



Appraisal of MA Thesis

**Covid19 and the Outbreak Narrative: How the Turkish State Produces and Obscures
Gendered and Sexual Vulnerabilities**

Çağla Cirikciel

The diploma thesis written by Çağla Cirikciel is beyond any doubt timely as it speaks to the contemporary moment – on more levels than is apparent at the first glance. The work of Çağla Cirikciel is important for its focus on how the pandemic has been utilised to reinforce and further legitimise the current political regime in Turkey as well as to further marginalisation and precarity of already externalised people and communities. I consider the thesis's biggest contribution to the emerging critical reflection of the Covid-19 pandemic in its (fulfilled) ambition to offer a feminist reading of the pandemic policies and politics in Turkey and to unpack how the state institutions utilised the outbreak of the pandemic to redraw the gendered nature of the authoritarianism, the symbolic borders of the national body and reinforce symbolic exclusions that underwrite the regime and its stability. Çağla Cirikciel thus provides us with a detailed and nuanced insight into how the discourses of outbreak that needs to be contained map onto the surveillance of 'suspicious' bodies and activities, support the arguments about the need to militarise the response to both outsider and insider threats and strengthen the 'home' against the foreign influences.

It is very clear that Çağla Cirikciel takes an avid interest in theoretical writing and theoretical debates. This interest reflects in the author's deep grounding in theories of neoliberalism and the specific forms it takes in Turkey. It bears noting that originally Çağla Cirikciel has written a text the length of the whole thesis discussing only the main (gendered) features of the Turkish version of neoliberalism. The final version of the theoretical discussion thus speaks to the author's ability to draw out the essential and most important concepts that connect the research questions with the analysis. A lot of the theoretical discussion found its way into the interpretation of the data and into the analysis. To frame the discussion on the pandemic, Çağla Cirikciel leans

against concepts from cultural studies and cultural theory, namely the concept of outbreak narrative.

As for the methodology, due to the lockdowns, the eventual choice was a combination of a content and a discourse analysis of the documents and media releases produced by institutions of the Turkish state, namely the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of the Interior. To give space to the knowledge and analysis gathered on the ground, Çağla Cirikciel decided to include shadow reports and critical commentaries produced by a Turkish organisation, İnsan Hakları Derneği, or the Human Rights Association. Eventhough at times, the author's voice might get too close to the position of the IHD, including these reports also allows the author to link the contemporary developments to long-term tendencies. Perhaps more precisely, it allows Çağla Cirikciel to chart out where the pandemic introduces new forms of symbolic violence and where it is used to reinforce long-term tendencies. I would like to invite the author to speak to these points at the defence and draw them out more clearly.

Interestingly, in the thesis describing political reality that we—in the EU—often consider as dramatically different from the Western democracy, the first analytical chapter actually offers many resemblances to the pandemic discourse 'in the West' – the invocation of the war metaphors, the accentuation of the national borders and of the outline of the national body, and the myriad ways in which responsibility has been individualised. Thus, this begs a question how specifically is the gender of outbreak narrative used in the Turkish context? And more importantly, since the concept has been articulated from the experience of the Western societies (specifically US), does the Turkish context actually ask for changes and modifications in such theorisation?

The analysis Çağla Cirikciel provides is very nuanced and manages to weave together individual features – for instance, the author links the rejection of the Istanbul Convention (what irony!), to the impact of heightened surveillance on gender and sexually marginalised communities, and to violence in public spaces. However, at times, the prose reads too thick and the reader might wish for more space and slower elaboration of the individual argument – to choose one example – I would like to ask the author to elaborate on how the above mentioned strategies of the authoritative state are connected to one another and what are their gendered effects.

On the whole, Çağla Cirikciel has written a very insightful analysis that offers a new and very topical interpretation of how the crisis is being turned into a political opportunity. The author demonstrated not only a substantial knowledge of theoretical sources, ability to design a research project, but also shown that they are able to carry out an independent and innovative analysis. As the tutor in the process, I can attest to Çağla Cirikciel's ability to work independently when needed as well as to follow feedback. For all these reasons, I am very happy to recommend Çağla Cirikciel's thesis for defence and suggest evaluation as **“excellent”**.

In Prague, September 13, 2021

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of two distinct parts separated by a vertical line. The first part is a stylized, cursive 'K' followed by a horizontal stroke. The second part is a more complex, cursive signature.

Kolářová Kateřina