

# Manifesto for Our Times: Theorising and Demonstrating “Affective Bridges” for Intersectional Feminist Coalitions

Dilara Asardag 

Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences, Tampere University, Finland

**Correspondence:** Dilara Asardag ([dilara.asardag@tuni.fi](mailto:dilara.asardag@tuni.fi))

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## Abstract

The article proposes the theoretical concept of “affective bridges” to describe “affective connection,” “solidarity practice,” or “political articulation” that elevates intersectionality within feminist and trans activisms in Turkey through its three elements: experience, movement, and discourse/action. It explores the emergence of affective bridges for bodily autonomy, against femicides and gender-based violence, as well as against the specific anti-gender backlash conditions created by anti-gender networked authoritarianism in Turkey. Turkey was chosen for the case study to build, establish, and demonstrate this concept, but the concept is intended to be applicable transnationally, particularly in countries where global political events have local ramifications and where such forms of intersectional solidarity, coalitions, and collaboration are needed.

## Keywords

affective bridges; bodily autonomy; digital feminist activism; femicide; gender-based violence; intersectional feminist solidarity; performative theory of assembly; right to appear; space of appearance

## 1. Introduction

There is currently an escalating transnational anti-gender backlash, along with the existence of transnational trans-exclusionary discourses by right-wing actors (e.g., US President Trump, Turkish President Erdoğan, and Russian President Putin), trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs; see the UK and Turkey), and a post-truth scenario with rising levels of disinformation (Asardag & Donders, 2021). In the face of these current realities, by seeking to comprehend the polyvocal public sphere, recent research demonstrates how queer and feminist issues are endorsed in digital spaces and how diverse actors are offered a new arena to “speak up and talk back”

while building resistance transnationally (Sorce & Thomas, 2025, p. 5; see also Baer, 2016; Bayramoğlu, 2025; Fuentes, 2019; Mukherjee et al., 2023; Olson, 2016; Pain, 2020; Puente, 2025; Rentschler, 2017; Şener, 2021; Williams, 2016). Understood from bell hooks's perspective, when performed in a public setting, speaking up holds performative power as it invites co-witnessing and sharing in dissent through solidarity (Puente, 2025; Sorce & Thomas, 2025). However, this comprehension of "witnessing" and "co-witnessing" can still point to more individual, individualised, and passive understandings of solidarity transnationally. Relatedly, despite the immense potential offered by digital platforms for feminist debates and activism (Chamberlain, 2016; Munroe, 2013; Rivers, 2017), academic research has shown that digital feminist activism may not have contributed to intersectionality as expected. For example, feminist scholars have asked why a movement such as #MeToo in the West has had an impact only when wealthy and often white cis women joined the movement, excluding trans women of colour or gender non-conforming people and indigenous women, when the issues of violence and assault have long been key struggles in feminist, women of colour, and trans activism(s) (Koivunen et al., 2018, p. 3).

In the context of authoritarian Turkey, previous studies have demonstrated how intersectional feminists establish strong solidarity networks online especially against femicides, violence against women, and anti-gender narratives (Büyükgöze, 2025; Eslen-Ziya, 2013; Şener, 2021; Yüce & Çatalbaş, 2023). However, recent research suggests that feminist activists need to more specifically consider the existence of the anti-gender movement in Turkey (Eslen-Ziya, 2022; Eslen-Ziya & Bjørnholt, 2023; Özbay & Ipekci, 2024; Özkazanç, 2019, 2020; Ural & Eslen-Ziya, 2024), especially the conditions created by the anti-gender networked authoritarianism (Asardag, in press) that emerges under the themes of: political repression, state violence, and criminalisation of dissent; economic precarity, intersectionality, and systemic exclusion; rising levels of online misogyny, trolls, and disinformation; algorithmic invisibility and moral regulation; individualising tendencies within feminism; and the affective condition of impasse. This recent research highlights that, in addition to fighting against the rising numbers of femicides and gender-based violence, intersectional feminists must also consider fighting against the anti-gender backlash, especially against gender-critical Islamic actors, male violence, institutions, policies, and discourses but also gender-critical Islamic feminists, TERFs, and the rising levels of oppression, criminalisation of dissent, misogyny, disinformation, surveillance, and moral regulation in Turkey (Asardag, in press).

Taking the aforementioned realities into account, how can new forms of alliances be established within transnational feminist activism and action? Although the feminist movement in Turkey is already intersectional, renewed efforts and affective bridges between the feminist and trans movements are needed to keep the solidarity engaging and alive. According to Braidotti (2019), "affirmative ethics"—"the pursuit of affirmative values and relations" (Braidotti, 2022, p. 9)—is also needed to enact a collective political praxis of hope, compassion, and transformation. Articulations of feminist digital geographies of hope against fear and hatred can emerge beyond the online-offline division through affective bridges. This article is an original contribution to the *Digital Geographies of Hope* thematic issue, as the affective bridges concept seeks to illustrate how "affective connections," "solidarity practices," and "political articulations" between the feminist and trans movements foster mutual opening, enabling participants to attune to one another's bodies, experiences, and emotions. This enhances feminist intersectionality and further leads to hopeful, compassionate forms of digital feminist activism in Turkey. My positionality as a pansexual intersectional feminist and LGBTIQ+ rights activist has enabled me to develop an in-depth understanding of the research context, to gain access to the field, and to form trusted relations with the research participants (Ghaffari,

2019). At the same time, however, it requires critical reflection and the ability to maintain a critical distance in the interpretative analysis. Since I am located in Finland, my positionality also provides an outsider status that can make it easier for some of the participants, particularly in restricted contexts, to confide in me and share their experiences, as argued by Bukamal (2022). Thus, my positionality becomes relevant in different stages of the research in different ways and requires reflexivity along the way.

In the affective bridges concept, “affect” is understood as a form of intensity and drive that can create a subjectively felt bridge for personal transformation that also brings people together in “spaces of appearance” (Butler, 2015) beyond the online–offline division to exercise their “right to appear” through words, discourses, and actions. Hence, the affective bridges concept has three elements: experience (intensity and drive), movement (human and non-human), and discourse/action.

Section 2 elaborates on the affective bridges concept which brings together the performative theory of assembly and space of appearance (Butler, 2015) as well as affect theory on material and discursive levels (Ahmed, 2004a; Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). After this, the methodology is presented, followed by an empirical analysis of two spaces of appearance (Butler, 2015) for affective intersectional feminist solidarity through the lens of affective bridges.

