

**THE LANGUAGE OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION:  
MEDIA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN TURKEY**

by

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**ABSTRACT:**

The mass media are the symbolic arena where social issues and their proponents are defined as legitimate or illegitimate. With its secular and quasi-monopolistic nature, the mainstream media in Turkey constitute an interesting example with their different attitude to various social movements. In this study, I elaborate on the media framing of two social movements, namely, environmental, and feminist. It becomes necessary to consider the cultural, economic and political contexts to analyze the media framing of these movements. By analyzing the three most popular newspapers in Turkey, I attempted to establish the nature of media framing of social movements in Turkey. The findings reveal that the ideological and material interests of journalists play out in shaping their sympathetic attitudes toward the feminist and environmentalist movements.

**KEYWORDS:**

Social movements, Environmentalism, Feminism, Media Framing, Turkey.

# **THE LANGUAGE OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION: MEDIA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN TURKEY\***

## **INTRODUCTION**

The mass media are the symbolic arena where social issues are defined as legitimate or rejected. The secular and quasi-monopolistic Turkish media constitute an interesting example with their different attitude to various social movements and their causes in Turkish society. In this study, I elaborate on the media framing of the Turkish social movements (environmental and feminist), considering the cultural, economic and political contexts of the media framing of these movements. For that purpose, I analyze the three most popular newspapers' (namely, *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, and *Sabah*) framing of social movements in Turkey during the year 2006. The findings support that the ideological and material interests of journalists play out both jointly and separately in shaping their attitudes toward a social movement.

Modern Turkish Republic is a secular nation-state founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on the ashes of the Sharia-based Ottoman Empire. Atatürk made various radical reforms to secularize the country by changing its institutional structure as well as its cultural codes. The founders used the press as a vehicle to implant these new cultural codes. The early state monopoly over the press left a long-lasting statist legacy among the journalists. This did not totally disappear despite a certain level of differentiation and liberalization in the media sector in the last half of the twentieth century. In that regard, I argue that the nature of media framing of each movement reflects different characteristics affected by different contextual factors. For example, the media framing of the

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environmental movement seems to be related to both ideological and material interests as it seems ideologically sympathetic to the environmental causes but it also seems to show cautious hesitation about the issues that challenge their economic interests. On the other hand, the media seem to wholeheartedly support the feminist movement since it is parallel to their ideological outlook without challenging their economic interests.

In this study I will solely focus on the opinion columns of the daily mainstream newspapers. Unlike many of its counterparts in the west, the newspapers do not solely report. In fact they are dominated by the opinion columns that occupy almost every page of the newspapers. From sports to more serious international politics to more tabloid issues the columnists share their views with their audience. Most of the time a particular columnist is not limited to a certain theme but can freely write on a variety of topics s/he like to write about.

I solely focus on the press for analysis due to the inaccessible nature of the audio-visual media in Turkey. This does not pose a serious challenge to the validity of our data. First, that is because the press and radio-TV's are dominated by two media groups, namely the Dogan and Sabah corporations. Second, there is a parallel between the press and audio-visual broadcasting that produce parallel media products. Third, the same journalists generally work both in the press and television channels.

### **Theoretical Background:**

Regardless of its importance, not every event has an equal chance to be covered in the media, resulting in selection bias. Moreover, the events that are covered are presented and framed in a certain, affecting its perception by the public. Media frames are mostly unspoken and unacknowledged schemas to make them easily understandable for both for the reporters as well as the recipients (Gitlin 1990). Media frames are made up of media packages and the package chosen by

a journalist or an editor shapes the presentation of the event (Gamson and Modigliani 1989)

Social groups, institutions and organizations compete for media space to disseminate and shape the public debates (Gamson 1992). To describe the centrality of both social movements and the mass media in modern politics, some scholars defined these new phenomena as “mediated politics” (McNair 1999) and “movement society” (Tarrow 1994). As part of the public, the social movements’ voices are affected by the nature of media framing of social movement agenda and activities. When social movements challenge an elite position, the media tend to align with the elites and status quo (Schudson 2002). For this reason, Gamson and Meyer (1996) saw the social movements’ access to media as a part of the political opportunity structure, where they limit or bolster the effectiveness of social movements.

