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## Digital Mediation of Dissent: The Stories of Unveiled Women from Turkey

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DIGITAL MEDIATION OF DISSENT: THE STORIES OF UNVEILED WOMEN FROM  
TURKEY

by

Atinc Gurcay

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
in Media Studies

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

August 2020

## ABSTRACT

### DIGITAL MEDIATION OF DISSENT: THE STORIES OF UNVEILED WOMEN FROM TURKEY

by

Atinc Gurcay

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee May 2020  
Under the Supervision of Assistant Professor Lia Wolock

This research project studies the digital mediation of the politics of communication and everyday life by examining the tweets of Turkish women who voiced their dissent regarding veiling practices during the #10YearChallenge trend in 2019. Like so many places, the question of veiling is central to the politicization of women's bodies in Turkey. The politicization of women's bodies, in turn, is central to competing secular and conservative visions of the modern Turkish nation-state. By examining the digital dissent in relation to these competing national projects, I map the historical context of modernization and its impact on the contemporary discussion of the bodily performances and public participation of women. In this project I bring infrastructure and platform studies, theories of the public sphere, and postcolonial feminist approaches together to understand the digital mediation of the politics of communication and everyday life. I collected data on Twitter by using two main methods. The primary tweets that included the stories of women were collected by hand during the dissent. The second set of data was collected using Twitter's search feature

by following two hashtags (#10YearChallenge, and #1YearChallenge) at the time and over the following months. The datasets were analyzed in line with the tenets of Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis. Specifically, I examined the civil unrest and public discussion of veiling and unveiling through the critical lens of postcolonial feminism. I also sought to understand how contemporary technologies play key roles in everyday life and the politics of communication. Importantly, this paper challenges Western conceptualizations of social movements, mediation, technology, and dissent by looking at these tweets, and the formation of these dissenting groups in their own sociohistorical context. The analysis showed that unveiled women felt freer after unveiling to be in secular public spaces, and that they have used technology to communicate their message. Analyzing their complex and careful navigation of identities, spheres, and spaces reveals the struggles of women in Turkey as well as their triumphs. More broadly, this project also offers a look into digital cultures in Turkey.

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To  
my parents,  
brother, sister-in-law,  
and my dearest nephew

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP – Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

API – Application Programming Interface

BLM – Black Lives Matter

CASON – Connective Action - Self Organizing Networks

CTDA – Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis

ICT – Information and Communication Technologies

LGBTIQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer, Plus

NGO – Nongovernmental Organization

SMS – Short Messaging Services

SNS – Social Networking Sites

STS – Science and Technology Studies

US – United States

WWI – World War One

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time at Istanbul Bilgi University where I cultivated my theoretical background in media and communication studies.

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Most of all, I am proud of supporting the freedom of choice for all women in Turkey. I am hopeful that Turkey will become a better place for all in the future. The alternative political culture of Turkey has changed since the Gezi Park Protests. This research or my feminism would not be the same without the women who have been protesting and calling for a better life in Turkey.

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

In early 2019, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg started the *#10YearChallenge* by sharing his pictures from 2009 and 2019. The idea of this post was to illustrate how much Facebook had grown, as had he, and how Facebook became a part of people's lives in the last ten years. The pictures quickly went viral, not only on Facebook but on other digital media platforms as well, and users across sites recreated the *#10YearChallenge* with their photographs. During the peak of this trend, several women from Turkey began using the hashtag to share their unveiling stories on Twitter. Their posts and pictures turned the commercially motivated viral hashtag campaign into a vehicle for civil unrest about Turkish politics and the policing of women's bodies. In a matter of days, the *#10YearChallenge* was appropriated into political mobilizations.

The Turkish women turned Twitter into a space to discuss veiling in which they could share their stories of leaving the headscarf “behind.” Their content covered several themes, such as veiling, religion, social pressure, and oppression.<sup>1</sup> They manipulated the hashtag to highlight different time frames corresponding with their experiences of unveiling. Some used *#5YearChallenge*, while others employed *#1YearChallenge*, which later turned out to be the most prominent hashtag for this mobilization. This modification, crucially, marked their laying claim to the viral media trend. The original tweets often supported the freedom of choice of women. Shortly after

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<sup>1</sup> Here I am riffing on the term “neighborhood pressure,” a concept coined by Serif Mardin during an interview (Cakir, 2007). It originated through the sociological analysis of neighborhoods as a site of oppression in everyday life in the Ottoman Empire. See the literature review section for more.

the initial tweets, public discourse shifted from celebrating freedom of choice to a broader political discussion. As I explain in the literature review, the women's rights and bodies of women are much more than their struggle, but it is a contest within Turkish politics. While the public was engaged in a vigorous, sometimes heated discussion of the unveiling, alternative and pro-government media outlets also covered this mobilization. Three main perspectives framed public discussions of the meaning of the veil in relation to the *#1YearChallenge* hashtag. The first perspective, developed by feminists and advocates for secularism, focused on the idea of bodily freedom and the rights of women. The second perspective was based on a more conservative understanding of women and their bodily practices. The AkTrolls, a pro-government (AKP) political online trolling group based on Twitter (Saka, 2018; 2019), was vaguely involved in such a discussion. Lastly, an alternative view arose, prioritizing women's freedom of choice on the subject of veiling.

In this project, I discuss the broader social meanings associated with veiling and the politicization of women's body, and how this relates to a political contest in Turkey between secularism and conservatism. I not only trace how these women, using the *#1YearChallenge* hashtag, have renegotiated the meaning of the veil, but also how they have utilized Twitter as a platform. Using three bodies of literature, I analyze the digital mediation of everyday life of these women, and those responding to them.

The first body of literature is based on the work of communication, media, and science and technology scholars. In relation to this literature, I discuss the mediation of dissent concerning three key terms: platforms, infrastructures, and affordances. This particular form of social movement requires a deep understanding of digital media and

its technologies since it is mediated and remediated on digital platforms. Although the experiences of women regarding body control are not specific to digital media, their civil unrest was digitally mediated. Thus, this project prioritized media and its technologies. If the main goal is to communicate ideas, one ought to account for infrastructures as the base of communicative processes, and platforms as the facilitator of communicative practices through media devices and sites. In addition to the media itself, the given set of possibilities and constraints of media technologies—their affordances—are crucial to this dissent's structure. We should be extra careful about how we treat digital mediation and technology. That is why this study utilizes technological affordances in order to create a comprehensive account of the relationship between technology and human agency in the context of digital media and dissent.

I pursue this project intending to understand the politics of communication in everyday life (Bayat, 2013; Zayani, 2015). Zayani's (2015) work on Tunisia, for example, centers the question of how ordinary people used the internet to be politically engaged when the traditional institutions of politics failed them. Bayat (2013), on the other hand, theorizes Middle Eastern nonmovements to understand the structure of noncollective and nontraditional forms of dissent—which occur across the spaces of everyday life, including digital media—based upon shared experiences and feelings.

I unpack these key terms and ideas to engage critically with the content of the unveilers' use of *#1YearChallenge*. They also help me examine the broader media ecology within which the women circulated their posts and how that more general media ecology affords certain types of interaction. The primary purpose is to map the Internet and digital media as a venue for dissenting communication practices. To achieve this, I

carefully consider how infrastructures and platforms work, what are their political and for-profit motivations, and how they interact with everyday life.

The second section of my literature review focuses on publics, counterpublics, networked publics, networked counterpublics, social movements, and nonmovements. Starting from a Habermasian understanding of the public sphere, I trace current scholarly discussions on publics, space, and networks. I adapt the frameworks that are circulated by boyd (2010) and Papacharissi (2011; 2012; 2016), which are applied by many contemporary scholars of digitally mediated activism (Brock, 2012; Jackson and Foucault Welles, 2015; Bonilla and Rosa, 2015) to analyze my case study. In particular, I focus on postcolonial theories of publics developed by Bayat (2013) and Zayani (2015). To understand the publics in Turkey, where one can say that the modern country is built on the opposition of secularism and conservatism in a manner that is very different from Western contexts, it is crucial to apply the work and frameworks of scholars from the region.

In the last section of the literature review, I unpack the tension between secularism and conservatism that has been a driving force in Turkish politics since the foundation of the republic through the lenses of critical studies and postcolonial feminist frameworks. The tension is the product of a rivalry between secular and conservative political alignments. The national project of applying Western visions of modern and secular life produced and feeds this tension. Mardin (1993) explains the social life of citizens of the Ottoman Empire was happening in the neighborhoods, where people experienced pressure on their identities and politics in their everyday lives. According to Mardin, the Kemalist group, the secularist leadership of the republic, approached this



existing public sphere as a nonfunctioning structure for a modern society and nation-state. Instead, the Kemalists proposed and employed top-down reforms that sought to apply Western ideas of modernity and secularism to everyday life practices. This produced mixed results, including unease and backlash. The enforcement of the “modern hat” was an example of this mismatch and forceful application. The Hat Law, passed in 1925, made wearing fezzes and turbans illegal for every male citizen. This male-centric regulation reinvented the look of the nation-state as intended, but at an unintended cost. First, people received capital punishment due to their resistance to the Hat Law. Second, such reforms later turned into the base of political rivalry between republican and conservative parties.

Similar proscriptions for women's headgear were not included in the 1925 law, but Kemalism sought to create a look for the new Turkish woman as well. For the state, the involvement of women in the public sphere was an essential part of the national modernization project since Western women were involved in public life to a more significant extent. The project to renew the look of women in many ways tokenized women's bodies. The regime promoted a discourse of women's freedom, but as part of it they pressured women to wear certain clothes and act in certain ways. This emphasis on producing the "modern Turkish woman" turned women's bodies, clothing, and behavior into a political battleground. Starting in the late 1920s, the "modern Turkish woman" has been illustrated with Western (mainly French) style clothing and never with a veil, even though wearing a scarf is an essential tradition in Anatolia and Islam. Creating a well-tailored “modern” look for women caused segregation between the elite and lower class. From the founding of the nation until today, both secular-modern

Kemalist governments and conservative political forces have sought to control the image of Turkey through the disciplining of women's bodies, especially women's veiling practices, turning women's bodies into a central site of the negotiation of national identity.

Performing the *#1YearChallenge* in such a context was an act of civil unrest against the current government and its politics. While engaging in public discussion about the *#1YearChallenge*, some women used words such as "freeing," "happiness," and "becoming beautiful." These particular word choices are part of a discourse that celebrates women when and only if they are unveiled. The assumption that being veiled means one is not free or beautiful reflects a secularist standpoint that originated in the complex politics of the Turkish nation-state's founding. The meanings of veiling were also read through the lens of Islamic conservatism. As I argue, both secularism and conservatism in Turkey demand heavy disciplining of women's bodies. Much of the discussion and dissent surrounding the *#1YearChallenge* connect back to these gender essentializing threads in both Turkish secularism and Islamic conservatism. However, every woman's experience of veiling, secularism, and Islam in Turkey is inherently specific and contextual. For some, unveiling might be synonymous with freedom, while other women might feel happier and freer in the veil. Everyday life is not as simple as national politics imagine it to be. Leaning toward one of these two options is not productive to understand the intricacies of women's lives. Therefore, this project utilizes postcolonial feminist frameworks to center the contextual and strategic meaning-making practices of the *#1YearChallenge* participants (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Göle, 1997; Gökarıksel & Mitchell, 2005; Gökarıksel & Secor, 2014).

