

The Resonant Chants of Networked Discourse: Affective Publics and the Muslim Self in Turkey

HAKTAN URAL
Ankara University, Turkey

This study draws on a specific hashtag campaign (#AliErbaşYalnızDeğildir), a concerted activity of tweeting supporting the chair of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey Ali Erbaş, who had criticized sexual practices outside of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. I read the archives of tweets as a performative site for imagining a Muslim self that forms affective publics. This research is built on two complementary layers of analysis. First, I dissect the thematic patterns of the top tweets including the above hashtag and identify three thematic patterns. Second, I scrutinize affective resonances by examining the circulation of the tweets in question. Viewing through this lens, the present study argues that networked discourse is a dynamic site for drawing the symbolic boundaries of Muslim identity. To have a deeper understanding of this dynamism, this study calls us to pay close attention to affective resonances, as they can provide the potential for negotiating networked discourse.

Keywords: affective resonances, discourse, Twitter, Muslim self, Turkey

Twitter's networked structure of communication is characterized by asymmetrical connections and different ways of interaction (i.e., tweeting, retweeting, mentions, and replies) and facilitates a vivid site for rapidly forming publics on the basis of ad hoc issues (Bruns & Moe, 2014). This dynamic has drawn significant scholarly attention to Twitter's networked discourses. There is an increasing amount of qualitative research seeking to understand how social boundaries are de/constructed across gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity or religion on Twitter. While some studies specifically focus on political elites' discourses on Twitter (e.g., Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018; Schertzer & Taylor Woods, 2020), the literature mostly addresses the heightened capacity of ordinary people to participate in public debates. In that regard, Twitter is deemed to be a site for the creation and dissemination of bottom-up discourses (Bozdağ, 2020; Crilley, Gillespie, & Willis, 2020; Downing, 2019; Eriksson, 2016; Lewis, Pond, Cameron, & Lewis, 2019; Ross & Bhatia, 2019; Siapera, 2014). This emphasis on "discourse from below" underpins the idea that popular participation in public debates via Twitter opens up a space for the negotiation of mainstream discourses (Downing, 2019, p. 256; Eriksson, 2016, p. 368; Siapera, 2014, p. 552). This article engages with this literature and seeks to understand the affective dynamics of networked discourse. Building on the thematic patterns of tweeting, this study examines how the creation and circulation of networked discourse is informed by affective practices.

Haktan Ural: haktanural@gmail.com

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The aforementioned body of literature builds on qualitative analysis and analytically focuses on the discursive elements of Twitter data. However, examining tweets alone, disregarding ways of dissemination, hardly shows the full picture (Bruns & Moe, 2014). As Bruns and Stieglitz (2014) suggest, the communicative processes of Twitter are also derived from how much the media content is circulated, which eventually influences its visibility and importance. In this regard, Bruns and Stieglitz suggest incorporating disseminative dimensions (for instance, retweeting or favoriting) into the analysis of Twitter use to obtain a more comprehensive understanding. A few studies shed light on these dimensions, an example being Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés' (2018) study on European populist leaders' Twitter use, which found a dissonance between populist leaders' agenda on Twitter and their followers' interests (measured by retweets). They address the prevalence of factors revolving around the contents of these populist leaders' tweets, although they do not provide an in-depth analysis of these factors. Siapera (2014) also examines retweet activity in her research on Twitter use in Palestinian politics. She suggests that that particular practice magnifies solidarity with Palestinian activism.

The present study has two related contributions to this literature. First, I aim to deepen our understanding of the creation and circulation of Twitter discourse, viewing through the lens of affect theory. To do so, I build on an analytical framework that goes beyond seeing communicative rationality on Twitter. Instead, I put forward the affective modes of discourse. As Fleig and von Scheve (2019) state, language has "its capacity to affect and to be affected, through different speech acts or even single words, establishes dynamics of affective resonance, in both consonant and dissonant ways" (p. 6). Twitter is one prominent example of a site in which these affective dynamics of language play a formative role in public communication. As conceived by Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013), affective discourses on Twitter are related to the level of spreadability to the extent that it weakens the traditional distinctions between the creation, circulation, and consumption of media content. According to Lünenborg (2019), the very character of "spreadability" is directly linked to the mode and tone of media content, as well as to the rhythms of its circulation (p. 33). These are surely affective dynamics that eventually turn Twitter into an affective stage. That said, an ensemble of re/tweet activities cannot be merely viewed through the term of communicative rationality. It is simultaneously a textual archive of affective formations. To better understand these formations, I suggest paying attention to both meanings created on Twitter and how they are amplified by means of retweets and favorites. In that sense, my purpose is to read re/tweet activities as affective resonances that accommodate "instances of connection, motion and amplification" (Paasonen, 2019, p. 50). According to Paasonen (2019), the circulation of new media content is laden with resonant chants that gradually invest in affective meanings. This is a process of pseudoeconomic accumulation, echoing Ahmed's (2004b) analogy, that comes up with the circulation of signifiers.

I then move forward with the thesis of "discourse from below" and its potential to negotiate with dominant narratives. I conceive bottom-up discourse as an affective formation that materializes a bulk of re/tweet activity and dynamically negotiates discursive formations. Viewing through this lens, I suggest that the negotiational capacity of so-called bottom-up discourses are not limited to utterances on Twitter. The ways that media content is circulated, which will be conceived as resonant chants, are also constituents of bottom-up discourses that can alter discursive formations.

