

International Symposium  
**Health, Reproduction and Sexuality:  
Neoliberal-Authoritarian Modes of Governing the Woman's Body in  
Turkey**  
5-6 April 2018, Bremen University, Germany

---

---

Neoliberalism has been hegemonic for the last three decades in many parts of the world, with its consequences of dismantling of welfare states, imposition of austerity measures, restructuring of health systems, and rising conservatism and heteronormativity. While these developments have had important implications for all gender and sexual identities, they have particularly affected women due to the accelerated precarisation of female labor power, increasing regression in women's reproductive rights and access to health care, as well as expanding commodification and control of life in general, of women's bodies in particular. Indeed, be it during the initial aggressive years of neoliberalism in 1980's, its "reformist" period in the 1990s, or its recent phase beginning with 2000's that paved the way to increasing authoritarianism (as seen in the triumph of conservative and right-wing parties in the United States, Eastern Europe, Turkey, and elsewhere), the bio-political and the bio-economic dimensions of governmentality have been distinctive and determining features of all neoliberal rationalities and regimes, and have targeted women in the first place. The increasing control of poor and ethnic minority women's fertility, the expansion of IVF and egg markets, the commodification of pregnancy and motherhood through surrogacy, the privatization of gynecological and obstetrical care, and the ongoing pathologisation of different life phases such as menopause by the pharmaceutical industries are some illustrative cases among many. While each of these areas include varying levels of surveillance and control on women, the authoritarian forms of government, which are becoming more and more the explicit norm in many neoliberal settings, create a direct assault to women's bodies, health and sexuality by legitimizing political and/or sexual violence through conservative notions like family, religion, nationalism or patriarchy, and by encouraging hypermasculinity. The aim of this symposium is to analyze such recent developments in terms of the governing of women's bodies within neoliberal and authoritarian regimes that are often intertwined. The Turkish case, without being unique, offers a privileged laboratory for an in-depth analysis of such dynamic transformations which have been operative in an accelerated manner in this specific national context for the recent years.

Neoliberalism began to be effective in the 1980s in Turkey, and then went through a period of recession in the 1990s before being revived under the leadership of the AKP (Justice and Development Party), a then newly established neo-conservative party that has been in power since 2002. After its initial reformist period, the political tendency towards authoritarianism became more visible towards the middle of 2000s. It was shaped by increasing centralization and personalization of power, and by the radicalization of conservatism and nationalism in particular since the constitutional amendment of 2010. Within this new neoliberal-authoritarian setting, offensive pronatalism represents a crucial issue that has led to a renewal of discourses, practices and regulations as to what concerns reproductive rights, family/gender policies and the administration of sexuality. Accordingly, women's central role in reproductive and domestic work was reaffirmed as a state value, while contradictorily their reinsertion in the labor market was also encouraged (albeit mostly on a part-time basis); abortion was reopened to political/religious debate for the first time since its legalization in 1983, which resulted in a transfer to the private sector of a till-then state service; IVF benefited from insurance coverage but the expanding restrictions for access have provoked new social/economic inequalities and new discriminations against singles and same-sex couples; surrogacy as well as egg and sperm donation, although formally forbidden, have nevertheless been tolerated in adjusted forms; the abuse of caesareans have been blamed by the public authorities for pronatalist reasons but the private hospitals where their boom is the most significant have been exposed to lesser regulations; the policing of even pregnant women's dress codes has been encouraged by the policymakers, while at the same time the beauty market of antiaging and esthetic operations has grown rapidly; the criminalization of both sexual violence/abuse and sexual deviance (incest)

has been loosened, while sexuality itself is both policed and made uniform, rendering trans and homosexual communities increasingly marginalized and extramarital unions and pregnancies more and more fragile. Thinking through all these issues, without any doubt, it would be vain to try to identify a single or homogeneous mode of governing the woman's body in today's Turkey. The neoliberal, authoritarian or conservative ways of governing women and their bodies may actually converge in many ways, thereby constituting hybrid regimes; or on the contrary, they may turn out to be irreconcilable and entirely antagonistic, according to the context. In this symposium, we propose to explore this complex diversity, which, in our hypothesis, is an emblematic feature not only of the Turkish context but of most of the current neoliberal and gendered settings in general.

We call upon original contributions from different branches of social sciences (sociology, gender studies, medical anthropology, history, political science, or governmentality studies) to examine the various ways in which gendered bodies are governed by neoliberal, conservative, authoritarian or religious discourses, policies and practices in contemporary Turkey, in the areas of health, reproduction and sexuality. These various ways can be analyzed at different levels: (i) representations of the woman's body (political, media, religious, industrial, juridical, feminist); (ii) interventions on and transformations of the woman's body (biomedical or disciplinary via care, or through violence); (iii) commodification of the woman's body or its organs or biological material. The papers can follow these research lines by focusing on a specific policy field (family/marriage policies, health policies, abortion policies, etc.), on a specific object/sector (ARTs, sexually transmissible diseases, anorexia, aesthetic surgery, etc.), on a specific subject of government (religious or ethnic minority women, lesbian and trans women, feminist groups, etc.), or they can rather choose to propose a transversal or comparative analysis of different objects, fields and subjects. We privilege the analysis of the period that starts with the strong neoliberal turn of early 2000s until now, but are open to more historical accounts. Contributions that highlight autonomous practices, resistance forms, and production of alternatives to the institutionalized body regimes also enter in the scope of this symposium. Last but not least, while focusing on Turkey, we encourage international and transnational comparisons as well.

---

### **Submission Guidelines**

Please send your abstracts around 800 words as well as a short biography, to [bremensymposium@gmail.com](mailto:bremensymposium@gmail.com) Before December 1th, 2017. The abstracts should offer a precise description of your research object, methodology and data if it is based on a research. If your abstract is accepted, you will be asked to provide a full paper by March 5st, 2018. We may cover the travel and/or accommodation expenses in accordance with the budget of the symposium.

---

### **Date and Place of the Symposium**

The Symposium will be held on 5-6 April 2018 at Gästehaus der Universität Bremen, Teerhof 58, 28199, Bremen, Germany

---

### **Organizing Committee**

Ayse Dayi, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Sezin Topçu, CNRS-Ehess, France

Betül Yerar (Organizing Committee Chair), Bremen University, Germany

For inquiries please email Betul Yerar: [yarar@uni-bremen.de](mailto:yarar@uni-bremen.de)

---

\*\*\*This symposium is organized thanks to a financial support from Bremen University, from The Philipp Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and from the French National Research Agency (ANR "Hypmedpro" Project-Ehess-Paris)\*\*\*

---