## **Chapter Breakdown**

In the first chapter, I provide an overview of the project and review the scholarly literature on digital media, publics, the Turkish context, and postcolonial feminism. It also includes the methodology and theory sections, which outline the analytical process of this project.

In the second chapter, I analyze the primary set of data (i.e., the women's posts) and two interviews that unveiled women did with news media. First, I provide a structural analysis of #1YearChallenge nonmovement and its relation to networked media. In the second part, I examine the primary tweets of unveiled women with a focus on how unveiling women constructed their dissent on Twitter. I deeply engage with their stories through the critical lens of postcolonial feminism. The construction of religion, freedom, beauty, and growing up are the main themes in my analysis.

In the conclusion, I discuss the results of my analysis and the possible implications of this research.

## **Literature Review**

This research project utilizes three bodies of literature to examine the social nonmovement of unveiled women in Turkey. In the first two sections, on (1) media and its technologies and (2) publics and their politics, I examine the social and political consequences of the increasing digital mediation of ordinary life. In the third section, on (3) postcolonial feminist frameworks and political movements and media in Turkey, I provided critical and cultural context for the research.

## **Infrastructure, Platforms, and Media**

The first section focuses primarily on insights from infrastructure and platform studies and the literature on technological affordances. Every instance of digital mediation has its distinct meanings and practices. Therefore, reducing the media into a device, system, platform, or institution would not make sense. For this research, I utilize three key concepts to have a comprehensive account of what we call digital media. Scholars of Infrastructure Studies mainly analyze the forms of media delivery, maintenance, connection. This particular field talks about the basis of communicative acts. The structures of ownership and maintenance are deeply connected to the meaning-making processes. Platform studies, on the other hand, are used to enhance our understanding of how technologies facilitate communication. Different scholars define platforms in various ways; however, this research accepts devices, systems, media sites, and applications as platforms. Instead of perpetuating these two concepts as opposing bodies of literature, I bring them into a conversation to analyze the digital context or environment within which this nonmovement operated. Lastly, I utilize literature on technological affordances to explain how people's use of media is shaped by the restraints and possibilities of digital and mobile technologies. The following section and my analysis of media operationalize these three key concepts to make sense of the given nonmovement and their uses of media to have a public discussion.

The concepts of infrastructure and platform are not inherently separate from each other. They are two parts of an entity that complement each other. For this research, I approach Twitter as an infrastructuralized platform that affords communication and approaches smartphones as programmable devices that have platforms and

components which run on hardware through software. In my thesis chapters, I unpack each aspect (i.e. the platforms, infrastructures, and affordances) of this case study, and their complex interaction, in order to better analyze both (1) why women turned to Twitter and the #1YearChallenge to register their dissent, and (2) the shape of the response to their unveiling posts.

Infrastructure has been defined and used in various ways. Scholars who are deeply invested in information studies offer a holistic approach to infrastructures as “pervasive, enabling network resources” (Bowker, Baker, Millerand, et al., 2009, p. 97). Bowker et al. claim that “Beyond bricks, mortar, pipes or wires, infrastructure also encompasses more abstract entities, such as protocols (human and computer), standards, and memory” (p. 97). Rossiter (2016), claims that infrastructure makes worlds (p. xv). He discusses that infrastructure is the base that we build everything on top of. It is safe to claim that these definitions become slippery (Edwards, 2003). Edwards provides a vague definition by saying, infrastructure is “often used to mean essentially any important, widely shared, human-constructed resource” (2003). These given definitions generally highlight that infrastructures are that which makes the digital communication process possible.

There is no Twitter without telecommunication infrastructure or electricity. Many NGOs and organizations around the World, for example, now claim that infrastructure is a matter of human rights. The idea that having access to information is key to participation and democracy drives this particular approach. Regardless of one's opinion of democracy and participation, we ought to understand the role of infrastructure in communication. This urgent awareness in advocating for the development of

communicative infrastructure shows us how deeply infrastructures are connected to participation.

In this case of Turkey or other developing countries, the genealogies of infrastructural developments must be seen as the effects of capitalism and colonialism. Most countries in the Middle East region have very weak and unreliable network connections centrally controlled by a small set of elites at a national level. For many, this is the main access point to the internet. In Turkey, the main movement to create telecommunications infrastructure happened as recently as the 1990s, while in the US, the cable systems were already laid out decades ago. This late development attempt not only prevents further advancement in the economy (Punathambekar & Mohan, 2019) but also creates inconsistencies in the dependencies for digital communication. The mapping of infrastructure with its genealogies is crucial to this research, not only to understand how this dissent happened but also to understand the importance of alternative modes of accessing the internet, which is deeply connected to the digital mediation of everyday life.

What is foundational and taken as a given sometimes becomes invisible. As Foucault (2010) explains, “the natural” in terms of being represented as without histories, infrastructures can also be taken for granted, naturalized, and ignored. When they break down, however, infrastructures can become highly visible. People are not aware of the existence and importance of electricity, for example, as long as it functions. It is important to keep in mind both that telecom infrastructures are a product of the national project, and they are invisible and taken as a given because the digital

communication of my research subjects is performed on and through these infrastructures.

An example of how a government-owned and maintained infrastructure could fail protestors at a time of protests and uprisings is the government's heavy control of the telecommunications infrastructure during the Gezi Park Protests in 2013. During the Gezi Park Protests, the Turkish government repeatedly tried to cut mobile communication and internet services to specific regions to stop protester mobilizations and the spread of information. Protestors only appreciated the infrastructure when they faced this blocking. This particular example shows how much access to digital media is contingent and at risk.

Along with the possibilities of control of the infrastructure, the physical spaces that we live in have different levels of structure to them (Mattern, 2005). The concept of media city shows us from the underground infrastructures to design, and the architecture of buildings and landmarks, the shape of our cities allow some actions and constrain others. Understanding that infrastructures, created by people, are the base through which our collective knowledge is produced and lived is crucial to enhance our knowledge of the mediation of everyday life. Peake (2018) claims that media production and consumption is deeply connected to culture and meaning. However, Peake also realizes that mediation is meaningful when it is transmitted, which is done through the platforms and infrastructures. My project maps the scale and temporality of the infrastructures that undergird the digital media practices of everyday life. As much as we accept infrastructures are substantial projects for societies and nations, we should regard its implications on daily practices.

Moving from the understanding of infrastructure as a material channel, we also ought to realize infrastructure from a platformized point of view. Contemporary media scholars have a more flexible way of using infrastructure in their work (Sandvig 2013). Since the internet is an infrastructure that affords access to networked knowledge, people may have internet experiences through many different digital infrastructures of different sizes. For example, I do accept Google services and social networking sites can be infrastructures in order to capture the ramifications of digital mediation. Each of these levels of infrastructure, moreover, have their own contextual history shaped by the cultures they were designed within.

Noble's (2018) work on algorithms and racism challenges the idea of people's imagination of computing, coding, or the internet as natural or free from culture. People tend to forget human agency and its cultural effects on these fields. Noble, in many ways, finds commonalities between what media scholars call digital media platforms and infrastructure (Gillespie, 2010). The oppressive algorithms of these systems often misrepresent black women and other counterpublics. Cohn (2019) expands Noble's discussion of algorithms into a broader social question by looking at multilayered social phenomena. Cohn looks at histories of coding, algorithms, and suggestion systems to map the utilization of this infrastructure in social life. He explains the connection between technologies and politics as the basis of technological improvements. Iddins (2019) looks at carceral culture in Morocco and claims that state-owned media infrastructure does not only afford specific communicative actions but currently are used for surveillance purposes by the government. Her research shows that discourses around infrastructures are inherently political since they carry symbolic values for



nations (Edwards et al., 2009). Noble and Cohn treated algorithms and codes as a social construct that share the features of platforms and infrastructures.

The study of media as a technology has been rising with Science and Technology Studies, Information Studies, and Social Informatics over the last couple of decades (Lievrouw, 2014). Work within Infrastructure Studies has tended toward a soft technological determinist view. Research within Platform Studies has tended toward a social constructivist perspective. Plantin et al. (2018) suggest that platforms are infrastructuralized and vice versa, which means that both structures can carry each other's features. In contrast, Bogost and Montfort (2009) claim that the platforms are programming structures that could run in a hardware and software environment. This limiting definition of platform bounds our understanding of the platform to its computational origins. Gillespie (2010) discusses that "platforms are platforms not necessarily because they allow code to be written or run, but because they afford an opportunity to communicate, interact, or sell" (as cited in Bogost & Montfort, p. 3). While Bogost and Montfort and other STS scholars focus on platforms through programmability, I side with Gillespie for a looser use of the term that is about its affordances for communicative purposes. Following this line of research, I look at digital media platforms through the affordance framework.

Hutchby's (2001) seminal piece creates a ground for a third approach to materiality and the social construction of technology. This framework is based on the negotiations and uses of technology by focusing on human-technology interaction. Hutchby says, "The affordances of an artefact are not things which impose themselves upon humans' actions with, around, or via that artifact. Nevertheless, they do set limits

on what it is *possible* to do with, around, or via the artefact" (p. 453, emphasis in original). This approach enhances our understanding of the complex relations between technology and human. Building upon this argument, boyd (2010) catalogued types of affordances of social networking sites, which are the limitations and possibilities that social networking sites offer to their users. Her initial discussion on networked publics, which will be introduced in the next body of literature, entails people both structuring and being structured through new forms of technologies. In that realm, she claims that people can now connect to a broader world than their friends and family (p. 39). Her claims about media being a structuring force and being structured by users create a common ground with Hutchby. She offers four types of affordances for networked publics: (1) Persistence: online expressions are automatically recorded and archived. (2) Replicability: content made out of bits can be duplicated. (3) Scalability: being visible within the networked public. And (4) searchability: content can be found with a search in the platform (ibid). These are vital concepts to my analysis on Twitter and my understanding of it as a site of negotiation. These affordances are realized in various steps of content production, distribution, and reception.

I will talk more about why and how this particular nonmovement happened on Twitter in my analysis, but it is safe to say that Twitter's particular algorithms and interface have various affordances. In this example, dissenting tweets became visible due to the hypertextuality of Twitter. boyd's (2010) approach has also been used by Renninger (2015) to analyze the asexual community on Tumblr. Renninger's study shows overall how a platform can be a safe space for a particular group of people. While Renninger used boyd's approach, he extends the affordances perspective to see

how digital media platforms (or social networking sites) work for networked counterpublics. In his case, asexuality and the asexual counterpublics form themselves on Tumblr because Tumblr can afford their action. More importantly, the context of the platform, being free of parents' control, encourage that particular counterpublic to be there as well as dissenting voices. His study "explains how the politics and affordances of platforms may encourage, tolerate, or prioritize counterpublics address on their platform" (p. 14). These platform-centric affordances are beneficial for many projects. However, the statistics show that more and more people now use SNSs through mobile devices. Particularly image-driven platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat cannot even be used extensively on other computing platforms (Windows, IOS, Linux, etc.)

