



Advertising, avoiding, disrupting, and tabooing: The discursive construction of diversity subjects in the Turkish context

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates organizational diversity discourses in Turkey – a non-Western, politically relevant, yet underrepresented context. Using a Foucauldian perspective on power and discourse, we scrutinize how power relations in the Turkish context are (re)produced. Based on our analysis of company websites and semi-structured interviews with various actors (e.g., HR managers), we propose a conceptual framework of the discursive construction of diversity subjects at work along the dimensions of (1) visibility of organizational diversity discourses and (2) contestation of meaning within organizational diversity discourses. The combination of these dimensions yields four discursive dynamics as illustrated in our data (Advertising, Avoiding, Disrupting, Tabooing). This framework may inspire future context- and power-sensitive investigations on diversity discourses at the workplace.

1. Introduction

Ironically, diversity research is “not very diverse” (Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2011, p. 35) but is rather dominated by the lens of “Western” concepts (Findler, Wind, & Mor Barak, 2007; Tang et al., 2015) and tends to overlook the role of the broader societal context for diversity at work (Ortlieb & Sieben, 2014). Yet, a contextualization of diversity is critical to understand how (context-specific) social structures and power relations are (re)produced in the workplace (Ahonen, Tienari, Meriläinen, & Pullen, 2014; Calas, Holgersson, & Smircich, 2009; Proudford & Nkomo, 2006). Further, context-sensitive analyses are needed to explain why diversity efforts often fail to be transferred to other countries (Kemper, Bader, & Froese, 2016; Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007; Prasad, Prasad, & Mir, 2010).

In addressing this gap, several diversity scholars have previously used discourse analysis to investigate diversity rhetoric in context (e.g. Cukier et al., 2017; Klarsfeld, 2009; Mahadevan & Kilian-Yasin, 2017; Meriläinen, Tienari, Katila, & Benschop, 2009). In many of these studies, a critical diversity perspective is used that views so called diversity dimensions (e.g., gender, age, disability) as social constructions instead of individual or group-based differences (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013; Litvin, 1997; Zaroni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010) and emphasizes the

role of power when specific meanings are discursively attached to these dimensions (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015). However, despite their immense value, many of these analyses fall short on explaining “how context matters in terms of power” (Ahonen et al., 2014, p. 278) for diversity at work and for the people who are subjects of diversity discourses. We seek to address this gap by exploring *how* organizational discourses on various diversity dimensions are constructed and scrutinize the power-laden discursive politics behind it, i.e. the contextual dynamics of associating meanings to concepts (cf. Lombardo, Meier, & Verloo, 2009; Lombardo, Meier, & Verloo, 2010). In doing so, we follow Tatli, Vassilopoulou, Al Ariss, and Özbilgin (2012) who call for not only paying attention to observable discourses and their meanings, but also to the dynamics behind more hidden discourses.

Specifically, we draw on Foucault’s conceptualizations of discourse and biopolitics (Ahonen et al., 2014; Foucault, 2003, 2007, 2008) and combine data from 19 company websites and 9 qualitative interviews (with experts from employer associations, civil society organizations, and HR practitioners) to investigate organizational diversity discourses in the Turkish context. This holistic and contextualized approach allowed us to first, inductively develop diversity dimensions that matter in the here studied context (Tatli et al., 2012) and second, analyze the discursive construction of these dimensions. In particular, we

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demonstrate how certain socio-demographic identities are made (more or less) visible and are (more or less) contested in terms of meaning. At the intersection of these dimensions, the discursive construction of diversity subjects can take four different dynamics: advertising, avoiding, disrupting, or tabooing.

This study seeks to make the following contributions: First, as we demonstrate how diversity discourses relate to power and politics (Ahonen et al., 2014; Bendl, Danowitz, & Schmidt, 2014; Özbilgin & Tatli, 2011; Tatli et al., 2012) we aim to advance theorizing on diversity discourse in work organizations. More specifically, we show how the discursive construction of diversity subjects can be better understood when considering simultaneously (1) the variation in visibility of diversity dimensions and related discourses as well as (2) different levels of contestation regarding the discursive meaning attached to diversity dimensions. In our framework, we then show which discursive dynamics shape the construction of diversity subjects on the intersection of these two dimensions. Second, we follow the calls for more context-specific diversity studies (Farndale, Biron, Briscoe, & Raghuram, 2015; Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Jonsen et al., 2011; Klarsfeld, Knappert, Kornau, Ngunjiri, & Sieben, 2019) and specifically contribute to the urgent but marginalized study of diversity in Turkey. The recent centralization of power around the country's president including the silencing of the opposition (Parkinson & Peker, 2016) and the growing influence of religion on the state (Gözaydin, 2008; Somer, 2015), has brought Turkey into the global community's attention (e.g., El Amraoui & Edroos, 2018; *New York Times*, 2019a) and has raised in particular diversity scholars' concerns that in this ongoing 'nation branding' process, workplace diversity issues will be further pushed to the margins (e.g., Özbilgin & Yalkin, 2019; Tatli, Ozturk, & Aldossari, 2017). Putting a spotlight on the role of organizational discourse of diversity in the Turkish context, this study echoes these concerns, while acknowledging the potential parallels to other contexts, especially in these times of rising right-wing populism (Cumming, Wood, & Zahra, 2020).

2. Theoretical framing

2.1. Discourse in critical diversity studies

Critical diversity studies emerged more than two decades ago in response to the proliferation of diversity management as a management tool that emphasizes inter-group differences (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015). Critical diversity scholars have raised concern for such an essentialist understanding of difference and the idea that specific groups have certain, fixed attributes. Instead they conceptualize such group membership as socially constructed categories permeated by the socio-political context and its power relations (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013; Litvin, 1997; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004; Zanoni et al., 2010). In order to understand how these social constructions come about, critical scholars have consistently emphasized the crucial role of discourse and scrutinized the discursively created meanings attached to concept and practices of diversity and related diversity dimensions (for a detailed review see Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015). For instance, such studies show how the diversity management rhetoric is often related to trends (Oswick & Noon, 2014; Prasad et al., 2010), business case arguments or neoliberal ideologies (e.g. Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Matus & Infante, 2011; Mease & Collins, 2018; Tatli, 2011), hence legitimizing an outcome-oriented perspective on diversity at the expense of rigorously fighting discrimination (Barnes & Ashtiany, 2003; Dickens, 1999; Kramar, 2012; Noon, 2007).

However, discourses are temporally and spatially dynamic (Tatli et al., 2012) and the business case discourse may compete with, coexist or be dominated by other discourses like social justice and corporate social responsibility (Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004) and, notably, may vary depending on the country context. In fact, several researchers investigated how diversity rhetoric is adapted and plays out in contexts outside the USA, such as France (Klarsfeld, 2009), Finland

(Meriläinen et al., 2009), in UK (Tatli, 2011), Canada (Cukier et al., 2017), Portugal (Barbosa & Cabral-Cardoso, 2010), or Sweden (Kalonaityte, 2010). For instance, based on various qualitative data material, Mahadevan and Kilian-Yasin (2017) show how discourses in Germany portray Muslims as 'inferior other' while constructing being German through ancestry and ethnicity. A critical analysis of organizational discourses within a certain context hence reveals how organizational language sustains and recreates established social patterns and existing power relations.