## 2. Conceptualising Affective Bridges

### 2.1. *Performative Theory of Assembly and Space of Appearance*

To conceptualise affective bridges and to comprehend how they materialise in digital platforms’ spaces of appearance, I refer to Judith Butler (2015). Comprehending bodies as plural forms of performative action, Butler (2015) argues that precarity—“the politically induced situation in which certain populations suffer more from failing social and economic networks of support [and] become differentially exposed to injury, violence[,] and death” (p. 33)—has been a galvanising force in today’s highly visible protests. For her, precarity gathers together women, queers, and transgender people, among other marginalised people. The feminist movement and trans liberation should not be construed as different from each other but as accompanying, enriching, and feeding into each other.

Bringing together performativity and precarity theories, Butler (2015, pp. 27–28) suggests how we can consider the right to appear as a coalitional framework that would merge gender and sexual minorities with more generally precarious populations. She extends performativity theory beyond speech acts to include the concerted actions of the body and connects assembly with precarity by pointing out that a body suffering under conditions of precarity still persists and resists, and that mobilisation tends to generate these two corporeal dimensions. While the public assemblies make the bodies that require basic freedoms of movement visible, these assemblies also expose coercive practices in prison, the dismantling of social democracy, and the continued demand for authorizing marginalized lives as “mattering” (Butler, 2015). Assembly, for Butler (2015), is the potential to appear and to embrace the right to appear.

Butler’s (2015, p. 77) “public assembly of bodies” draws on Hannah Arendt’s reconceptualisation of the political as the space of appearance where the political is grounded in the public and the public is comprehended as the in-between that brings the political into being. As argued by Butler, referring to Arendt (1998), to be truly

political, the space of appearance (polis, the square) must include engagements/participations other than those specifically directed towards political action, such as speeches on public squares (Nikunen, 2018, p. 5).

Butler (2015) utilises the concept of the space of appearance to describe the conditions needed for political articulation/action, visibility, and recognition. For her, the spaces of appearance are the public spaces—in our case, the spaces beyond the online–offline division—where individuals assemble together through their discourses and actions to establish their realities and subjectivities while claiming their rights and lives. Butler (2015) expands this by analysing how these spaces are constituted by the bodies of those who assemble, their material needs, and their continuous struggle for their right to be recognised as part of the political community. The right to appear, on the other hand, points towards the individual and collective political claim(s) to visibility and existence made by individuals and groups, particularly marginalised ones, through public assemblies. It is a performative act that focuses on individuals' and groups' right to be seen and recognised by challenging established political and social norms that hinder who is considered human and worthy of rights.

What are the contributions of spaces of appearance and the right to appear? The notion of a space of appearance provides a conceptual language with which to describe the inter-corporeal dimensions of political assembly. Moreover, the performative theory of assembly and the space of appearance contribute to the affective bridges concept, especially through the right to appear under extreme precarity and authoritarian conditions.

Every affective bridge formation can be materialised—that is, enabled through a space of appearance beyond the online–offline division. This is where, starting from individuals, collectives exercise their right to appear through words, discourses, and actions, and assemble with the most marginalised others to assist them in exercising their right to appear. Under everyday authoritarian conditions (e.g., political repression, state violence, and criminalisation of dissent), such as those in Turkey, feminists and LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer or questioning; the plus sign signifies other identities not openly listed [Equality Project]) activists can be labelled as criminals and terrorists both due to their everyday street appearance as well as their online presence. For example, women's and transgender people's right to appear against femicides and gender-based violence and to affirm their bodily autonomy through words, discourses, and actions in digital platforms' spaces of appearance can become intrinsically linked with every other struggle to appear online and beyond the online–offline division without violence. To further conceptualise affective bridges and comprehend how affect as intensity and drive invigorates this form of feminist activism, affect must be comprehended on the material and discursive levels.

## ***2.2. Affect on the Material and Discursive Levels***

The second dimension that appears relevant for the affective bridges concept is connected to the way affect can affirmatively operate across the material and discursive levels for intersectional feminist activism by creatively combining different theoretical understandings of it, such as Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) non-representational comprehension of it as intensity and becoming, and Ahmed's (2004a) discursive, experience-based, and socially constructed comprehension of it. Deleuze and Guattari (1994, pp. 169, 173–174) define affect as an excessive range of connections. Notably, this understanding of affect (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), in emphasising the body's ability to affect and be affected, removes boundaries between

humans and other animals, between objects and subjects, and between nature and culture, and shifts the attention to the mobility and flow of the body's current and possible states (Wetherell, 2012, p. 75). In other words, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) comprehend the body as a continuously flowing process of simultaneous messages and stimuli that has no clear boundaries, only porous interfaces. This porous body can form countless assemblages with any other body, forming an affective assemblage exchanging actions and passions.

However, affect is not only a subjectively felt intensity, drive, and consequent bridge to the other that creates an experience but is also discursively expressed, represented, circulated, and mediated, as well as it "sticks" (Ahmed, 2004a). Ahmed (2004b, p. 119) argues that through discursive means, emotions "do things" and align individuals with communities through the intensity of their attachments. This approach conceives emotions as relational and shaped through contact with objects by evoking the phenomenological notion of experience as "lived conjunction" (Ahmed, 2004a, pp. 4, 6–7; Koivunen, 2010, p. 14). Accordingly, it is through emotions and how we respond to objects and others that surfaces or boundaries are established; the "I" and "we" are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others (Ahmed, 2004a, pp. 8–10; Koivunen, 2010, p. 14). In this sense, emotions become a site of embodied meaning-making and social ordering, a process through which boundaries of communities are articulated and re-articulated (Koivunen, 2010, p. 14). According to Ahmed (2004a), knowledge is intimately connected with what leads us to sweat, shudder, and tremble, feelings sensed on the bodily skin surface, where we touch and are touched by the world. Thus, it is important to reflect on the building up and stickiness of emotions such as anger, rage, sadness, and cynicism, and their transformative potential into hope, joy, desire, and drive through affective bridges. Affect, understood in this way, can then align bodies and carry transformative potential in a feminist political struggle.

### 3. Methodology

The empirical material of this article includes two case studies of intersectional feminist activism. Although these two cases refer back to activism in 2021 and 2022, they were pivotal moments of activism that are still prominent today. Inspired by Markham's (2018) comprehension of ethnography in the digital era, the feminist assemblage ethnography adopted in this article involves: reminiscing core events; digital auto-activism archives as entry points; screenshots/captures of activist moments; and saving, tracing, scrolling, following, and in-depth reading of and reflection on Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) posts and conducting interviews.