Mass media serve several functions that may help or hinder social movement activities. First, the mass media informs the general public and the social movement followers. Second, social movement constituency can establish ties and networks through the mass media. Third, mass media can be a propaganda outlet for social movements or vice versa. Fourth, successful media strategies or movement activities can set precedence for the later movements. In all these respects the mass media carries a critical importance for the operation of social movements and their ability to spread their rethoric (Goodwin & Jasper 2001).

## **Historical Background**

After the collapse of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire, the founders of the new Turkish Republic choose a secular nationalism as the principle of government. As earlier Ottoman reform attempts to modernize the country failed, they believed that modernization required a total westernization, i.e. changing both material and cultural characteristics of Turkish society. a cultural modernization was a prerequisite for a material modernization to establish a modern nation. This ideology was justified with their distaste to the public role of religion (Mardin 1962) and the relatively homogeneous nature of the new nation.

The founders tried to limit the public role of Islam by abolishing the Caliphate and religious courts (1924) and adopting Swiss Civil code (1926), the switching to Latin Alphabet (1928), accompanied by banning Sufi orders, switching to Latin Alphabet and Gregorian Calendar and the unification of the educational system. These radical reforms aimed a total westernization by stripping religion from its public functions (Lewis 1968).

The history of the Turkish press showed a parallel development with that of modernization attempts as the early journalists emerged as a part of the bureaucratic intelligentsia in the late nineteenth century (Heper and Demirel 1996). In the beginning, they advocated a constitutional government to limit the Sultan's absolute rule and defended westernization and democratic ideals to modernize the country (Groc 1994). The conservative press could not cope with the strong modernist wave and lost the battle after the establishment of the Republic. That was partly because the single-party rule did not tolerate the operation of any alternative press. The legacy of secular and authoritarian journalism remained even after the transition to democracy as the journalists maintained their adherence to an idealistic democracy rather than popular

democracy (Heper and Demirel 1996). The journalists defending the secular establishment based on nationalism, secularism and republicanism maintained a didactic role between the state and the mass public (Groc 1994). Very often the center-right governments' policies were criticized by the Turkish media as a compromise from secularism and republicanism. For example, the AK party government efforts to lift the ban on headscarf were rejected as compromise from secularism.

The privatization of media sector resulted in a quasi-monopolistic market structure in the 1990s. The journalists were not fully comfortable with liberal policies but they took advantage of liberalization to their both material and ideological interest. They defended the secular establishment against the popular demands to obtain economic protection from the state elites against the newly-emerging competition to the big business they are associated with.

The media arena is dominated by two main corporations, namely Dogan and Sabah that operate businesses such publishing, financial services, energy, telecommunication, tourism, and marketing (Boulton 2001). The Dogan Corporation controls a major portion of daily of daily newspapers with forty percent (DKM 2006). The companies also control the distribution of the press, making it nearly impossible for a challenging to enter the market. Considering the market domination and the dysfunctional nature of the Turkish political structure, the media sector becomes even more critical and stronger. For that reason, some even argued that the media constitutes the first estate rather than the fourth (see Alpay 2005; Karaca 2005).

As Bagdikian (1997) stated, the competitive and diverse nature of news sources provides more a objective and accurate coverage. The Turkish media sector suffer from these problems as both ideological and material concerns are openly played out and there are not sufficient checks and balances to change this

imbalance. Big companies (e.g. Dogan Corporation) use their media outlets as a sidekick for their market power and can even compromise from the profitability of their media outlets. They have strong interest in the governmental support to, for example, acquire “cheap state land, indemnities on importing and inexpensive credits from state banks” (Finkel 2000) and earning advertisement by the Press Announcement Department controlled by the government (Unsal 1994). These big businesses with strong media outlets have great interests in the privatization of the state-owned firms and government-paid contracts. The editor-in-chief of popular *Hürriyet* justified their involvement in direct business as they are par of a big enterprise along with publishing and broadcasting (Finkel 2000).