Since certain platforms can only be used in certain devices, and certain applications have different uses in particular devices, I utilize Schrock's (2015) work on mobile media affordances. He discusses that there are four main affordances associated with mobile media and mobile devices. While being mobile is mostly about being portable, *portability* is about being able to use and create new meanings while being mobile. The second affordance is *availability*, which is the ability to control one's communicativeness. In other words, availability can be understood as a combination of multiplexity, direct contact, and increased frequency (p. 1237). The multiplexity here means communication through text, voice, or social media. While a phone can handle all of the given situations, one would prefer to use one over the other because of what Schrock calls directness, which is the preferred means of communication for the specific group. He argues that the increased frequency of communication across different physical locations is another affordance that is related to availability. The third

affordance he mentions is *locatability*. While this is a more critical feature of real-time geo-location driven applications like Google Maps, Tinder, and Grindr, almost all the other social media applications use geo-location related features. Fourth, he understands the *multimediality* of a mobile media as the number of tasks and different media functions a device can do, such as calling, texting, editing an image or video, emailing, or using social media. In other words, the growing technologies related to digital cameras in smartphones allow users to create a different type of media that is not often associated with everyday people, such as recording videos or taking pictures daily. The current internet penetration and use rates show that people often use mobile devices to connect to digital media platforms. In the case of the unveiling women sharing pictures on Twitter, these mobile media affordances appear to be crucial.

Examining and appreciating the paralinguistic affordances of social networking sites is also important (Hayes et al., 2016). Actions such as liking, retweeting, reposting, and upvoting are central affordances of specific digital media platforms. They define the experience and shape the community of users. The public discussion consists not only of talking but also in acts of listening, approving, supporting, and sharing. This is especially important given that active content creation and posting is only a tiny fraction of what happens on social media.

Hanckel et al. refer to Evans et al. (2017) to argue that "an affordance is not a feature of a digital object or an outcome of its use, rather affordance is the variable process that mediates between the two" (2019, p.3). Mediation is more related to affordances because of the communicative purposes of platforms. In their example, a smart phone's microphone is a feature, while its recordability is an affordance. This is

the definition of technological affordance that I followed for this project. Their work is important for my research project because it applies this framework of affordances to people's practices of media production and curation, not to their final products. The affordance applies to shared content, not to people's perception of production and/or curation. They also consider how context, which is created by users within their publics, might change an affordance, producing different uses. In their example of applications of Tumblr within the LGBTIQ+ communities in Australia, they found that young people strategies affordances of platforms for their prospect.

I have brought together this literature to treat technology, digital, and media as intersecting structures. A technological affordances framework allows me to show both how dissenting voices used technology, and also how technologies put barriers to user while monetizing dissent at every step.

### **Publics and Their Politics**

Terms like the public, public sphere, and public space have been central to the social sciences and humanities in relation to understanding human agency and institutions (Habermas, 1989; Fraser, 1992; Harvey, 2005). In order to understand the space and people who dissent on digital platforms, I consider a variety of theories and frameworks on publics and spaces. Although a Habermasian understanding of the public sphere was condemned as excluding to subordinated or alternative publics (Fraser, 1992; Squires, 2002), in the early years of internet research, scholars were hopeful that the internet and its technologies might hold inclusive opportunities. It is now clear that the internet and digital media technologies offer powerful possibilities for participation and public discussion (boyd, 2010; Renninger, 2015; Tufekci, 2017).

Papacharissi, in her early work, offers that "The internet and related technologies have created a new public space for politically oriented conversation; whether this public space transcends to a public sphere is not up to the technology itself" (2002, p. 9). This careful treatment of technology is crucial to my understanding of digital mediation. Along with Papacharissi, Warner (2002) also argued that the internet might profoundly change the public sphere (p. 68).

Fraser's (1992) critique on Habermas was that he had treated the public sphere and public as if there is one public or sphere that covered everyone in a given society. However, due to existing inequalities, certain ethnic, racial, or gender groups had been left out from the public sphere. These subaltern publics, Fraser argued, shared their subaltern discourse amongst themselves in multiple, smaller spheres. Building upon this idea, boyd (2010) introduced the concept of networked publics, covering various publics that are networked on social networking sites. Later, Renninger (2015), and Jackson and Foucault Welles (2015) discuss that even within the more participatory publics, there are still those who constitute counterpublics. Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, on the other hand, introduced the idea of affective publics (2012). Affective publics are "networked publics that are mobilized and connected, identified, and potentially disconnected through expressions of sentiment" (p. 311). This approach looks at the structures of storytelling and social change through emotive lenses. Affective publics share a similar approach, as Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue, to their Connective Action – Self Organizing Networks model of social movements. This model tries to understand newly fostered communities of dissent. The key claim is that a Connective Action Self Organizing Network functions through little to no organizational coordination

of action, and there is no one particular center to the network. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) offer that the decline in social group loyalties is connected with a rise of more personalized politics. In that manner, Bennett and Segerberg's model fits with movements such as Occupy Wall Street, the Indignados, or the Gezi Park Protests. As all of these theories suggest, it is essential to understand the role of the identities of individuals. As Papacharissi discusses with affective publics, Bennett also recognizes that most organized acts of dissent do not produce immediate change but instead set an agenda for future politics. However, the works mentioned above are largely based on theories derived from Western empirical research. Epistemologically speaking, this creates a mismatch for scholars who are not studying Western societies or the Global North.

I here turn to Zayani (2015) and Bayat (2013). Zayani argues that instead of using the lenses of political communication, scholars should adopt the perspective of the politics of communication. While political communication is defined as "an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, the news media, and the public" (Norris, 2001, p. 11631), Zayani is interested in the politics of everyday life and communication. He looks at this through how ordinary people utilize communicative resources for their politics. In his case study on Tunisia, he finds that people who were involved in politics in their everyday lives in Tunisia could not identify themselves with the traditional institutions of politics such as existing political parties and NGOs. This breakdown is not new, as Bennett and Segerberg (2012) have discussed. Zayani further explains the fact that people in the Middle East and North Africa do not dissent from the system just because of their ideological differences but

from their shared experiences. It is fair to claim that the neoliberal political and economic system has been torturing people all around the world. Tunisian people, who were not able to identify themselves with the existing rusty institutions of politics, started to engage in *alternative* ways of participation, such as utilizing the streets and digital media platforms for their causes. The government's oppression on everyday life through censorship and limiting the means to participate in politics triggered people to begin to dissent. Along with governmental oppression, Zayani looks at another form of abuse, which is the family. The family has been a crucial structure in the Middle East and North Africa. The British Council's research on *Next Generation Turkey* (2017) found similar results regarding how Turkish youth understand their families. It stated that even though the family was seen as a site of oppression that most people wanted to get rid of, the family was also often thought of as a means of support, both financially and emotionally.

This disengagement from traditional forms of politics and finding alternative ways to participate in politics needs further explanation. Bayat (2013) argues that this breakdown was not only based on ideological differences, but it was caused by commonly experienced forms of oppression. According to Bayat (2013), "*nonmovements* refers to the collective actions of noncollective actors; they embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leaderships and organizations" (p. 15, emphasis in original).

Overall, I use the politics of communication in order to refer to people's acts of dissent and use social nonmovements to talk about how they dissented. There is an epistemological difference between how people communicate their political ideas and



how mainstream politics distribute their content. The politics of communication focuses on human agency. In addition to the politics of communication, social nonmovements shows us a unique way to engage with dissent as it explains how people form their dissent as shared experiences.

However, I still believe that there is a growing literature on networked counterpublics that can augment a more considered discussion. The existing literature on dissent, mediation, and counterpublics covers research conducted on many African American publics in the United States. Jackson and Welles Foucault (2015) attempt to capture the digital mediation of dissent through their analysis of the public relations campaign of the New York Police Department, #myNYPD. Hashtags are accepted as meta and hyper words that allow every post that includes it to be followed. For example, for this research, I have collected tweets that used #1YearChallenge. There are clear obstacles, such as private accounts or deleted tweets. Hashtags, due to their affordances, are one of the most used forms of data in current research. The question of power is key to this style of research. Rambukkana (2015) also prioritizes this question in his research on digital media. Rambukkana says, "Digital convergence increases the sphere of global connection, but that does not, in and of itself, heal a world community broken by misunderstanding" (2015, p. 31).

Counterpublic experiences on platforms like Twitter, in some cases, bring them into national-level visibility (Brock, 2012). Brock argues that Black people's uses of Twitter redefined cultural aspects of the venue. Venues like Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram should not be treated as public space purely promoting political participation. Rather we ought to accept these platforms as a part of larger economic relations within

their ecologies and business models. The following examples are important signs of the claim that these platforms are not for people but for profit. As a part of racialized experiences on digital media, boyd (2010) found that White flight to Facebook from MySpace inherently changed the meaning of MySpace, which was ghettoized. Similar results were found by Nakamura (2009) on *World of Warcraft*. Nonleisure players, in most cases, were racialized to be Asian.

The theorization of social movements and counterpublic is needed to understand the formation of unveiled women's dissent. In addition to the theoretical aspect, the analysis showed that the women navigated themselves and their subjecthoods into different public spaces and spheres as they unveiled. That is why the relationship between the publics and their politics is central to my discussion.

### **Turkish Media and Post-colonial Feminist Framework**

Similar to the situation I examine in my research on Turkey, Kraidy (2009) looks at how Saudi Arabia polices women's bodies in order to build a national identity. He zeroes in on how television content challenges this national identity. Kraidy analyzes *Star Academy* to see how women's bodies are highly associated with Islam, with a perfect Muslim/Saudi woman imagined in terms of wearing the hijab, not being public, etc. In the case of Turkey, Kemalist elites claimed the bodies of women were central to visions of Enlightenment and secularism, which differentiated the country from its Islamic past as the Ottoman Empire. Kraidy's work shows how fragile body politics can be when it is challenged by mediated communication. In order to understand this in relation to the *#1YearChallenge* posts, we must look for how body politics were shaped throughout the history of the Turkish Republic.

After World War I, today's developing countries started to establish their sovereign states. The Ottoman Empire, which was on the losing side of WWI, was not doing well. The plans of European colonizing nations to share the land (mainly Anatolia) triggered some of the military officials to revolt and fought against this colonialization. After the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923), the new parliament was led by the Kemalist group (Ateş, 2016), and the new republic was founded on the principles of Western thought, Enlightenment, and secularism. The Kemalist elites had gone to France and other European countries with the idea of learning Western concepts and modernizing the Ottoman Empire's institutions and military as the empire at that time was perceived to be falling behind its counterparts in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (Zürcher, 2017). With this historical perspective in mind, the officials who were educated in the West planned to modernize the empire through a different plan. After World War One, when the conditions of the revolution were ready, Kemalist elites led the parliament in establishing a modern and secular republic. The new republic entailed reorganizing political institutions, social formations, and economic systems accordingly. These strategic choices were not necessarily accepted or even discussed by large parts of society and were executed in a top-down fashion.

Some of the regulations, such as the ban on the fez, had bodily or performative outcomes. Foucault (1995) offers the concept of technologies of body and control to map how power is diffused throughout society. He traces the different ways of disciplining the body to understand how power appropriates bodies and sexual conduct. As Gökarıksel and Mitchell (2009) discuss, the notion of secularism played a significant role in how the newly founded Republic tried to appropriate women's bodies so that they

could create a model Turkish woman and nation. In order to understand the importance of secularism in Turkey, it is necessary to understand the claims of Kemalism, which positioned secularism as the opposite of the Ottoman Empire. Abandoning the symbols of the past regime, such as the fez, was seen as benefitting the new Kemalist system. Although the state has never passed a ruling on the veil, there was still an ideal Turkish woman image. The government's ban on the fez, for men, and discouragement of the veil, for women, are just examples of this plan to discipline and control bodies (White, 2003).