Through auto-ethnography (Markham, 2018, p. 1146) and self-reflection exercises, obtaining nuanced layers of meaning about how people experience everyday life in digitally saturated social contexts is possible. As auto-ethnography (Markham, 2018, p. 1146) offered an entry point to this feminist assemblage ethnography, I collected screenshots of my March 7–13, 2021, digital activism archives (also part of my mental notes) in my Instagram account. The first case study concerned #SiziBirakmayacağız hashtag research data that involved building affective bridges through intersectional feminist solidarity with Kurdish trans women. The data were collected from March 7, 2021, using the search term "#SiziBirakmayacağız." Overall, 145 posts that used this hashtag were identified, and 10 typical posts on March 7 were selected and saved on Instagram for in-depth reading and observation, after which screenshots of them were taken.

Small-data approaches relying primarily on qualitative analysis offer “a granularity of detail that might otherwise be lost in large-scale data visualisations that value the quantitative over the qualitative” (Losh, 2015, p. 1650; see also Laestadius, 2017). Thus, both in the first and second spaces of appearance, a small sample size was intentionally selected. The data collected for the second case were related to the March 5–8, 2022 Women’s Day March from the public X account of a TERF group (anonymised). In this second case, after identifying the visible TERF group, I scrolled through their X account and identified their posts related to their involvement in the March 8 Women’s Day March. This process brought me to other videos and posts in which this TERF group could be seen as having been repudiated by intersectional feminists. These data were obtained through virtual ethnography and participant observation of the two cases on social media (Hines, 2015).

I also carried out nine interviews in July–September 2023 with grassroots feminist activists or female nongovernmental organisation workers, as well as journalists and lawyers whose work included feminist and LGBTIQ+ individuals or whose daily practices involved some forms of feminist online/offline activism. The interviewees’ affiliations were as follows: Cinsel Şiddetle Mücadele Derneği (Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence), Mental Clitoris Podcast, BIANET platform (an independent news agency based in Beyoğlu, Istanbul), Kırmızı Şemsiye Cinsel Sağlık ve İnsan Hakları Derneği (Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association), 17 Mayıs Derneği (May 17 Association), Pembe Hayat LGBTİ+ Dayanışma Derneği (Pink Life LGBTI+ Solidarity Association), Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı (Purple Roof Women’s Shelter Foundation), Feminist Movement in Turkey, LGBTI Equal Rights Association for Western Balkans and Turkey, Velvele.net (an LGBTIQ+ media collective), 8 Mart Feminist Gece Yürüyüşü (8th March Feminist Night March), Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu (We Will Stop Femicides Platform), and Barış İçin Kadın Girişimi (Women’s Initiative for Peace). The interviewees were selected through a mixture of snowballing and online observation (mainly on Instagram and X). Each interview included about 10 open-ended questions and lasted approximately an hour. In the interviews, I inquired about the perceived role and purposes of social media platforms and the interviewees’ perceptions about affect and intersectionality in digital feminist activism. The interview data were later analysed through thematic content analysis (Anderson, 2007). The interview participants and their positions can be observed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Interviewees and their positions.

Interview Participant	Job Position
Interviewee 1	Journalist, activist, podcast producer
Interviewee 2	Journalist, editor, activist
Interviewee 3	Human resources expert, feminist (but does not define herself as an activist)
Interviewee 4	Individual trans activist, international relations coordinator
Interviewee 5	Activist
Interviewee 6	Activist, consultant for civil society groups, editor
Interviewee 7	Sociologist, independent activist
Interviewee 8	Lawyer, social media coordinator
Interviewee 9	Journalist

Although the data sample (both Instagram and X activism posts and interviews) was small, primarily focused on intersectional feminist activism arising from big cities such as Istanbul and Ankara, and not representative of the whole of Turkey, the approach used allowed for a deep, qualitative engagement with key activist

moments and the interviewees' multi-layered experiences and perceptions. Moreover, although auto-ethnographic encounters are important, they cannot be generalised.

Due to privacy and surveillance concerns regarding Turkey's authoritarian conditions, I sent an information sheet about the research's purposes and content to the interviewees, and all the interviewees cited in this article signed consent forms approving their participation in the study. In addition to interviewees, I also obtained my contact/friend's consent for publishing her name as part of the auto-ethnography. However, during the study, I took into account the ethical guidelines provided by AoIR (Association of Internet Researchers; Franzke et al., 2020) to reduce harm to the research participants and anyone else whose full names and pictures might appear in the article as part of the research data. Due to my research being politically sensitive as it involved women activists, minorities, and LGBTIQ+ communities' accounts, the account names and handles reflecting private names were anonymised. These sensitive data were stored securely in the university repository, and only my primary supervisor and I had access to them.

## 4. Imagining and Comprehending Affective Bridges

### 4.1. Space of Appearance One: Affective Bridges with Kurdish Trans Women Through #SiziBırakmayacağız (#WeWillNotLeaveYou)

The first space of appearance concerned the analysis of the #SiziBırakmayacağız hashtag which involved intersectional feminist activism and solidarity with Kurdish trans women. After Kurdish trans women were brutally detained by the police, the #SiziBırakmayacağız hashtag appeared on Instagram. Feminist and LGBTIQ+ activists started sharing Instagram posts with this hashtag, elevating the importance of intersectionality, solidarity, and togetherness against the patriarchal state structure and violence beyond the online-offline division. In a multi-layered and multidimensional country such as Turkey, where there are many disparities with regard to, for example, the socioeconomic situation, ethnic identity, class, sexual orientation, and political opinions, social media—according to the interviewees—became a great tool for *revealing data* and stories about women and LGBTIQ+ people across all these differences and distinctions while creating *visibility*. Interviewee 4, a trans feminist activist, stated the following:

I think digital platforms are effective, especially in terms of political organisation. Beyond being physically organised, they also help the stories and problems experienced by different women and *lubunya* [queer] from Hakkari to Tekirdağ, from Ordu to Antakya Samandağ, to become accessible, heard, communicated, and publicised. Using hashtags is a good strategy; you can at least capture everything falling under them as data. They also provide visibility. If they get interactions and are planned correctly, they can help an issue become visible instantly, for an hour, two hours....

Moreover, according to Interviewee 1, a feminist activist and journalist, digital platforms clearly have a role in “political organisation” and can sometimes be regarded as a last resort when it comes to justice seeking in Turkey, while allowing for self-transformation:

I think social media is very effective in organising any kind of action—digital or street action—or for other rights-based political motives. While there are so many restrictions due to censorship in Turkey, it has become very common to bring visibility through social media, to convey a demand for rights, and



to use social media as a tool in this search for justice, which is a distant dream. For some, social media can assassinate one's reputation, but for others, fighting for justice is their last option. We also use social media to create new words, change, and transform.