This study is based on a specific hashtag (#AliErbaşYalnızDeğildir), a concerted activity of tweeting that is based on a specific public debate in Turkey about the chair of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Ali Erbaş. On April 24, 2020, Erbaş delivered a Friday sermon and preached on a wide variety of issues revolving around Ramadan and fasting, as it was the first day of Ramadan. In his sermon, he addressed growing threats to human health and referred to Islamic teachings as the springs of wisdom. He stated that the only true way of protecting humanity is by forbidding “ill-gotten” pleasures—namely, extramarital sexuality and homosexuality, as is so in Muslim belief.¹ Shortly thereafter, the Ankara Bar Association made a press release reprimanding Erbaş’s speech. The association’s declaration was heavily laden with affective intensity, accusing Ali Erbaş of bigotry, backwardness, misogyny, and homophobia. Following this, the main opposition party’s spokesperson Faik Öztrak made another statement, condemning Ali Erbaş for upholding hate speech toward some segments of society. This event has turned into a formidable public debate, in which many politicians, bureaucrats, journalists, and intellectuals have become involved.

This debate circulated widely around the Twittersphere. However, the debate’s extension into Twitter is not limited to the appearance and circulation of discourses across digital space. More importantly, Twitter has been one of the key sites in which the main lines of argument have been created and circulated. Indeed, the bulk of tweet activity has been created using the hashtag #AliErbaşYalnızDeğildir (“Ali Erbaş is not alone” in Turkish). Thousands expressed their support and solidarity with the chair of the directorate, including the ruling AKP’s politicians as well as bureaucrats and journalists who publicly support the policies of the AKP. Following Ankara Bar Association’s declaration of April 26, 2020, the total number of tweets reached 136,173 and retweets reached 1,269,027. The hashtag campaign turned out to be a popular action mostly developed by AKP ministers and MPs, and Islamist journalists and intellectuals.

I analyze this specific hashtag campaign as a performative site for imagining a Muslim self in relation to its cultural and political others. From that vantage point, I dissect the thematic patterns of hashtag discourse, specifically #AliErbaşYalnızDeğildir, and the affective resonances of these discursive themes. Analyzing the modality, tone, and circulation of these themes, I examine the construction of a Muslim nation, particularly focusing on its affective dynamics. By doing so, I argue that there are three thematic patterns: (1) an essentialist sense of Islam, (2) a self-image under threat (particularly by an imaginary West), and (3) hate speech toward nonheteronormative sexualities. These are certainly interrelated dispositions, but, nevertheless, also differential in terms of tone, modality, and volume. Examining the resonant chants, I suggest that affective resonances dynamically amplify or curtail some themes in favor of others.

Networked Discourse and Affective Publics on Twitter

Twitter is widely seen as a performative arena in which public discourses are created, and maintained or contested (Bruns & Burgess, 2016). The platform’s affordances (particularly microblogging, hashtags, and retweeting) facilitate the instantaneous circulation of media content at a massive scale. They

¹ Erbaş’s sermon attracted remarkable attention within the context of the coronavirus pandemic. In fact, he overtly denounced the threat of the AIDS epidemic, in that it is allegedly caused by “ill-gotten pleasures.” However, the timing led to the reception of his preaching as an overall rebuttal to nonheteronormative sexualities. These were portrayed as the villains of a health crisis, including the coronavirus pandemic.

certainly have a wide variety of usages. Among those, a number of studies address its prominence, especially during events that trigger public communication such as terror attacks (Downing, 2019; Eriksson, 2016; Payne, 2018), elections (Al-saqaf & Christensen, 2019), reception of media narratives (Nothias & Cheruiyot, 2019), protests (McGarry, Jenzen, Eslen-Ziya, Erhart, & Korkut, 2019; Ozduzen & McGarry, 2020; Siapera, 2014), and media events (Lewis et al., 2019), among others.

The use of Twitter in relation to these events generates discourses that are substantially ephemeral, volatile, and episodic in character. However, to a certain degree, hashtags translate these discourses into more organized and structured frames. As a "reminiscent of movement slogan" (Kuo, 2018, p. 496), hashtags forge crowdsourced frameworks on the basis of "collective authorship" (Siapera, 2014, p. 552) and "collaborative argument" (Papacharissi & De Fatima Oliveira, 2012, p. 268). These collectively authored arguments fit together well with a networked construction of identity. As Brock (2012) states in his study on digital Black identity, hashtags are signifying practices that portray a collective image of the self in its relation to others. Texts, sounds, and images archived by means of metadata tagging remake or unmake the contours of identity.

Recent scholarship sets forth two distinct forms of these meaning-making practices. On the one hand, hashtag discourses may give rise to mutual understanding, recognition, and belonging, as in the case of the depictions of British Muslims during Grenfell fire (Downing & Dron, 2020), the making of networked solidarity after Jo Cox's assassination in the UK (Parry, 2019), portraying the self-image of Gezi protesters in Turkey (McGarry et al., 2019), and expressing solidarity via #Palestine (Siapera, 2014). On the other hand, heightening populism by means of trolling both in Russia (Aro, 2016; Klyueva, 2016) and Turkey (Bulut & Yörük, 2017), as well as abusive and inflammatory discourses toward ethnic, religious, gender, or sexual differences (e.g., Bozdağ, 2020; Lewis et al., 2019), are primary examples undermining the idea of networked media's democratizing potential. Indeed, it is not as straightforward, as it seems to locate such discursive formations in terms of their democratizing potential. For instance, Downing's (2019) study on Twitter use in relation to the Charlie Hebdo attacks suggests that depictions of French Muslim victims destabilize the boundaries between the categories of "European" and "Muslim." Yet, simultaneously, the representations of Muslim victimhood advance the normative distinctions between "good" and "bad" Muslims.

