. TV SCREENS:**

Since the July 15 attempted coup, the Turkish political sphere has been experiencing a very noticeable masculinization.

Increased security threats, the wars that Turkey badly tries to get involved in Syria, Iraq, and operations within the country, emergency law, continuing arrests and purges meant a lot of security talk on tv screens.

And we all know who the security and war experts are. In Turkey they are exclusively men.

Since the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, women very fast, regressed from being a mere minority to a real rarity, on political tv programs and debates.

So noticeable even in Turkish standards it caused a strong reaction.

A protest in social media found wide support among women. But not so much liked even by the men of opposition. Many of them thought it was a trivial issue.

The debate around this on social media was a very useful reminder of gender blindness within the secular and left-wing opposition.

Himself well known to these TV political shows, until last year, but now excluded, respected journalist (arrested, some weeks later) Kadri Gürsel tweeted “those who demand female discussants on idiot boxes [tvs] — do they wish to watch women who are as illiterate, boorish and arrogant as their male counterparts currently on tv?”

This argument “TV’s are totally controlled by the government what’s the point of having women rather than men” does not take into account the wide and deep social implications of excluding women from public sphere..

Millions watch those idiot boxes, day and night, and among them new generations of boys and girls. And not only them, us, the minority who do not watch those idiot boxes, are being exposed to the gradually changing gender specific values and attitudes of those millions, on daily basis.

The future of gender relations are re-shaped and pre-determined in all detail while we are watching by.

Similarly the TV drama series have also been changing gradually but visibly. Female characters are fading in the background.

A friend of mine, a sociologist, who wrote her PhD on dating programs on Turkish TV, tweeted the other day:

“This season Turkish soaps are hopeless. The female actors are far too weak.”

When I asked what her take was on this she said:

“It is a bit like the political shows on tv. They are affected by the political climate. The climate is about war, confrontation, mafia gangs, dangerous enemies, and parallel state within state. Because of the perceptions, women are not given big roles in these scenarios.

And this is all happening at a time when a whole new genre of crime and political drama with larger than life female heroines, is dominating most of the screens around the world.

### **3. POLITICS:**

Women are being actively pushed out of parliamentary and local politics as well.

The last local elections in Turkey were in 2014 and the Kurdish party of the time BDP now called HDP (and its sister party DBP), won in 11 city, 68 town, and 23 smaller municipal units: a total of 103 mayoral seats mostly in the east and south east.

Being a very gender equality aware party, they have a fifty percent quota on all elected posts. And this seriously affected every single political party and Turkey's politics so far.

Almost half of their 59 seats in the parliament are filled by women and for local elections, every mayoral seat, I filled by co-mayors: a woman and a man.

In the last year with the collapse of the peace process between the government and the Kurdish political movement, the government has been targeting the party in the parliament as well as its local authorities. (Ten of their mp's –six of them are women- have been arrested and put in jail since the day of this presentation)

Recently they have been arresting the mayors, and naming trustees to take over.

They are chosen from local public servants working for the central government- who are always men.

After the coup attempt, under the emergency rule they sped up this process. And the biggest prize, they co mayors of Diyarbakır are arrested this week.

Now you may ask what is the gender angle in this? There is always a gender angle:

103 co-mayoral seats for women are taken over by trustees, so far always men...

103 female co-mayors meant a huge change in the political standing of women in the eyes of the public in a very traditional region. Trustees are putting an end to this.

Female co-mayors, also meant a wide-variety of projects for the advancement of women were encouraged by these municipalities.

We hear these projects are also stopped by the trustees.

#### **4. Public places : SCHOOLS, MOSQUES**

Conservative student clubs in Istanbul University, starting from the School of Theology, started a campaign for men and women to be educated in separate class rooms.

Some columnists started writing supportive articles.

And TV's which are completely controlled by the government took up the issue as well.

This is how people get used to ideas, that looked so silly or unnecessary previously.

With the mobilization of government supporters and believers, through the prayers from mosques on the night of the coup attempt, the political role of the mosque gained legitimacy.

There are signs pointing out that the AKP will try to make most of it.

A report prepared after the coup attempt by the government's Religious Affairs Department suggests the "formation of youth organizations around mosques".

At the beginning of this month, speaking to imams the Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş said "Mosques are not only for prayers. We have to make the mosques, places to gather, and solve its problems for the community.

I am not going to get into a secularism debate here. But this is not good news for women.

Women are not allowed to go for Friday prayers, the times they are allowed, they are usually given broom cupboard like places to pray, while men have their praying in the central and magnificent parts.

Even the social spaces around the mosques are usually allocated for men. When you talk of the congregation of a certain mosque, "cemaat" you mainly refer to men.

## 5. **WORK:**

And last but not least women are very fast excluded from work, from economy.

Latest figures released by the State's official statistics agency shows that the women are first to be kicked out of work.

Yearly unemployment rate is raised to 10.7% in July. Unemployment rate among women is 14% whereas men's unemployment is dropping.

July unemployment figures are very telling:

In just 1 month:

- **INDUSTRY: 69.000 of 76.000 job losses are women**
- **EDUCATION: 83.000 of the 124.000 lost jobs are women**

- A total of 145.000 women lost jobs, 130.000 men found jobs.
- The rise in unemployment was basically due to women's job losses.
- Women lost 21.000 jobs in HEALTH, 9.000 in TRANSPORT, 15.000 in PUBLIC SERVICE, 3.000 in FINANCE, 3.000 in TOURISM sectors.