By embodying the aforementioned non-human agency, feminist activism and solidarity online, especially in the form of hashtags, act as spaces of appearance for materialising hopeful formations of affective bridges in discursive and material means.

To illustrate the foregoing, in the annual March 8 march organised in Istanbul, trans women were brutally detained by the police. Not being attuned to the struggle of trans women within the intersectional feminist movement in Turkey and around the world in previous years, that year, I remember sharing KAOS GL's post with the hashtag #SiziBırakmayacağız (#WeWillNotLeaveYou), as well as KAOS GL's post showing two banners from the march saying "trans rights are human rights!" and "you go crazy; I will live no matter what!" Not only did I engage in that year's feminist march beyond the online-offline division, but my previous affective connection and encounter with a transgender friend of mine online, which transformed me, also led to an affective connection or bridge to other transgender people within the feminist movement in Turkey for allyship without any previous personal experiences and connections with them.

Thus, social media activism also creates "remembrance and data memorialization" through digital archives. Interviewee 6, an editor and feminist activist, shared the following: "I think digital platforms are very important. We are going through a particularly difficult period in Turkey. During such times, keeping memory is very important, especially as it creates a permanent resource."

As digital archives and remembrance are important components of digital feminist activism, auto-archival, auto-ethnographical, and auto-activist memories can also act as openings for entering the field, as mentioned earlier (Markham, 2018), for starting the feminist assemblage ethnography. Reminiscing and resurrecting personal memories through feminist reflexivity can assist in comprehending, internalising, and demonstrating such forms of online feminist activism as first instances of affective bridges and as "echoes of experience" (Nikunen, 2023). It was spring 2020 when I met for the first time, coincidentally on Instagram, a transgender friend of mine who worked as a cultural consultant for the Netflix mini-series *Unorthodox* (about a young ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman who flees her arranged marriage and religious community to start a new life abroad), which I watched during the Covid-19 lockdown. Before that year, I considered myself an intersectional feminist, but transgender rights had never been a focal point of concern for me as a feminist researcher/activist. We followed each other on Instagram through stories and posts, and we met a few times through the Instagram video function because she lives in New York. After a while, she came out as transgender on her Instagram account and started identifying with the pronoun she/her. She invited me to an Instagram live session while taking her hormone pills, reciting a Jewish blessing, and celebrating the sixth month since her transition. Since that day, I have been reading the stories she shared on her Instagram account and have learnt much about transgender issues and the injustice experienced by trans people, especially trans women.

As I was open to the experiences of another woman, in which I was invited to participate, I realised the brutal injustices she had been exposed to, which I had not. Thus, an affective bridge emerged between us, beyond online and offline. Not only did I participate in an Instagram live session that she initiated, but an affective



bridge also materialised between us through Instagram's spaces of appearance when I commented on her posts, engaged with and participated in her stories, and shared stories supporting her journey of becoming. This case is an example of the ways in which these participations and interactions imbued with drive and intensity can have a transformative effect on a person. What starts as anger and rage over the injustices one has experienced can transform into hopeful and joyful solidarities. Taking into account three dimensions of affective bridges, what started as an affective bridge (as experience) by participating in the life experiences of another transgender woman (my friend), created a movement towards other transgender people, and led to trans-inclusive intersectional feminist discourses and actions in the spaces of appearance of digital platforms (as can be seen from examples above). So this case shows how the three dimensions of experience (intensity), movement, and discourse operate in digital space to create a connection and a drive towards transgender people, trans women especially, and their cause.

Interviewee 3 made the following compelling argument about the importance of affect and emotions in queer/feminist politics and activism:

Our body is the area of struggle. We see emotions as deriving from that body and against rationality. Our education has been in that direction since primary school, and this is what society imposes on us. However, a body politic cannot be made without emotions. When women and LGBTIQ+ people show their anger, they are always thought of as marginal and incredibly shameful....These discussions allowed me to take ownership of my anger and make peace with it. I feel anger over a very serious injustice, and this is quite normal. This also makes one more confident when one does politics on the street; it transforms feminist activism's production and articulation.

The above interview quote demonstrates how affect operates as a drive to invigorate solidarity but also transforms anger and rage into hope. Affect, in affective bridges, accommodates and leads to the desire, drive, and move to transform the affective dissonance experience of anger, rage, sadness, cynicism, and despair into emotions such as hope through emergence.

In the March 8 Women's Day rally organised on March 6 at the Kadıköy Pier in Istanbul, the police did not allow rainbow flags or umbrellas to be brought into the protest area. A group of trans+ activists/protesters who attended the rally were brutally attacked by the police. Five Kurdish trans women and LGBTIQ+ activists, who were detained while being beaten, were fined TL 3,500, based on Public Hygiene Law No. 1593. One of the activists, Güneş, recounted their experience in a news article:

When we first entered the area with our banners and slogans, we stated that we would enter with a group of trans+ people, and the police told our friends, "They cannot enter with this banner." A few of my feminist friends said, "They will not let you in, but we will be with you. We will resist; we will fight." As we entered the area with slogans, the police started to directly attack our banner and us. (Karakuş & Karakuş, 2022)

Ağrın, an activist, also stated:

At the rally stage, we wanted to reveal the violence we had been experiencing, but the women who formed a circle didn't allow us to do this. So, the two opposing groups both consisted of women.

I think that whatever those women's reason was for barring us from revealing the violence we had been experiencing, no one among them, despite their being cis, trans, bisexual, or lesbian, had ever experienced the violence that we Kurdish trans women had experienced. Thus, the problem is not just about being trans, but it is also related to Kurdish identity. Thus, I feel the need to ask why we were not allowed to deliver a better speech on the stage. (Karakuş & Karakuş, 2022)

The instance recounted above is a living testimony to the brutal state and police violence in Turkey, depriving the most marginalised people of bodily autonomy and freedom of speech, criminalising dissent, and the divisions created between some feminists and trans people. After the brutal March 8, 2021, feminist march incident, the hashtag #SiziBırakmayacağız became visible through the spaces of appearance on social media (Butler, 2015, p. 55). In this way, feminist activists were able to establish and materialise affective connections or bridges through intersectional feminist solidarity by sharing words, images, and hashtags in the spaces of appearance on Instagram.