A large body of research conceives of networked discourse with a Habermasian perspective, using the idea of communicative rationality. However, considering its ecstatic and phatic character, I suggest reading Twitter through the lens of affective discourse. As Papacharissi (2016) contends, an ensemble of tweets cannot be merely understood as informative flows. The repetitive and imitative circulation of the very same information again and again, which is typically called trend topic, is substantially driven by affective dispositions. In that regard, Lünenborg (2019) and Papacharissi (2016) set forth the limitations of the rationalist conception of networked publics and address the centrality of affect in networked publics.

Former conceptions of affect rely on the view that embodied intensities are nonrepresentational, prediscursive, and ineffable (Massumi, 1995; Thrift, 2004). The study of affect from that vantage point leaves little or no room for language-based methodologies. Yet poststructuralist critiques of affect theory contend that such a view overlooks meaning-making practices while they are inseparable from affective

dispositions (Hemmings, 2005; Leys, 2011). In this respect, I follow Ahmed's (2004b) theory, built on interlinkages between affect and discourse. Accordingly, embodied affect and discursive practices are inseparable, for they emerge out of encounters with others that leave behind impressions. She conceives of this process as affective encounters about which feelings get intensified and produce the fixity of meanings and boundaries (Ahmed, 2004a). On that account, she calls for reading the textuality of affect that both generates knowledge and orientations in relation to people, objects, and places. The conception of affect in relation to discourse, thus, comes to express how regimes of truth are created and maintained in an affective mode.

Reverberations of affect in networked discourses are especially prominent, given the platform's affordances. Twitter is widely used as a microblogging service blending opinion with fact, personalized accounts with information flows, and impassioned speeches with instantaneous storytelling (Papacharissi, 2016). This dynamism opens up a discursive site that is profoundly characterized by rhythm, mood, and tone. As previously mentioned, what is tweeted and the patterns of its circulation (via retweets, replies or favorites) are all laden with affective ingredients. Twitter's architecture of networked interaction, thus, constitutes the infrastructure of affective economies through the constant movement of resonant chants.

This form of networked interaction eventually brings affective publics into existence. Following Lünenborg's (2019) conceptualization, I conceive of this process through the terms of performativity. Accordingly, publics emanate from the "modalities of communication between very different kinds of actors, networks, and groups in society" (Lünenborg, 2019, p. 34). Performative understanding here refers to the "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988, p. 519) that bring publics into existence. This leads to a constructionist conception of affective publics that do not exist before networked interactions. Resonant chants are thus performances that invest in publics' existence and cultural intelligibility.

Viewing through this lens, the formation of affective publics through resonant chants cultivates an affective-discursive terrain over which differences are imagined and celebrated. While discursivity generates the markers of symbolic boundaries (Brock, 2012), affectivity invests in shared sentiments and belonging (Parry, 2019). Drawing on the specific hashtag (#AliErbaşYalnızDeğildir) in this study, I examine tweet activity as a domain in which the contours of Muslim identity are drawn and transformed into symbolic resources used to imagine Turkish national identity.

National identities are not given and fixed, but come into view and are experienced through rhetorical work that defines associations and dissociations (Hall, 1992; Özkırımlı, 2005). This understanding calls for a broad view of nation-building that moves beyond institutional and official bodies, such as the state (Edensor, 2002). In this context, Szulc (2017) suggests that digital technologies play an influential role in the formation of nationalist discourses. Such platforms may provide a vivid site for banal reproductions of nationalism. Shahin (2020), for instance, examines how everyday discourses on Twitter imagine the world as "the world of nations" (p. 3) and eventually reproduce the banal nationalism. However, nationalist discourses also emerge out of ecstatic and eventful processes that create collective memories and mobilize national feelings (Skey, 2006). Bozdağ (2020), for example, reveals how Twitter becomes a battleground for redefining the Turkish nation in response to political events about refugees. The ecstatic and eventful nature of nationalism also paves the way for reconsidering affective dynamics in the making

of national identities (Ural, 2019). As Ahmed (2005) states, national signifiers are strongly imbued with affective registers. Therefore, symbolic markers of national differences are interwoven with affective resonances.

The Cultural Politics of "New Turkey"

The AKP, the ruling party of Turkey, has inaugurated significant political reforms, dramatically restructuring political and cultural life. This has commonly become known as the making of a "new Turkey." This rhetoric identifies the AKP's political project as seeking to impose its own image on society, which goes hand in hand with neoliberal market rationality. The cultural politics of the AKP's "new Turkey" is built on a totalizing conception of Turkish national identity. This novel formation of identity politics relies on a vision of Turkey's alleged otherness, especially in relation to Western European nations (Ertuğrul, 2012). This view considers Turkish society and culture to be radically different and distant from "Western" societies and cultures. Therefore, the AKP's "new Turkey" thoroughly contradicts the modernization project of the Republican era. The AKP identifies the Republican era as an alienating political project improperly blurring the boundaries between "Turkishness" and "Europeanness." Instead, the ruling party reidentifies modern Turkey by means of resurrecting its Ottoman past and culturally emphasizing Islamic identity (Ongur, 2015).