As Göle (1997) states, the early Republic had an agenda when creating the model of a woman who was not veiled, in the public sphere, equal to her male counterpart. This forced modernization process later included the common suffrage laws that were to create the ideal modern Turkish women. By enacting these laws and discourses, Kemalist reformers changed the everyday performances of citizens. Specifically, secularism was used to distinguish what is private from what is public concerning sociality, and, more importantly, regarding religion (Gökarıksel & Mitchell, 2005). Sayan-Cengiz (2016) argues that “Much of the headscarf discussion in Turkey has tapped into this (the normal) conceptual framework. The headscarf issue has been approached primarily as demand for the recognition of excluded Islamic identity in the face of the secular public sphere in which secular, Westernized identities are constructed as universal and neutral” (p. 26). The secular claim on being universal and neutral is what postcolonial feminism critiques. Considering both Sayan-Cengiz's and Gökarıksel and Mitchell's claims, the State attempted to form a new public sphere that

was universal, neutral, and separate from the private by demeaning the religious and ethnic as limited, parochial, and deviant.

This new idea of “modern” public space required several changes to how citizens acted, as exemplified by the fez law and anti-veiling narratives. The new Republic claimed that freedom was introduced by bringing these Western concepts and modes of comportment to Turkey and its public spaces. In particular, the idea of liberty was heavily associated with removing the veil. Elver (2012) claims that the veil was deeply associated with the women of Turkey from the time of the Ottoman Empire. This gave a reason to control the bodies of women in order to create a new narrative. The new narrative, which we may call the Modernization Project of Turkey, also attacked the veil as the barrier between women and their freedom (Göle, 1997). The embodiment of the policies of the new state is enacted through bodies of citizens, especially women. The discourse of the veil as the cage for women's bodies was both reproduced in Turkey and the Western countries (Göle, 1997; Abu-Lughod, 2013).

The vision of ethnic and religious dress in Turkey as necessarily contrary to the practice of modernity aligns well with Bayat's (2013) critique of the static way Middle Eastern cultures are conceptualized. Bayat notes that,

“Mainstream Orientalism tends to depict the Muslim Middle East as a monolithic, fundamentally static, and thus “peculiar” entity. By focusing on a narrow notion of (a rather static) culture— one that is virtually equated with the religion of Islam— Middle Eastern societies have been characterized more in terms of historical continuity than in terms of change” (p. 3).

The discourses that suggest women wearing veils cannot be modern and that they even hold back the Turkish nation from reaching its full potential, benefit from and reinforce this vision of the "Muslim Middle East" as unchangeable.

Muslim Women as an extension to this perspective are often seen as one singular unit of women who perform their identities in the same ways. This connects with Abu-Lughod's (2013) concept of IslamLand. She discusses how Western standards of freedom and feminism do not apply to women in the Middle East because the struggles and priorities of women are not the same in these different contexts. While it is easy to think that women must be saved from Islam and its implications, the reality is much more complicated. As Abu-Lughod reminds us, the German International Human Rights campaign has depicted a veiled woman in such a fashion.



Figure 1. The German human rights campaign. The slogan reads, "Oppressed women are easily overlooked. Please support us in the fight for their rights."

By acknowledging academic works that have postcolonial approaches in them, we can understand non-Western societies much better. Rajan and Park (2005) state that “Postcolonial feminism is an exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities in the different contexts of women’s lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights” (p. 53). For example, Sayan-Cengiz (2016) found through extensive fieldwork talking with women that unlike the existing literature, which always politicized the use of the veil in an urban setting, middle class and urbanite women rarely veiled to be political. Although their veiling had political connotations to others, they did not accept it as a symbol of a particular political movement (p. 25). Gökarıksel and Secor (2012) argue that “Veiled women are often seen as political tools of the Islamist movement in Turkey” (p. 859). Instead, unveiled women defy dominant knowledge and discourses to understand how people perceive and use veiling fashion. In her book, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, Abu-Lughod (2013) mentions many stories of women from different contexts and backgrounds. She emphasizes how they face diverse and complex inequalities every day in their lives and have come up with equally complex responses. One respondent, Zaynab, does not think her veil or her religion is the cause of her problems, but rather that the socio-political environment causes her problems. Looking at the intersecting parts of women's experiences, we can appreciate with more nuance their actions and their understandings of their situations. All in all, I use this literature to ground my research on Turkish women’s digital media posting on veiling, and to create a critical approach for this study.

The last body of literature is on traditional and digital media in Turkey. The current trends on studying politics in Turkey either focus on the press and its news coverage (Yesil, 2016; Kaya & Cakmur, 2010; Iseri, Şekercioglu, and Panayırıcı, 2019) or social media (Saka, 2018; Saka 2019; Furman and Tunc, 2019; Tufekci, 2017). Although both focuses are legitimate for their purposes, I focus on social media-based research.

Eslen-Ziya, McGarry, Jenzen, Erhart, and Korkut (2019) examined how Turkish people got together to protest the government during the summer of 2013. They claim that the Gezi Parki Protests were strengthened by emotions such as anger and solidarity. Although this study unpacks what people felt and shared during the protests, it fails to understand protests as a political act. As Saka (2017) maps, there is digital aftermath of Gezi, which turned into political and social organizations.

Yesil (2016) attempts to understand the current neoliberal authoritarian government in Turkey. She discusses how multiple neoliberal authoritarian governments have engaged with activities that change the shape of the public sphere and the political atmosphere around the world, although she focuses on Turkey in particular. Yesil provides a strong conceptualization of the early AKP's neoliberal policies (the current ruling party, Justice and Development Party). Branded as a liberal government, they stood against the veil regulation in public buildings and jobs (p. 12). The ongoing political, social, and cultural change in Turkey started with the 1980 Military Coup (Gurbilek, 2014). Yesil discusses how the AKP, as well as the Kemalist regime, kept intervening with women's bodies. In other words, neoliberal conservative parties have been pushing a conservative agenda on society by intervening and changing the



ideal female body. I connect these unofficial policies, never written down as laws and regulations but often part of larger discourses and interventions, to both social movements and newer neoliberal authoritarian politics.

Lastly, Saka's (2018; 2019) work, which focuses on the pro-AKP political troll network, highlights the AkTrolls as a prominent social group in the Turkish Twitter-sphere. Saka's findings show that the AkTrolls are influential in delegitimizing public critiques of the government through the practices of surveillance and policing which they conduct on Twitter. In the case of unveiled women and many other examples, AkTrolls have stigmatized the experiences of women by associating them as being part of the Gulen movement, which allegedly organized the failed coup attempt in 2016.

Using the above bodies of literature to examine the digital mediation of postcolonial feminist nonmovements, I pay attention to the way new forms of media and technologies inherently change our relationship to everyday practices. To theorize the relationship between governmental, social, and digital institutions, I employ infrastructure and platform studies frameworks. To appreciate the human agency at play, I review the literature on the publics, spaces, and networks. Lastly, I engage with the politics of modernization and secularism through the critical perspective of postcolonial feminism.

## **Methods & Theory**

The purpose of this study is to understand the complexities of the everyday lives of women in Turkey and how they are shaped by the perceived opposition of secularism and Islam. Furthermore, I aim to make sense of how networked counterpublics come

together through the digital mediation of their dissent. This requires an in-depth investigation of the process of mediation.

I utilized a data-driven, Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA)-informed approach to analyze my data. Instead of describing the text that I am dealing with, I further explain the veiling and digital mediation in this particular context. The analysis will be done in two parts. I have conducted an analysis of tweets and the pictures attached. Brock (2018) describes CTDA as “a multimodal analytic technique for the investigation of the Internet and digital phenomena, artifacts, and culture. It integrates an analysis of the technological artifact and user discourse, framed by cultural theory, to unpack semiotic and material connections between form, function, belief, and meaning of information and communication technologies (ICTs)” (p. 1012.) I can efficiently utilize my affordances framework and critical discourse analysis within the limits of CTDA. For its best use, Brock mentions that there is no need for one technocultural theory; rather, it is imagined that researchers will apply the critical theory of their choice to their analysis, in this case, postcolonial feminist critique. This project, in many ways, also incorporates a Foucauldian understanding of power and the practices over bodies. I do not see the methodology of this work separately from its theory. The analysis is empowered and enabled through the existing work, theoretical frameworks, and the experiences of the researcher.

### **Data Collection**

Collecting data online, especially on Social Networking Sites, has its perks and disadvantages. As boyd (2010) discusses, the persistence affordances of SNS provide some archiving features. Searchability, on the other hand, allows users to search

through several different keywords, tags, etc. For that reason, it is imagined that collecting data is more effortless for scholarly purposes. However, there are two main complications. First, the platforms know how to monetize data, and these practices of monetization of data collection processes create an economy for platforms and software. Software such as Hexagon or DiscoverText can trace data retrospectively. However, this software is beyond the budget of this research. Second, also related to the first issue, it is hard to trace data back in time. Many free-to-use APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) only allow data collection in real-time, for limited periods, or limit access to some periods. Therefore, SNS research, many times, has its limitations.

This research is based on data collected from Twitter. Due to financial and time restraints, the data was collected through two primary efforts. First, I took screenshots of some during the height of the *#10YearChallenge* meme, when I first saw the hashtag on my Twitter feed being taken up by Turkish women to talk about their experiences unveiling. By tracing those tweets and accounts, I found more posts and accounts and realized that users were converging more around the *#1YearChallenge* hashtag instead of *#10YearChallenge*. By using Twitter's advanced search, I limited what I was looking for by hashtag, language, time, and location. I collected 30 tweets from unveiled women, while I have more than 1000 tweets of relevant public discussion. In addition to that, I searched for “büyüdük, güzelleştik ve özgürleştik” since it was a key slogan for the mobilization. The data was collected from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, to February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019. Unfortunately, some of the original tweets and accounts that I have screenshotted do not exist anymore. Potential reasons for their deletion will be discussed in the analysis.

## CHAPTER II

### **Nonmovements and networked media**

A woman, who we do not know, or we do not need to know, has started all of this. Not that she does not matter as a woman who has suffered various levels of patriarchy and social pressure, but we just need to know and learn the fire she started for the limits of this study. In this case study, the exact person who started it does not matter because of the result. Women of various socioeconomic backgrounds came together online to share their unveiling stories after a woman started the fire. However, I do not suggest that the people who start movements or political organizations do not have significance. When activists do claim responsibility and visibility, it is important to acknowledge both their political efficacy and intellectual nuance. For example, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was founded by three Black women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, who incorporated years of experience with Black Feminist Thought and Pedagogy into their organization (Garza, 2014; Cohen & Jackson, 2016).

Structural features of organizations, movements, and politics have been changing rapidly. Studies show that people have a more difficult time identifying the political tools that have been available to the public for a long time (Bayat, 2013; Zayani, 2015). The most recent movements and uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa are examples of how people attempt to redefine participation in politics. The scholarly discussion of this change is often associated with structural changes in societal order. Castells has been producing academic materials that can be seen as flagships (2008; 2011; 2015). Most Network Theories, however, often essentialize media in their

description of this process of social change. Instead, I presume that media and its technologies are tools that people and the publics utilize to narrate and communicate their stories and struggles. Engaging with movements and organizations through the lenses of digital mediation allows me to understand various levels of how a story is shaped and told. In other words, seeing a political action as the process of digital mediation permits me to account for communicative technologies and history. As I have argued, considering the affordances and constraints of communicative infrastructures and platforms is crucial for such an approach.