Notably, as others have suggested (Foldy, 2002; Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013; Hardy & Clegg, 1999), the theoretical underpinnings of power taken up by critical diversity scholars using discourse analysis can be broadly differentiated into (i) the domination approach (rooted in Marxist theory) and (ii) the Foucauldian approach. We position this paper in the tradition of the latter stream and lay out its theoretical concepts in the following section.

2.2. Foucauldian approach to power and discourse

In contrast to the domination approach, which conceptualizes power as domination of managerial elites, the discursive or Foucauldian understanding of power can be characterized as subtler and less intentional (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013; Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015; Hardy & Maguire, 2016; Hardy, 2003). More precisely, power in the sense of Foucault (1980) is not simply a resource of dominant actors, but exercised through a diffuse web of social practices enabling some actors while restricting others, albeit unequally (Hardy & Maguire, 2016; Hardy & Thomas, 2014; Hardy, 2003).

In order to allow for a deeper understanding of the connection between context, power, and diversity, we turn to Foucault's concept of *biopolitics* (2003, 2007, 2008). Biopolitics describes regulatory interventions that fragment the population along a biological continuum (Ahonen et al., 2014; Foucault, 2003, 2007) to monitor them based on their 'diversity', so that people "will work properly, in the right place, and on the right objects" (Foucault, 2007, p. 69). In this view, the population is seen as a political problem that needs to be regulated "to protect the security of the whole from internal dangers" (Foucault, 2003, p. 249), such as deviations from the norm, with the ultimate goal to maintain a somehow defined societal equilibrium (Foucault, 2003). Diversity management in organizations can be considered an example of this regulatory apparatus through which biopolitical power is exerted as it defines groups and guides the behavior of people (Ahonen et al., 2014). Hence, this perspective emphasizes "how biological features of the human species become the object of political strategy" (Foucault, 2007, p. 1).

Furthermore, discourses play a crucial role in Foucault's work and his conceptualization of power. Both concepts are inextricably intertwined and characterized by a complex relationship as "discourse transmits and produces power" (Foucault, 1984, p. 100), i.e., discourse is both a vehicle but also a result of power. Further, discourses can be defined as an interdependent compilation of texts and practices that "systematically form the object of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Notably, discourse does not only encompass discursive, but also material practices presuming that discourses "are instantiated over time as multiple actors engage in local practices that help to normalize and diffuse them" (Hardy & Thomas, 2014, p. 321; see also Hall, 2001).

2.3. Subject positions and discursive politics

Discourses aggregate knowledge and thereby produce different categories of identity, such as gender, age, disability etc. Diversity programs and initiatives pick up these categories and thereby (re)produce a confined space for individuals to occupy (Hardy & Maguire, 2016). Hardy and Phillips (1999) suggest that the broader societal discourse is crucial in this regard as it limits the "number of subject positions [...] understood as meaningful, legitimate, and powerful" (p. 65). Therefore,

discursively created subject positions are commonly associated with stereotypical attributes and behaviors (Martin-Alcoff, 2006). For instance, Dobusch (2017) analysed how organizations discursively constitute specific subject positions for gender and dis-/ability and showed how, normative claims of inclusion are considered legitimate for non-disabled women and men with ‘female living conditions’ (e.g. caring responsibilities), while claims to inclusion by disabled people were open to negotiation. This illustrates how, discourses “create and control the objects they claim to know” (Leclercy-Vandelannoitte, 2011, p. 1250), and how in turn, occupying such a subject position is less a matter of personal choice, but rather depends on which spaces are ‘made available’ within discursive practices (Dobusch, 2017).

This discursive production of subject positions is a political process characterized by discursive struggles of multiple actors negotiating meanings (Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005; Erkama, 2010; Özbilgin & Tatli, 2011) and ‘appropriate’ subject positions. Diversity discourses are particularly prone to such discursive politics (Lombardo et al., 2009, 2010; Tatli et al., 2012) and contestations of what is considered ‘normal’ because diverse views and lifestyles may challenge prevailing political ideologies (Leclercy-Vandelannoitte, 2011; Tatli et al., 2012). While discourses are always sites of some degree of struggle (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004), some are more coherent in that they display a distinct meaning of “who and what is ‘normal,’ standard, and acceptable” (Hardy & Maguire, 2010, p. 1367) and hence convey a widely shared idea of people’s ‘appropriate’ place in society (Hardy & Maguire, 2016; Phillips et al., 2004).

Notably, such contestations not only prevail in the sense of negotiating meaning and related subject positions, but also in the sense of negotiating visibility – pointing towards the power of silencing certain discourses, while pushing others (Bell, Özbilgin, Beauregard, & Sürgevil, 2011; Tatli et al., 2012). For instance, Meriläinen et al. (2009) analyzed the discourse on Finnish corporate websites and showed how Finnish companies have institutionalized the concept of ‘gender equality’, but silenced inequalities based on race or ethnicity (Meriläinen et al., 2009). Such blind spots are not necessarily related to specific intentions or agendas, but are still the result of human activities that are in turn embedded in societal power relations (Foucault, 1991; Lombardo et al., 2009, 2010; Meriläinen et al., 2009; Tatli et al., 2012).

Overall, this theoretical perspective enables us to see how the power relations within a specific context impact diversity discourses (and vice versa). To keep the assumed societal equilibrium ‘intact’, these power-laden discourses are used to create ‘appropriate’ subject positions for people based on their ‘diversity’. As a consequence, discourses are silenced or pushed to the surface, and politically contested, depending on contextual power-relations, and reinforced by organizations adopting these subject positions in their diversity management.

Next, we provide a brief overview of the regulative Turkish context and the ways in which various diversity dimensions are addressed, before delving deeper into our methods and results.

3. The Turkish context

Originating from the Ottoman Empire, Turkey holds a quite diverse population in terms of ethnicity, language and religion. In the early Republic era, the ethno-cultural diversity of Turkey had been managed with a difference-blind approach (Kaya, 2010) to create national unity and homogenized society (Yavuz & Öztürk, 2019). Fundamentally, equality is protected under the Constitution (1982). The Labor Act (2003) is the main document on the prohibition of discrimination at the workplace in Turkey. Also, various international regulations (e.g. CEDAW, Beijing Declaration) have entered into force in 1980s and 1990s (see Table 1).

Considering these regulations, gender appears to be the most addressed diversity dimension in Turkey. Especially in line with the accession negotiations for membership of European Union (EU) in 2000s, a strong commitment to EU reforms was marked and several legal

Table 1
Fundamental National Laws and Regulations on different diversity dimensions.