To analyze the media framing of social movement issues in Turkey, I take the media framing of women’s rights and the project of nuclear power plant in the year 2006. For that purpose, I conducted a two-level analysis: general media attitude and specific frame analysis. First, I tried to measure the general media attitude toward women’s rights and toward building a nuclear power plant by determining whether each opinion column is negative, positive or neutral to the issue. I tried to do that by summarizing each opinion column into one single proposition and coded it as positive, neutral, or negative according to its tone on the issue.

## **THE MEDIA FRAMING OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS**

**Table 1: Media Framing of Women's Rights in Turkey**

	NEGATIVE		NEUTRAL		POSITIVE		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>Hürriyet</b>	-	-	11	39,3	17	60,7	<b>28</b>	<b>100,0</b>



<b>Milliyet</b>	-	-	2	22,2	7	77,8	<b>9</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>Sabah</b>	-	-	4	33,3	8	66,7	<b>12</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>Total</b>	-	-	<b>17</b>	<b>34,7</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>65,3</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100,0</b>

As we mentioned above, Ataturk and his friends founded the Modern Republic as a nation state based on secularism and nationalism. In their vision of modernity, the founders attributed to secularism a central place and they considered the status of women as the main indication of development in society (Gole 1991). What White (2003) called a “state feminism” aimed at promoting women’s rights and equality in the public sphere. However, the effectiveness of this project was limited due to the overwhelmingly rural nature of Turkish women population in the first half of the twentieth century. The state’s support for women’s rights found a strong adherence among the elites including male and female journalists. The mainstream media’s full hearted support for women’s rights also coincides with their anti-clerical approach. As Table 1 shows, the journalists strongly favor women’s rights in Turkey. The results did not indicate the presence of any opinion columns that oppose the feminist ideals or did not support the traditional way of life for women.

In 2006, forty nine opinion columns addressed the issue of women’s rights in the mainstream press in Turkey. While about one-third (34.7 percent) of the columns did not seem to express an obvious preference, about two-thirds (65.3 percent) openly supported the cause of women’s rights. Not surprisingly, some journalists (Çapa 2006a) declared that they were feminists and others demanded that others must also embrace the feminist identity (Güler 2006). Therefore, the media publicly supported the women’s rights and easily adopted a feminist frame to bolster the changes in that regard.

**Media & Women's Rights:** Turkish journalists recognized the role of the media in advancing the women's causes: "Battling the violence against women is one of our main goals. The media is of crucial importance in this struggle" (Tınç 2006b). Some opened his/her columns for women organizations. For example, Yalçın Bayer (2006b) of *Hürriyet* were inviting his readers to celebrate the seventy second anniversary of women's earning the right to vote in Turkey by naming non-governmental women's organizations. The mainstream press frequently reported the activities of various women NGOs such as KAGIDER (Association for Turkish Women Entrepreneurs) (Benmayor 2006).

The journalists generally complained about the lag between legal arrangements and social practices. While the legal arrangements tend to consider women and men on equal statuses, traditional social practices are still far from such equality (Doğan 2006d). A common theme was that a cultural renaissance was needed to realize women's rights in today's society. One leading columnist even complained about the unrecognized status of homosexuals and asked them to be more open and courageous to advocate their goals (Uluç 2006). The death of an outspoken feminist writer, Duygu Asena, woman in the summer of 2006 spurred a wave of debates about women's rights in the media. Supporting her feminist identity and mission, some journalists publicly supported what she advocated by noting that she thought women that she could divorce, and support herself (Abla 2006; Ulagay 2006).

