



KADİR HAS UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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**CONSERVATIVE LGBTI+ GROUPS IN TURKEY: AN ANALYSIS OF  
“MUHAFAZAKAR LGBTI” WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF GENDER**

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SUPERVISOR: ASST. PROF. DR. İREM İNCEOĞLU

MASTER’S THESIS

ISTANBUL, MARCH, 2019

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Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Kadir Has University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master’s in the Discipline Area of Communication Studies under the Program of Communication Studies.

ISTANBUL, MARCH, 2019



I, BEGÜM SELİCİ;

Hereby declare that this master's thesis is my own original work and that due references have been appropriately provided on all supporting literature and resources.

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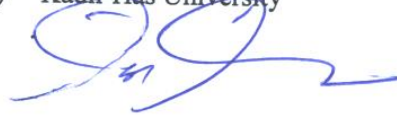
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## ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

This work entitled **CONSERVATIVE LGBTI+ GROUPS IN TURKEY: AN ANALYSIS OF "MUHAFAZAKAR LGBTI" WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF GENDER** prepared by **BEGÜM SELİCİ** has been judged to be successful at the defense exam held on **26/03/2019** and accepted by our jury as **MASTER'S THESIS**.

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## ABSTRACT

SELICI BEGUM. *Conservative LGBTI+ Groups in Turkey: An Analysis of “Muhafazakâr LGBTI” Within the Context of Gender*, MASTER’S THESIS, Istanbul, 2019.

LGBTI+ organizations are not usually discussed within the framework of conservative ideology or Islam. However, perhaps as one consequence of the modernization process, there is a rich diversity also in LGBTI+ communities. There are currently several conservative LGBTI+ groups and Muslim LGBTI+ organizations throughout the world. Although there are number of researches which discuss conservative and Muslim LGBTI+ respectively, limited number of scholarly works have been conducted about LGBTI+ group which embraces both conservative ideology and Islam in Turkey to my knowledge. This research presents a conservative and Muslim LGBTI+ group called AK LGBTI, mostly gay male individuals who identify with policies of Justice and Development Party (Turkish Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP), in Turkey. The thesis aims to reveal how AK LGBTI establishes masculine, patriotic, nationalist, statist and conservative homosexual identity. The research tries to shed a light on how AK LGBTI evolved from mainstream LGBTI+ movement and how AK LGBTI members identify themselves with LGBTI+ identity politics in Turkey. The thesis also points out the possibility of national and conservative LGBTI+ identity by presenting how AK LGBTI members prioritize their national identity and patriotism over their sexual identity. Therefore, it elaborates on how AK LGBTI could be considered and discussed within the context of queer or LGBTI+ movement

Moreover, the research also discusses the AK LGBTI members’ gender performance by contemplating on their gay masculine identity. The study uses Connell’s (1995) theory of hierarchical masculinities as a base and discovers how AK LGBTI members perform a masculinity which becomes alternately hegemonic, subordinate and complicit depending on their relation and position to normative manhood, their conservative environment and mainstream LGBTI+ communities in Turkey. In other words, AK LGBTI’s performance of masculinity is determined as hegemonic, subordinate and complicit by social, political, power and status relationships. The shift between masculinity types and the state betweenness are essential to analyze and understand AK LGBTI’s formation of gay masculine identity

and gender performance. The thesis also aims to discover how masculinity performance becomes political through nationalist and right-wing homosexual identity.

The research uses materials from personal in-depth interviews with four members of AK LGBTI as well as online sources. In addition, the thesis tries to provide a critical and feminist perspective for the discourse analysis.

**Keywords:** masculinity, homosexuality, nationalism, conservative LGBTI+, Muslim LGBTI+





## ÖZET

SELICI BEGUM. *Türkiye’de Muhafazakâr LGBTI+ Oluşumları: Örnek Olarak Muhafazakâr LGBTI Grubunun Toplumsal Cinsiyet Bağlamında İncelemesi*, YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, İstanbul, 2019.