Dimension	Constitution	Labor Law	International Regulations
Gender	Article 10 on equal rights Article 50 on protective legislation	Article 5 on equal rights Article 74 on maternity leave	United Nation Conventions (CEDAW; Beijing Declaration) ILO Conventions (100, 111, 122, 142) European Social Charter (Article 4, 8,20) EU Directive 2002/73/EC* 2006/54/EC* ILO Convention (C159) EU Directive 2000/78/EC
Disability	Article 10 on equal rights Article 50 on protective legislation Article 61 on protection	Article 5 on equal treatment Article 30 on quotas	European Social Charter Article 15 on work conditions United Nation Convention (e.g. Article 27 on employment)
Religion	Article 10 on equal rights Article 24 on freedom of religion and conscience	Article 5 on equal treatment	ILO Conventions (111) EU Directive 2000/78/EC*
Ethnicity	Article 10 on equal rights	Article 5 on equal treatment	ILO Conventions (111) EU Directive 2000/43/EC*
Political Opinion	Article 10 on equal rights	Article 5 on equal treatment	ILO Conventions (111)
Age	Article 10 on equal rights	Article 71 on prohibition	EU Directive 2000/78/EC*
LGBT+	Unspecified	Unspecified	-

* As Turkey is not a member of the European Union, directives are not binding.

amendments was realized in the Constitution and Labor Act to harmonize legal practices with the EU acquis (Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008). Moreover, in 2009, the “Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men” was founded in parliament to promote gender equality. In 2013, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum, “Equality at Work Platform” was created to fight with gender inequality and to minimize the gender gap. However, these initiatives have coexisted with a contravening political discourse of the AKP government. Especially, with the weakening commitment to the EU, the patriarchal conceptualizations and conservative approach that stress women’s key role as mothers and family care-giver became apparent in the discourse of Erdogan’s government. Also, the absence of mechanisms for monitoring and penalizing discrimination at the workplace has led to the existence of the secondary social status of women in the Turkish context. Still in 2019, female labor force participation rate was 34.4 %, with a 28.7 % share of women in employment (TURKSTAT). Further, Turkey – like many other countries – is still facing a gender pay gap (15.6 % in 2018; cf. ILO, 2020) and the Global Gender Gap Report that also includes indicators such as political empowerment or educational attainment even ranked Turkey as 130 st out of 153 countries in 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2020).

The recent political discourse also has an effect on religious and ethnic diversity in Turkey. Since ethnicity is not mentioned explicitly in any of the laws and regulations on the prohibition of discrimination, ethnic groups are not legally sufficiently protected in the Turkish context. Different ethnic groups are recently increasingly segregated as Erdogan uses his power to polarize Turkish society (Esen & Gümüşcü, 2016; McCoy, Rahman, & Somer, 2018; Konda, 2011). In the recent years, the opposing identities such as “religious-secular”, “Muslim-non-Muslim”, “Sunni-Alevi”, “Turkish-Kurdish” have reawakened and the whole situation turned into an identity issue (Hintz, 2016; McCoy et al., 2018).

LGBT+ individuals also are not efficiently legally protected in Turkey. This is reflected in the fact that the Constitution and the Turkish Labor Act do not explicitly include sexual orientation or gender identity (Güner, Kalkan, Öz, Özsoy, & Söyle, 2011). Instead, the conservative and patriarchal structure of Turkey creates a homophobic workplace (Öztürk, 2011). As heterosexuality is the expected norm, LGBT+ individuals are generally considered a challenge to “the morals of the society” (Ozeren & Aydın, 2016, p. 207; Yurtsever & Erdoğan, 2010). This approach is evident in AKP’s discourse, for instance, in one of his speeches in 2017, Erdoğan defamed the LGBT+ community as “against the values of our nation” (The Guardian, 2017).

During nearly two decades under AKP governance, by exercising political power that is characterized by conservatism, traditionalism, and paternalism, AKP became “increasingly unwilling to share power, intolerant of criticism, and bent on authoritarianism” (McCoy et al., 2018, p. 32). Thus, the idealized and empowered identity in Turkey represents a “Turkish, Muslim, Sunni, male, and heterosexual” while the other identities are marginalized. Hence, Turkey as a national context, where secularism is challenged with conservatism, authoritarian regime is dominant, the society is polarized by “us” and “them” categories, legal support for equality is limited and no organizational measures exist to protect diversity (McCoy et al., 2018; Özbilgin & Yalkin, 2019) represents an extreme case to examine discursive politics in the construction of diversity subjects.

4. Methods

4.1. Data collection

As we seek to provide holistic and contextualized insights into the nature of organizational diversity discourses, we combine different sources of data in our research approach (for a similar approach, see Klarsfeld, 2009). First, we analyze 19 company websites to provide an overview of the diffusion of concepts and diversity dimensions in the Turkish corporate world. Second, we use nine qualitative interviews with experts from employer associations, civil society organizations (CSO) and HR practitioners to help us develop a deeper understanding of the broader context and how this relates to the discursive construction of diversity dimensions.

Company websites are important channels for companies to communicate with their external stakeholders and to present themselves. Previous studies show how the textual material displayed on corporate website is a useful source when analysing how diversity issues are (re)constructed and how they mirror the power relations in a society (Benschop & Meihuizen, 2002; Meriläinen et al., 2009; Singh & Point, 2006). Inspired by Meriläinen et al. (2009), we selected large Turkish companies (in terms of revenue) including companies from various industries and with national and multinational orientation. In total, 19 Turkish companies were identified based on the “DS100 – Top 100 Companies of the OIC Countries” – a ranking of the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Conference (see Table 2).

We proceeded as follows to obtain the analyzed text material. First, we started off reading the subsections of the websites on career and/or human resources in order to explore how companies portray the way they deal with their own employees. However, in the course of screening the websites, we realized that many Turkish companies specify their approach towards their employees in subsections on sustainability or corporate social responsibility (CRS). Following methodological contextualization (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004; Welch & Piekkari, 2017), we included texts from these sections into our analysis as this seemed appropriate for the Turkish context. Second, in addition to the website texts, we also accessed sustainability or CRS reports and analyzed the sections on employees or human resources within these reports. When no sustainability or CSR report existed, we accessed annual reports instead. We always used the most recent version of the report, preferably in English in order to provide transparency for

Table 2
Top 19 Companies in Turkey.

Industry	Company	Revenue in 2012 in million US\$
Banking	Türkiye İş Bankası A.Ş. (İsbank)	9,310
	Ziraat Bank	8,271
	Halkbank	4,765
	Vakıf Bank	4,612
Holding	Koç Holding	45,354
	Sabancı Holding	13,418
	Eczacıbaşı Holding	6,867
	Doğuş Holding Co.	5,486
	Borusan Holding	4,266
Telecommunications	Türk Telekom	6,545
	Türkcell	5,170
Airline	Turkish Airlines	6,529
Food processing	Ülker Gıda Sanayi ve Ticaret A.Ş. (Yıldız Holding)	6,255
Energy	Elektrik Üretim A.S.	5,610
Building and construction	Enka	5,037
	Erdemir	4,929
Retail	BİM Birlesik Magazalar A.S.	4,523
Automobile	Tofas Türk Otomobil Fabrikası A.S.	4,019
	Vestel	3,855

non-Turkish speaking readers of the paper. However, in some cases the English version was outdated, so that we referred to the Turkish version instead.

In order to further contextualize our findings from the website analysis, we conducted nine semi-structured interviews with different actors in Turkey. First, we interviewed actors from the Turkish employer side, more specifically two representatives from professional associations of HR managers and one head of department of an employer representation. The selection was based on the assumption that these interviewees are rather close to the mainstream organizational discourse and might be reproducing it (Tatli, 2011; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004), i.e. reflecting and further feeding our results. Second, we conducted interviews with actors whose perspectives on the mainstream organizational discourse and diversity practices are somewhat more distanced. More specifically, we interviewed three HR managers from foreign multinational companies (MNCs) (headquartered in Germany, France and UK) and three program managers from CSOs who work towards improving human rights and the conditions of particular minority groups at the workplace. CSOs as well as MNCs are highly pro-active in advocating the value of diversity in organizations and society in Turkey (Özbilgin, Syed, & Dereli, 2010) and may thus contribute different perspectives and reflections that go beyond the reproduction of dominant discourses.