The Instagram post of a university women+ community (anonymised) shown in Figure 1 features the trans women whose detention spurred the creation of #SiziBırakmayacağız with the colours purple (the colour of the feminist movement) and blue and pink (the transgender flag colours).



**Figure 1.** Screenshot of a #SiziBırakmayacağız hashtag post endorsing intersectional feminist struggle against patriarchal state structure. Note: Translation of the second part of the of the post—“Against the fascist, homophobic, patriarchal state, we are together. Detentions and arrests will not wither our colours. We will take our friends; you can drown in hate!”

With the hashtag #SiziBırakmayacağız (both as a usual hashtag and as appearing in the image), and as discursively materialised in the caption of the aforementioned post, with words such as “we,” “togetherness,”

“solidarity,” and “variety of colours,” affective connections or bridges among the people in the feminist movement are elevated against the hatred of the fascist, homophobic, patriarchal state of Turkey.

Shown in Figure 2 is another post by another university women+ community (anonymised) with the motto “women are rebelling from lecture halls to the streets!” and with the same visuals presented.

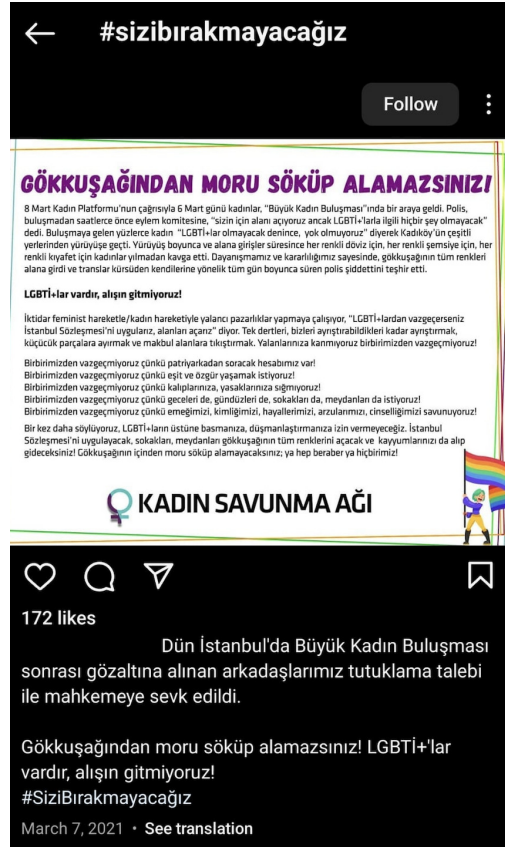


**Figure 2.** Screenshot of a #SiziBırakmayacağız hashtag post elevating togetherness and intersectionality. Note: Translation of the second part of the post—“We will not give up defending the rainbow and our lives. You will get used to it!”

In the aforementioned post, affective bridges materialised discursively through the word “rainbow,” symbolising the LGBTIQ+ community, and the community members were elevated by their defence of intersectionality, solidarity, inclusivity, multiplicity, love, and life, depicted in all shades of the community’s colours.

Moreover, according to an independent feminist network/organisation (anonymised), as can be read in Figure 3, just hours before the March 6 event organised by 8th March Women’s Platform, the police told the action committee, “We’re opening the area for you, but there should be nothing related to LGBTIQ.” However, hundreds of women who came to the meeting replied, “We won’t disappear when we’re told that there will be no LGBTIQs,” and they marched from various parts of Kadıköy. Throughout the march and at all the entrances to the area, women fought tirelessly for every coloured banner, umbrella, and piece of clothing. Thanks to their solidarity and determination, all the colours of the rainbow were able to enter the area, and trans people exposed the police violence against them that continued all day long.

So in this other important post related to the same event, the same independent feminist network (anonymised) shared an important manifesto-like activist statement (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Screenshot of #SiziBırakmayacağız hashtag post articulating intersectional feminist manifesto-like statements. Note: Partial translation—"The government is trying to strike false negotiations with the feminist/women's movement. They say that if we give up on LGBTIQ people, they will implement the Istanbul Convention and open up the spaces. Their only concern is to separate us as much as they can, to divide us into small pieces and cram us into acceptable spaces. We are not fooled by your lies, we are not giving up on each other."

In the aforementioned section of the post, the feminist network built affective bridges with LGBTIQ people by criticising the government's anti-gender backlash and attempts to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention by posing LGBTIQ+ people as scapegoats, as well as the government's attempts at creating division, separation, and discrimination within the feminist movement and against LGBTIQ+ people, especially transgender people. They also implicitly criticised the government's public morality arguments by pointing out that the government was trying to squeeze women and LGBTIQ+ into "acceptable spaces."

The aforementioned feminist network also said:

We don't fall for your lies; we don't give up on each other!

We don't give up on each other because we have something to ask from the patriarchy!

We don't give up on each other because we want to live equally and freely!

We don't give up on each other because we don't fit into your moulds and prohibitions!

We don't give up on each other because we want the streets and squares day and night!

We don't give up on each other because we defend our labor, our identity, our dreams, our desires, and our sexuality!

In response to an environment of distorted notions of truth and anti-gender backlash, affective bridges were formed among women as they used the pronoun “we” and said, “We don't fall for your lies; we don't give up on each other.” The pronoun “we” materialised the affective bridge in the post because it signified togetherness, intersectionality, and inclusivity, and referred to women and LGBTIQ+.

The aforementioned post also stated:

We say it once more. We won't allow you to step on LGBTIQ+ people and turn them into enemies. You will implement the Istanbul Convention, open the streets and squares to all the colours of the rainbow, and take your *kayyums* and leave. You won't be able to take the purple out of the rainbow—either all of us or none of us!

In the statement above, the words “all the colours of the rainbow” again materialise affective bridges, solidarity, and togetherness because purple (the feminist movement's colour) cannot be separated from the other colours of the rainbow (LGBTIQ+). The metaphoric alignment of colours is followed by solidarity in relation to the Istanbul Convention, which is expected to be implemented for the benefit not only of women but also of LGBTIQ+.

The aforementioned examples illustrate how affect is not only a subjectively felt intensity, drive, or dissonance that results in an experience of personal transformation and bearing witness (experience as feeling for someone) but also a consequent drive or move in the form of emergence, a bridge to others, and is also discursively expressed, circulated, and mediated (Ahmed, 2004a). As in the case of the #SiziBırakmayacağız hashtag, which formed affective bridges, emotions “do things”—they align individuals with communities, or bodily space with social space, through the intensity of their attachments (Ahmed, 2004b). By adopting the hashtag #SiziBırakmayacağız in Instagram's spaces of appearance, feminist activists could build and express affective connections and bridges through discourses and actions upholding intersectional feminist solidarity.