Genellikle LGBTI+ örgütleri muhafazakâr ideoloji veya İslam çerçevesi etrafında tartışılmamaktadır. Fakat modern zamanların bir getirisi olarak, LGBTI+ toplulukları içinde zengin bir çeşitlilik ortaya çıkmıştır. Günümüzde dünya çağında birçok muhafazakâr ve Müslüman LGBTI+ grupları bulunmaktadır. Günümüzün akademik literatüründe birbirinden bağımsız ele alınarak, muhafazakâr LGBTI+ ve Müslüman LGBTI+ grupları üzerine dünya çapında yapılmış çalışmalar mevcuttur. Fakat henüz, kendini hem muhafazakâr hem de Müslüman olarak tanımlayan LGBTI+ grupları üzerine çalışmalar neredeyse yok denecek kadar azdır. Bu çalışma muhafazakâr ideolojileri ve Müslümanlığı benimseyen, kendilerini Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi’nin politikalarıyla özdeşiren, kendisini homoseksüel olarak tanımlayan ve çoğunlukla erkek katılımcılardan oluşan AK LGBTI adında bir grubu konu almaktadır. Çalışma AK LGBTI’nin maskülen, vatansever, milliyetçi, devletçi ve muhafazakâr homoseksüel kimlik inşasını incelemektedir. Araştırma aynı zamanda AK LGBTI’nin Türkiye’de hâkim olan queer akımının içerisinde nasıl ve neden evrildiğine, ve bu hareketin kimlik politikaları içerisinde AK LGBTI’nin kendini nasıl konumlandığına ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma aynı zamanda AK LGBTI’nin milliyetçi ve vatansever kimliğini cinsel kimliğinden öncelikli tutmasını ele alarak, milliyetçi ve muhafazakâr bir LGBTI+ ihtimalini tartışmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, araştırma AK LGBTI Türkiye’nin hâkim queer ve LGBTI+ hareketi içerisinde nasıl tartışılabileceğine dair bir tartışma alanı yaratmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Ayrıca, çalışma AK LGBTI’nin maskülen homoseksüel kimlik inşasının analizi üzerinden AK LGBTI üyelerinin toplumsal cinsiyet performansını incelemektedir. Araştırma R.W Connell’in *Masculinities* kitabında sunduğu dört erkeklik modelini temel olarak kullanarak, AK LGBTI üyelerinin erkeklik performanslarını ele almaktadır. Buna göre, AK LGBTI üyelerinin erkeklik performansları, normatif erkeklik, muhafazakâr çevre ve Türkiye’deki hâkim LGBTI+ toplulukları ile olan etkileşimlerine göre hegemonik, madun ve işbirlikçi olarak kendini yeniden inşa etmektedir. Başka bir deyişle, AK LGBTI’nin maskülen kimlik

performansı kurduđu sosyal, politik, g¼c ve stat¼ ilişkilerine göre kendini hegemonik, madun veya işbirlikçi olarak konumlamaktadır. Erkeklik performansındaki bu deđişim ve arada kalmışlık AK LGBTI'nin maskülen ve homoseksüel cinsel kimlik inşasını ve toplumsal cinsiyet performansını anlamak açısından önem arz etmektedir. Çalışma, aynı zaman da bu erkeklik performansının milliyetçi ve sağcı homoseksüel kimlik inşası üzerinden nasıl politik hale geldiđini de araştırmaktadır. Çalışmada, internette yer alan verilerin yanı sıra AK LGBTI'nin dört üyesi ile yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine m¼lakatlardan edinilen veriler kullanılmaktadır. Araştırma konuya eleştirel ve feminist bir bakış açısı getirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** erkeklik, homoseksüellik, milliyetçilik, muhafazakâr LGBTI+, Müslüman LGBTI+



## INTRODUCTION

There have been several discussions that focused on LGBTI+ in contexts of Islam and right-wing conservatism respectively. For example, it is possible to refer scholars like Jamal (2001) and Kugle (2010) who analyze and interpret the relationship between Islam and LGBTI+ communities by discussing the possibilities of co-existence between them with a progressive approach. There are also scholars such as Kotb (2001) and Al-Qaradawi (2004) who adopt normative stance and rejects any potential co-existence of Islam and LGBTI+. Right-wing conservatism and LGBTI+ have been also discussed within the context of homonationalism and pinkwashing by considering already existing right-wing LGBTI+ groups in mainly Europe and United States.