Interviews were executed by all members of the research team and were conducted in English or Turkish depending on the language skills of interviewer and interviewee. The interview guideline included questions on the personal background of the interviewee, the role of the organization for promoting diversity and the Turkish context. The latter section covered questions on, for instance, the public discourse on diversity and equality, governmental and organizational programs and practices, and the perceived relevance and meaning of different diversity dimensions.

4.2. Data analysis

All collected material from the websites as well as interview transcripts were then imported into the software NVivo to help us code and structure the large amount of text. Following critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 1984), we explored the representations of meaning conveyed through the texts, whilst being sensitive to aspects of power in that we moved “back and forth between text and social and political formations” (Cukier et al., 2017, p. 1037).

In a first step, we sought to get an overview over the diversity discourses used on the corporate websites (displayed in Table 2 for each company). More specifically, we coded inductively for the different diversity dimensions in order to mirror the categories used by the companies and to display which discourses are more or less visible. That way we were also sensitive to categories that remained invisible on the website – following scholars who suggest that silences are an important part of the discourse, especially to understand its power effects (e.g. Benschop & Meihuizen, 2002; Meriläinen et al., 2009).

In a second step, we analyzed the discourse that appeared around the diversity dimensions in more depth. For instance, we paid specific attention to the location of statements (e.g. career site vs. CSR site) because this tells us something about the target group of these statements and how topics are understood and conveyed by the company (Singh & Point, 2006). Furthermore, we sought to understand underlying problematizations (i.e., how a subject is constructed as a problem) and rationalizations (i.e., how companies justify their approach) (Vaara, Kleymann, & Seristö, 2004). In doing so, we paid specific attention to the subject positions made available to people with different socio-demographic characteristics (cf. Dobusch, 2017) and the ways in which they were constructed in the texts.

In a third and final step, we included the interviews in our analysis and coded them with the same code system as developed in the website analysis, i.e. according to the diversity dimensions specified in Table 3. This enabled us to compare different statements around the same discourse across interviewees and website material and helped us provide contextually embedded interpretations. This approach proved to be particularly useful to enlighten our analysis around dimensions that remained invisible or silent on the websites.

5. Results

In this section we analyze the organizational discourses on the various diversity dimensions as they appear on the websites to understand how these dimensions are discursively constructed in the Turkish context. Table 4 illustrates the visibility of the diversity dimensions as used on the corporate websites. In the left column, we specify the organizational discourse under which we summarize and contrast the related inductive categories in the following section.¹

5.1. Gender

‘Gender’ clearly dominates the organizational diversity discourse in Turkey as it is mentioned by all companies from our sample. This discourse is largely shaped by a problematization around the low labor market participation of women and how it can be increased. While several companies only mention the share of women employees within their workforce without further elaborating on the topic, others – above all Koç Holding – document their efforts in more detail by mentioning respective practices (e.g. mentoring, talent management), initiatives, and declarations that they have implemented and signed to enhance the inclusion of women in the workplace and increase their share in managerial roles (e.g., Declaration of Equality of Work by the Turkish Ministry for Family and Social Policies). However, the discourse around gender and women’s employment is closely intertwined with the dimensions ‘family status’, ‘pregnancy’ and ‘marital status’. Interestingly, marital status was mentioned explicitly by two companies (Enka and Turkcell) who emphasized that no discrimination occurs based on this category. Yet, the fact that this is mentioned at all indicates that this

¹ Notably, as they have been mentioned on some corporate websites, the dimensions political opinion, social origin, and veteran status are listed in the Tables, however, we do not present them in more detail because no further information on these dimensions was provided on the websites nor in the interviews.

Table 3
Inductive diversity categories per company.

Company website	Name subsections of website / report	Inductive diversity categories
Isbank, www.isbank.com.tr/EN	Sustainability → Our Approach Sustainability Report 2017	B, Cu, Di(m), Di(p), G, P, R, Re, S
Yıldız Holding, english.yildizholding.com.tr/	Our vision → Talent Sustainability Sustainability Approach → Sustainability Report 2017	A, G
Koç Holding, koc.com.tr/en-us/	Human Resources Sustainability → Sustainability Report 2017	A, B, Di, En, F, G, L, R, Re, SO
Sabancı Holding, www.sabanci.com/en	Career HR Policies Our Sustainability Reports → Sustainability Report 2017	A, B, Di(p), G, L, P, R, Re
Turkish Airlines turkishairlines.com/en-int/	Career → Corporate Governance → Sustainability Report 2017	A, Co, Cu, Di, FS, G, N, Re, R
Ziraat Bank http://www.ziraat.com.tr/en/Pages/default.aspx	Human Resources Sustainability → Sustainability Report 2017	G
Enka http://www.enka.com/	Human Resource Sustainability → Employees → Sustainability Report 2017	A, Co, Di, G, L, MS, N, P, R, Re, Sex, SO, V
BİM http://www.bim.com.tr/default.aspx	Investor Relations → Annual Report 2017	
Borusan Holding http://www.borusan.com.tr/en/	Career Corporate Responsibility Sustainability → Sustainability Report 2017 (Turkish version)	G
Vestel https://www.vestel.com.tr	Social Responsibility Human Resources	Di(m), Di(p), G
Doğuş Holding https://www.dogusgrubu.com.tr/en	Career Corporate Social Responsibility → CSR Policies → Sustainability, CSR Report 2015 (Turkish version) → CSR Strategy Human Resource	A, G
Eczacıbaşı Holding http://www.eczacibasi.com.tr/tr/anasayfa	Sustainability → Sustainability Report 2017	G
Tofas Turk Otomobil http://www.tofas.com.tr/en/Pages/default.aspx	Career Sustainability → Corporate Sustainability Policies → Corporate Social Responsibility → Sustainability Report 2017	A, B, En, G
Turk Telekom https://www.turktelekom.com.tr/en/Pages/default.aspx	Investor Relations → Socially Responsible Investing → Annual Report 2017	A, G
Turkcell http://www.turkcell.com.tr/en/aboutus	Corporate Social Responsibility → Sustainability Report 2017	A, B, Di(p), En, G, H, MS, N, Re, Sex, SO
VakıfBank https://www.vakifbank.com.tr/English.aspx?pageID=977	Investor Relations → Sustainability Report 2017 → Human Rights and Employee Rights Policy	A, B, E, G, L, P, Re, Se, Sex

(continued on next page)

Table 3 (continued)

Company website	Name subsections of website / report	Inductive diversity categories
Erdemir https://www.erdemir.com.tr/homepage/	Career Sustainability → Our Employees → Sustainability Report 2017	En, G, N, Re, R
Halkbank https://www.halkbank.com.tr/en/	Investor Relations → Annual Report 2017 Social Responsibility Policies Corporate	
Elektrik Üretim	→ Annual Report 2017 (Turkish version)	

- A: Age.
- B: Belief.
- Co: Color.
- Cu: Culture.
- Di: Disability.
- Di(p): Physical disability/capacity.
- Di(m): Mental/neuropsychiatric disability.
- En: Ethnic origin/ethnicity.
- FS: Family status.
- F: Faith.
- G: Gender.
- H: Health status.
- L: Language.
- MS: Marital status.
- N: Nationality.
- P: Pregnancy.
- Po: Political opinion/thought/view.
- R: Race.
- Re: Religion.
- S: Social origin.
- Se: Sect.
- Sex: Sex.
- SO: Sexual orientation.
- V: Veteran status.

