

Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey

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Discussions of conflict, war, and violence very often make references to notions related to gender, such as “proper” womanhood and manhood, normative familial and kinship relations, sexual acts, and identities. In the context of the South Caucasus and Turkey, such discursive associations are abundant in societal and political discourses. In this paper, we use feminist perspectives on state, nation, army, border, enemy, threat, and security to look at particular examples from Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey of how gender and sexuality are reflected in the discourses of the nation-state in the context of conflicts.

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Introduction

Across various geographic and cultural contexts, the discourses of ongoing and past conflicts, along with the accompanying images of the Enemy¹ and beliefs about state security, are often intertwined with discourses of gender and sexuality. Discussions of conflict, war, and violence very often make references to notions related to gender, such as “proper” womanhood and manhood, normative familial and kinship relations, sexual acts, and identities. In the context of the South Caucasus and Turkey, such discursive associations are abundant in societal and political discourses. One needs to look no further than the ubiquitous evocations of the “need” to wage war to protect mothers and sisters, lullabies telling little boys to go to sleep so they grow up fast and go defend the *motherland*, or the anxieties about possible mixed marriages with the “Enemy”. Even though such cross-references are a very naturalized part of every culture and language use, a deeper look can reveal substantial interrelations between discourses of gender and sexuality on the one hand and the continued perpetuation of conflicts on the other.

In this paper, we deploy existing feminist perspectives on the state, nation, and citizenship to look at particular examples from Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey and question how the binary² gender categories and normative sexualities³ are inherently interlinked with how the “State” (re)produces the image of Enemy in the discourses of threat, security, and conflict.

¹ Throughout this text, words such as “State”, “Other”, and “Enemy” are often capitalized and in quotation marks. This is done in the cases when our use of their meaning is different from that in everyday use as well as the use in other disciplines. These words are not in quotation marks (but are still capitalized) when they appear in phrases with “the concept/s of”, “the framing/s of”, “the image/s of”, “the representation/s of”, “the discourse/s of”, “the perspective/s on”, and other phrases that already show that we are not speaking about a real-life referent but rather a concept. In cases when the everyday use of the word overlaps with our use, no special marking is used.

² “Binary gender” is the conceptualization or belief that there are only two genders aligned with biological sex and resulting in two distinct, opposite, and disconnected forms of identity – masculine and feminine.

³ “Normative sexuality” assumes the alignment of biological sex with a sexual orientation, a gender identity, and a gender role.

At the Intersection of Conflict Studies and Gender Studies

The study of conflicts and conflict resolution and the interdisciplinary field broadly defined as gender studies have come into increasing contact with each other, despite having started as thematically different fields with differing objectives. Most frequently, these two fields have come together in order to look at the specific impact armed conflicts and violence have on women or to discuss and problematize the exclusion of women from peace and reconciliation processes (Cockburn 2013). Recent studies have also explored the relationship between escalations in violent conflict and the forms of masculinity that are dominant within a particular society (Messerschmidt 2015, 10-13).

Meanwhile, feminist scholarship has aimed at demonstrating how conflicts are “gendered⁴” by highlighting how the discourses, norms, and expectations of manhood and womanhood are in a reciprocally formative relationship with concepts and institutions from seemingly other domains, such as state, nation, army, border, enemy, and state security. Such institutions and concepts are not usually seen as relating directly to issues of gender or sexuality, and theoretical conceptualizations of the State and its apparatuses do not normally encompass the private practices of gender and sexuality. In other words, both in social practice and political discourse, “conflicts”, “enemies”, and “national security” are not normally seen as interlinked with the ways people experience gender identities or sexual practices. Nevertheless, both nationalist rhetoric and discourses of conflict have been thoroughly bound to the ways manhood and womanhood are conceived and perceived.

⁴ “Gendered” means reflecting the experience as well as the prejudices associated with one sex more than the other; it also means reflecting stereotypical gender roles.

Conceptualizing State and Nation Through a Gendered Lens

In order to address the relationship between people's gendered subjectivities⁵ and the discourses of ongoing conflicts, we first provide a brief overview of how feminist scholarship has proposed new ways of analyzing the concepts of State and nation. For the purposes of this paper, the notion of the State refers to all institutional structures whether they directly belong to the apparatus of a state or are auxiliaries of a state system, such as the power of the capital or institutional education. When we talk about the "State", we do not refer to one unitary and coherent source of supreme power. Instead, we use "State" to refer to the multitude of institutional structures – from government to education to healthcare – that govern and organize citizen-subjects⁶, since it is impossible to deconstruct the "State's" performance of power in the patriarchal discourse without paying attention to the "interlocking of multiple social-political sites and locations" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

On the most basic level, adding a gender and sexuality dimension to the analysis of the nation-state does not require complex feminist theorizing, since allusions to manhood and womanhood and gendered language are abundant in the discourses about nation-states and nationalism: references to motherlands and fatherlands, nurturing mother-nations, and strong and impenetrable states are ubiquitous across cultures and languages.