The structural analysis of the nonmovement of unveiled women is crucial to this research. I am using the interviews that *Sol Haber* conducted with two unveiled women as my secondary sources. The interviews help to unpack the details about these women and the social action they have started. Bayat (2013) expands our understanding of a new type of social movement as the “nonmovement.” The term refers to an uprising that was not motivated by set ideologies but rather caused by shared experiences. It is crucial to follow such a theoretical framework within the limits of this research. During her interview @bircirkef says,

I did not know. I have seen their tweets later. I was talking to another girl who has also shared pictures. She asked me whether I have shared my pictures knowingly or did it happen spontaneously. I had no idea. Doing this naturally was the best.

This explanation of how she tweeted, and of how others saw her tweet and reached out to her, can be explained by utilizing Zayani’s theory. The prime motivator that we see in the nonmovement of unveiled women and their digital mediation is

shared experiences, not shared ideology. @lffunal perpetuates what @bircirkef shared with *Sol Haber*.

I am not a frequent user of Twitter. I rarely use it. The 10YearsChallenge was started on Instagram. There I shared my pictures from 10 years ago and now. Then, later I saw Busra Cebeci's, a journalist, tweet. She shared her pictures under the hashtag of #1YearChallenge. I first replied to her tweet with my pictures. I said later I should have it on my wall. I did not have many followers. I had no purpose when I was sharing. I just wanted to say, "I have also gone through a similar process. I am also here."

The way these two women tell their stories shows us that they were participating in articulating their experiences with the veil. Both women somehow tell a similar story, especially about their families in the interviews. They have a mother figure who is more religious and putting a soft pressure on their daughters to veil. The rest of their families are not so religious according to what they say in the interviews. The way people of Turkey experience and follow Islam is based on the observation principle. About 98% of the population identify with Islam, and a vast majority calls themselves Muslim. Yet my years of experience in Turkey show that people do not observe Islamic rules regularly. One example is that Islam requires praying five times a day with a congregation in Mosques. People often fail to follow this rule due to the many dynamic relations in their daily life. However, they would mostly join the Friday Prayer in the afternoon by using their lunchtimes. The way that both women explain their families are similar to this. In other words, their families are mostly observant Muslims.

The nonmovements framework's insight on shared experiences reflects itself into this social action. Although we do not see any tight connection between these women, their pasts connect them. It is crucial to know that Turkish Laws do not ban veiling or headscarf for women. However, we ought to acknowledge that veiling and unveiling have specific social meanings. As @Iffunal explains in her interview, there are acceptable, well-defined manners that a veiled woman must follow. It includes several fashion choices besides the veil. A veiled woman is expected to avoid wearing anything that shows her body lines or curves. This inherently means that pants, jeans, and sweatpants are not acceptable in front of males, except relatives who are part of a nuclear family, and some other males who share a bloodline.<sup>2</sup> Following this logic, makeup is also designated as inappropriate. Each group, woman, and region has their version of veiling and the additional obligations that accompany it. The neighborhood pressure that Mardin explained is viable here. Every neighborhood, in contrast to the national public sphere idea, has its expectations from women. This closed-circuit pressure model reinforces itself in many ways.

Going back to the discussion of nonmovements and the structure of this particular social action, I must add what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) have argued with the Connective Action - Self Organizing Networks (CASON) model. As Zayani's nonmovement, the CASON model specifies these sorts of actions are rarely organized; they coordinate on a personal basis. There is no defined structure, hierarchy, or organization. The patten of the network is based on contingency. These personalized

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<sup>2</sup> The idea and practice is that you are not supposed to exhibit your body to anyone who you can legally marry by Islamic order. This often means your brothers, nephews, father, and father-in-law are the only ones who can see your uncovered self.

political or individually motivated CASONS do not produce a social group or ideological loyalties. Looking at the data I have collected, and the published interviews of two unveiled women, we see almost pure personal motivation. I am well aware that these choices could also be motivated by various personal reasons, such as the need for recognition, among many others. However, to analyze these external motivators would go beyond the limits of this study.

The social action of noncollective actors (Bayat, 2013, p. 534), in this case, has occurred on Twitter. Although both Bayat and Bennett and Segerberg (2012) studied contexts where activism happened across both physical and digital space, this study looks at a digital nonmovement. The use of digital media and their affordances for the nonmovement is crucial to how people participated and shared their stories. We cannot possibly know how this social action would happen on another platform or space. This is because every space (both in physical and digital meanings) and platform have their unique affordances and restraints. Before I start tracking down why Twitter was chosen as a platform from the technological perspective, we should talk about the social context of Turkey and Twitter in Turkey.

### **Twitter, #1YearChallenge, and Technological Affordances**

The Next Generation Turkey report (2017) clearly states that Turkish youth have problems with their families. The issues are not merely caused by the pressure placed on Turkish youth by their families, as the youth value and respect their families. However, in return for support and comfort, they are presented with significant limitations. The ability to achieve individual autonomy as a young person is restricted by location and limited by physical place/space. The social constructions of family and the



home are reliant on a traditional paternal figure and his rules, which serve as governance of the space. This means that although you might have a job and some financial freedom, or offer to help with utilities, rent, etc. you must still follow the family rules. In this case, people seek autonomy, yet they cannot afford it. Young people cannot afford to move out with friends, significant others, etc., because it is far too expensive. I would have to note that moving out before you get married, start working or going to a school in another city is also not the custom in Turkey. Young people frequently live with their parents until marriage, or a job opportunity in another city is presented. Forced social and economic interconnection often causes family conflicts.

With both neighborhood pressure and the family paradox in mind, we have to talk about why Twitter was the place of dissent. Twitter is often a space for political and entertainment use. The platform is often associated with youth and alternative political culture (Saka, 2019; Tufekci, 2017). Although there is an accumulation of political discussion and youth entertainment on Twitter, more traditional means of politics (political parties, politicians, official governmental accounts) also exist in this space. However, Twitter has never been as popular as Facebook in Turkey (WeAreSocial, 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020). It has been the case in both global and many regional cases. Based on my research on Twitter use in Turkey, I assert that older adults do not use Twitter as frequently as Facebook. For example, one 2016 study showed that only 1.9% of middle-aged and older people use Twitter as opposed to the 17.9% who had accounts on Facebook (Tekedere and Arpaci, 2016). Family and neighborhood pressures barely exist on Twitter. The lack of an older population and not having to manage one's reputation in front of them makes Twitter a freer space for younger

people. This is especially important because the women studied stress that their experiences of veiling are heavily shaped, both positively and negatively, by their parents. All of this helps us reckon why Twitter was the place of action. Since Mark Zuckerberg triggered the #10yearchallenge on Facebook and the picture sharing application Instagram became the flagship space of the challenge, it is essential to recognize the choice of Twitter. In summary, the specific demographics and style of sociality of Turkish Twitter afforded this social action to happen in this particular way.

Although I do not suggest that nonmovements or the collective action of this noncollective was only made possible due to networked communication technologies, the mentioned technologies play a critical role. We should continue to explore the ways in which Twitter technologically afforded this nonmovement. I will now go over four Social Networking Sites (SNS) Affordances and how they apply in this case study: persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability (boyd, 2010). Persistence, referring to archiving and indexing, is the nature of most SNS, including Twitter. The idea that what you shared, wrote, commented, does not disappear is central to Twitter. The conversations that take place on Twitter often rely on this affordance. The relevant functions are currently called “liking,” “retweeting,” “replying,” and “retweeting with comment.” The tweets, as they stay archived and indexed on Twitter, remain open to conversation and communication. It is, furthermore, an essential part of Twitter as it makes data collection viable. The persistence of a tweet does not depend on the user who shares the post. Twitter, as it states in its policy, keeps the data to itself, even when the user deletes their account or their particular tweet. More importantly, the technological affordance and features of a device in which we run the platforms

complicate the issue. It is easy to capture a tweet in the form of a picture or screenshot and store it, almost forever. Therefore, the persistence first allows the archiving of tweets, then creates a possibility of conversation and participation. It might even create an adverse effect, as what you shared has the potential to follow you for a long time. In the case of #1YearChallenge, the social action as a whole depended on the use of a hashtag. Anything that is posted, including the hashtag, would be stored and accessible through the website, allowing users to track the conversation and further engage with content by following the hashtag. As boyd claims, persistence is crucial for asynchronous conversations but is questionable in terms of the use of content out of context.

The content, as boyd would call it *bits*, are substantially different on digital media. The idea of creating, sharing, editing, mixing comes from the fact that content can be replicated. If we look at the memes, we would see that both the visuals and the text are reproduced bits. Recreating original material with a new meaning is a common practice in many digital cultures. The same logic applies to the way that unveiled women have changed and claimed power over the hashtag campaign. The original purpose of the #10YearChallenge was to post two photos of yourself side-by-side, to show your online community how you've changed over the course of a decade. Unveiled women have changed the period from 10 years to many years or months according to their experience. The change was an attempt to reclaim the hashtag and repurpose it to represent their experiences. Unveiled women using the hashtag to tweet about their experiences, and reclaiming the hashtag by appropriating and participating in the

challenge, are both possible because the hashtag is part of Twitter's persistence affordance.

People share various things to gratify their needs (Ruggiero, 2009). In the case of #1YearChallenge and #10YearChallenge, unveiled women shared their experiences and stories to be recognized or part of a bigger group. It is highly possible to see their actions in terms of collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1995). People of a community, movement, or a nonmovement sometime get together, not necessarily in a collective way, to communicate their shared adventures. This, again, was made possible through persistence. However, we have to acknowledge the fact that this is more meaningful because it is visible to the public. According to boyd, scalability allows posts to be visible to a broader range of audiences. By utilizing a hashtag, one allows their content to be visible, reachable, and acknowledgeable. Another question that we have to answer regarding hashtags is that although all platforms have hashtag as a feature, why people chose Twitter over other platforms. For one, Twitter has a long history of supporting hashtags. The Trends section has been a crucial part of the Twitter experience since 2008. The platform used to support only hashtags in its earlier Trending Topics section. Hashtags are hypertextual keywords that allow one to click and see all relating content on one page. What we used call Trending Topics hosted many social and political movements such as Gezi Park Protests, Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, and Occupy Wall Street.

The visibility that Trends provide is almost unimaginable. Bonilla and Rosa (2015) found that tweets containing hashtags could expand to national and international public visibility. The use of the #1YearChallenge hashtag by unveiled Turkish women

was no different. During her interview, @bircirkef noted that she could not imagine this content would be so widely seen. People often underestimate their actions on digital media platforms regarding the reach. The public visibility is the main reason why we become aware of some topics that do not necessarily happen on our own feeds. It raises awareness of the subjects that we may or may not be interested in. Twitter, in this understanding, has a better command of scalability than some other SNS.

Last but not least, searchability is another SNS affordance. It means that users can reach out for content by utilizing search tools. Here, hashtags make the searching process much more manageable. I, as a researcher, have used several search tools to collect data. More importantly, it makes participation possible.