Table 4
Visibility of diversity dimensions on corporate websites.

Organizational discourse of diversity dimensions	Inductively coded categories from websites	Number of companies mentioning this category
Gender	Gender	16
	Marital status	2
	Family status	2
	Sex	2
Age	Pregnancy	1
	Age	10
Religion	Religion	8
	Belief	6
	Faith	1
	Sect	1
Disability	Disability	3
	Physical disability/capacity	4
	Mental/neuropsychiatric disability	2
	Health status	1
Ethnicity	Race	6
	Ethnic origin/ethnicity	5
	Language	4
	Nationality	4
	Colour	2
LGBT+	Culture	2
	Sexual orientation	3
Political opinion	Political opinion/thought/view	2
Social origin	Social origin	1
Veteran status	Veteran status	1

dimension has a certain relevance in the Turkish context as also reflected in the following statement by Doğuş Holding:

“(…) a mentoring program was initiated in order to draw attention to the importance of gender equality at workplace. The aim of this program is to support our female employees, wearing a spouse, mother and manager hat, to climb the career ladder quickly in Doğuş Holding and our subsidiaries” (Doğuş Holding, sustainability report, 2015, p. 33)

As such, unlike men employees, women employees are discursively constructed in their role as spouses with additional obligations that must to be balanced in accordance with the requirements on the job. In addition to that, those companies that elaborate further on their gender equality efforts view women in their reproductive role as mothers and for instance, offer lactation rooms, child development seminars for mothers, child care services and flexible work arrangement. As an exception, Sabancı Holding relates ‘maternity’ also to men and mentioning that “the rate of male employees who completed their maternity leave and came back to work is 100 %” (Sabancı Holding, sustainability report 2017, p. 23). However, we could not find any information on how long this ‘maternity leave’ for men is or how many men actually made use of this opportunity.

The dominance of gender issues and especially women’s labor market participation is also reflected in our interviews. All the interviewees suggest that this dimension enjoys priority by companies, but also by their own organizations. Some interview partners referred to economic pressure and untapped potential of women to rationalize this prioritization, for instance, one representative from a professional association of HR managers explained that

“As a human resources association our aim is to develop human resources capability of Turkey. That’s why we focus on the other half of our human resources who are female and they have great potential, but we are not benefiting from this potential. Most of time when they get married, when they have a baby, they may stop working for the company or when the promotion is an issue employers prefer to promote the male partner instead of females. (...) that’s why we chose gender equality rather than age or ethnicity or other things” (representative, professional association 1)

This quotation not only illustrates the reasons for prioritizing gender over other dimensions, but reflects how the interconnection of gender and maternity/marital status as discussed above is also reproduced by interviewees on the Turkish employer side. However, program managers from CSOs focus more on the social embeddedness of gender-related inequalities and for instance, emphasize that a higher employment rate of women in the labor market is not the cure-all:

“Yes, we definitely need more women in the labor market. But it does not necessarily mean that you have more women in the labor market with empowerment. (...) So in our society, we have many cases where the woman is the only breadwinner of the family, but they take the money, their salary, and give it to their husband or their dads or their brothers or whatever, the male figures. And they do not even have a voice or say on how this money will be spent. (...) we have to find another base and mechanisms to empower her on a social basis, on the power relations within the society and within the family” (program manager, CSO 3)

Overall, the organizational discourse on gender is centered on two somewhat conflicting positions of increasing women’s employment and economic independency while preventing this from colliding with women’s socially prescribed roles as mother and dependent wife.

5.2. Age

Age is mentioned on ten of the analyzed corporate websites. The

discourse around age is very much shaped by the relationship between younger and more senior employees and several companies describe the need for specific efforts to ensure harmony between these groups. For example, Turkcell who state that they have recruited 225 young talented people in 2017 declares that this process is managed through the leadership development and mentoring program that has the following objective:

“We aimed to create a synergy with information sharing by mentoring at the level of CXO [= corporate executives] and General Manager to the young generation under the age of 27 with the reverse mentality process which we have put into practice this year and call it as GNCMNTR [= genç mentor; Turkish for ‘young mentor’]” (Turkcell, sustainability report 2017, p. 43).

This statement reflects that companies see the need to facilitate a better dialogue between generations with a special emphasis on younger employees. According to our understanding, the “reverse mentality process” suggests that the mentality within the organization needs to be changed towards embracing the values of younger people. Furthermore, they gave the program an abbreviated name omitting all vowels, presumably to sound appealing to the young target group.

These interpretations are broadly reflected in the statements from interviewees representing the Turkish employer side. For instance, one interviewee summarizes as follows:

“There is a Gen X that is trying to understand the Gen Y. We give trainings to explain the generations and differences between them (...) there is a serious effort to include them in business life and create satisfaction for them by carrying out flexible practices that will respond to their communication styles, working styles etc.” (representative, professional association 2)

This quote illustrates how potential solutions are suggested with a special emphasis to please the younger generation in order to convey the image of an attractive employer.

5.3. Religion

‘Religion’ or related dimensions are mentioned by nine companies on their corporate websites. In several instances, companies use the term ‘belief’ or ‘faith’ in addition to, or instead of religion. In one case a company speaks of ‘sect’. One possible explanation for this variety in the wording is that Turkey is rather homogeneous when it comes to religion as 99 % of the population are Muslim, while there are different religious groups and variations in the extent to which this religion is practiced or not (Çarkoğlu & Toprak, 2006; Gözaydin, 2008; Kayabaş & Kütük, 2011). The term “belief” is broader in a sense that it may capture this variation and address the protection of a large variety of people from discrimination. Yet, the corporate websites remain silent with regards to who actually needs protection and what they do to eliminate exclusionary tendencies towards certain groups.

Our interviewees provide further insights into these questions and explain how religion needs to be contextualized in Turkey. One interview partner from a CSO suggested:

“Turkey is a place that is subject to heavy censorship mechanisms, and when you look at the education curriculum, it is very strictly constrained by the norms of Turkishness-Sunninism-heterosexuality, meaning it does not allow any identities other than Sunni-Muslim” (program manager, CSO 1)

This quotation indicates that being a Sunni-Muslim is the societal norm and that deviations from that norm are less accepted. One HR manager from an MNC shared his experiences with how norm deviations are perceived:

“The headquarters of the MNCs can have diversity projects, but here [in Turkey] problems may arise – even based on the appearance reflecting religious variations. For example, one of our female employees was labelled as Alevi because of the style of her hair knit and she was obviously excluded by other employees. Or round-bearded males, they may also become ‘the unwanted’. So in Turkey, you cannot do certain things even if you want to. Because we [people in Turkey] can’t accept these things, everybody is polarizing between different groups.” (HR manager, MNC 2)

As such, differentiation occurs along visible religious symbols that signal the belongingness to a specific religious group and may lead to exclusion of those who seem to deviate from the Sunni norm. However, representatives of the Turkish employer side and HR managers from MNCs also pointed out that differentiations are not only made based on different religious groups, but also based on the extent to which the religion is actually practiced. Our interviewees suggested that on the one hand, there are more conservative people who have a certain idea of how “a real Muslim should behave” (head of department, employer representative) and on the other hand, there are people, in particular so called ‘white collar people’, who see religious symbols like a headscarf as a threat to secularism. This becomes particularly evident in the following statement from a HR manager:

“If I recruit someone with a headscarf, even if her educational level and competencies are good enough, I will damage social peace within my company. Here, as HR manager, I also have the task to protect social peace within the company. I think that our corporate culture does not accept and endure this. Why? Because the headscarf is used as a political symbol mostly and I know that most of our white-collar employees are against that use of symbol. So the issue here is what is acceptable within the social environment.” (HR manager, MNC 1)

These quotations demonstrate that religion and especially visible religious symbols are a highly politicized in the Turkish society and that views on the ‘proper’ place of people who practice or signal their religion are contested.