Nevertheless, almost no research has been conducted which brings Islam and right-wing conservatism together as Muslim and right-wing conservative LGBTI+. This thesis will discuss Muslim and right-wing conservative LGBTI+ by analyzing a group called AK LGBTI mostly male, pro-AKP, group founded in 2015 as a social media platform. However, it is important to clarify that the name of the group has been recently changed as “Muhafazakâr LGBTI.” AK LGBTI name is used because the name was changed after research process. The group members identify themselves as homosexual individuals and adopt masculine, nationalist, patriotic, statist and conservative stands. In this context, homosexual refers to same-sex-relations or gay. However, as AK LGBTI members refer themselves mostly as homosexuals, the term homosexual is commonly preferred in the research in order to achieve consistency. The name “AK” derives from the name of the ruling party, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party), which is in Turkish abbreviated as AKP or sometimes AK Parti. However, the group is not official LGBTI+ organization and has not been founded by AKP. It is a social media platform and has around 2000 followers on Facebook and around 900 on Twitter.

They mostly identify their gay male identity with masculine manners and adopt a critical approach towards “extreme” effeminacy attitudes among gay individuals. According to members, the main goal of AK LGBTI is to create more tolerable and acceptable

homosexuality for conservative environment by adopting masculine, nationalist, patriotic, conservative and Muslim homosexual identity. Moreover, the group members claim that addressing to moral and traditional values of the majority can be considered as a modest way to demand rights by criticizing mainstream LGBTI+ organizations in Turkey for radicalizing against government and challenge people's moral principles.

Theoretical background discusses how conservatism and nationalism underline traditions and common values of the society in terms of collective identity construction and sense of belonging to specific groups. The discussion on conservatism and nationalism aims to reflect upon how publicity of moral values, traditional family values and militarism by governments can affect the establishment and institutionalization of mainstream gender roles and sexual boundaries within the society. It is important to discover how such terms as nationalism, conservatism and religion that are mostly associated with patriarchy and masculinity become involved in LGBTI+ context. Then, it is discussed how different types of masculinities appear depending on social relationships how gender is performed accordingly to heteronormativity in the context of male homosexuality.

The work further discusses this theoretical background of conservatism within Turkey's context to provide more comprehensive knowledge about AK LGBTI's understanding of conservatism and then, moves forward to conservative homosexuality taking the term homonationalism as a framework. Finally, this thesis aims to shed a light on the research gap between Islam and LGBTI+, and right-wing conservative LGBTI+ by reflecting AK LGBTI's stance and ideas. With the information provided from in-depth interviews, thesis further discusses AK LGBTI's self-identification process, their perspective upon sexuality and gender, their connection to religion and tradition, their position within main LGBTI+ movement and their attitudes towards mainstream LGBTI+ organizations in Turkey and finally their political stances within Turkish politics. Hence, the data obtained from interviews is analyzed to discover and question how AK LGBTI can be considered and discussed within the LGBTI+ and queer movement in Turkey as a group consisting of nationalist and conservatist individuals who identify themselves as homosexual. Finally, the

thesis discovers the possibility of right-wing conservative and nationalist LGBTI+ existence in Turkey.

During research both primary and secondary sources are used to obtain data. I have employed field research through in-depth interviews with AK LGBTI members as well as archival and media search. The research relies on the data obtained through examining documents, and the interviews conducted directly with AK LGBTI members. Thus, the data is interpretive, which means the methods used to collect and analyze data are qualitative.