#### ***4.2. Space of Appearance Two: Affective Bridges With Trans Women Through Resistance Against a TERF Group***

In Turkey, the anti-gender backlash and violence are perpetrated not only by the government, the police, and affiliated civil society actors but also by TERF groups. It can also be argued that transnational TERF groups and conservative governments, civil society actors, and the police forces can articulate and materialise their own version of affective bridges by building solidarity among themselves and against trans activists, allies,

and intersectional feminists. Thus, I argue that digital platforms can also offer a space of appearance for intersectional feminists “to speak up and talk back” at TERF discourses in the spirit of bell hooks’s passionate politics (Sorce & Thomas, 2025). This can also be done by making visible the ways in which TERF groups can be spatially and discursively repudiated by intersectional feminist activists (“acts of repudiation”) through boundary-setting beyond the online–offline division while establishing solidarity with trans women. Feminism, as Butler (2024) argues, has always been a struggle for justice formed in alliance and affirming difference. Trans-exclusionary feminism is not feminism—or rather, it should not be (Butler, 2024, p. 168). Thus, in this second case, I will demonstrate “speak-outs” and “talk-backs” as well as acts of repudiation and boundary settings against TERFs online.

When I came across the mentioned anti-gender, TERF group (anonymised) from Turkey, I scrolled through their X account and realised the post thread they shared on March 5, 2022, right before that year’s March 8 rally, that confirmed their participation in the women’s march to amplify the voices of “biological” women and channel their anger by discriminating specifically against trans women, as well as trans people and gender-queer people, through the hashtag #sexnotgender. This post in Figure 4 below, written in English, not in Turkish, demonstrates the transnational connections between TERFs and how TERFs have been arising out of academic discussions in the Turkish context.



**Figure 4.** Screenshot of the TERF group’s (anonymised) post confirming their discrimination against transgender people.

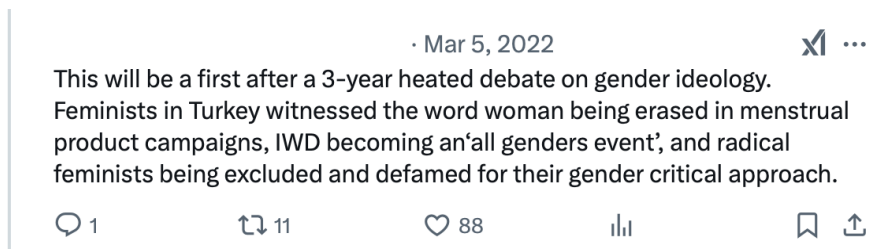
By resorting to a discourse of victimhood and claiming that gender is an “ideological capture,” to prove their point, with the hashtag #women, the aforementioned feminist group continued their discourses as shown in Figure 5.





**Figure 5.** Screenshot of the TERF group's (anonymised) post articulating their discrimination against transgender people and their statements of victimhood.

The statement above, shared by the TERF group (anonymised), seemed to articulate an inclusive call, but in reality, through gender criticality, it left out trans people and gender-queer people and continued with the rumination shown in Figure 6.



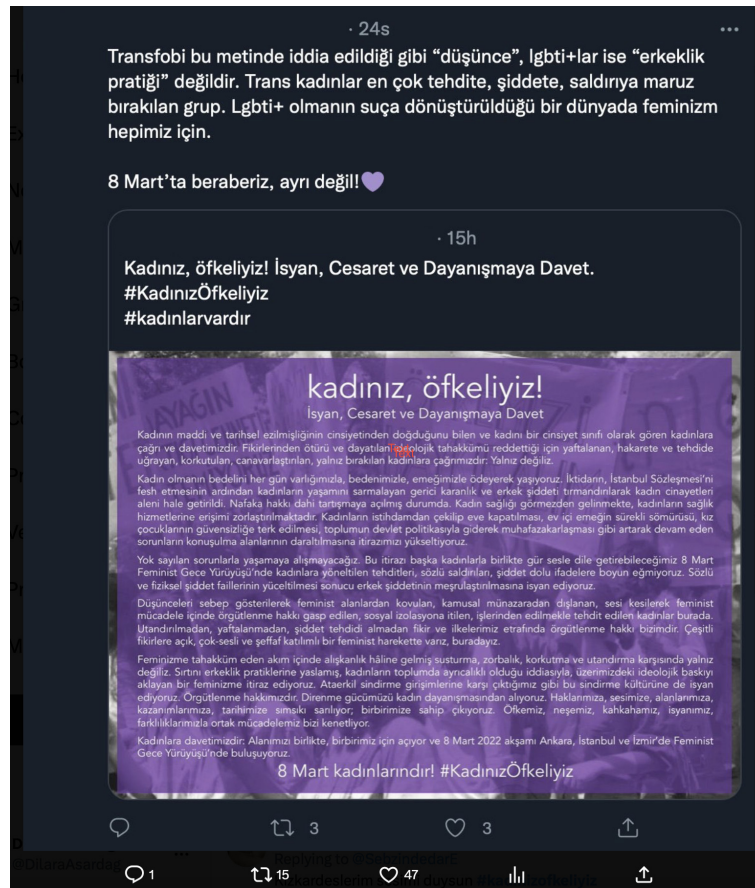
**Figure 6.** Screenshot of the TERF group's (anonymised) post and their continuation of victimhood statements as well as their critique of "gender."

The aforementioned group also reshared others' posts with statements insulting trans women, such as "Amin Kumbara Değildir Gülsüm, Pezevenklere İnanma" (your pussy is not a piggy bank, Gülsüm; don't believe the pimps), "Rıza Satın Alınamaz" (consent cannot be bought), "Kadın Kadındır, Cis Babandır" (woman is woman, cis is your dad), "Fuhuş Öldürür, Kadın Dayanışması Yaşatır" (prostitution kills; women's solidarity saves lives), "Kuir Değil, Lezbiyeniz" (we are not queer but lesbian), "Porno Kadın Düşmanlığıdır" (porn is misogyny), and "Cis Ney Kız Adımızı da mı Unuttun?" (what is cis, girl? Did you forget our names too?). As Butler (2024) argues, TERFs oppose trans women's basic claims for self-determination, freedom and autonomy, and rights of protection from violence and access to public space and healthcare without discrimination, all of which are rights that they, as feminists, also fight for. With this emphasis on identitarian claims and unsubstantial fears, TERFs' activism contributes to anti-gender phantasm without any interest in coalitions or resistance against the rise of the Right.