5.4. Disability

Out of 16 companies only seven mention ‘disability’ (often in combination with ‘physical’ or ‘mental’) and one mentions ‘health status’ as a dimension to be protected from discrimination. Yet, only few companies specify how many PWD work in their company and none explain what steps they take to improve the situation for them within the organization. Furthermore, there is the extremely exclusive case of Halkbank who specify certain ‘qualifications’ based on which they recruit employees, among others, the following:

“Except for those who will be employed within the scope of the requirements set out by the Labor Law on the employment of disabled persons, being in good health as required by the position of employment and not having any mental or physical disabilities that may prevent the individual from doing permanent work in any part of Turkey.” (Halkbank, annual report 2017, p. 106)

Through this statement, Halkbank clearly signals that the underlying rationale of dealing with disability is merely the need to comply with the law. Furthermore, they are problematizing PWD in a way that neglects their capabilities to engage in work. Although such explicit statements about the exclusion of PWD are an exception, the organizational discourse around disability in other Turkish companies seems to be rather exclusive, too, but in a subtler way. For instance, Turkcell and Sabancı Holding, more specifically Sabancı foundation, initiated projects on the ‘social inclusion’ and ‘disabled rights’, however, they do not relate this to their own organization and workplace inclusion for PWD. As such, issues around disability are framed as a social problem that

should be solved through donations and philanthropic actions while being avoided in the corporate world and working life.

In the interviews, disability was not a very controversial issue in a sense that everyone agreed that the exclusion of PWD is a problem, for instance, one interviewee from a professional association of HR managers explained:

“When I entered this association, I saw how big their [PWD] problems are. Because, they cannot find people to talk to, little attention is paid to their problems, they do not actually appear in social life. I used to act just for obeying the rules of the state for disabled workers. But after I started working in this association, I started to give them a chance, and I saw that they can do a really good job. Creating accessible workplaces and matching these people with the right jobs can work very well.” (representative, professional association 2).

This quotation reflects a certain change in mind set from the mere compliance with laws towards a more proactive approach reflecting a more positive framing of workplace inclusion of PWD. In a similar vein, one of the program managers of a CSO emphasized that problems still exist, but suggesting that different actors are working on improvements:

“So, I mean, and none of them, very limited number of companies are really disabled friendly. So for them [PWD] it is difficult to find a job first and it is difficult to go to a job by using public transport and even find a decent place for them in the companies, you know. So we have several attempts to work on that. And it is definitely in our program. We will be doing something on this, with the different ministries.” (program manager, CSO 3)

She continues to elaborate on different programs they have implemented to enhance the inclusion of workers with disability in the labor market. Interestingly, this is done in cooperation with governmental bodies, supporting the notion that general societal support for the inclusion of PWD exists, though not necessarily in the organizational work context.

5.5. Ethnicity

Dimensions we address under the heading ‘ethnicity’ are rather diverse and cover - beyond ‘ethnicity/ethnic origin’ - also ‘race’, ‘language’, ‘nationality’, ‘color’ and ‘culture’. Turkish Airline even mentions several of these dimensions in a row emphasizing the value they see in employees coming from “diverse cultures and various countries.” (Turkish Airlines, sustainability report 2017, p. 86). This discourse is more about employees of different nationalities and how this creates advantages for an internationally operating company. However, when it comes to certain ethnic groups living in Turkey, there is silence on the websites.

Interview partners of the Turkish employer side mirror and partly reproduce this silence. For instance, one of the representatives from a professional association explained that they do not see the danger of discrimination based on ethnic origin:

“Yes, in Turkey we have minorities. Kurdish people we have, Laz people, Çerkez people and several people here, but when we are promoting someone or providing a job we do not care their minority, their ethnicity. We just say he is a good fit or not. We are not interested in their ethnic roots, so again I will repeat that the main diversity issue is that unfortunately females are not provided equal rights.” (representative, professional association 1)

These perspectives from the Turkish employer side stand in sharp contrast to the statement of interviewees from MNCs and CSOs. All interviewees from CSOs see severe discrimination of certain ethnic groups:

“But when it comes to the discrimination based on ethnicity, it receives also a higher public attention, but not always very

progressively, from a very nationalistic perspective. We hear so many cases that Kurdish workers are isolated, are marginalized at the workplaces, are even harassed by other Turkish workers because they are Kurdish.” (program manager, CSO 3).

All interviewed HR managers from MNCs explained that these problems are deliberately neglected in companies due to their political sensitivity, especially when it comes to Kurdish people, for instance:

“Due to the internal situation in Turkey we cannot do certain things. For example, because of the situation of the Kurds, etc. We need to be very sensitive there. We’re trying not to get into that issue to avoid the reaction. I mean, how to say, we need to be on the safe side there.” (HR manager, MNC 3)

This quote indicates that even HR managers from MNCs refrain from addressing issues around ethnicity because they are “politically dangerous” (HR manager, MNC 1).

To sum up, the discourse around ethnicity is highly complex and multi-layered and may be more or less contested depending on the political sensitivity of the group in question.

5.6. LGBT+

Sexual orientation is one of the least visible dimensions on the companies’ websites. Only three companies, namely Enka, Koç Holding and Turkcell, list ‘sexual orientation’ or ‘sexual tendency’ as one dimension they do not discriminate against. However, they do not go beyond listing this aspect and remain silent about measures or specific practices. Furthermore, gender identity is not included as a relevant category to begin with, but instead ignored altogether in the organizational discourse. This finding is mirrored in the interviews with experts from employer representatives and professional associations of HR managers who remain rather silent about this topic. However, one HR manager from an MNC talked more openly about these issues and explained the silence as follows:

“In Western cultures, it is no problem to talk about your sexual orientation, but this is not like that in our society. (...) in Turkey, this issue is a taboo, a social sensitivity. In fact, it is difficult to employ someone who reveals his or her sexual orientation not only in our company, but also for all companies in Turkey. You can say social rejection, unacceptance.” (HR manager, MNC 2).

That this topic and the situation of LGBT+ people is widely neglected in the Turkish context is also supported by the interviews with the program managers from the CSO. One of them explained:

“I mean, this LGBT issue is seen as kind of abnormal by so many people and by the public institutions. (...) no one really accepts that there is an LGBT issue. (...) They [LGBT+ people] are really more and more vulnerable compared to, for example, women, compared to disabled people because the bias and the prejudice against them is huge because we are living in a very, let us say, conservative country. (...) and they see them as a kind of really/ they should be excluded from the society and they should live in a very isolated way.” (program manager, CSO 3)

Further, the program manager from the CSO specifically working to improve the rights of LGBT+ people provides several examples of how this topic is tabooed in the public discourse. For instance, she referred to a politician who always said ‘excuse me’ before using the word ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’ in a speech or explained that in the seminars of certain, more conservative universities in Turkey, you could not use the word ‘homosexuality’ explicitly. She further elaborates on severe problems LGBT+ people face as they are frequently victims of hate crimes and openly discriminated in the labor market and in political life (e.g., the AKP openly stated that they do not nominate homosexuals). Hence,

LGBT+ issues and their ‘proper’ place in organizations and society at large are highly contested while at the same time being somewhat unspokeable.