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research has certain characteristics. Among many others, qualitative research has natural setting, which means researcher does not bring participants into a lab or employ certain instruments for individuals to complete, like in survey research. On the contrary, researchers gather close information talking directly to people in their own context, in natural setting. Moreover, qualitative research is essentially interpretive, which requires a narrative description of individuals or settings, the analysis of the data by dividing them into themes and categories, and last but not least, interpretation of the data and drawing conclusions out of it (Creswell, 2009).

For the research, primary data has been collected through using 4 semi-structured in-depth interviews. Interviews has taken around 45 minutes to 1 hour and audio-recorded. Researcher has tried to create a friendly and conversational environment by asking open-ended questions which will offer more freedom for participants to express their opinions. Conversations are recorded with permission and consent, for which participants signed a consent form. Then, recordings are filed in a safe folder who only researcher has access to, transcribed and checked by the researcher. Following those steps, the researcher has coded, interpreted, thematized and finally synthesized the data obtained from transcripts.

Secondary data has been collected through gathering data on internet. Data will focus on broadcasted news and interviews conducted with AK LGBTI in online journals. The data obtained from internet research will be useful in terms of providing general and background information about the groups as well as discourse analysis. The data obtained from both primary and second sources has been used to analyze and discuss AK LGBTI's discourse

and stance by employing feminist critical discourse analysis as a method. By doing so, the thesis aims to develop more comprehensive understanding and provide a critical view for hierarchical gender orders as well as power and ideology discourses.

Lazar claims that aim of feminist critical discourse studies is to reveal that complex and subtle as well as not very subtle and granted “gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities” (2007, p. 142).

Thanks to this method, the thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach and reveals the intersection between gender, race, sexuality, social class and position. As feminist critical discourse analysis regards gender as a social construct, it is especially useful for the thesis while discussing and contemplating on gender performativity and identification process of the participants. This method also presents an opportunity to both consider and challenge hegemonic patriarchal and hierarchical dividends such as masculinity/femininity, subordinate/dominant, man/woman, gender/sexuality etc.

To maintain anonymity, interviewees’ names and other personal details are not disclosed throughout the thesis. They are therefore referred with alias which are common male Turkish names; Samet, Ozan, Can and Furkan. To give background information about participants, all participants identify themselves as homosexual men and come from either right-wing or conservative/religious family background. Except for one participant, other three is known to be homosexual within their family environment. However, it is common that they do not share with distant relatives, particularly two participants are hesitant to reveal their sexual identity within the work environment as it is a conservative environment. Three participants live in İstanbul and one of them lives in a smaller city in Marmara region of Turkey. Three of them are known to be living together with their parents and siblings.

## CHAPTER 1

### CONSERVATISM AND NATIONALISM

According to the dictionary definition, conservatism is “a political doctrine that emphasizes the value of traditional institutions and practices” (Viereck, Minogue, Ball, and Dagger, 2018). As it can be inferred from the name, conservatism is based on conserving. It could be explained as maintaining status quo and preserving the conventions and customs in societies. Therefore, conservatives generally resist changes, innovations, reforms and abstract thinking by aiming a stable community (Ball, Dagger and O’Neil, 2017)

Conservatism originally rose as a reaction to eighteenth-century Enlightenment and French Revolution. It was mainly based on certain central beliefs such as tradition, human imperfection, organic society, hierarchy and authority, and property (Heywood, 1998). In general, conservatism “developed as an ideology in response to the claims of other, radical, movements: liberalism, at first, then nationalism, socialism, fascism, feminism, environmentalism, all of which sought change, massive social ‘improvement’, reform and the removal of ‘old’, ‘discredited’, social orders, institutions and ways of life” (Harrison and Boyd, 2003, p. 176).