All in all, boyd's four affordances of SNS show us that Twitter, in particular, is particularly poised to host a movement or nonmovement. The collective actions of noncollectives are made possible through these four affordances. I acknowledge that the four affordances can be applied to many platforms. Yet, it is clear that the level of affordance will vary with every platform. Instagram and Facebook also have hashtags and related technologies. However, neither of the platforms has a Trends section, or supportive user habits and practices that support these affordances being used in the same way or to the same degree. What we learn from the analysis of Twitter and #1YearChallenge is that these four affordances of SNS could be supported by the platform and its users in various ways that then affect the platform's suitability for hosting different kinds of social action.

The connection between networked media and social movements is undeniable. I have suggested that this connection must be studied from a holistic perspective, which

includes platforms, devices, and infrastructure. The next section will talk about the importance of the device and the affordance of mobile devices.

What we share on a digital media platform can be an outcome of many things. The platforms, as we discussed, have different ways of affording communicative actions. That's why this study spent time on platforms and their affordances. Another part of meaning-making is about which device you put to use. I am using Schrock's (2015) mobile media affordances to understand the role of the device in the process of communication. What I argue is that different types of devices afford various communicative actions. We Are Social's (2020) report shows that 94% of web traffic in Turkey is done through mobile phones. In addition to this high penetration through mobile phones, the report also proves that 98.2% of users access Facebook via some kind of mobile phone. We Are Social did not detail the percentage of users who access Twitter through mobile phones, but we can assume the rate is similar, given the primacy of smartphones across all web traffic.

Schrock (2015) also offered four affordances of mobile media: portability, availability, locatability, and multimediality. I will operationalize all four affordances by looking at the #1YearChallenge data. Portability, Schrock claims, is being mobile while you create new meanings and consume other media content. Using a highly portable device like a smartphone, a person can keep communicating while going about their daily movements. Moreover, Schrock claims that smartphones are high on the technological affordance spectrum compared to desktops. In the context of Twitter, we can look at the brief history of the platform. Twitter started as an SMS (short messaging service)-like technology in which people could send a message to their specified groups

(The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). The idea was to create a social networking site (SNS) that mimics group messages but connects to a broader audience; the platform incorporated instant messaging into an SNS. The users could communicate with others by tweeting, which embodies the features of an SMS.<sup>3</sup> As a result, a tweet was limited to 140 characters. However, to easily view Twitter traffic, one originally had to use computers and web browsers. This was a compulsory choice because phones were not able to afford proper internet connections and lacked some properties of a computer. People were using Twitter through laptops and desktops, mostly because of this reason. As technology progressed and smartphones became devices that can afford Twitter, people turned back to mobile usage. It almost feels like going back to the intended use of Twitter. In the context of the #1YearChallenge, mobile media plays a significant role. It is mostly because mobile devices are affordable (cheaper than owning a computer), and using mobile devices is more convenient. Here, I am not referring to the user interface of smartphone operating systems. Smartphones, compared to laptops, have longer battery time, are easier to control, and serve more communicative purposes. The list can be expanded. Every day, people prefer using mobile devices over laptops. One might even see the smartphone as an extension of the body.<sup>4</sup> The higher level of portability of mobile media affords more communication than nonmobile media and devices.

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<sup>3</sup> Users can still send their tweets via phone SMS services. You can send a message to short code which sends out tweets from your account.

<sup>4</sup> I do not refer to McLuhan or technological determinism here. I see the phone as a thing that can become a part of body or everyday life practice.

Another communicative affordance of mobile phones is availability, which means the use and control of communicative tools within mobile phones. Coupled with this is the way individual apps and the phone itself allow users to limit or monitor that availability. For example, “It’s common for users to turn off push notifications from mobile Facebook while leaving voice calling on” (Schrock, 2015, p. 1236). People often make decisions in terms of how people should reach them. This is a manner of making do and of making tactical choices that is part of the availability smartphones afford their users (de Certeau, 2011). The unveiled women made themselves available to Twitter users by sharing their pictures on Twitter. This availability caused them to receive replies, retweets, and Direct Messages. Even though they have opened a communication channel, it is important to remember that because of the way smartphones and Twitter are designed, they could have turned the communication off by restricting Twitter’s push notifications.

Our experiences of everyday life are often defined by physical space and its limitations. Although we become part of an SNS, we are still somewhere around the world. Locatability refers to the use of geo-location within mobile phone services. Although we do not necessarily see geo-tagging in the #1YearChallenge data, it is possible to discuss a wider geo-location or language-specific use for the movement. For example, the Iranian online social movement of MyStealthyFreedom used locations within their practices. MyStealthyFreedom was a movement in which women from Iran went to public spaces and unveiled. They have shared their unveiled pictures and videos to promote women’s freedom of choice in relation to veiling. Their posts have included both the pictures taking in physical spaces and geo-tagging. On the other



hand, #1YearChallenge does not include any explicit geo-tagging, but it does use language and imagery specific to a certain region. The lack of geo-location use in the tweets does not mean that devices are low on the affordance spectrum, it shows us that people did not use it. Users have to realize and use the affordance to advance communicative actions.

The pictures are a prime part of #10YearChallenge. Unveiled women shared their photographs, regardless of hashtags. This relates to smartphones' multimodality, which means the production and use of audio, video, pictures, gif, and other image formats within the device. Most pictures shared as part of the #1(0)YearChallenge selfies that are created via phone cameras. The rise of photo taking and sharing relates to this particular affordance of mobile media. It is hard to think of this nonmovement without images. We should also acknowledge the commonality of taking and sharing photographs by smartphones. The challenge or the nonmovement may not exist without this affordance. Looking at the data, it is quite easy to spot that people have taken those pictures of everyday life or events. It is also clear that the multimodality of smartphones made taking photos mundane. Previously it was a luxury in Turkey to take pictures in everyday life. You would have to own a camera and film and have money to print them in a store. Now people easily take multiple pictures every day, a far cry from the older, expensive process. Technologies such as digital cameras in smartphones seem natural or feel as it has always been like this. However, this is as recent as the last ten to fifteen years.

The last piece of technological analysis that I wish to do is from the infrastructure studies perspective. One of the aims of this study is to make sure that we do not

understand communication as a given in every context. We should recognize that access to internet is a privilege, especially in developing and underdeveloped countries. Internet, as a social phenomenon, faces an ontological crisis. People often think of internet as a singular entity. However, the internet has many platforms and many different ways to access it. I would like to talk about the differences and struggles regarding accessing to web and digital media platforms.

The internet has been a phenomenon in Turkey for just over 20 years now (Saka, 2017b). Its access has been controlled and monitored by the Turkish government. Strict regulations, and application of these regulations, have created a history of internet use in Turkey, which often includes practices like banning, punishing, or limiting the use. The government and state bureaus have repeatedly limited access to or prohibited platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Wikipedia. The government can justify these bans by utilizing several laws and articles. The most recent shutdown was experienced on February 19-20 of 2020.<sup>5</sup> The reason for limiting access was the death of 33 Turkish soldiers during an attack in Idlib, Syria. Netblock, an NGO working on tracking disruptions and shutdowns of internet, noted that this shutdown was the most disruptive for the last three years (Netblocks, 2020). All main sites and their links were limited. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp were profoundly affected by this blockage. That is why studies of infrastructures are critical. Widely shared, publicly owned systems are often accepted as given in media studies literature written by

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<sup>5</sup> There is no known way to ban a website in any given context. What most governments do is limit the access from the national internet service. Most users in Turkey are well prepared for such limitations. Virtual Private Networks are often used to overcome the problem.

academics based in developed countries and metropolises. I have discussed in detail that infrastructures are beyond simple cables or pipes. Infrastructures either afford or constraint our access to the means of communication. They are very large and publicly accessed. My treatment of the internet (as a communicative service) is based on an infrastructure studies perspective. We have to understand the history and politics behind it. The politics behind the internet and communication infrastructures in Turkey are inherently related to the governments' approach to criticism and freedom of speech.

In addition to the control, access to internet in Turkey is still expensive. A home connection usually costs around 70 to 100 Turkish Liras.<sup>6</sup> A mobile connection would cost between 30 to 120 Turkish Liras. Therefore, having an internet connection at all times is a privilege. Looking back at the #1YearChallenge, we see that the unveiled women were lucky to share their stories because first, they did not face a blockage. Second, they have the benefit of having a connection which helped creating this nonmovement and brought women together to share their experiences.

### **Veiling, Women, and Feminism**

This study utilizes Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) as the mode of analysis. As Brock (2018) argued, it is possible to use any critical theory that would be most suitable for the context of your research while using CDTA as the primary technique. For this study, I take postcolonial feminist frameworks as my

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<sup>6</sup> Legal required net minimum wage is 2324.70 Turkish Liras per month. However, Bianet (2016) reported the 33.47 percent of working force does not have any records of social security or registered in any system. This means that 33.47% might be getting paid less than net minimum wage. In addition to this, the fine for paying your employee less than minimum wage is only 289 Turkish Liras.

theoretical standpoint and apply Foucauldian critical discourse analysis to the various texts surrounding the women's tweets. To conduct Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as a part of CTDA, I am incorporating Foucault's notion of genealogies (Foucault, 1995; 1966). The social construction of everyday life is a prominent theme in Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, which accepts that social life and the practice of it are made over time. I have applied the same logic both all over the study and in my analysis. The politicization of women's bodies can be followed as genealogies of body politics.

The struggle of unveiled women from Turkey is an example of how power could work both ways. I have explained the context of veiling in Turkey in the literature review. The social construction of veiling has many meanings. However, all these meanings were made on and out of women's bodies, their dress, and their comportment. Beyond this simple claim, I have suggested that the bodies of women were utilized to make political claims about nationhood and modernity. Kemalist authorities made sense of women's bodies and practices by promoting unveiling and the wearing of secular and Western clothing to challenge ideas about who belonged in the public sphere in the Ottoman era. You can also see how Islamic conservatism operationalized women's bodies to oppose secularism and to maintain female modesty in public life. Nonetheless, it is crucial to remember that not every women's life is the same. Every veiled, unveiled, or nonveiled women's story is different. One of the similarities they have, however, is that their bodies are being politicized with or without their consent. In light of this, I believe it is essential that I acknowledge my positionality as a researcher before delving into the textual analysis. Being a male and from Turkey is not enough for me to conduct this study. This work does not attempt to *mansplain* women's lives and

experiences. As a feminist scholar, my intention here is not to prescribe how women should live or decide what their actions mean. Rather, I put effort into seeing how every woman's life is different, how each woman who participated in the #1YearChallenge understood and articulated her own experiences, and the ways in which their lives are being utilized by various parties for political ends. I examine the tweets from the #1YearChallenge to map, record, and analyze the politics in Turkey, their struggles, and courageous discourse. This work does not side with either Kemalism or Islamic conservatism on the issues of veiling, modernity, modesty, nationhood, etc. Instead, I focus on each woman's discourse. Last but not least, I trace the genealogies of veiling to tell the political and social aspects of some women's lives in Turkey

As detailed in the methodology section, I was able to find 33 original tweets posted by unveiled Turkish women from my #1YearChallenge dataset. Although I have collected over one thousand tweets, including many that responded to, parodied, or praised the original tweets, for the purposes of this study, I am going to look closely at the 33 tweets from unveiled women. To conduct my analysis, I have separated the tweets into two components. I have looked at the text and pictures from every tweet. My analysis is based on the use of space, clothes, and the messages the unveiled women posted. The ambiance of the pictures allows me to analyze the spheres where they felt comfortable taking pictures and being visible. I look at the textual and visual components together as a whole in line with what CDTA offers.