Nationalist rhetoric has explicitly and implicitly used allegories of binary gender to construct the nation-state framework. Within this dual framework, the nation and the state are identified as feminine or masculine entities, with their respective gendered attributes and characteristics. Depending on the particular discursive context and its peculiarities, such as political configurations, levels of militarization, and the trajectory of the nation-building process, the nation may be imagined as a feminine entity possessing qualities usually attributed to women – a caring and nurturing body to which citizens or members of that nation belong – and the state may be attributed with a masculine identity, seen as providing

⁵ "Subjectivity" means the perspective of the individual self on the experience, rather than some neutral or objective perspective from outside the self's experience.

⁶ When used in this sense, the word "State" will be capitalized.

Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey protection and strong borders within which the nation lives safely. Alternatively, the nation may be imagined as a collectivity of men, standing strong against the threat of the “Enemy”, with concepts such as the “military nation” in Turkey and the recent policy of the “army-nation” in Armenia (Altınay 2004) (Grigoryan 2016). The male symbols of the nation are usually represented as individual “typical” men, such as soldiers, while the female figures represent more abstract ideas and virtues.

Within these symbolic associations, the state and nation are often perceived as being under threat either by internal or external forces, necessitating the protection of the “purity of the mother-nation” against the “penetration” (external) or “proliferation” (internal) of the “Other”. Furthermore, in this nation-state fantasy, not only are the state and nation gendered in their characteristics and features, but they also create a framework in which the perceived threat to the nation requires the cooperation of the citizens through performing normative manhood, womanhood, and related hetero-reproductive sexualities.

A key element in the regulation of gender and sexuality against the “threat” to the nation is the reproduction of the nuclear family. Lauren Berlant argues that “a familial politics of the national future came to define the urgencies of the present” (Berlant 1997, 1). The “urgency of the present” is the nuclear family, both a prototype and replica of the national fantasy. The heteronormative family, the patriarchal unity that is dependent upon neatly prescribed gendered and sexual roles, is seen as the only space for reproducing the future (generation) of the nation. The maternal framing of the nation can be understood in relation to a metaphorical and actual reproduction of the paradigm of patriarchy as subordination. In this framework of a nation-state, within which the nation is under threat, women are destined to become caring mothers and giving birth to men who will grow up to be soldiers and protect the nation, so that the mothers can continue the work of giving birth to more soldiers and mothers of soldiers. This process also involves the reproduction of patriarchal values, neatly prescribed gender norms and sexualities through the vein of the “possible route to happiness”. In this closed cycle, men’s involvement in state-making can be fulfilled also through military service, whereas the family is seen as the main citizen-duty for women who are in charge of reproducing future generations, including future soldiers. This vision of women and the female body is sexist; women are expected not only to demonstrate compliance with this role, but also take pride in being able to contribute to the nation’s reproduction.

Alongside these gendered expectations of lifestyle, gender and sexual performances and identities are also regulated through more abstract, affective categories of belonging, familiarity, and morality. For feminist theorist Judith

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Butler, the “State” is a force that controls belonging and can potentially control non-belonging. She argues that the “State” binds an individual in the name of the nation (Butler and Spivak 2007, 3). The invocation of the nation by the “State” in these sexualized and gendered relations is the main field where affect⁷ operates in the form of national attachment or a sense of (national) belonging.

In physical terms, the demarcation line of the “comfort zone” of belonging to the nation is the state border. As a political entity, a border “always marks a limit between two territorial and social entities”, and in this sense, it is associated with “dichotomous notions such as inside/outside, inclusion/exclusion, we/them” (Sohn 2015, 4). The official or de facto border of the state is an affective field where the gendered and nationalized politics reproduced by the “State” intensifies. This kind of politics, the repetitive performance of the “State”, that is usually masculine and somewhat violent, is necessary for the reproduction of the “State’s” own identity for the creation and maintenance of borders. Without the everyday performance, the border itself is very futile, almost a fantasy. The border as a structure, is “not actual”; “it is neither actual, nor fictional, neither real, nor possible” (Deleuze 1967 (2004), 178). In this sense, a border gains meaning through the diversity of practices in which various actors engage. Thus, a border can also mean an invitation to transgression and desire for openness. The “State’s” bordering practices that can be found virtually anywhere within state territory (flag posts, maps, national symbols, etc.) intensify close to the border to counterbalance this centrifugal urge for transgression. Moreover, “the study of borders adds to our understanding of national, ethnic, gender and sexual identities, among others, because borders inflect these identities in ways not found elsewhere in the state” (Wilson and Donnan 1998). To render the futile border more tangible and sealed, the representation of the “neighbor” easily lapses into the representation of the “Enemy”. This kind of political representation could be read easily by analyzing how images of the neighbor and the Enemy change places to represent the same subject.