Classical conservative thinkers criticized nationalism because of its revolutionary creed and regarded as threat to social order and stability during the French Revolution. Burke discussed nationalism within the conservative thought and defined it as warm feelings towards one’s country, patriotic commitment, preserving traditional authorities, and finally, an attachment to the nation on the level of emotion and identity. Thus, emotional nationalism is found at the heart of conservatism as emotional attachment to the nation helps to maintain the status quo and the governmental institutions (Langan, 2017).

For instance, Roger Scruton (1980) considers ‘citizens’ membership of a national community’ and maintaining traditions as one of the milestones of conservatism (Fentestein and Kenny, 2005); “The ceremonies, cultures and symbols through which this allegiance is experienced are integral to subject’s identification with, and integration in, their society” (Fentestein and Kenny, 2005, p. 123). For Scruton and many conservatives, traditions are



essential because they bind individuals together by creating the sense of an organic identity through a collective national past (Harrison and Boyd, 2005). “The nation with its distinctive culture, history and identity, is second only to the family as the natural unit of human society and a similar emotional tie” (Harrison and Boyd, 2003, p. 181).

However, towards the end of nineteenth century, there had been a shift from emotional nationalism defined in classical conservatism to a nationalism based on race, ethnicity and culture within the nation-state. Character of nationalism has changed and become increasingly chauvinistic with the spread of flags, national anthems, patriotic literature and public ceremonies and holidays. It started to reflect such ideas as “social cohesion, order and stability, and organic community” (Heywood, 1998, p. 154). During that period, conservative politicians such as Disraeli, Bismarck and Tsar Alexander III among many adopted the nationalism and contributed the development of ‘conservative nationalism.’ In modern age, conservative nationalism is regarded as a “natural ally in maintaining social order and defending traditional institutions” (Heywood, 1998, p. 171). Conservative nationalism is mainly based on traditions and history; therefore, nationalism becomes the touchstone of traditional institutions and customs. It also fosters nostalgia and romantic patriotism among individuals by looking back to past glories and triumphs of the nation (Heywood, 1998).

Conservative politicians promoted national sentiments and emphasized the importance of national interests within the nation-states. They also aimed to maintain social cohesion and public order through the sentiment of national patriotism (Heywood, 1998). Like traditional conservatives, they regarded society as an organic community and human beings as imperfect creatures who cannot exist outside the national community. Therefore, “the main principle of the conservative nationalism is to maintain the national unity by fostering patriotic loyalty and pride in one’s country” (Heywood, 1998, p. 171). For example, Heywood (1998) provides British nationalism as an example; British nationalist symbols are mostly based on the monarch as in the national anthem *God Save the Queen*. Moreover, Margaret Thatcher as well emphasized ‘Victorian Values while linking to past of UK. As a result, conservative nationalism strengthens the national identity by dignifying traditional and family values of

the societies as well as glorious past of the nations. With conservatist nationalism, there is a yield for the return to the past of the nation, return the 'core' of the organic society by aiming to reach to the 'pure' nation.

Nationalism has thereby become a tool for each nation to glorify their 'superior' qualities and marginalize other nations. This kind of understanding mostly promotes "a dislike and suspicion of foreigners and immigrants (xenophobia) who are seen as 'alien' bodies 'infecting' the national organism and undermining social cohesion and homogeneity. While most conservatives would reject racism, they would also reject 'multi-culturalism' as divisive and stress the need for immigrants to 'assimilate' into national culture" (Harrison and Boyd, 2003, p. 179). Moreover, they believe multi-cultural societies lack social and cultural cohesion which can be generated with only national identity which preserves the cultural purity and traditions (Heywood, 1998). Therefore, conservative politicians today often promote "the 'national interest', the touchstone of right action in foreign and defense policy. Much is made of national institutions: flag, armed forces and the constitution" (Harrison and Boyd, 2003, p. 181).

However, Benedict Anderson (1991) regards nation as a social construct, as an artifice, rather than an organic community. Therefore, Anderson does not perceive nation as a natural entity, but something intentionally and consciously constructed by human agents through historical contexts (Anderson, 1991). Individuals imagine and create a nation while talking about their communities within certain geographical confines and time periods (Langan, 2017). As well as individuals, both media and politicians recreate the nation and reproduce national narratives by talking about national status on daily basis. According to Anderson, these processes reveal how nation-states and national identities are constructed and remade in relation to a greater whole (Anderson, 1991).