**Tradition and Women:** The anti-clerical perspective of the journalists shows itself in their treatment of women and traditional lifestyle. Many columnists criticized the traditional treat of women in Turkish society. For example, one journalist expressed her gratefulness for living as a women in Turkey rather than in Iran (Tınç 2006a). Another argued that women in many Muslim African countries lacked basic inheritance rights and Muslim women suffered from such

problems as early marriage, honor killing, and degradation (Doğan 2006a). We can easily notice the journalists' distaste against the Islamic treatment of women. Some even criticized the Directorate of Religious Affairs for not helping women to fight against injustices (Çapa 2006b). One of the leading journalists expressed concerns about the risk that the Directorate's service toward disadvantaged women (Ekşi 2006). The moderate Justice and Development Party government also took its share of criticisms for ignoring honor killings of women and for equating women's rights with the right to wear headscarf (Tınç 2006c). One columnist blamed the whole parliament for not respecting women's rights by labeling it a "chorus of polygamists" (Aydıntaşbaş 2006) while there is not a factual report that the members of the Parliament are mostly polygamous. Similar criticisms were expressed by other columnists that government was seeking a separation between man and women based on religious view (Coşkun 2006). At other times, they criticized the government for being indifferent to the problems the women face such as unemployment in Turkey. Even Egyptian society took its share from their criticism that most of the Egyptian still wear headscarf due to their inability to implement secularism and democracy in Egypt (Şafak 2006). The former editor-in-chief of Milliyet, Mehmet E. Yılmaz expressed his worries about religious pressure on women not wearing headscarf and asked "how will we protect the women who do not want to wear headscarf from those who pressure others to wear it?" (Yılmaz 2006).

**International Context:** International political opportunity structure is accepted as a facilitating factor for certain movement goals. Turkey's candidacy for European Union (EU) allowed an ample room to advance women rights as the EU required improvements in this area. Benmayor (2006) explains that the European Union is directly concerned with women rights besides the implementation of reforms and interpreted this concern as a sign of support for women's active participation in social and political activities along with preventing domestic violence in Turkey. One argued that Atatürk's aspirations

for a modern Turkey was parallel with the EU membership and advancing equality between man and women and to promote women's rights (Bila 2006). The United Nations also showed a similar interest in women's rights by opening offices in the eastern provinces of Turkey. Even talking about women's rights in those traditional eastern provinces was considered as a progress (Tınç 2006d).

## **MEDIA FRAMING OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IN TURKEY**

The environmental movement has global ties and it addresses the issues of global significance such as global warming, greenhouse effects, and nuclear power plants. These issues are more and more becoming part of the international political agenda and struggle. The decreasing sources of fossil fuels seemed to cause major conflicts in the Middle East and around the world. Worried about these developments, the Turkish government announced its aspiration to establish a nuclear power plant in order to reduce its dependence on foreign oil, igniting a critical public debate in Turkey in 2006. The media seemed to have a split attitude on the question of nuclear plant. As we can see in Table 2, the mainstream press seemed to have a relatively negative attitude to building a nuclear power plant. With a somewhat split tendency, a third of the opinion columns opposed the idea of installing such a plant while about forty percent seemed to be neutral and a quarter supported building one such a plant. Two of the three major newspapers (Hürriyet and Milliyet) that belonged to the Doğan Corporation seemed to be more interested in the issue than their rival, Sabah. The latter's limited interest in the issue can be interpreted as their general indifference to the issue where the two-thirds of their columns displayed neither a neutral attitude to the issue (see Table 2). The issue of nuclear power plant is covered and interpreted in relation to various national and international developments.

**Table 2: Media Coverage of the Nuclear Power Plant Project**

	NEGATIVE		NEUTRAL		POSITIVE		TOTAL	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Hürriyet	10	38,5	8	30,8	8	30,8	<b>26</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Milliyet	14	36,8	15	39,5	9	23,7	<b>38</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Sabah	2	16,7	8	66,7	2	16,7	<b>12</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>34,2</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>40,8</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>25,0</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100,0</b>

**Positive Framing:** For those who favor the building of a nuclear power plant, the increasing need for energy was viewed as an important reason. For example, Doğan (2006b) of the daily Hürriyet quoted the energy minister's idea that the current sources of energy would be exhausted by 2020. Others seemed to advocate the same rhetoric that Turkey's energy sources are limited and a nuclear power is needed (Türkmen 2006b). Some journalists also suggested the parallel use of both nuclear and renewable energy sources (Birand 2006b); (Heper 2006c). Similar columns allowed the government framing that the nuclear plant would be built in a region that would not pose threats to the environment (Doğan 2006c). The environmental risks are minimized by some columnists by claiming that the fourth generation plants are a lot safer (Türkmen 2006a).