The National Sentimentality of "New Turkey"

The AKP's vision of Turkish identity has introduced a national sentimentality that is manifested in diverse political discourses and practices. The ruling party has set forth a political project struggling to impose a pious and family-based conduct of social life on Turkish society. In this political rationality, the "strong family" is considered the best model of living, and the end goal (Kaya, 2015, p. 60). This political project is manifest in diverse fields. The repercussions of this national sentiment are epitomized in the vision of raising pious generations amplified through education policies (Lüküslü, 2016), as well as using religion-based civil society organizations for the promotion of welfare the conduct of welfare mechanisms through religion-based civil society organizations (Kaya, 2015; Keyder & Buğra, 2006), the imposition of the familialist ideals in gender and sexual regimes (Acar & Altunok, 2013; Cindoglu & Unal, 2017), and diverse discourses such as pronatalism, antiabortion campaigns, the relegation of women to the role of primary care providers, and marginalizing discourses against premarital and queer sexualities (Korkut & Eslen-Ziya, 2016; Mutluer, 2019).

In this context, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (known as the Diyanet) has played a vital role. In spite of its dating back to the early Republican era, the institution's economic basis, as well as its scope of activities, have dramatically enlarged under the AKP's rule. As Öztürk (2016) states, the most striking markers of this transformation is that its current budget has drastically grown to the point that it is one of the largest state institutions, it has the authorization to register halal certificates, establishing TV broadcasting, and on-demand fatwa services via telephone lines. In this way, the Diyanet has heightened its capacity for taking part in the everyday life of ordinary people. Concomitantly, the chair of the Diyanet has turned into an active interlocutor in major public debates. Öztürk (2016) notes that the Diyanet's public announcements have recurrently revolved around issues supporting antiabortion, antifeminist, and profamily ideas, as well as the denunciation of new media technologies on account of their alleged harm to

familial ties. The chair of the Diyanet Ali Erbaş's Friday sermon on April 24, 2020, is one such example of this phenomenon. His public condemnation of extramarital and nonheteronormative sexualities is unmistakably connected to the Diyanet's (as well as AKP's) image of society and culture.

***The Transformation of Twitter From an Insurgent Site
Into the Domain of Contestations in the "New Turkey"***

During the early 2010s, Twitter was a vivid public arena in which insurgent voices could be raised against the AKP's rhetoric of a "new Turkey." At that time, unlike the traditional media outlets which had been put heavily under control by economic and judicial mechanisms (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012), new media technologies remained out of the AKP's control and regulation.² Thus, the Turkish speaking communities of new media technologies could expand their capacities for collective action and protest. For instance, Eslen-Ziya (2013) shows how feminist activists could strategically use these platforms to increase communication and organize protests online and off-line. Likewise, Gorkemli (2012) points out the significance digital networks have for LGBTQ activists negotiating the sociospatial boundaries of being in the closet. The rise of the Gezi protests in 2013 is another example; the insurgents actively used Twitter and Facebook to perform a networked collective action and translate it into offline spaces (McGarry et al., 2019).

In the meantime, new media platforms (particularly Facebook and Twitter) rapidly became a part of the government's agenda. The AKP actively sought to use several legal mechanisms to put new media under control via censorship (Bulut, 2016). Concomitantly, a new set of AKP discourses have gained prominence on Twitter. Many Twitter users have emerged openly advocating pro-AKP policies and sought to dominate networked conversations. Being widely known as AKP troll teams, these Twitter users frequently make an orchestrated effort to suppress dissident voices through smear campaigns and tweeting that typically involves offensive and provocative contents (Bulut & Yörük, 2017). There are some serious claims that those troll teams are composed of paid users (see Saka, 2016). However, it is not possible to clearly identify whether pro-AKP tweet activity comes from paid crews or not, for the prevalence of these troll teams is by no means officially recognized. Despite this, a recent report of the Stanford Internet Observatory on retweet rings in Turkey suggests the prevalence of fabricated personalities and anonymous users associated with the youth branch of the AKP (Grossman, Akis, Alemdaroğlu, & Goldstein, 2020). On these grounds, pro-AKP tweet activities can be plausibly be understood to be government-led methods to regulate networked conversation.

Irrespective of whether they are paid or voluntary, government-led practices of trolling transform Twitter into a contested site that deepens cultural and political polarization in Turkey (Bulut & Yörük, 2017). As Ozduzen and McGarry (2020) state in their study on the memorialization of the Gezi protests,

² The transformation of the media dates back to the 1980s, when Turkey had increasingly integrated itself into the global economy and a neoliberal market rationality. In this period, the media sector was corporatized and owned by a few business investors who, for the large part, had commercial and political relationships with the ruling authorities. These political economic transformations have reinforced a political parallelism over time that has dramatically hindered the possibility of journalistic autonomy (Kaya & Çakmur, 2010).

echo chambers strongly characterize such a polarized structure of Twitter use in Turkey; they help in making sense of the self within their bounds. In this respect, the use of Twitter among Turkish-speaking communities is largely characterized by heated debates, even over mundane events that are easily translated into macropolitical polarization of Turkey. As Ozduzen and Korkut (2020) reveal, the polarization between Islamist and secular circles largely stems from debates over gender and sexualities in Turkey.³

Methodology

Data Collection and Sampling

To extract Twitter data including the hashtag #AliErbaşYalnızDeğildir, I used the free and open source tool Mecodify (Al-saqaf, 2016). The software's Search API method fetched 136,173 tweets and 1,296,027 retweets by 302,033 users who shared content between April 25, 2020 and May 2, 2020. There are probably more tweets relevant to that tweet activity that I was unable to add to my sample, albeit not including that specific hashtag. Yet it is not possible to find and collect all possible manifestations of these data. Moreover, Twitter also set some limitations to scrape the complete data, and there is no way of checking the extent that accessed data captures actual tweet activity. Despite these limitations, search queries containing these dates provide insight into prevalent tendencies as it includes the kernel of tweet activity (see Figure 1).