Individuals construct national ideas based on common geography, religion, ethnicity, race and language, all of which provide them a collective history and memory. National identity constructs a social bond among individuals and connect them to a bigger part of a group in the societies through drawing upon the importance of shared culture and traditions. Besides cultural nationalism, ethnic nationalism connects people through a collective national

identity as well. As members of an ethnic group is considered to have ascended from same origin and common ancestors, they are regarded as kinship groups that is united by blood (Heywood, 1998). Therefore, ethnic nationalism has exclusive character and it is not possible to “join” an ethnic group (Heywood, 1998). Heywood presents Black nationalism as an example and explains; “development of black consciousness and national pride therefore required blacks to look beyond white culture and rediscover their cultural roots in Africa” (1991, p. 66). Heywood also claims that heightened ethnic consciousness is most of the time “fueled by atavistic fears and hatreds, focused on foreign people. Ethnic nationalism therefore often associated with chauvinism and racialism” (1998, p. 167).

Thus, nationalism is essential for the identity construction process in terms of defining who belongs to which group and establishing confined boundaries in societies. National identity naturally establishes differences and inequalities on the existential level among the individuals. For example, Nagel claims that “nationalist ideology, that is, beliefs about the nation – who we are, what we represent– become the basis and justification for national actions, that is to say, activities of state- and nation-building, the fight for independence, the creation of a political and legal order, the exclusion or inclusion of various categories of members, the relations with other nations” (1998, p. 248).

Therefore, conservatism, basing on nationalism, ethnicity and race, also determines the power relations in terms of establishing subordinate and dominant identities within the society.

## **1.1 TURKISH CONSERVATISM**

As mentioned above, conservatism in Europe rose as a reaction to French Revolution and promoted former values of society, which existed before French Revolution. Conservatism originally yielded for returning to older traditions of aristocracy. It also adopted a religious approach to promote the ideology of human imperfection to object revolutionary ideas such as freedom, democracy, independency etc. Therefore, conservatism occurred as a need to adopt traditional values after a radical change. Explaining the roots of Turkish conservatism,

Çiğdem (2004) refers to rise of conservatism and argues that conservatism rose in Turkey as a result of declaration of Turkish Republic. He further points out the fact that declaration of Turkish Republic was not only a change of political regime but also a desire for very radical detachment from Ottoman socially, politically, culturally and ideologically (Çiğdem, 2004). He discusses the parallelism among oppositions between Revolution and Republic in terms of patterns of what conservatism yearns for; king and aristocracy corresponds to sultan and palace, church and clergy corresponds to shaykh al-Islam, caliphate and ulama, and finally ancient régime corresponds to Ottoman regime (Çiğdem, 2004). Therefore, Turkish conservatism is mostly rooted in the Ottoman-Islamic past of Turkey as a form of yearning for “a golden age of traditional, Islamic, Ottoman, Turkic and even of eroding local customs” (Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, p. 3). In other words, Turkish conservatism originally aimed to preserve Ottoman traditions, culture, practices and religion as well.

However, it is significant to state that Turkey has a special case of conservatism. Conservatism normally stands in opposite of what is called revolution and it is associated mostly with right wing and religion. For Turkey’s case there are two kinds of conservatism; Kemalist conservatism which starts to exist in the form of cultural and national conservatism after declaration of Turkish Republic and Post-Kemalist conservatism which adopts a conservatism that is more based on right wing nationalism and religion.

As the founder of Turkish Republic, CHP (Turkish Republican Party) was regarded as the main paradigm of Turkish modernization project, and bearer of the Kemalism ideology. CHP carried several ideologies and political thoughts which are based on French Revolution and Enlightenment opposing the conservative political thought by running a radical ‘modernism’ project during single-party era (Gökmen, 2004).