In reality, trans people face atrocious violence and other rights violations all over the world, with a striking rise in anti-trans legislation and hate speech globally, and Turkey is no exception to this (Güler, 2020). Previous ethnographic research (Güler, 2020) showed how, at the urban margins, encountering intense police surveillance, societal discrimination, and a lack of other employment options leads trans women sex workers to self-organise, creating networks of care and community for visibility and against shame and despair in Turkey. Despite the differences between trans women's, cis women's, and feminists' experiences, women+ should be able to build affective bridges for bodily autonomy against anti-gender backlash, gender-based violence, and state oppression.

Moreover, as shown in Figure 7, X's account (anonymised)—a lesbian, feminist, and journalist—by articulating affective bridges with trans people and by being inclusive of all LGBTIQ+ people, responds—in hooks's (1989, as cited in Sorce & Thomas, 2025, pp. 1–2) words, “speaks up and talks back”—to the TERFs' official statement in Turkish with a comment on a X post and by resharing the TERF post. In fact, some would also argue that by resharing the actual TERF post and not cancelling it, she contributed to the amplification and visibility of TERFs. However, she emphasised togetherness and solidarity with transgender people in her comment below.



**Figure 7.** Screenshot of a “speak-up, talk-back” against TERFs. Note: Translation of the post—“Transphobia is not a ‘thought’ or ‘opinion,’ as they are claimed to be in these statements, and LGBTIQ+ are not ‘a practice of masculinity.’ Trans women are the most marginalised group, facing discrimination and exposed to violence. In a world where LGBTIQ+ are constantly exposed to criminalisation, feminism is for everybody. On March 8, we will be together; we will not be separate!”

X's statement "feminism is for everybody" reminds me of a book with the same title by the well-known feminist author bell hooks (2000) in which she defines feminism as a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression, and demonstrates how feminism is not about divisions but is, in fact, a political movement for everybody. Feminism is for everybody because not only cis women but also trans women, not only cis men but also trans men—all genders—should be encouraged to embrace it. A passionate, rebellious, radical, visionary feminism that combats sexism, racism, and classism is the kind of feminism bell hooks imagined (Sorce & Thomas, 2025, p. 1).

According to hooks (1989, as cited in Sorce & Thomas, 2025, p. 2) when performed in a public setting, speaking up holds performative power because it encourages co-witnessing and sharing in dissent through solidarity. She comprehends this experience as empowering:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonised, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of 'talking back' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice. (hooks, 1989, p. 9).

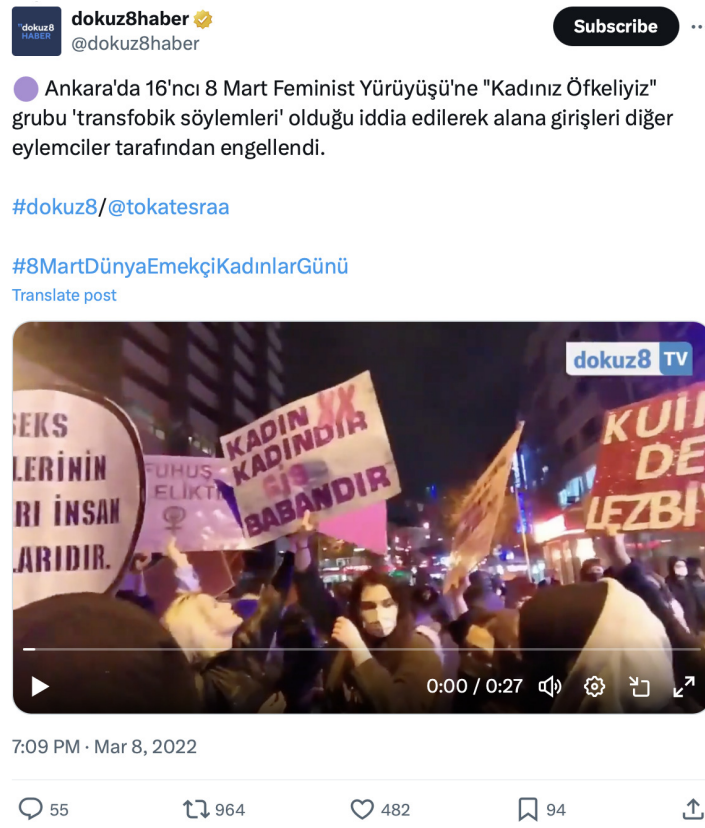
I argue that the form of talking back in X's comment goes beyond merely co-witnessing because X not only spoke up and talked back from her own positionality but also built affective bridges with transgender people and was inclusive of all LGBTIQ+ people.

However, Interviewee 6 issued the following important comment:

You can't create believability and credibility just by reacting. Okay, you will respond to some things...but how do you set your own agenda and create your own digital queer feminist media?...You can turn your own media into an area of encounter, and your own movement into something attractive, so that young people can read and be curious about you.

Furthermore, through an act of repudiation, dokuz8haber (Turkish news agency based on citizen journalism) reported that activists prevented the TERF group from carrying the statements and banners mentioned above and from entering the March 8, 2022, Feminist March arena in Ankara, stating that they were making "transphobic statements."

In the screenshot of the video in Figure 8, the alignment of trans women, cis women, and LGBTIQ+ created a shield against the TERFs, and as an act of repudiation, prevented the entrance of the TERF group into the protest area. This act operated as a barrier; however, it was a barrier against hostility, and therefore it can be perceived as an affective bridge emphasizing togetherness and solidarity. Here we can observe how affective bridges involve movement, discourse, and action. Feminists also chanted the well-known slogan of the feminist movement in Turkey—"You will never walk alone"—while gathering at the protest area, as can be seen from Figure 9.



**Figure 8.** Screenshot of an act of repudiation against TERFs. Note: Translation of the post—“In Ankara, during the 16th, March 8th march, the [anonymised TERF group] was prevented from entering the area by other feminist protesters, who claimed that they made transphobic statements.”



**Figure 9.** Screenshot showing rallyists chanting “you will never walk alone” emphasizing intersectionality and togetherness against TERFs. Note: Translation of the post—“In Ankara, women who say ‘you will never walk alone’ continue to gather at Sakarya Street.”

My discussions with the interviewees confirmed that the TERF discourses originate from academic discussions in Turkey and are imported from Europe. Moreover, although a TERF debate also exists in Turkey, the feminist movement in Turkey is considered intersectional and trans-inclusive. In agreement with the interview participants' views, and as it happened with the speak-ups and talk-backs against the TERFs' posts and through the act of repudiation in which a TERF group was prevented from entering the protest area, the trans women, cis women, and LGBTIQ+ in Turkey could demonstrate affective bridges through intersectional feminist solidarity.