³ Traditional media in Turkey also plays an important role in the polarization between Islamist and secular segments of society on the basis of gendered and sexualized images. As Cetin (2010) reveals, secularist and Islamist discourses put forward dichotomous representations of gendered and sexualized bodies that eventually inform the signifiers of political positions.

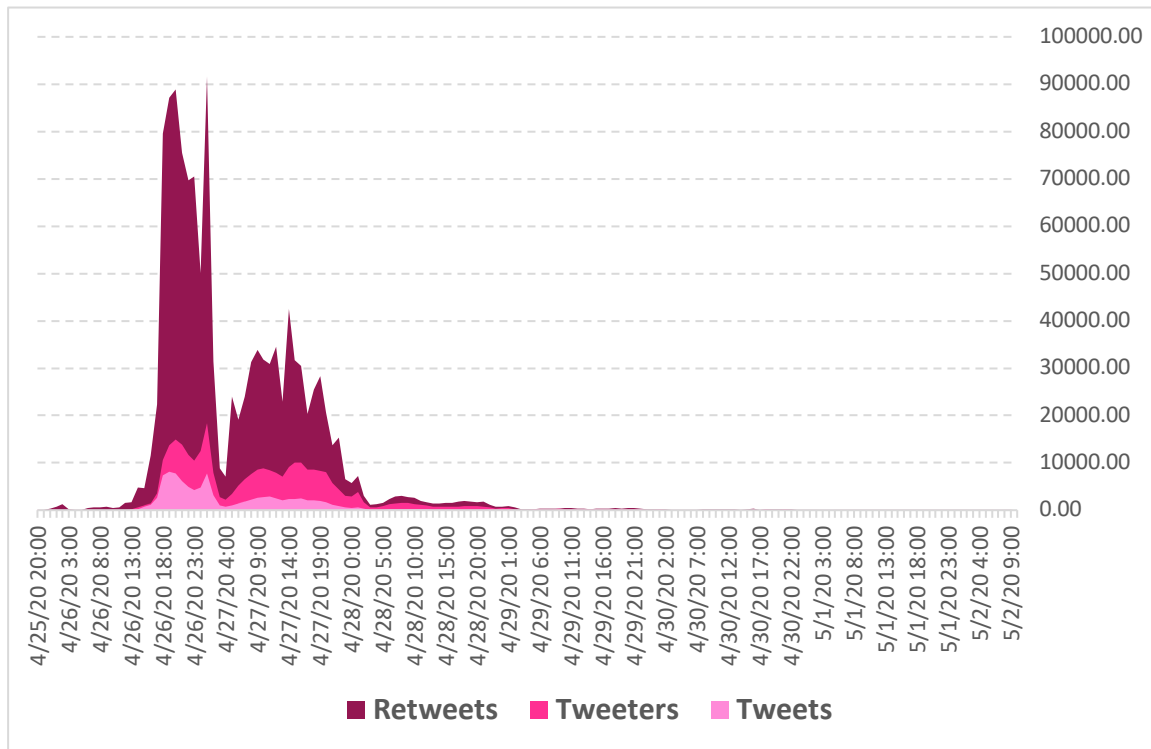


Figure 1. Tweet activity including the hashtag #AliErbasYalnizDegildir by time (hourly intervals).

To generate suitable data for a qualitative research, I selected the most retweeted tweets. As the software used for data collection, Mecodify, makes a list of each tweet (including user specifics and metrics such as retweets and favorites) available, I could easily single out the most retweeted tweets. The sample includes the top 500 tweets, which were retweeted 436,648 times in total. As this is the most disseminated piece of hashtag discourse (33.7% of overall retweets), I suggest that this sampling strategy helps examine the prevalent ways of thinking and feeling. By that means, I had the opportunity to analyze mainstream and popular discourses on Muslim identity on Twitter.

Data Analysis

The methodological approach of this study is an analysis of discourse on Twitter content portraying an image of a Muslim self. I am using the term "discourse," here, not simply as a direct reflection of reality but as a constructive practice that guides seeing, thinking and feeling the social world (Gill, 2000). Considering the structure of communication on Twitter, collected data constitutes a networked discourse that accommodates social practices defining, negotiating, and contesting ways of thinking and feeling. The notion of networked discourse here refers to particular styles of communication on Twitter which is not limited to unique utterances on the basis of microblogging functionality. As Bruns and Moe (2014) state, communicative processes are also

structured by exchanges of media contents. Therefore, the study of Twitter discourse requires scrutinizing dissemination as well.

To operationalize an analytic framework on discourse, I draw on a thematic analysis of networked discourse. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) formulation, data processing and analysis is composed of a six-step procedure: (1) familiarizing with data via (re-)reading tweets; (2) generating initial codes to identify certain features of the data; (3) searching for themes by collating codes within specific themes; (4) reviewing themes to understand coherence both between and within themes; (5) defining and naming themes, including the examination of overall narrative; and finally (6) constructing the body of the report by reviewing the extracts.

I suggest that a thematic analysis serves the research objectives of this study in two ways. First, this method is used for analyzing texts and talks by identifying the key themes or patterns of large data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). On that account, thematic analysis is becoming a widely used method of Twitter research (Bulut & Yörük, 2017; Downing, 2019; Downing & Dron, 2020; Eriksson, 2016; Papacharissi & De Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Payne, 2018). One of the most significant advantages of this method is its capacity to "summarize key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a 'thick description' of the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97). As there is usually large volume of cases when analyzing Twitter data, using thematic patterns makes the data set more intelligible.