6. Discussion

In this explorative study, we analyzed organizational discourses on various diversity dimensions from websites of Turkish companies as well as semi-structured interviews with various actors to understand the ways in which people with different socio-demographic characteristics are placed in specific subject positions through discourse, hence (re) producing societal power relations. In doing so, we pay attention not only to the meanings within present discourses, but also consider what is absent or less visible (Bell et al., 2011; Tatli et al., 2012).

6.1. Discursive construction of diversity subjects in the Turkish context

We propose a framework that portrays and arranges the discursive construction of diversity subjects along two dimensions that characterize diversity discourses, namely *visibility of organizational diversity discourses* and *contestation of meaning within organizational diversity discourses*. In the following, we first outline the two dimensions and then illustrate how the discursive construction of diversity subjects in the Turkish context may involve different discursive dynamics (cf. Lombardo et al., 2009) (Fig. 1).

Concerning the first dimension – *visibility of organizational diversity discourses* – we found large variations in the visibility of diversity dimensions and related discourses as indicated by their prevalence on the corporate websites (see Table 4). For instance, while gender issues were discussed extensively on the Turkish websites, discrimination of LGBT+ was largely silenced. This is partly reflective of findings from other country contexts where, e.g., the dimension ‘gender’ also permeates the diversity discourses (e.g., Klarsfeld et al., 2019; Meriläinen et al., 2009; Point & Singh, 2003). Such a dominance of a specific, privileged discourse often exists “to the detriment of antagonistic others” (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015, p. 34) that in turn remain less visible reflecting country-specific societal power effects (Benschop & Meihuizen, 2002; Tatli et al., 2012).

Regarding the second dimension – *contestation of meaning within organizational diversity discourses* – our analysis of the websites and interviews demonstrates that the discursive meaning attached to some diversity dimensions are more contested than for others, i.e. the internal construction of a diversity discourse varies in the sense that more or less consensus exists on the ‘appropriate’ place of individuals with different socio-demographic identities in organizations (Dobusch, 2017; Hardy & Maguire, 2016; Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Phillips et al., 2004). For instance, our data suggests that for Turkish women, there are two

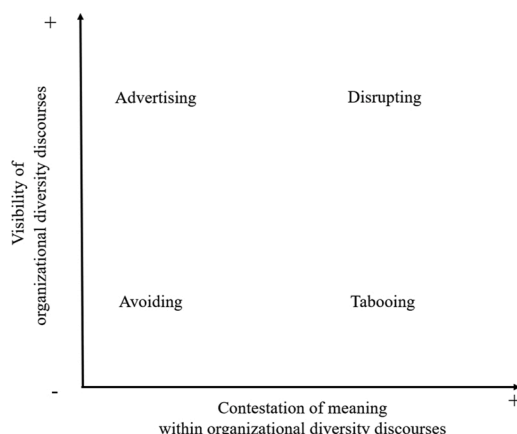


Fig. 1. Discursive construction of diversity subjects in the Turkish context.

distinct, yet clashing subject positions made ‘available’ through discourse, namely the reproductive, unpaid family care-giver versus the productive, paid worker that is crucial for the country’s economic growth in times of demographic change. Conversely, for age, there seems to be a widely shared consensus that young people’s ‘appropriate’ place is in the latter position.

Taken together, the two dimensions can be combined into a framework that illustrates four discursive dynamics (cf. Lombardo et al., 2009, 2010) that we identified in our data: (i) Advertising, (ii) Avoiding, (iii) Disrupting and (iv) Tabooing.

6.1.1. Advertising

When visibility of a certain organizational discourse is high and consensus on an ‘appropriate’ subject position exists, we observed the discursive dynamic of *Advertising*. In the context of Turkey, age, and in particular the group of younger employees serves as a good example. Age is the second most frequently mentioned diversity dimension on the websites which reflects a relatively high level of visibility with respect to age issues at work. At the same time, our interviewees suggest that age is not a big topic around which controversial discussion arise. As such, younger generations are perceived as politically harmless and hazard-free while other contextual aspects like the demographic change (Demirkaya, Akdemir, Karaman, & Ataman, 2015; Özkan, 2017) seem to play a greater role in framing this topic. Based on business case argument young people are advertised as crucial talent that needs to be attracted and retained.

6.1.2. Avoiding

When visibility of a certain organizational discourse is low, yet consensus on the ‘appropriate’ subject position exists, we identified the discursive dynamic of *Avoiding*. In the Turkish case, disability was a good example to illustrate how people can be discursively avoided by framing them as unrelated to organizational life or incapable of doing certain jobs. On the websites, disability is one of the less visible dimensions, at least when it comes to presenting PWD as legitimate organizational members or specific practices to create, for instance, barrier-free work environments. The existing discrimination of PWD at work is not neglected, but mostly constructed as a social problem and the responsibility to solve it is shifted to philanthropic activities or to other social actors. This appears to be a common practice, not only in the Turkish context (cf. Dobusch, 2017). As such, there is a discursive consensus that the appropriate subject position of PDW is outside work contexts.

6.1.3. Disrupting

When visibility of a certain organizational discourse is high while at the same time its meanings is contested, we revealed the discursive dynamic of *Disrupting*. In the Turkish context, this applies, for instance, to gender and religion. Gender was the most visible dimension on the websites reflecting the fact that a certain type of gender discourse is accepted by society, namely the one around the business case rationale enhancing women’s career opportunities and increasing their labor market participation. At the same time, our interviewees supported our reading of the websites indicating that this topic is highly contested, also through discourses on the highest political levels primarily promoting women in their role as mothers and wives. Public statements from Erdogan such as “women are not equal to men, our religion has defined a position for women: motherhood” (The Guardian, 2014) or “a women who rejects motherhood (...) is deficient, is incomplete; women should have three or more children” (The Guardian, 2016) are noteworthy in this respect showing how women are portrayed to primarily serve men and the family. Hence, gender discursively disrupted in the sense that women are reduced to and kept stuck between two largely conflicting and polarizing subject positions made available to them.

We see a similar pattern in the case of religion. Religion or belief were rather visible on the websites compared to other dimensions.

However, especially visible religious symbols seem to be a highly politicized and contested issue in Turkey, for instance, the meanings discursively attached to headscarfs for women and in particular, the distinction between traditional loosely bound headscarf and a tightly bound turban version. The latter turned into a political symbol perceived as a threat to secularism by some parts of the population (Tanyeri-Erdemir, Çitak, Weitzhofer, & Erdem, 2013) while the comprehensive changes in liberating women wearing headscarves realized by AKP further strengthened the social-political polarization between opponents and advocates of secularism (Somer, 2015). Hence, by choosing to wear a headscarf or not, or by using a certain style (loosely vs. tightly bound), women inevitably make a political statement and are positioned as supporter of political Islam or not.