Interviewee 4, a trans activist, said:

As the trans movement started organising in the mid-2000s, and with its strengthening in 2006 and 2007, feminist perception and discourse in Turkey became trans-inclusive, more intersectional, and immigrant-inclusive. It was the Amargi Academy that revealed what trans-inclusive feminism is and established transfeminism as an academic and political discourse. It produced a feminism with a broad perspective, in which even minorities with disappearing languages found a place for themselves and could produce words. Thus, I think we are able to keep trans queer feminism alive in Turkey by considering the intricacies of Turkey and Middle Eastern contexts. The TERF situation is much higher and stronger in the Anglo-Saxon world than in Turkey. The feminist movement in Turkey is very strong, inclusive, and intersectional, so when TERFs appear, the members of the movement can immediately keep them out the door.

According to Interviewee 3, although the feminist movement in Turkey is broadly intersectional and trans-inclusive, it can do better in terms of intersectionality. Thus, the interviewee claimed that there is still a need for politics and spaces for affective bridges to emerge:

I think this TERF debate was spread from Europe to here by some academic people, and it found supporters. This trans-exclusionism is a debate inherent in radical feminism. I think the feminist movement in Turkey is intersectional and responds to TERFs, but the encounter between feminism and the queer and trans feminist movements is very important. We can still perceive how heterosexuality and the binary gender regime are dominant within feminism. We are still fighting with the women's movement on these issues.

Moreover, even though the feminist movement in Turkey is intersectional, existing anti-gender backlash conditions not only in terms of right-wing authoritarian state violence, police oppression, civil society actors, and TERFs but also in the form of cultural feminist groups such as KADEM (Kadın ve Demokrasi Vakfı) can still be detrimental to the intersectional feminist solidarity. Interviewee 4 added:

However, there are also groups funded and supported by this anti-gender movement and also receiving state support, such as KADEM. Turkey is a conservative country with a low level of education, and because the mainstream media is under government control, these groups have an image of being able to spread their messages much more and present their beliefs as if they are the norm.

Moreover, although the interviewees thought that the TERF discourse was imported from the West and that not the women's movement but the feminist movement is intersectional and inclusive, there may still be

barriers for this movement to reach distant geographical regions of Turkey, or issues may arise when we think about the online and offline dimensions. According to Interviewee 6:

Of course there is a distinction between online and offline. Many women who are less educated and who don't have any political involvement don't exist in digital activist spaces. Without physical activism, digital activism becomes too narrow a field to satisfy activism elites. You cannot become an activist only online.

The interviews also confirmed that although there is a need to strengthen affective bridges, the intersectional feminist solidarity in Turkey is already strong. The three elements of the concept of affective bridges are clearly visible in both of the aforementioned spaces of appearance. Taking into account these three levels, how intersectional feminists formulate affective bridges, solidarity, and togetherness both discursively through speak-ups and talk-backs in the form of bell hooks's passionate politics and through discourses, movements, and actions can be observed.

## 5. Conclusion

In this article, I theorise and demonstrate the concept of affective bridges against the anti-gender backlash, for bodily autonomy, against femicides and gender-based violence, through two spaces of appearance online. The affective bridges concept simultaneously emerged from the mentioned spaces of appearance and through theory synthesizing, by bringing together the performative theory of assembly and space of appearance (Butler, 2015) as well as affect theory on the material and discursive levels (Ahmed, 2004a; Deleuze & Guattari, 2013).

The theoretical concept of affective bridges refers to the phenomenon of affective connection, solidarity practice, and political articulation within the feminist and trans movements elevating, strengthening, and deepening feminist intersectionality. The phenomenon enables collective action of bodies, community building, and mutual recognition across various identities and political struggles. Thus, affective bridges are about the solidaristic and transformative movements that emerge within feminist activism as people assemble together and exercise their right to appear. However, beyond mere solidarity and connection, they involve an affective process of opening to one another and attuning to each other's bodies, experiences, and emotions while collectively creating a political force. By being active listeners and being receptive to our own vulnerabilities and those of others, affective bridges can transcend distant solidarities and evolve into a transformative force for change at a deeper level. Through these affective connections, participants not only align around shared interests and feelings but also transform themselves and their relations, generating the affective momentum and energy that bolster feminist politics and activism.

Although the study had a small sample that was not representative of the whole of Turkey, it still enabled an in-depth and nuanced comprehension of intersectional feminist activism in Turkey. Especially in Turkey's authoritarian context, where there is a strong backlash against the feminist movement and LGBTIQ+ rights, the affective bridges concept has substantial relevance. Turkey was selected for the case study to build, establish, and demonstrate this concept, but the concept is intended to be applicable transnationally, particularly in countries where global political events have local ramifications and where such forms of intersectional solidarity, coalitions, and collaboration are needed. Affective bridges can also materialise as



“rainbow utopias,” emergent inclusive spaces of appearance, and digital geographies of hope beyond the online–offline division to assert bodily autonomy and fight against femicides, gender-based violence, and anti-gender backlash, but also against state oppression, inequality, and authoritarianism. As the queer scholar Jose Esteban Muñoz (2009, p. 12) argues:

Utopia can offer us a critique of the present[,] of what is[,] by casting a picture of what can and perhaps will be...where hope is spawned of a critical investment in utopia, which is nothing like naive but, instead, profoundly resistant to the stifling temporal logic of a broken-down present.

Hence, affective bridges can be considered a posthuman feminist manifesto for our times—involving experience (intensity and drive), movement (human + non-human), and discourse/action. I feel the resonances of the affective rainbow bridges and hence digital geographies of hope emerging—those that transgress and go beyond the binaries of East and West, North and South, global and local, modernity and tradition, male and female, and online and offline. Removed from the binaries that divide us, potential alliances can be built among transnational feminist groups—in which hegemonies are scattered, complex, and multiple—against violence and oppression under conditions of transnational connectivity.

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The author declares no conflict of interests.

### Data Availability

The data is securely stored in the university repository. Due to the sensitive context of the research, the data access is allowed only to me and my primary supervisor.

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### About the Author



**Dilara Asardag** is a feminist media studies researcher and activist who completed her BA in media and communication at the Goldsmiths College, University of London, and her Master's degree in media and global communication at the University of Helsinki. Currently, she is a doctoral researcher in media studies at Tampere University.