Second, a thematic analysis is also helpful to investigate the particularities of networked discourse. Once thematic patterns are identified, the question of how and to what extent Twitter becomes an effective medium for the dissemination of particular themes can be discussed. In that regard, the quantifiable character of themes (specifically measured by certain metrics such as the number of tweets, retweets, and favorites) sheds light on the volume and directions of networked discourse. As mentioned above, this dynamism is conceptualized through the lens of affect theory.

Islamic Truth, Muslims' Warfare, and Hatred

As the hashtag #AliErbaşYalnızDeğildir shows clear support for Ali Erbaş's sermon, the top tweets including that hashtag are unequivocally sympathetic to him. Yet there are also discursive positions reframing Erbaş's rebuttal within extramarital and nonheteronormative sexualities. Drawing on thematic analysis, I identify three patterns that are characterized by distinct affective discourses. The themes identified here are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but instead complementary and correlative ways of thinking and feeling.

These themes share in common affective intensities that are strongly enmeshed in networked discourse. Yet the themes are differentiated in terms of the objects of affection. The first theme is built on affection toward Islamic meanings. The bulk of tweets within this theme constructs binary oppositions by associating or dissociating with Islamic teachings. Besides, the second and third theme communicate affect in language on the basis of relations with cultural others. Tweets within the second theme portray an image of the Muslim self affectively dissociated from an imagined West. Finally, the third theme imagines alienated subjects of a "Muslim nation," who are prominently deemed to be queer subjectivities (see Table 1).

Table 1. Examples of the Most Retweeted Tweets.

| Theme | Tweeter | Tweet |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| The truth of Islam | Government Representative of AKP | Those who defame the word of God will be disappointed both in this and the other world. #AliErbaşisnotalone as he puts into words God's command. |
| | Bureaucrat | We speak for God, not pleasure. #AliErbaşisnotalone |
| | Islamist intellectual | Ali Erbaş speaks of the truthful side of the Sacred Book. Those who criminalize this are ignorant culprits. . . . Their boldness is detrimental not only to them but to the whole world. Of course #AliErbaşisnotalone. |
| Islam under attack | Bureaucrat | #AliErbaşisnotalone as he enlightens society about religion, reminds them of the Quran's commands and vehemently defends God and his truthfulness. |
| | Pro-AKP journalist | I speak to the Muslims throughout the world. Their target is not only Ali Erbaş here, but ISLAM, QURAN and OUR PROPHET through him. Unless we unite against this challenge of the bars, they will eventually dare to threaten our religion. #AliErbaşisnotalone. |
| | Individual user | We stand in solidarity with @DIBAliErbaş for the sake of mankind as the apex of creation against the project of the global forces and their dirty games. |
| Hatred | Pro-AKP journalist | #AliErbaşisnotalone The call to prayer will always be recited five times a day #AliErbaşisnotalone |
| | Islamist intellectual | #AliErbaşisnotalone Formerly, being a faggot was an abomination but now, this despicable attitude has turned out to be a source of pride for those who lack honor. |
| | Pro-AKP journalist | Muslims! Stand upright! There are carrions against you! #AliErbaşisnotalone |
| | Anonymous Twitter user | Those advocating LGBT cannot have any rights. They are lower than beasts as is mentioned in the Quran. #AliErbaşisnotalone |
| | Anonymous Twitter user | I consider LGBT to be a nuisance as troubling as terrorist organizations. Those homosexuals should be treated in the same way as terrorists. By the way, #AliErbaşisnotalone. |

Along these lines, tweeters construct multiple subject positions that come to form affective publics polyvocally upholding Erbaş's Friday sermon.

To specify, the first theme portrays an essentialist image of the Muslim self through an appeal to a sense of Islam. Such a Muslim image derives from a rhetorical work positioning Erbaş's speech into the words of indisputable truth. The homonymy of the Turkish word *hak*, which originally comes from Arabic, is central to these discursive strategies. In speaking of the *haklılık* (rightfulness) and *hakikat* (truth) of Erbaş's sermon,

the top tweets also call for abiding by and advocating God's will (as *Hak* means God when capitalized). In that sense, they validate Erbaş on account of the idea that he is the one intermediating God's word. Indeed, the tweets may even point out, or directly quote, specific verses about the story of Lot's people that appear in the Quran and hadith. Dominant interpretations of the Quran set forth a strict prohibition against adultery and homoeroticism in Islam, mostly referring to that story⁴ (see Dunne, 1990; Kligerman, 2007). The flows of tweets resonate with that understanding and praise sexual pleasure within heterosexual marriage as a marker of societal order and harmony.

By validating Erbaş's sermon through the ultimate truthfulness of God's will and referring to Islamic texts, tweeters show their distaste for the opposition party CHP and the Ankara Bar Association's open critique of Erbaş's preaching. Tweeters rage at the CHP for spokesperson Öztrak's accusation of hate speech in the Friday sermon, and the Bar Association for its disavowal of Islam through the words "obsolescence," "bigotry," and "backwardness." They harbor intense resentment for any practice questioning Islam or pursuing more inclusive religiosity. In that regard, the flow of tweets in this theme materializes an affective intensification finding nothing short of downright and unmistakable truthfulness in their sense of Islam.