6.1.4. Tabooing

When visibility of a certain organizational discourse is low while at the same time its meaning is contested, we echo previous studies (e.g., Lombardo et al., 2010) in calling this discursive dynamic *Tabooing*. In the Turkish case, this was particularly obvious for LGBT+ people and certain ethnic groups like Kurds. Regarding LGBT+, our findings are in line with previous studies suggesting that Turkish organizations are highly homophobic places (e.g., Özturk, 2011) that prefer to remain silent about this topic reflecting the societal denial of the mere existence of LGBT+ people. At the same time, this taboo is instrumentalized in the political discourse to serve a more conservative-religious political position, e.g. through constructing LGBT+ individuals as abnormal or shameful.

Regarding Kurds, their fight for equal rights in Turkey dates back to the early years of the Turkish Republic, 1920s (Ergin, 2014) while the country's government keeps the reluctant attitude to show an inclusive approach and not flinches from conducting military operations, most recently in 2019, against certain groups of this population, even outside of its' own territory (New York Times, 2019b). Our data showed how the historically and politically tense situation of Kurds in Turkey scares HR managers to risk a potential political backlash for themselves or for their organization if they address this topic. As a result, Kurds have little legitimacy to participate in organizations in Turkey and the problems they face in the labor market are largely marginalized (e.g. Alp & Taştan, 2011; Ergin, 2014; Somer, 2002). Yet, at the same time, especially the representatives of CSOs, criticized this exclusion of Kurds from Turkish organizations.

In sum, with our framework we demonstrate the importance of considering visibility of diversity discourses in combination with related contestations of meaning because this provides more nuanced insights on the discursive dynamics within diversity discourses and may explain differential outcomes and working conditions for the people who are subjects of these discourses. Previously, scholars have argued that the more contested meaning is or the more "troublesome societal and organizational questions" (Meriläinen et al., 2009, p. 238) are within a discourse, the more likely this discourse is to be silenced or made invisible (Bell et al., 2011). Yet, we demonstrate that contestation and visibility should be understood and studied as two related yet separate dimensions shaped by the power relations and regulatory forces inherent in a given context.

Given the centralization of power and related 'nation branding' efforts in recent years (Özbilgin & Yalkin, 2019), the Turkish case has served particularly well to flesh out how different modes of subjectification are infused by biopolitical power (Foucault, 2003, 2007), i. e., how people are assigned their 'proper' place in society in order to keep the societal balance intact. However, whereas the discursive dynamics for certain diversity dimensions may take a different shape in other contexts, the exertion of biopolitical power to define individuals' social identity based on certain biological features can be observed across the globe (cf. Calas et al., 2009; Klarsfeld et al., 2019). For instance, diversity discourses in Western countries are not less infused with the political goal to maintain a societal equilibrium. As a result,

members of certain religions are portrayed as inferior (e.g., Islam in Germany; cf. Mahadevan & Kilian-Yasin, 2017) or entire discourses are being silenced (e.g., on race in the USA; cf. Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). Yet, although the political goal (i.e., societal balance) and the instrumentalization of populations through discourses seem to be observable on a global scale, the specific discursive dynamics and the outcomes for the people who are subjects of these discourses vary depending on the respective context. Contributing to the standardization-localization debate in diversity management (e.g., Jonsen et al., 2011; Klarsfeld et al., 2019; Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007), our study therefore highlights the necessity for locally responsive diversity efforts that are sensitive to the contextual discourses, while acknowledging underlying biopolitics as a tool of global importance.

6.2. Limitations and future research directions

Many diversity scholars have previously done critical discourse analysis of websites, however, very few have combined this website analysis with other data sources like interviews (exceptions are Klarsfeld, 2009; Mease & Collins, 2018). Following the call by Tatli (2011), we have conducted interviews with different stakeholders inside and outside of employing organizations in order to account for the contextualized nature of diversity issues and its embeddedness in the political environment. Paradoxically, it is precisely due to the political developments in recent years in Turkey and increased political sensitivity on diversity topics that the number of interview partners we could acquire for this research project was rather limited. Future studies could certainly benefit from a larger interview sample and more stakeholders' perspectives (such as e.g., employees themselves) in order to provide a more encompassing picture on how different actors discursively construct subject positions within or outside organizational contexts.

Furthermore, in the course of writing this paper, we felt somewhat trapped in the "sameness-difference dilemma" (Holvino & Kamp, 2009, p. 398), i.e. we write about and hence, run the risk reproducing group differences. Yet, in light of our findings, we believe that it is necessary to disentangle how groups are discursively constructed and hence, affected in systematically different ways by societal power relations and politics. Especially in view of increasing nationalism and rise of right-wing populism in many countries (Cumming et al., 2020; Muis & Immerzeel, 2017), our theoretical framework may be fruitfully applied to other national contexts to show how social groups are constructed differentially in these contexts and how different discursive dynamics play out. We see some indications that, e.g. the dynamic of avoiding discourse of PDW at work might be similar in other country contexts (cf. Dobusch, 2017) as well as the discursive dynamic of tabooing for LGBT+ (Bell et al., 2011; Jonsen et al., 2011). However, other dynamics, e.g. concerning religion, are possibly less disruptive in other country contexts where religious symbols are less politically contested and instrumentalized.

Although company websites are increasingly being used as data sources in qualitative research, also in examining how diversity and related concepts are framed on websites (e.g., Heres & Benchop, 2010; Jonsen, Point, Kelan, & Griebel, 2019; Point & Singh, 2003; Singh & Point, 2006; Windscheid, Bowes-Sperry, Jonsen, & Morner, 2016), using this type of data material has its limitations. As the website data is collected at a specific point of time, its representativeness is limited to that specific moment. Moreover, as websites are corporate tools that are widely used for impression management and image-building, website discourses do not necessarily reflect real practices (Schwabland & Tomlinson, 2010). However, as argued throughout the paper, websites in itself are nevertheless powerful instrument in proactively shaping realities in organizational settings (Meriläinen et al., 2009).

Finally, to make our findings traceable for the international scholarly community, we decided to use the English version of the companies' websites and reports, except for the case when the most recent version was only available in Turkish. Yet, the quality of the English translation

varied and in some cases seemed to have resulted in rather unusual phrases and wording (e.g., “reverse mentality process” to describe the effects of age differences). In these cases, we went back to the Turkish original and discussed the words’ meaning carefully within the research team, to ensure a common understanding of the text.

7. Conclusion

Following calls for more context-specific analyses of diversity (Farndale et al., 2015; Jonsen et al., 2011; Klarsfeld et al., 2019), we investigated organizational diversity discourses in Turkey and present a framework that advances theorizing on the discursive construction of diversity subjects. More specifically, we show how the discursive construction of diversity subjects cannot only be characterized by variation in visibility of diversity dimensions and related discourses but also display different levels of contestation regarding the discursive meaning and people’s ‘proper’ place in society. Our framework may serve future work to enhance explanations of how visibility of diversity discourses and context-dependent discursive contestations on meaning go along with different discursive dynamics that have material consequences for people at work (Ahonen et al., 2014; Bendl et al., 2014; Özbilgin & Tatli, 2011; Özbilgin & Yalkin, 2019).

With Turkey we chose a country that is undergoing drastic political changes in recent years that attract the global community’s attention. These developments risk to create a toxic climate for diversity, with many people pushed to the margin or out of the labor market altogether. Thus, we hope that our study inspires more context-sensitive research on diversity to consider a country’s political environment, in particular during these times of increasing right-wing populism (Cumming et al., 2020; Muis & Immerzeel, 2017).

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Angela Kornau: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Resources, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Project administration. **Lena Knappert:** Conceptualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Duygu Acar Erdur:** Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors report no declarations of interest.

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