The fashion and clothing choices of veiled women in Turkey have been the focus of many scholars (Gokariksel & Secor, 2009; 2014; Sayan-Cengiz, 2016; Kılıçbay & Binark, 2002; Alimen, 2018). The veil is not exempt from the neoliberal political

economy. Gokariksel and Secor (2008) investigated how neoliberal capitalism has found ways to include veiling as a fashion to create new consumers, thus commodifying the veil. Gokariksel and Secor (ibid) cite Yuval-Davis (1997) to explain the critical relationship between consumption and being a person as “If consumption is considered constitutive of the neoliberal subject and her relationship to the state and society” (p. 15). The question of self is always in relation to consumption. From a cynical standpoint, you could read how gay men are getting more representation in media, but not other LGBTQ groups. The answer is as simple as gay men having the most disposable income compared to other groups. The gay men are consumers, thus citizens (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Creating a consumption culture and fashion around the veil is a sign that capitalism is recognizing veiled women’s bodies to make them subjects.

Research on the veil-as-fashion is often conducted as industry analysis or in-depth interviews with women who are part of the veiling discussion in Turkey (Gokariksel & Secor, 2012). As a complement to this, I analyze what women shared on Twitter as dissenting voices. I look at the text and pictures they have shared. The images are essential in terms of semiotics to see how the women relate to themselves—both their veiled selves and present unveiled selves. I am not suggesting that one is better than the other, but the themes and ambiances in these pictures showed that veiled pictures are generally more subtle, while unveiled ones are louder. Veiled images are routinely taken in domestic spaces in opposition to unveiled photos in public spaces. The clothing choices are inherently different, as well. In the more recent

unveiled images, for example, tunics are often replaced by tank tops, shirts, tees, and blouses.<sup>7</sup>

I have centered this analysis on three main points. First, I look at the use of domestic vs. public spaces through the posted pictures and text. Second, I explore the ways in which women used different clothes and colors to represent themselves. Last, I argue that how they position their bodies in the pictures is another change one can see in their everyday lives. I have to mention that I will not share photos of unveiled women in the context of this research. Although some of their tweets might still be available at this moment, they might opt to take them down later. Also, as mentioned, I have tweets that are already taken out of public access. However, I cannot provide the option of deleting their images if this thesis is published or used by other scholars. Similarly, I will also not use their names or handles. I will use the *UW#* (Unveiled Woman, Number) tag when needed.

### **Domestic vs. Public Spaces**

Mardin has explained the dichotomy between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic through the conceptual war over spheres (Cakir, 2007; Mardin, 1993). He tackles the concept of what it means to be in public at large. Theorists like Habermas (1989) argue that modern societies have public spheres in which people can be included in the discussion of public matters. This modernist ideal—that people will be

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<sup>7</sup> Tunics are one of the most common clothing items that veiled women prefer in Turkey. It provides modesty and they are more available and easier to wear in public. It is a type of female garment that covers the body from the shoulders to knee and is popular among young women. I have also seen many women who are modest in their clothes, but not veiled also prefer this type of clothing. This would include the female members of my family at large.

in the public sphere, spend time on being themselves, and get involved in communicative acts to make sense of society—is also a central ideal of the Turkish Republic. This modernist ideal has reflected itself in a fashion that women are supported to be active members in the nation. It is possible to read this inclusion as the tokenization of women rather than amplifying the sheer importance of being inclusive for the sake of it. Notably, this inclusion was projected by the state as for nonveiled women who looked Western, rather than Anatolian. Key for this maneuver is the fact that what is public and governmental are not always one and the same in Turkey. Veiling was not welcomed or allowed in governmental spaces, while it was not banned in public spaces. Women were not allowed to be veiled on governmental premises (including school campuses, even as a student) until 2013.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, for Islamic conservatism, women were not allowed to be not veiled in public spaces and places where unlawful female-male interactions can happen.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, I do not suggest that every person who follows Islam and its teachings follows this rule strictly. However, the unveiled women will tell us a bit more about this.

The struggles of the women who took up the #1YearChallenge were not against governments or legal authorities. Rather, they struggled against their families, groups, peers, and communities. The neighborhood pressure that Mardin offered us is an

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<sup>8</sup> University students were not allowed to wear headscarves on campus or state dormitories. The ban of headgear was even prevalent across universities and school that do not belong in the public system.

<sup>9</sup> I refer to any unlawful interaction (marriage) between a male and a female through the Islamic perspective. The lawfulness is assessed through if a male and a female are related or not. A woman is not supposed to be seen unveiled by a person who they can marry lawfully. Two people can marry in Islam if they are not siblings, parents and children, nephews/nieces and aunts/uncles, grandparents and grandchildren. For example, it is often seen as okay to marry a cousin or a distant relative.



excellent example of how overwhelming it could be for a woman. *UW2*, for example, tweeted that “After 11 years of pressure! I am happier, freer, and more like myself. You’ll find yourself when you resist the oppression.” She is a mother who was forced to be veiled. As her short tweet tells you, she had to fight to unveil to “find” herself. Her experiences on unveiling are not merely her saying “no,” but her active and ongoing resistance against oppression for years. This resistance defines her freedom. I would not suggest that unveiling is the key to freedom. However, her attempting to unveil and face oppression makes unveiling a matter of freedom for *UW2*. It is fair to say that being true to yourself is being free or at least having the freedom of choice. When you look at her veiled picture, what you see is her shy smile in a restaurant. She unveiled last year, although her struggle to unveil seems to be at least 11 years long. She had to fight both herself and others to come to peace with her choice. A reoccurring theme for unveiled women is that leaving the headscarf behind is not an easy decision. Even beyond backlash from others, they have to redefine who they are.

Every woman is not necessarily forced to veil. Some decide to do so without any external pressure. They relate to themselves as veiled better. Sayan-Cengiz (2016) showed us that women in the retail industry in rural Anatolia have chosen to veil. Their reasons were tactical; some did it for more acceptance while others veiled to feel safer. However, they had a cheerful tone for doing it, as Sayan-Cengiz tells us. It was their preference. Thus, the decision to unveil is about reimagining yourself and managing desired sociality. For *UW2*, it took ten years to decide and act on it. One part of this discussion is about deciding on one’s psychological state. However, the other part is purely social. The question of “what would others say” is something that women are

forced to address. As Mardin explained, the neighborhood, the public sphere closest to these women, is a constant reminder for a woman to police herself. Because of all the reasons I have given throughout this work, veiling is not just about how a person relates to religion and religious practice. It is more often a social contract that binds people together, which is part of a larger project to utilize female bodies as a part of politics.

The way that unveiled women represented themselves in domestic and public space is an extension of this discussion. One thing that I have noticed during my analysis of images is that unveiled women moved to public spaces for picture taking purposes. People make strategic choices while taking pictures and using them online (Goffman, 1956; Chen & Marcus, 2012; Hogan, 2010; Seidman, 2013). For example, *UW3* shared a selfie from 1 year ago and now. The more recent image is a mirror selfie. It was taken in a public restroom, such as those found in workspaces and university campuses. The public restrooms are places where one can enjoy private space in public environment. Combined with her look, this selfie indicates that *UW3* is in a public space and does not mind taking a picture. She is dressed professionally. This shows a) she was not comfortable enough to take selfies in public restrooms as a veiled woman, b) she was not in the workforce, or c) she did not want to share a picture taken in her work space.

As a person who grew up around conservative spaces and socialities, a veiled woman is expected to be modest and a Muslim role model at all times. There is not much room for failing people. I would imagine that taking a mirror selfie in a public restroom would draw some attention from other women in the restroom. We must remember that public restrooms are gendered and shared spaces, compared to our

bathrooms at home. While there is some prescribed safety and privacy given to occupiers, a woman taking a public restroom selfie is likely still being looked at. I cannot say unveiling has moved people to the workforce or public spaces, but I can argue that being unveiled, losing the label of veiled women, has helped some people to navigate their lives in public areas. Other instances of being in public space include attending schools, colleges, other educational institutions, being outside in public at night, or being at third-wave cafés<sup>10</sup>. You have to build a relationship with the space you are in to feel like a part of that space. I argue that women have an easier time building relationships with these particular places when they are unveiled. What seems to be “a crazy act” while you are veiled, is not at all crazy when you are unveiled. Although their stories highlight how their liberalization and emancipation from the *neighborhood* helped them, the fact that they cannot feel safe to be in some spaces, to take pictures of themselves in some spaces, is a result of years of oppression on women.

Freedom and emancipation are related to being able to move freely in public spaces. It is clear that freedom is not really about the veil, but the construction of the particular space and the act of veiling. According to Sayan-Cengiz (2016), we see that different spheres have their versions of a liberated woman. The problem that postcolonial feminism wants us to address is these contextual freedoms and lives. We must not think of these women in the binary of “liberated Muslim woman” or “Muslim

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<sup>10</sup> Third-wave cafes are stores that offer a variety of espresso and coffee drinks associated with “third wave” coffee making and serving (meaning these practices come after the first wave of Folgers-style coffee and the second wave of Starbucks-style drinks). These cafes are a growing business in Turkey. They combine comfortable spaces where people can hang out with a new set of experiences of coffee. These places are also highly *Instagrammable*.

woman who needs our saving” (Abu Lughod, 1998; 2002). Beyond the discussion of who subjugates women the most, we have to realize that power has levels of effectiveness and reach, and certain women, dealing with overlapping and intersecting forms of oppression, have more and more repressed lives (Frye, 1983). A lively example of women being told what to do even as they expressed their desire for self-identification and liberation was simultaneously happening under the same hashtag in which women were defying the authorities.

*UW23* articulates this very well, “Did we again become a current issue with your head, hair, or the headscarf that we do not wear? Are we Enlightened? Are we going to hell? Are we free now? Or Were we never veiled? Tell me, I am listening to you.” This is an excellent way of showing how unveiled women are treated in Turkey. Being accepted and free in different spaces become harder and harder in these circumstances. They have to navigate themselves between multiple, often contradictory pressures at all times. However, we have to acknowledge and celebrate the fight these 33 women have put for their decision whether the decision is to be veiled or not. Some women owned their past veiling practices as their own choice. Their oppression was not being forced to be veiled but pressured to stay veiled, perhaps through the neighborhood. *UW11* said, “Let’s share the best of challenge and face the lynch. Long live freedom of expression and clothing. I like both my versions, but I like better me now.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The lynch, or to lynch, is a concept in digital cultures in Turkey. It is often used to explain a situation in which members of a digital platform come together to shame, punish, or insult a person. It’s used in reference to bullying more than anything, such as when a user is being torn apart by people who have not bothered to acquire enough

One exception we might need to recognize could be *UW19*. She shared a picture of herself while carrying a flag of *Öğrenci Kolektifleri*, a student organization in Turkey, in a protest or a march. This student organization is a leftist group whose politics are to create and implement scientific socialism into student lives and educational institutions. The leftist groups are often highly secular, anti-religious and atheist and exclusive to nonreligious people. It does not mean that they would exclude veiled women, but it is another challenging space for a woman with a headscarf to maintain sociality. Her tweet not only tells how she navigated society at large while veiled but also the student organization specifically. *UW22* is another example. She shared a picture of herself paragliding compared to her veiled image at home. She says, "There is no way to tell how good it feels to live your life the way you believe and want to." I believe her words project what she's gone through in her life. There are so many hints that the unveiled women give us to see what their lives were before and now. How much they wanted to live their lives in the way they wished. This reminds me that their issues are not about veil itself or religion, perhaps. Because most of them owned the past version, their problem was mostly with the society. Reminding ourselves the story of Zaynab from Abu Lughod's (2013) book, the issue is not the religion but the men and government who create her many problems. In the cases from Turkey, it is the neighborhood

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information. It is also a defensive word for people who are not politically correct. As in, the transgressor would say they are being lynched when people are correcting a politically incorrect statement of the transgressor. It is crucial to acknowledge that the concept lynching does not have the same genealogies in Turkey as it has in the United States. Religious minorities did face lynchings in the mid-1950s in Turkey, which seems to be forgotten in the contemporary digital cultures. I will use the term to refer to digitally mediated bullying in this text, in line with popular usage on Turkish social media.

pressure, body politics of secularism, and conservatism that constantly impact and attempt to limit women's lives.