Secondly, metaphors of warfare characterize another thematic pattern. Tweets of this theme raise concerns about threats to the Turkish nation and portray vaguely identified images of enemies, such as the West, global forces, LGBTQ identities, the Hollywood film industry, and capitalism. Tweeters offer a conceit of imaginary enemies in the form of demonized cultural forces. In their view, these imaginary enemies ruthlessly exercise power over Turks, seeking to eradicate their Islamic way of life. Hence, they call Muslims to take action against this alleged attack. Passive voice informs the narrative of enemies; the tweeters believe that the Diyanet's sermons will be restrained and calls to prayer will be silenced. Therefore, they strengthen the rhetorical illustration of an intensely dreadful atmosphere that is a matter of life and death for the lives of Muslims. Both the passive voice and vaguely defined enemies deepen the affective registers of fear that ultimately position Muslims under a constant threat. In doing so, fearful subjects inextricably bind the image of the Turkish nation with omnipresent pain.

As Yilmaz (2017) states, claims of victimhood have an influential role in the formation of Islamist nationalism in Turkey. Being based on self-imagining as victims of modernity, a discourse of suffering positions Muslim selves within a dangerous world constantly attacking an Islamic way of life. Such a vision of the social world starkly opposed to Islamist ideals realigns Muslims to take action collectively. It develops an image of the Turkish nation coming together to avert its imagined adversaries. In this way, the suffering of Muslims legitimates authoritarian cultural politics and claims of victimhood translate Islamists' wounded selves into "an entitlement to suppress any opposition and perceived threat" (Yilmaz, 2017, p. 501). Metaphoric warfare in hashtag discourse reverberates around national imagination. In this way, tweeters bluntly uphold inflammatory language, favor bodily damage to their imagined enemies, and transform their tragedy into potency.

⁴ There are some readings of the Lot narrative that clearly fall apart from the heteronormative interpretations (e.g., Shannahan, 2010). Given that, it should be noted that the prohibition of extramarital and queer sexualities is hardly intrinsic to Islamic texts.

Finally, the third theme communicates a straightforward hatred toward extramarital and nonheteronormative sexualities. These tweets do not necessarily involve religion-based justifications to validate acrimony. Tweeters are more likely to use defamatory words. Indeed, the hostility in their language is unequally distributed; tweeters are more inclined to express hate for LGBTQ communities regarding them as “carriers,” “inferior to animals,” “terrorists,” “cursed,” and so forth. In that regard, they view queer bodies as ill-suited to Turkish cultural identity. As Ahmed (2004b) eloquently states, hate is an intense feeling that is closely linked with love. The other’s proximity to the love object translates into feeling hate toward those others. Such affective dispositions correspond to a crisis of identity; hate speech stems from the blurring of symbolic boundaries between the self and the other. Viewing through this lens, tweeters hate filthy queer bodies that ostensibly threaten their purity. Hateful utterances thus stick to queer bodies and eventually serve to ensure the queer’s symbolic difference from Muslim embodiment.

The Affective Resonances of Hashtag Discourse

These themes articulate three different subject positions vocalizing support for Erbaş’s Friday sermon, but their volumes are severely differentiated. As shown in Figure 2, the validation of the Diyanet’s sermon on the basis of Islamic truthfulness is the most prominent theme, whereas the portrayal of the queer as a body alienated from the nation is relatively muted in comparison with the other themes. However, the dynamics of networked discourse are not only limited to the unequal distribution of themes. The patterns of how these themes are differentially circulated on Twitter shows a greater dynamism.

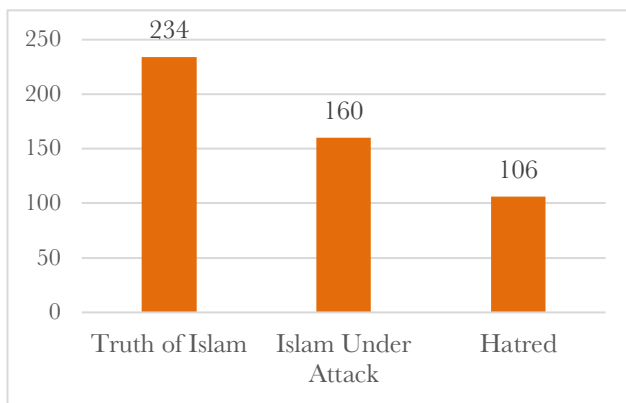


Figure 2. Total # of tweets by theme.

Figure 3 shows the average number of retweets and favorites by theme and type of user. Accordingly, the theme “hatred” becomes outranked in relation to other themes. This is especially true for verified users, while the magnitude of retweeting and favoriting among non-verified users is relatively narrow, although the patterns are roughly the same. Retweets and favorites reclaim the prominence of themes. While the straightforward expression of hate takes the lead in networked discourse, the view of Islam as being targeted by its “enemies” comes second, and the idea of self-evident Islam third.

