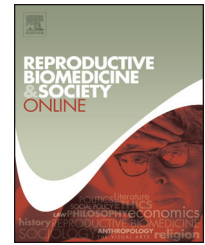




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SYMPOSIUM: IVF - GLOBAL HISTORIES


Patriarchal pronatalism: Islam, secularism and the conjugal confines of Turkey's IVF boom

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Abstract This article constructs an explanatory history of the introduction, growth and social regulation of IVF in Turkey, labelling it a form of 'patriarchal pronatalism'. Based on sociological research between 2006 and 2010, including analysis of regulatory and media materials as well as an in-depth clinical ethnography and interviews with IVF patients and practitioners, the paper contextualizes Turkey's 'IVF boom' within the wider and governmental contexts of reproductive politics. Examining both the legal framework and the surrounding rhetoric, it highlights how the nationally pertinent tensions between Islam and secularism unfold in this particular field, and traces how the rise of neo-conservatism and the expansion of the role of religious organizations and discourses has led to the promotion and development of assisted reproduction, but only within strictly enforced conjugal confines. This work contributes not only to the significant sociological and anthropological scholarship on the globalization, localization and repro-national character of assisted reproductive technologies around the world, but also to the growing scholarship examining the contours of reproductive citizenship, gender relations and family formation in contemporary Turkey. 

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Introduction

Turkey's first *tüp bebek* (literally 'tube baby'), Ece Çokar, was born on 18 April 1989, 11 years after the birth of Louise Brown heralded the dawn of a new era in assisted reproduction. Following the creation of a pre-emptive legal structure by the Ministry of Health – and the Germany-based training of Turkish doctors entrusted with importing the

latest medical technologies back to Turkey – her parents were one of 10 couples recruited to undergo IVF treatment at Izmir's Ege University Hospital. Despite early successes, however, the development of IVF in Turkey was slow and tentative. In the late 1990s, a review of assisted reproduction practice across Europe (Schenker, 1997) showed Turkey to be one of the countries with fewest fertility clinics per capita, ahead only of Poland, Russia and Ukraine. Yet, a

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decade later, the situation had completely changed. By 2008, the national press was celebrating Turkey as 'the world's seventh biggest IVF market' (behind Israel, France, Spain, England, the USA and Germany), and reflexively referring to the country as a '*tüp bebek* paradise'. Indeed, today, having gripped medical ambitions and the public imagination, *tüp bebek* is a large and lucrative industry dedicated to the art of making babies (Gürtin, 2013). As one of the most rapidly growing IVF markets in the developing world (Urman and Yakin, 2010), assisted reproduction in Turkey has not only changed the lives of countless involuntarily childless couples, but also impacted local notions about reproduction, infertility and modernity (Aciksoz, 2015; Demircioğlu Gökner, 2015; Gürtin, 2014).

Based on sociological research in Turkey between 2006 and 2010, including analysis of regulatory and media materials, in-depth clinical ethnography, and interviews with IVF patients and practitioners, this article constructs an explanatory history of the introduction, growth and social regulation of IVF in Turkey. Examining both the legal framework and the rhetorical debates surrounding IVF, I highlight how the nationally pertinent tensions between Islam and secularism unfold in this particular context. I also explore the role of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, with its neo-conservative and pronatalist agenda, and the growing influence of the Ministry of Religious Affairs to explain both the boom of the Turkish IVF industry on the one hand, and the construction of firm access restrictions on the other. I label the particular 'repro-national' character that emerges in this hybrid state, with its precarious relations between secular principles and Sunni morality, a form of 'patriarchal pronatalism' promoting and funding IVF but only within strict 'conjugal confines', justified with reference not only to religious but also to moral, social and scientific rhetoric.

The growth of IVF

After almost 15 years of slow growth, Turkey's '*tüp bebek* sector' experienced a marked and accelerated development in a very short period. The introduction of state and social security funding for IVF treatment in February 2005 not only widened access but also provided an unparalleled opportunity for the expansion of the assisted reproduction industry. Clinic numbers rose dramatically from 66 (20 state, 46 private) in 2005 to 91 (19 state, 72 private) in 2007, with private clinics opening in nine additional cities, extending coverage to 22 of Turkey's 81 cities (Ministry of Health figures, <http://www.saglik.gov.tr>). Even more markedly, the number of annual treatment cycles doubled from approximately 20,000 to 40,000 (Turkish Society of Reproductive Medicine, <https://www.tsrn.org.tr>), amassing a total turnover in excess of 300 million euros. Moreover, in 2008, Professor Bülent Tıraş, then president of the Turkish Society for Obstetrics and Gynecology (TSOG), estimated that, in order to properly meet demand, the sector would need to perform 150,000 IVF cycles per year (Aktüel, 07.04.2008), while some newspaper reports claimed as many as '2 million women waiting for *tüp bebek*' (Radikal, 13.08.2007) across the nation. Although in more recent years, clinic numbers have continued to rise, reaching 120

centres in 2014 (located variously in private clinics, private hospitals and state institutions), growth has become much slower as various legislations have made it more difficult for doctors to open their own private practices. Hence, my fieldwork, conducted between April 2006 and December 2009, coincided perfectly with the extraordinary 'boom' period of the Turkish IVF industry enabling me to witness both the opportunities (particularly in terms of access) and challenges engendered by such rapid growth of the industry.

Today, there are approximately 120 IVF clinics operating in Turkey. Although many are concentrated in the large urban centres of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, clinics have also opened in the farthest corners of the country. The locally welcomed establishment and successful operation of IVF clinics in what are often considered traditional and conservative areas of the country are a testament to the widespread acceptability and desirability of high-tech fertility treatments as IVF becomes 'normalized' (Thompson, 2005) in Turkey as it has been elsewhere (Demircioğlu Gökner, 2015). Moreover, the spread of assisted reproductive technologies is often interpreted by practitioners and the popular media as an indication of progressing social mores and national scientific advancement, with newspaper reports representing infertility as 'a battle that must be fought until the end' (Görgülü, 2007), with IVF designated as the modern weapon of choice.

Islam and secularism

In 1923, Turkey became the first secular democratic nation with a predominantly Muslim population, a fact that has arguably been more influential on the national character than any other (for discussions see Bozdoğan and Kasaba, 1997; Kandiyoti and Saktanber, 2002). It is still the case that the most interesting and heated public debates in contemporary Turkey concern and question the rhetorical and actual mobilization of secularism and Islamism as the basis for binary identities and identifications in both public and private imaginaries. Such processes of dialogical identity formation, in relation and reference to an 'othered' opposite, on the part of both Islamists and secularists, have been recently noted, described and analysed by anthropologists Ayşe Saktanber (2002), Esra Özyürek (2006), Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002) and Jenny White (2002), as part of their ethnographic enquiries. Despite White's pertinent description of a continuum of identities, however, over the past decade, polarized thinking and oppositional self-definitions have increased among Turks who identify as 'secular' (*laik*) or 'Muslim' (*Müslüman*), amounting to what some have called a 'conflict between two Turkeys' (Yavuz, 2009: 144).

The AKP, which entered its third term with a strong majority in 2011, has been variously referred to in both the national and international press as 'fundamentalist', 'Islamist' and a 'party with Islamic roots'. Although they define themselves as 'conservative democratic' and deny an Islamic agenda, critics, such as political scientist Hakan Yavuz (2006, 2009), accuse the party of a 'politics of camouflage', claiming that, although 'the AKP never uses the explicit language of political Islam, and indeed often feels compelled to stress that it is not an Islamic party', its 'repressed identity occasionally re-emerges' (2009: 3). Acar and Altunok add that

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