With a counter thesis to the opponents of nuclear energy, a columnist argued that fossil fuels, not the nuclear ones, are the real threats to the environment

(Münir 2006c). Several journalists expressed the need for a popular support for such a project in order to calm popular concerns (Birand 2006a). That is because Turkish people, like other countries, are afraid of nuclear technology (Münir 2006a).

Another theme for advocating a nuclear power plant was the idea that all western countries get a significant portion of their energy from nuclear plants (Münir 2006b). One columnist argued that having a nuclear power would improve Turkey's prestige in the region (Heper 2006b). One of the reasons the pro-nuclear columnists showed was that opposing the project meant a continued dependence on foreign natural gas (Heper 2006a). Interestingly enough, both the proponents and opponents of nuclear energy expressed a western conspiracy the issue. The proponents argued that the western nations themselves produce nuclear energy while they encourage other non-efficient types of energy production (Uras 2006).

**Negative Framing:** While some journalists totally opposed to the idea of any nuclear power plant, others expressed a more reserved opposition. It is obvious that certain columnists adopted a negative attitude to nuclear energy by maintaining his/her insistence on the risks of the project. In that regard, some journalists allowed an ample room for international peace movements framing that nuclear energy was not desirable. For example, Bayer (2006d) favored with the environmental movement rhetoric that the West tried to get rid of the nuclear power plants by giving it away to the Third World countries. Another one see the issue as the government's conspiracy to distract attentions from critical issues (Sağlam 2006).

One of the main themes among the opponents of the nuclear power was that there was not a real need for nuclear energy but that international interest groups and lobbies encouraged the Turkish government to build such a power plant. For example, the columnists that defined himself as one of the 'Turkish

Greens' condemned the project as a conspiracy of the nuclear lobby that seek to make unjust profit (Bayer 2006c). Similarly, Tamer (2006a) of Milliyet argued that the strong international nuclear lobbying did not allow the local interest groups to be heard. She also argued that the energy to be produced with a nuclear plant can be obtained by saving on the current production (Tamer 2006b).

Bayer (2006a) even proudly noted that he was declared a 'honorary environmental leader'. Another columnist urged the international Greens to show solidarity against the nuclear plant in Turkey (Atkaya 2006a). The columns were filled with the idea that the nuclear energy posed threats to the environment and that new generation plants were nor ready very safe to use (Tamer 2006a). Some others like Atkaya (2006b) of Hürriyet expressed a more reserved opposition to a nuclear plant by arguing that the project did not have any other benefit in terms of cost and health but it only decreases Turkey's dependence on external sources of energy.

#### **CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

The media's role in framing critical issues in social and political life is already well known. Our findings support Çaha's (2004) argument that the media especially contributed to publicizing the previously unspoken aspects of life and to bolstering interest group politics. The way the journalists frame certain issues may be related to their material and cultural interests. Turkish media's approach to women's rights is closely related to the journalists' secular outlook in that they are the primary proponents of women's rights and equality in society. For example, the problem of some parents' reluctance to send their daughters to school, women's political participation and employment are widely brought to the attention of the public. In that regard, the sympathetic media framing of

women's rights can be understood as attempts of social inclusion by considering their ideological and cultural outlook to the role of women in society.

The media's ideological orientation to the issue of environmental issues is less obvious. That is partly because the nature of some environmental issues concerns cultural and ideological issues while others involve material concerns among the media sector. The media's association with the corporate business that produce and fossil distribute fossil fuels seems to affect their opposition to such problems as nuclear power plant that is generally regarded by the environmentalists as a threat to the environment. Compared with women's rights where the media's ideological concerns dominate the agenda, the environmental issue seems less obvious and is counterbalanced with their material interests in the question since it is both an ideological and a material issue.

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