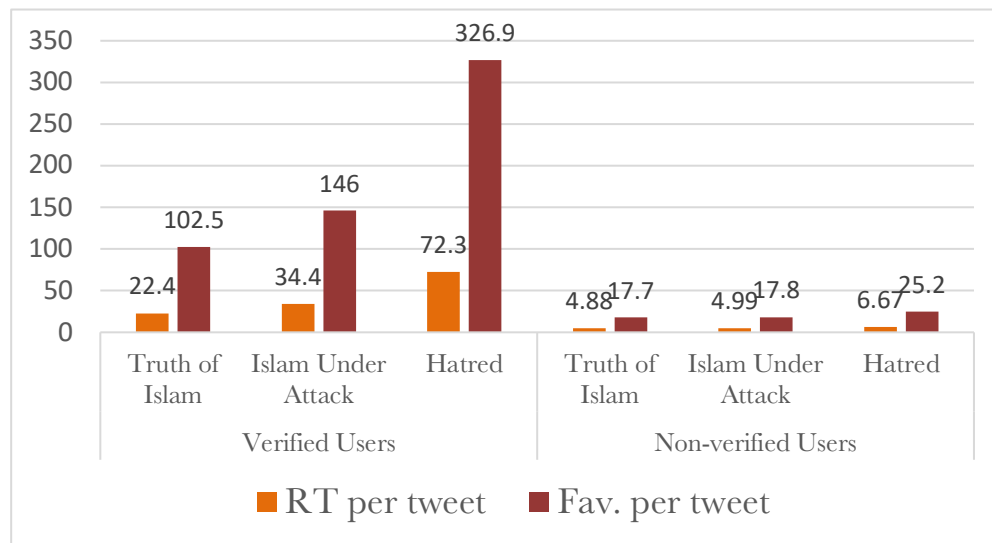


Figure 3. Average of retweets and favorites by theme and type of user.

From that perspective, retweets and favorites are the resonant chants of networked discourse that negotiate what is more prominent and needs to be recognized on Twitter. As Papacharissi (2016) states, retweeting is a structuring action that allows “thought leaders to be crowdsourced to prominence,” (p. 314) especially when tweets are regularly archived by hashtags, and heavily retweeted or favorited. By the same token, retweeting or favoriting are not necessarily a discursive reproduction of what is said on Twitter; resonant chants may amplify or curtail the flows of tweets by retweeting and favoriting.

In this process, user specificities are obviously significant; verified users’ capacity to be retweeted and favorited is by far greater. Their heightened capacity derives from their transfer of social capital onto Twitter, as all the verified users are composed of AKP politicians and bureaucrats, pro-AKP journalists or intellectuals who get more followers in comparison to individual, and/or anonymous users. However, it is not simply that hashtag #AliErbaşYalnızDeğildir is a top-down discourse led predominantly by government authorities and pro-AKP public figures. Affective publics play their part and articulate their discourse from below into the networked discourse. Affective publics redefine what is more noticeable and favorable mostly using resonant chants. Their significant function is to magnify the flows of media content portraying an image of the Muslim self constituted in relation to its cultural others. In regard to the second and third themes, imagining the Turkish nation in a stark contrast to its alleged adversaries is the primary function. Unlike the theme “truth of Islam,” they narrate antagonism between the Turkish nation and its external enemies (the West, the global economy, global gay cultures, etc.) or internal enemies (i.e., queer bodies). Therefore, tweeters make sense of their national identity on the front line of culture wars against their imagined adversaries.

These discursive negotiations reverberate around the “convergence cultures” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2) of digital environments. Participatory cultures of new media effectively transform into sites for affective encounters between the self and its cultural others. Encountering differences vividly generates an affective

domain in which formations of subjectivities along the lines of gender, sexual, national, or religious differences take place. One's proximity to its others cultivates affective impressions that ultimately lead to the negotiations of boundaries along these differences (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b). The magnification of metaphoric warfare against the imagined "West" and repulsion at gender and sexual differences stem from tweeters' digital proximity to their alleged adversaries. Twitter becomes a site for encountering differences in which a national self-image is constructed and performed. These encounters translate into a feeling of being incapable to conduct a Muslim life. Therefore, they communicate a form of hysteria that emanates from these encounters. By the same token, they nurture a sense of self that barely leaves room for agonistic relations.

Conclusion

This study sought to expand on debates on networked discourse by moving beyond current conception of publics in terms of communicative rationality. Examining the hashtag #AliErbaşYalnızDeğildir as an affective-discursive terrain, the present study concurs with the centrality of affect in the formation of networked discourse (Lünenborg, 2019; Papacharissi, 2016). Viewing through this lens, it sets forth two complementary conclusions. First, drawing on a thematic analysis of top tweets, this study illustrates the prevalence of three discursive frames that are distinguished in terms of their objects of affection: (1) belonging to a particular form of Islamic meanings, (2) imagining the Turkish nation as being in a warfare against its alleged adversaries, and (3) acrimony toward those involved in sexual practices outside of heterosexual marriage. Along these lines of affective discourse, tweeters draw the contours of their Muslim identity and imagine their Turkish identity.

Second, the "spreadability" (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 3) of new media technologies introduces another layer to the affective dynamics of networked discourse. I conceive of the extent of what is circulated on new media platforms as affective resonances. In this context, the resonant chants of networked discourse are "affective economies" (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 44) of signifying practices that come to dynamically negotiate discursive formations. In regard to the hashtag in question, resonances effectively magnify metaphoric warfare against an imagined "West" and acrimony against gender and sexual differences. In that regard, I argue that the affective resonances accommodate distinctive potential for negotiating what is more prominent and favorable.

This idea is linked to debates over "discourse from below" on Twitter. The present study reveals that affective publics' flows of tweets generate a dynamism that is not restricted to unique contributions through tweeting. Tweeters may performatively alter the extent of circulation by interacting with Twitter's affordances. These are the resonant chants of networked discourse that do not necessarily reproduce what is said. As Papacharissi (2016) conceives, hashtags are open signifiers to be redefined and reappropriated. Networked discourses dynamically archived through hashtags cultivate a vivid site for the formation of affective publics. This dynamism accommodates a distinctive creativity to develop counternarratives. Yet affective publics may simultaneously parallel with, and give new direction to, dominant narratives. The way that tweeters amplify discourses imagining Turkishness on the front line of culture wars against their adversaries is one function of this novel directionality.

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