The right to belong to the nation involves an implicit requirement of possessing and performing a normative and predetermined gender identity as well as a normative sexuality. This requirement does not function in the formal sense of the word: usually it is not inscribed explicitly within the legal arena, and in fact, most state constitutions currently guarantee civic equity that traverses identities. Instead, what makes it possible to talk about the existence of such a “requirement”

⁷ “Affects” are the state of body and mind that are similar to feelings and emotions, yet are pre-subjective. They are not entirely contained in a person’s consciousness; they are in a constant dynamic without set meanings.

Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey are the discursive constructions of various “Others” as not possessing the desirable normative and predetermined gender identity or normative sexuality.

These “Others” can be internal – inside the body of the nation and the state borders but not belonging to the state, nation, and land; they are considered not worthy of belonging. Usually, “Others” are used as reference points for what constitutes an undesirable element for the nation and as a threat to the integrity, safety, and survival of the state. These “Others” are, on the level of everyday culture and discourse, “what parents fear their children might become” or what is used as an epitome for “moral and ethical decay”. These “Others” can also be external – beyond the body of the nation and state borders – constituting an external “Enemy” or threat.

As a norm, for states with active conflict situations or perceived threats, the image of Enemy, whether internal or external, serves as this very point of reference for what is the undesirable “Other” as opposed to the morally, ethically pure, and desirable “Us” or “We”. Alongside the array of identities, characteristics, behaviors, performances, and other subjective configurations, this “Us”/“We” versus “Them”/“Others” dichotomy is also constructed in clearly gendered and sexualized ways. The state, as a paternal site, deploys the nation, as a maternal site to create an affective bond between the nation and the desired ideal heterosexual individuals, whereas the “Others” possess a deviant and undesirable gender and sexual identity. The “Others” are also often imagined and constructed as possessing a feminine or “effeminate” identity – the subordinate end of the gender binary.

To reiterate, the “State” does not possess a unitary rational identity through which this gendered nation-state and “Us” versus “Them” dichotomy is constructed. Begoña Aretxaga foregrounds the complexity of this process: sexuality and gender are central not only to the “State’s” regulation of the citizen’s bodies or the managing and producing of socially acceptable sexual practices; sexuality and gender, she argues, also shape state institutions, agencies, ideologies, and practices. We should, therefore, see the “State” as the complex assemblage of structures, discourses, and practices that are fragmented, contradictory, and marked as much by subjectivity as by reason (Aretxaga 2005, 165).

In the following sections of this paper, we look into three different examples and manifestations of the entanglements of discourses of conflict, enemy, state, and gender in Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey. The three examples were chosen based on a few criteria: firstly, they correspond to our individual interests as researchers coming from these countries, and secondly, we tried to engage in each case a different focal concept – borders, militarism, masculinity, and homosexuality – to

Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey demonstrate how the abovementioned theoretical generalizations can be manifested across different regions, institutions, and discourses. The section on Armenia looks at the interrelations of the Enemy image and hate speech in the context of the conflicts with Turkey and Azerbaijan, and the public discussions of sexuality, especially regarding the growing LGBTI visibility and movement. The section on Georgia takes off from a recent violent event in Batumi, a border city, where the invocation of “Tatars” through the “State’s” agencies mobilized the violent crowd of men, thereby protecting their masculine identity. The section looking at the Turkish context focuses on the sexist language used by the security forces or the counterinsurgency/paramilitary forces in the city of Silvan with the aim of exerting violence upon Kurdish citizens.