Access to the secular and Western public sphere is more rigid for veiled women in Turkey; being yourself while veiled is more challenging for these women in these spaces. As Sayan-Cengiz (2016) suggested, Westernized identities are perceived as neutral and universal, and thus those performing them have an easier time belonging to many spaces without carrying the burden of veil. Once they unveil, they seem to be in secular public spaces more often and taking selfies in public freely. There is a connection between being present in these spaces and feeling comfortable to take pictures. The visibility of unveiled or nonveiled women in secular and Western spaces is accepted as neutral and universal. There are a considerable number of professional looking women in the unveiled pictures. I do not suggest this because the headscarf does not belong to the public, instead I am saying this through looking at the photos shared and the environment of the pictures.

The use of space is not the only thing that changed with the unveiling. Gokariksel and Secor (2014) noted that, "veiling is part of being visibly Muslim" (p. 179). Unveiling, therefore, is also a visible change that comes with changing what you wear and how you wear. One thing that is consistent over the before and after pictures is that unveiled women often changed their looks. The most common way of veiling in Turkey is Hijab. This, however, does not mean that everyone follows the same style. This would depend on sect, observance, and beliefs. Figure 2 shows some common ways of covering your body around the world. Hijab is covering your hair, head, neck, ears. It often does not cover the face. In this manner, the hijab is accompanied by modest clothing, such as

the long ferace, dresses, or tunics that I have previously mentioned.<sup>12</sup> For young women, the fashion choices in the early 2000s were limited. The stores would design clothes that are aimed at an older audience. Most veiled women would wear tees, sweaters, and blouses under a topcoat. It would be hard to find modest clothes that you can wear without a topcoat. The fashion industry, especially after the 1990s, started to utilize more and more designs to create an immense variety of dresses for veiled women.



Figure 2 Common ways of veiling. Graphic made by ABC News (Australia) in relation to a proposed national burqa ban (2017).

<sup>12</sup> Ferace was a clothing option for women in the Ottoman Empire. The fashion made a comeback in the late 2000s.

In the cases of unveiled dissenting women, the modest (in the Islamic sense) dresses were no longer visible in their unveiled pictures. This could mean that they redefined what modesty is for them outside of Islam. Some also incorporated the use of makeup products and body piercings in their appearance. The reason why I point out these changes is that unveiled women reclaimed their bodies. They have moved into a new direction for utilizing their bodies for their own purposes. Their slogan said that “We have grown, we become free and beautiful.” Although I do not suggest or agree that unveiling is a universal or necessary step to be a grown-up, free, or beautiful, these women seemed to reclaim their lives and bodies for themselves through both unveiling and redefining their ideas of beauty and modesty. The new meanings they have given to their bodies might be preoccupied with secular thought or neoliberal politics, but this is still a win for them because of the freedom of choice. This slogan is reviving for them because of this reason. We do not know whether these women still associate themselves with Islam or not. Their journey from being visibly Muslim to unveil to be themselves is inspiring. What we can say is that they have integrated their looks and bodies into modern, secular private and public spheres on their own terms and for many different motivations.

There are great examples of how unveiled women presented their ideas and experiences. *UW14* said, “This was the hardest and the most satisfying thing I have ever done. There is no way to explain this feeling.” This is why #1YearChallenge was a triumph for these women. Taking up the hashtag for their own use was not merely a matter of saying, “look at me, I have changed.” Instead, they used it to announce, “this is the me I choose to be and love.” *UW17* said, “You have to accept and respect women



as they are, not in the ways that you imagine them.” Their dissent was against the oppression of conservative people. However, they did not fail to expand and relate their struggle to a broader range of misogyny and sexism. Their slogan of growing up, becoming free, and beautiful is not about unveiling. It is instead a recognition of their struggle of becoming themselves and accepting themselves. Throughout this work, I have mentioned how both secularism and conservatism coerce women and politicize their bodies. Thus, reducing their struggles to a win for secularism is not fair. On this note, *UW32* shows us the importance of self-reflection and questioning: “From a girl who was living with the reality of uncontested order to a woman who has dedicated her life to individualization. Ideas are not right when they are accepted by everyone, but they are only right when you do.” Her process does not only apply to conservative lives and experiences. Reading this tweet as a method for living, rather than reading it as blaming Islam or others, is the key point of this research.

In this chapter, I have shown how these women navigated their stories of coming out as unveiled women. The technological affordances of Twitter, mobile phones, and computers have given them the possibility to share their stories. They have shared two pictures, one being veiled, the other is unveiled. I have looked at the images and text to explain the spaces they were and are in, their relation to the area, their choice of clothing, and bodily modifications to recreate and own their bodies. I have articulated that unveiling, using makeup, or changing your look does not necessarily mean that you are freeing yourself, or becoming more beautiful. However, in this case, dissenting women defined their experiences of veiling, Islam, and oppression through this change. Postcolonial feminist frameworks and scholars tell us that there is no one way of being

free. Following their works, I suggest that these women liberated themselves from the oppression of neighborhoods, societies, women, and men who subjugated their lives, bodies, and experiences. I know that there are plenty of women who feel safe, happy, free, and beautiful who are veiled. Rather than advocating for veiling or unveiling, my analysis helped me to trace the genealogy of publicness for women in Turkey.

## CONCLUSION

This research analyzed how unveiled women mediated their dissent on Twitter. In terms of exploring the mediation of dissent, I have studied how unveiled women used Twitter as a space for political action and leveraged its affordances to mediate their dissent under the #1YearChallenge hashtag. I have reviewed the literature on digital mediation that calls for understanding the relationship between media, humans, and social change through technological affordances. I have shown how the technological affordances framework could be especially useful in terms of studying social nonmovements. We cannot deny the importance of technology while we deal with human action on digitally mediated spheres. As Brock (2018) says, we have to appreciate the technocultural aspect of digital mediations. I have repeatedly mentioned that treating internet as a singular entity is a pitfall. We must recognize that there are infrastructures and platforms around and on the internet and that people use them in different configurations across various devices. These platforms and infrastructures, as well as the choices users make, shape their experiences of digital mediation and everyday life.

In my quest to make sense of the interaction here between social action (dissent), human agency (unveiled women), and structure (both technology and social institutions), I have found that the concept of technological affordances is an indispensable tool and lens. Not only is the concept critical for incorporating technology into our discussion of social change. It also invites us to consider the many levels and types of structure—cultural and technological, familial and social—that shape human agency and actions. Along with that, I have suggested that in every society, digital

cultures will be different. I have provided insights from digital cultures in Turkey in an attempt to expand on this claim. The perspective of understanding technology as an equal part of social action provided me opportunities to realize how a tweet is produced, shared (by the users), distributed (by the platform), and read.

In an attempt to bring technology into the discussion of how social movements act on their dissent, I have argued that the devices that we use are also crucial. I have shown that the majority of users from Turkey access web services and the internet through their mobile devices compared to desktops or laptops. Internet access varies from country to country, and internet access and digital platforms are highly controlled in Turkey.

Another aim of this project was to understand this dissent through a postcolonial feminist framework and nonwestern theories of social action and mobilization. Although it is impossible to deny the literature on social action and movements that are developed in the West, I have especially relied on the works of scholars who have spent their time in relevant cultural contexts for this project. A significant discussion I had was to show the fact that concepts of feminism, liberation, freedom, and being a woman could mean a variety of things in different contexts. For example, I have noted many similarities that other feminist frameworks could explain. However, I must say that the contexts that other frameworks were developed in are inherently different from what women in Turkey have gone through. We must understand that the homogenous category of “Muslim woman” or “Turkish woman” disregards the intersecting lives of women. Throughout this work, I have not called the dissenting women as Muslim or Turkish for the same reason. Turkey is a multiethnic country and any of the unveiled

women have identified themselves with a Muslim or Turkish identity, but not all have overtly. I did not want to assume that they identified as Turkish just because they speak Turkish or live in Turkey. Thus, I have attempted to utilize my knowledge and insight from feminist scholars from Turkey. I have also used postcolonial scholars who have a more comprehensive conceptualization of what it means to live and be a woman in the Middle East and North Africa. I have referred to many other scholars who guided me to theorize some other points throughout this work. Studying the complexity of women's lives in Turkey requires a hyper-awareness of intersectionality in our research. This study was a reflection on how the act changing one's look or belief could be deeply challenging for such women. Being a woman in Turkey is not easy. Perpetuating political messages willingly or unwillingly just by how one presents herself in public spaces, not being able to define one's stand in society due to veiling-related issues, all of this has made many women's lives harder. There is no easy path here. For many years, veiled women were not accepted to educational facilities. For many years, nonveiled and unveiled women were treated as a shame to Islam and Turkey.

The dissenting women showed that they have reclaimed their bodies, freedom, and lives by unveiling and "coming out" as unveiled women to a larger public audience. Being out in some sort of public sphere was a key point for unveiled women. Their courageous acts of coming out have been celebrated by many secularists and feminists. I have not unpacked the data on the public discussion of the tweets in depth in this thesis, which could give more context on the struggles of these women, and how different groups responded to the #1YearChallenge. This would be a fruitful avenue for future research. In my preliminary analysis, that part of the data showed how men in

Turkey are invested and interested in governing female bodies for their own political motivations. This lines up well with Saka's (2019) work on political trolls in Turkey. Certain political trolls tried to discredit the unveiled women by calling them terrorists, fake, etc. This trolling and other bullying have caused some women to delete their tweets, accounts, or social presence from Twitter. The relationship between personal expression, public visibility via digital publics, and reclaiming privacy through deleting posts and accounts is also worth further study.

My contribution to research in digital media and feminism is to acknowledge that neither technology nor feminism mean one thing only. The many meanings of life call for an intersectionality in our research. The same idea applies to technology. Academics too often have treated technology as a monolithic entity that either shaped us or is being shaped by us. The life and mediation of life are much more intricate. I have shown this in my research by utilizing technological affordances and postcolonial feminist frameworks. It takes more time to unpack and contextualize each women's message rather than prescribe the meaning that we have ready in our minds. While dealing with Muslim women, or any women, we must remember that geography does not give one identity and life, but hosts many. In that regard, a postcolonial feminist framework not only helps us to think critically about our knowledge of women's experiences and lives. It also forces us to engage with technology through the same complexity-revealing lenses. Technology, as is, looks universal and neutral until we study the genealogies of it.

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