

State- Policy Is a Children's Toy? :Reexamination of Impacts of the Political on the Social through Images of Children in Commercials

The world has been shaking since the beginning of the millennium with an increasing pace, tension, and impatience. This restless quiver, or the age of speed as widely depicted, has been an aggregate outcome of changes in a political, social, and economic climate and of technological and scientific improvements. Influencing and getting influenced by the political, economic, and cultural, the social and movements of the social today have become more multidimensional, multidirectional and multimedia-oriented. These characteristics of the social movements have been manifested through migrations, resistances, occupations, protests etc. since the beginning of the century. Also, considering the common characteristics of the participants of these social movements as well as taking the profiles of social media, Internet users, and global influencers, it is likely to demonstrate that those, who are compatible with global fast life, capable of adapting to constantly changing conditions, trends, and technologies and equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills for using digital devices and media, seem to play leading and decisive roles in society as well as have a considerable opportunity to make themselves/their struggles/problems visible and their voice to be heard globally. Among them children and youth and the ones who live in Middle East and particularly in Turkey are not exceptions.

Since the beginning of Westernization reforms and subsequently the rise of nationalism in the Ottoman Empire during the mid-nineteenth century, children and youth were closely monitored, controlled, and disciplined by the state and its various institutions. They were not only subject to state policies particularly produced to control them, to form a generation displaying uniformity in terms of mentality and fitting into the corporeal, moral, and sexual norms of the state. However, they, as substantial constituents of the population, were exposed to the regulatory state policies including exclusion, normalization, and optimization. This Foucauldian notion of power relations based on biopolitical regime of the state, despite some modifications, was perpetuated and reinforced during the early Republican period of modern Turkey. Established as a nation-state, relations between the state and children and youth have not displayed significant changes during the rest of the twentieth century. Even if governments changed, each of them either maintained the policies of the previous one or produced new ones which were not too different from the old ones in principle. In a nutshell, each government took a commonly prudent approach to the issue of forming a generation which were supposed to be loyal to the nation, national values, and national interests, to have strong, robust, and healthy bodies, to align with the patriarchal and heteronormative structure of the state and also to embrace Kemalist principles such as secularism, statist economy, and republicanism and idea of Westernization. Been a ruling party since 2002, Justice and Development Party, nevertheless, changed the depiction of and expectations from ideal generation even though state remained as a producer of disciplinary and regulatory policies to increase the base of its followers and to guarantee victories from the subsequent elections. Raising a religious generation which has been expected to adopt Islamic values, to be familiar with Islamic sources, to be loyal to its Ottoman heritage and to apply Islam in its everyday lives without severing its ties with modern sciences.

Taking these developments vis-à-vis formation of a generation, child-rearing, relations between state and children/youth, and the current positions and advantages of these groups into consideration, first, I aim to trace the changing state discourses regarding an ideal generation and, particularly, children's health (mental, physical, sexual) between 1923 and 2019. Second, in relation with the first point, I am going to show in what ways and to what extent the state discourse adopted through the commercials advertised by different media sources. In so doing, I scrutinize multiple representations of children and use them to comprehend the impacts of political milieu on the social one. Also, through my paper, I am seeking the answers of following questions: What did the images and representations of children in commercials reveal regarding ideal corporeality and sexuality? What did they signify regarding abject bodies, sexualities, and ethnicities? What were the roles of nationalism, Islam, modernization, and globalization in formation of an image of an ideal generation? What were the roles of these commercials in cultural and medical areas? Based on comparisons of representations and images in commercial, I will argue that although biopolitical regime of the state is still going on today, impact of the political on the social has gradually decreased due to relatively loose presence of state control in virtual sphere as well as because of a crucial opportunity for children and youth to express and represent themselves without being exposed to direct state intervention. I intend to reach a conclusion that as the virtual sphere of Internet and social media has become a source of contested conceptualizations of corporealities and sexualities, it challenges the biopolitical regime of the state and state-produced notion of abject bodies. To find the answers and substantiate my argument, I am drawing on a wide variety of archival sources including children's/women's/healthcare magazines, newspapers, televisual and online commercials, books specifically written on child-rearing/health, child corporeality and sexuality.