Armenia: Sexuality at Home and Beyond

Homosexuality has been decriminalized in Armenia since 2003, and multiple state policy documents declare the state’s commitment to gender equality and the procurement of equal opportunities for men and women⁸. In practice, however, on the level of public discourses and the media, as well as various canonized historical, literary, and cultural texts, the image of the “proper” Armenian man and the “proper” Armenian woman is constructed with allusions to expected gender roles and sexuality. Moreover, the expectations of traditional gender and sexuality are presented as not only desirable, but also immediate necessities for the survival of the nation and the sovereignty of the state. In other words, sticking to traditional gender roles is presented as a civic duty of each citizen upon which the survival of the state depends. Consequently, the image of the one who transgresses either traditional gender roles or sexual identities becomes that of the “Other” and is presented as the “Enemy” of the nation. The unmarried woman who has sexual relationships, the gay man, and the transgender woman are all presented as threats to national survival and state security. So most often, the exclusion, repression, and silencing of non-normative genders and sexualities are performed not through the more conventional (and still problematic) affective notions such as shame,

⁸ Armenia is signatory to international conventions such as the United Nations convention on “On the Political Rights of Women” and the Council of Europe conventions “On Equal Pay for Male and Female Workers for Work of Equal Value” and “On Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation” (Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia n.d.).

Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey inappropriateness, and personal reputation, but rather through evocations of “state” and “nation” as well as references to historical events, genocide, and current geo-political circumstances. The frozen conflict with Turkey – along with the unresolved historical trauma of genocide – and the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are the main points of reference for the kinds of threats the Armenian nation faces, along with larger and more abstract concepts of victimhood, threat, enemy, and survival.

In the wake of the 2009 Zurich protocols that were being negotiated between Armenia and Turkey, the prospect of opening the Turkey-Armenia border since its sealing in 1993 raised many anxieties (Tert.am 2008), among them also sexual ones. A number of social media discussions raised the issue of controlling Armenian women’s sexuality in case Muslim/Turkish men were able to freely cross the border: how would the “State” and the nation make sure intermarriages and sexual intermingling would not happen? It is important to note that the same issue was rarely, if ever, raised regarding the marriage of Armenian men to Turkish women, since in the logic of traditional gender roles, a man’s sexual relations with a woman is a relationship of conquering and dominance; therefore, marrying Turkish women, even though still undesirable, would constitute a relationship of dominance over the “Enemy”. This widespread fear of Armenian women’s sexual relationships with Muslim/Turkish men, whether consensual or not, arose on a backdrop where domestic violence against women in Armenia is omnipresent. Recent research published by the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women has called femicide in Armenia a “silent epidemic” (Coalition To Stop Violence Against Women 2016, 9-10). With at least 30 women having been killed by either a current or a former partner between 2010-2015, there is still no legislation addressing domestic violence and no mechanisms for proper police investigation or protection of women. The parliament has repeatedly voted to reject such legislation proposed by women’s rights groups. Outside of activist and advocacy groups, this situation has never been presented as alarming either from the viewpoint of national survival or state security.

Similarly, and even more accentuated, is the construction of gender and sexuality in relation to the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Whereas in the case of Turkey the main fear is women’s sexuality, the discourse on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – where there is no imminent prospect of “border crossing by masses of Azerbaijani men” – focuses more on the construction of a proper masculinity. Manliness and a heterosexual orientation are the discursive prerequisites of becoming a soldier, which is seen as the ultimate duty of male citizens. With the increased visibility of LBGTI people as a result of the work of human rights organizations and activists, gay men have come under attack from nationalist

Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey voices who claim that “while the brave boys are sacrificing their lives on the border to protect us, gays are disrespecting their sacrifice by engaging in homosexual sex” in their civilian lives⁹. So, the reproduction of traditional masculinity and heterosexuality is presented as the civilian equivalent of protecting the borders. In other words, the two paradigms for fulfilling male citizenship are military service and the social reproduction of heterosexual masculinity.

Consequently, this image of a masculine Armenian citizen-soldier is contrasted with the image of the emasculated and effeminate “Enemy”, who is the one that “lost the war”. The sexual “Others” then, particularly gay men, are seen as the internal “Enemy”, as the delegate-representatives of the external “Enemy”, in this case the imaginary unity called “the Turk¹⁰”, inside the country. Among social media discussions regarding homosexuality, one can often find enunciations such as “gays are Turks” or “gays are worse than Turks”. Notably, there have also been calls to “round up all the gays in Armenia and send them to Baku”, which also comes to demonstrate that the space of the nation-state is constructed to contain only a particular kind of sexuality, and within the hegemonic imaginary, the space of the “Enemy” nation-state is made to contain all forms of “Otherness” – ethnic, religious, moral, ethical, and sexual. In May 2012, a local bar in Yerevan, “DIY”, which was a gathering spot for the queer community, was subjected to an arson attack. The assailants later claimed that the attack was a reaction to the bar owner’s participation in the Istanbul Gay Pride event. This was a moment when the imaginary equation of homosexuality as perversion and Turkishness as “Enemy” was confirmed in the eyes of the assailants, and the crossing of an “internal Enemy” – an openly queer citizen – into the space of the “external Enemy” had turned her into an open threat to the stability of the nation-state framework.

Georgia: “The Night of the Tatar”

In this section, the representation of Turkey as a neighbor posing threat and the related gendered and nationalized discourses that intensify particularly around the

⁹ A reader commented under an article titled “Sex, Choice, Fascism and the Nation” published on Hetq.am: “Create an army of homosexuals, with its generals and officers, and go protect the border of the fatherland instead of organizing gay parades and avoiding service in the army. It would not be a bad idea to send the gays to the army, to make up the number of women in the army” (Bournazian 2012).

¹⁰ In public discourses, “Turk” is often used in reference to Azerbaijanis as well.

Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey peripheral region of Adjara in Georgia will be examined. The construction of the image of Enemy happens through the “State” presentation of Georgia as a Christian nation-state and by perpetuating the dominant discourses on gender and sexuality.

Prior to Georgia’s independence, the region of Adjara, with its vibrant heritage and unique geographical position, had to tuck its potential of transcending borders in cultural and economic interaction behind the iron curtain. During the Soviet era, the inhabitants of this border region had adjusted to the existence of the iron curtain and had developed their own ideas about “Self” and homeland in a series of routinized interactions with the state according to the Soviet “nationalities policy”. After yet another nationalization project in the post-Soviet period, the affect of shame associated with their marginal Muslim-Ottoman heritage still maintains its power to disturb their identities (Khalvashi 2015).

The incident of the so-called “Night of the Tatar” has been chosen for the closer examination of the gendered representation of the nation-state and how this representation is linked and contributes to conflict. This representation is done in two ways: 1) by constructing the gendered fantasy of the nation as the “comfort zone” – the strong affective site—and 2) by reproducing fear or hate through the exaggerated or fetishized sexual/gendered image of the Enemy, the Other. The two elements of representation are interlinked because the “State”, through the sexual representation of the Enemy, builds a strong affective bond that determines how and why individuals are drawn to the nation and the state.

On the night of March 11, 2017, the so-called “Night of the Tatar”, the rallies against the new police chief and tightened traffic fining policies in Batumi turned into a chaotic, disruptive, and spontaneous protest (Pertaia 2017). The crowd mostly consisted of men in their twenties. The protest that was largely influenced by the social inequalities in the developing city simply turned violent after news spread that the head of the police allegedly called the people in Batumi and Adjara “Tatars”. Whether these allegations are true or not is irrelevant for this analysis; what is important is that the slug of “Tatar” hit the nerve.

Why did the identification with Tatars trigger the outburst of violence? In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the name “Tatar” was used in reference to the Turkic-speaking populations of the Caucasus and is occasionally used today with a derogatory connotation towards Georgian Muslims. This discursive alienation and otherization sometimes takes a violent turn. In 2012, conflicts on religious grounds unfolded in the villages of Nigvziani, Tsintskaro, and Samtatskaro, where both

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Christian and Muslim Adjarian “eco-migrants¹¹” live side by side, by other Christian and, in the case of Tsintskaro, other Muslim communities. A 2013 study of these conflicts and discourse analysis of interviews with local Christians revealed that their perceptions and behavior is fed by historic narratives of antagonism, such as “Adjarians were forcefully converted to Islam”, “Turkey is a conqueror”, “Georgians were thrown out of Saingilo”, and others. The local Christian communities tie the practice of the religious rights of the Georgian Muslims to a theory on the expansion of Turkish policies into Georgia. (Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center 2013).

In a 1999 ethnographic study, Mathjis Pelkmans traces a shift in the (re)construction of Turks and Turkey as the “Other” to the early 1990s as the border between Turkey and Georgia opened. The increased interactions between the communities meant new experiences and the flow of people, commodities, and new images. Together with wide-ranging economic opportunities, the new patterns of trade were initially associated with a “grand liquidation of Georgia” as metals, machinery, and raw materials were taken out of the country across the border. In this process, the “Other” was endowed with values by which the new reality could be understood and justified and the “Self” could be defined as positive and be protected. Pelkmans uses Mary Douglas’s concept of a “wounded body” that she applied as a metaphor for a threatened bounded social system (Douglas 1966). The opening of the border was perceived as an attack on a body, and this perception was reciprocal. Adding onto Pelkmans’s analysis, we further claim that this attack on the body has been imagined as an attack on a female body. In Turkey, Georgian women have been held “responsible” for sexually transmitted diseases; in Georgia, anxieties grew about Georgian women having to remain “pure”. Citing an image from the newspaper *Izvestiya*, Pelkmans describes how the image of a new moral border between Turkey and Georgia was being constructed – “a border that contrasted somber prostitutes with horny Turkish men, scarcity with affluence and capitalism with corruption” (Pelkmans 1999). Since then, there is ongoing “moral panic” in Georgian border villages about the brothels that, according to locals, are created only to serve Turkish drivers who cross the border every day (Imedaishvili and

¹¹ Eco-migrants are the people who have been displaced from their homes due to natural disasters. In Georgia, since the early 1980s, climate change and natural disasters have given rise to a migration trend from densely populated mountainous areas in Georgia, including Adjara.

Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey Bigg 2012). This hyper-sexualization of Turks and their portrayal as lecherous are common fears (Kucera 2017)¹².

So, while the dominant nationalistic discourse otherizes Adjarians based on their Muslim-Ottoman heritage, closer to the border these discourses intensify and gain stronger gendered nuances. In reaction, Adjarians constantly reject their own “Otherness” associated with the Muslim-Ottoman heritage, and Muslim and Christian Adjarians alike are easily triggered concerning their loyalty to the Georgian nation.

Coming back to our case study of “The Night of the Tatar”, the alleged use of the word “Tatar” by an actor that represents the state hinted that the Adjarians are more Turkish than Georgian and are disowned by the nation. Further, the use of the word “Tatar” associated the Adjarians with the image of the Other with its entire complexity of gendered stereotypes. With the evocation of the “Tatar”, the social protest lost its original intent and shifted focus onto masculinity and the national identity that was used as a tool for political manipulation. The Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center cites the failure of the police to intervene and isolate the early manifestations of violence. It reports that the analysis of statements of the protests show that one of the main reasons for the outburst of violence was the chauvinist rhetoric against people living in Adjara. The report also calls the authorities to take the age and gender factors of persons engaged in violent actions into consideration. “The explanation of such aggression and destruction should not be limited to the argument of ‘criminal thinking’ because it can be an expression of acute social crisis and nihilism”, reads the report (EMC Echoes the Events Taking Place in Batumi 2017). We would argue that an added reason to the social crisis of the young men that turned violent on the “Night of the Tatar” in Batumi was the challenge to their masculinity hinted at by the association with the stigmatized image of the “Tatar”. Violence was the effective means of reaffirming masculinity.

Another interesting detail about “The Night of the Tatar” was how the police responded to the protest. According to some observers, the government let the protesters vandalize the city infrastructure and property of residents for almost 12 hours (Kiria 2017). While there are speculations that this ineffective, somewhat delayed reaction to the crisis might be politically motivated and the government aimed to allow the mob to vent (Nodia 2017), the unwillingness of the police and

¹² This is mirrored by a fear in Turkey of the “decay in values” with instances of Turkish government representatives complaining that the ease of travel to Batumi led men from Turkey’s Black Sea region to travel there for gambling, prostitution, and cheap alcohol (Göksel 2013).

Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey security services to act properly in time could be argued to have given the mostly angry mob of young local males to re-gain their masculine identity by being extremely violent.

The analysis of the events that took place on March 11 in Batumi reveals the representation of the neighbor as a threat employed to disown the disobedient citizens. Turkey in particular is not represented as an immediate threat to Georgia in political discourses; however, becoming “Tatar” could be read as a threat to the population who lives near the border. The affective border between Turkey and Georgia does not lie on the white building in the village of Sarpi, with an abstract architectural meaning, nor does the regulation of the border end with checking the documentation by the border police. It logically continues into the narratives about sexuality, threat, and the “wounded body” of the periphery of the nation.

Turkey: The Writings on the Wall

This section looks at the case of the writings left by individuals from the security forces or the counterinsurgency/paramilitary forces inside and outside of citizens’ homes in the city of Silvan during the military operations following the 2015 elections in Turkey.

The background to this incident is complex. Turkey witnessed two general elections in 2015. In the first round of the elections held in June, the newly formed pro-minority Peoples’ Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) managed to cross the election threshold. Even though attempts to form a coalition eventually proved unsuccessful, and a second general election was called, the significant support shown for the HDP was seen as a democratic victory not only for the Kurdish population, but also many other unrepresented minorities, such as Alevis, Armenians, women, LGBTI citizens, and others.

The Kurdish question in Turkey has been burning since the 1980 coup d’état and remains on top of the national and civil society agendas. According to the review by Kerim Yıldız and Mark Müller on the historical background of the Kurdish question, “the relaxation of judicial supervision of government behavior under the OHAL [“Emergency Rule”] opened the door to chronic abuses commissioned by state security forces in their actions against ‘terrorist’ targets [...]. In the government’s view, the situation in the Southeast was characterized solely by terrorism inspired by Kurdish separatism, justifying all-pervasive repression of manifestations of Kurdish identity and pro-Kurdish expression” (Yıldız and Müller

Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey 2008, 106). This view is still reflective of the approach of the current government formed by the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP). After the HDP's rise in the first election of 2015, the government immediately turned to similar discourses to otherize the HDP by associating it with terrorism and considering it and ethnically Kurdish citizens as being equal to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK)¹³. The ruling AKP, with the classic militarist approach of the "State", has waged military operations that have lasted for months under the "Emergency Rule", citing the threat of possible attacks.

As Murat Belge explained, "Of course, the possibility of a war with an enemy outside is at the top of the militarist ideology [...]. But if we do not have such a problem, we can say that militarism is needed to keep an obedient population in discipline rather than fighting against external enemies" (Belge 2012, 151). Therefore, this "Enemy", which is needed as a "threat" to hold the nation together, may emerge inside the country as well, as in the case of the Kurdish question and at times when the incumbent political power thinks that its grip is weakening.

Against this general backdrop, we examine the manifestations of the rising militarist-nationalist and gendered discourses and practices in the Southeastern regions of Turkey in 2015. Following the military operations of 2015, individuals from the security forces or the counterinsurgency/paramilitary forces wrote messages on the walls of residential homes and public buildings in the city of Silvan. The militarist, nationalist, and gendered writings read "The state is here", "If you are a Turk, be proud of it. If you are not, obey", "We will make you wear thongs once spring comes", "You have the state, do not betray it", "Girls, we came into your caves", and other similar phrases. These writings cannot unequivocally be attributed to the formal security forces or the counterinsurgency/paramilitary forces because who really wrote them is not clear. However, as local people indicated, members of the "Esadullah Team"¹⁴ carried out the military operations alongside the security forces in the Southeastern provinces, and many of the writings on the walls are signed with the group's name.

¹³ The Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* in Kurdish) is a left-wing organization based in Turkey. Since 1984, the PKK has been involved in an armed conflict with the Turkish state. The PKK is considered a terrorist organization by the Turkish state as well as many other states and organizations.

¹⁴ "Essadullah" means "Allah's Lions". It has not been clarified yet whether they are affiliated with the official security forces or an unknown group independent of the security forces. Still, the writings were made when security forces were in the region, and none of the writings were deleted by the official security forces.

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It is not common for the security forces, the founding body of the “State”, to write on the walls. Wall writings and graffiti are usually made by dissidents – individuals from alternative and marginalized groups who do not have access to public spaces and are denied a voice. Given the nature of the writings, they could not appear in the official discourses in the phrasing they were put into. However, the narrative voice of the utterances is that of the “State”; the act of writing them on the walls of people’s homes is an act of threat and violence in the name of the “State”. The people whose houses bore these writings were dismissed from the “ranks” of “acceptable” citizens and were portrayed as “traitors”; the militarist and sexist discourse “otherized” them in a loud and unwavering manner.

The binary normative gender discourses, built on each level of society producing hierarchy and oppression, are an instrument for legitimizing the language of rape. A masculine language that clearly triumphs over the “Other” by feminizing and hurting “honor” is manifested in the writings on the walls in Silvan. Afsaneh Najmabadi, who wrote on gendered concepts in the context of Iranian modernity, gives a stimulating explanation, stating that “nation was largely conceived and visualized as a brotherhood, and homeland as a female, a beloved, and a mother. Closely linked to the maleness of nation and the femaleness of homeland was the concept of *namus* (honor)”, drawing attention to the moral motivation behind the socially constructed concepts of masculinity and femininity (Najmabadi 2005, 1).

In the cited writings on the wall, the words “girls, we came into your caves” and “we will make you wear thongs once spring comes” are the most saturated with misogyny and sexualized hate speech. “The girls they came into” are no other than the “Others” (pun intended) that are despised by gender and sex and deserted through extortion. According to Bell Hooks, “when race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other” (Hooks 2006, 367). We think that the writings in Silvan testify to the concept of the Other that is called to surrender and be taken over, consumed, and transformed through sexual pleasure, as described by Hooks.

These writings demonstrate the kind of ideology, discourse, and practice in which the institutions of the “State” (re)produce and engage citizens, while both are a product embedded in such ideology, discourse, and practice. Of course, the production of nationalist and gendered discourses in a militarist state is not limited to militarist tools alone. In many domains of societal life, the “Enemy-traitor” rhetoric is spoken to the people within the security-insecurity dilemma. The most basic institutions, such as family and school, play a major role in the recreation and acceptance of single-type nationalist-militarist and gendered discourses in the

Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey socialization processes of individuals. We see that those who are labeled as “traitors” are automatically imagined in femininity, and that the rape discourse can turn into a legitimate one against the “traitor”. The soldier who engages in a fight as a hegemonic masculinity ritual confronts and attacks the “Other” as a “traitor” and threatens with a rape discourse by imagining him in a female body, forcing him to wear a thong on his body. This is the point where we can clearly see the normative gender relations in all their hierarchy and oppression. The “traitors” are subordinated in the face of all-powerful masculine domination and are imagined and raped as feminine bodies. The raped and the feminized are built to serve as the domain where the superiority and glory of the masculine nation can be exercised. In other words, in the conflict dynamics, power is exerted over “Other”/“traitor” men that are imagined as feminine and are again bound to the actions of men. The main actors are men on both and all sides.

Conclusion

The discussion of the abovementioned contexts and examples has aimed to demonstrate how the gender and sexual roles of citizens are regulated and heteronormativity is enforced in conflict contexts through a dual mechanism: (a) the state is threatened to be defeated by the “Enemy” in case a citizen fails to perform a traditional feminine or masculine role, and (b) a citizen faces the fearful prospect of becoming *like* the “Enemy” with an effeminate or “deviant” sexual identity – the ultimate moral downfall in the national imaginary.

On the one hand, the image of Enemy has particular parameters of gender and sexuality, and on the other hand, the image of Enemy is used to construct, reproduce, and enforce the “proper” gender performance and sexuality of those who wish to belong to the nation-state. In such a discursive backdrop, the “enemies” of the nation are often identified with citizens whose gender or sexual identity doesn’t fit into the framework of hetero-reproductive masculinity and femininity. Another way this plays out is the imagination of the enemy as a woman or an emasculated and effeminate subject, and the subordination of the woman as the desired dynamics to be achieved over the “Enemy”. As such, the discourses about Enemy and threat and discourses about sexual deviation and sexism often cross-pollinate each other in political and societal discourses, mass media, and pop culture.

The masculine hegemonic language surfaces in the field of tension, conflict, and war; gendered discourses of Others, Enemies, and traitors proliferate and are legitimized. Additionally, through the metaphoric connections between deviant gender roles/identities/sexualities and enmity/treason, the image of the national

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Enemy/traitor is projected from the public arena into the private one, so as to be made present in the most intimate and everyday practices and performances. The masculine hegemonic discourse is internalized. The gendered/sexualized representation of the Enemy/Other/traitor is embedded in our lives through everyday politics and reproduces present ways of life.

Recommendations:

One possible recommendation would concern the alliances between civil society organizations working in the fields of conflict transformation and resolution on the one hand and gender equality and feminist advocacy groups on the other. Women's and LGBTI rights groups have been increasing awareness about the entanglements of conflict discourses and the gendered order of the societies. Many such groups and organizations have tried to both reach out and build alliances with those practicing conflict transformation, as well as themselves run conflict transformation initiatives across borders and conflict divides. The conflict resolution practitioners and organizations have exerted far less efforts to face the gendered and sexualized aspects of conflict and to acknowledge the interdependency of the transformation of existing conflicts and the liberation from state-determined and state-enforced gender roles and sexualities. Keeping in mind this suggested interdependence, we would like to encourage individuals and organizations working towards the transformation of various conflicts in their societies to pay closer attention to how gender and sexuality complicate and sustain the conflict dynamics as well as to reach out to those working for women's and LGBTI rights to build alliances.

Another recommendation for the academic and policy-making communities would be to put more effort towards generating and using a gender-sensitive language that would both enhance possibilities of critique and explore alternative ways of conceptualizing social order. Since the sustenance of the militarist discourse and culture relies on gendered language, awareness and sensitivity about the uses of gendered imaginaries and references in relation to conflict can contribute to the transformation of militarist sentiments. This awareness is necessary, particularly by groups and initiatives working towards conflict resolution and peace processes.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AKP – *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party)

HDP – *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Peoples' Democratic Party)

LGBTI – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex

PKK – *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Workers' Party)

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