Irem (2004) explains CHP’s modernization project as; CHP aimed to nationalize the imperial government structures inherited from Ottoman past by turning them into nation-state structures through legal and administrative reforms. He further claims that re-organization of state as nation-state and society as nation was the main goal of cultural project of Kemalist reformist politics. Irem (2004) points out how Kemalism is associated with conservatism and

explains that Kemalism not only brought fundamental political, economic and cultural changes but also a new kind of politics which enables the conservation of the new. Kemalism enabled nation to be re-recognized as a political entity; therefore, Kemalism revealed a new kind of conservative values by establishing nationalist-culturalist practices and discourses which connects nation and the state, different than older ideologies revolved around Ottomanism and Islamism. According to Gökmen (2004), Kemalist idea of national progressivism is accepted as a modernization project without a compromise; however, it was an idea which especially promoted the preservation of unique characteristics of Turkish nation. Therefore, although Kemalism appeared as a form of reform, it also projected cultural and national conservatism by promoting nation-state ideology, and an organic society which is reinforced constantly through commonly shared language and culture. Thus, it is possible to say that Kemalism adopted an unorthodox conservatism by bringing together such ideas as secularism, statism, populism. Although CHP adopted Kemalist conservatism, it is important to state that today's CHP is more liberal and identify itself as social-democrat party.

What we can consider as Post-Kemalist conservatism, right-wing conservatism has been related to traditionalism and religiosity. Kalaycıoğlu claims that right-wing conservatism in Turkey stresses; “upholding of traditions, mores, and customs, and institutions that value and sustain patterns of behavior, which are tied to traditions. Family, religion, localism and nationalism seem to be tied to such a system of core values of conservatism” (2007, p. 9).

Cizre (2002) reports that since 1946 among 15 general elections, political parties that promote traditional and conservative values have a record of winning eleven and six of them landslide victories. Political parties such as Democrat Party (DP) in 1950 and 1954, the Justice Party (AP) in 1965 and 1969, the Motherland Party (ANAP) in 1983 and 1987, Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 established the base of Turkish conservative politics.

## CHAPTER 2

### GENDER IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONALIST CONSERVATISM

Ultimately, it is obvious that conservatism has connections with traditions, family, nationalism, patriotism and religion, all of which reproduce traditional gender roles in societies. Conservatism regards family as the most basic and important social institution as family is the place where children are first educated about the traditional values of nation and bonded to society with strong ties (Harrison and Boyd, 2003). According to conservatism, strong nations depend on strong family ties and family breakdown weakens the foundation of the society and nation. Therefore, conservatism regards family as a public matter and adopts family-centered policies by promoting successful family life and social solidarity within the nation (Harrison and Boyd, 2003). Most conservative regimes, considered as various rightist, populist traditionalist, religious, extreme rightist, project traditional gender-based labor divisions, in which women are attributed as mothers and wives and men as breadwinners and caretakers (Birkbeck and Vrije, 2018). For example, in far-right conservative countries such as Turkey and Poland among others, which adopt patriarchal and religious moral values, abortion has become a huge issue. The president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that abortion is a murder and totally unacceptable by asking individuals to have at least three children for the benefit of Turkish nation (*Erdoğan'dan: Kürtaj Cinayettir*, 2012). In Poland as well, far-right ruling Law and Justice party tried to pass a law that bans all forms of abortion and imposes prison sentences for women who have illegal abortions in alliance with the Catholic Church (Cocotas, 2017). Thus, conservatives employ a discourse promoting traditional family values that equals womanhood to motherhood.

Similarly, nationalism and national narratives establish certain gender roles within the society. Within the nationalist narrative, militarism and manhood are always connected to each other; values such as bravery, duty, honor, cowardice and patriotism, are both nationalist and masculinist and both strongly tied to nation and manhood (Nagel, 2003). According to Nagel, “state power, citizenship, nationalism, militarism, revolution, political violence, dictatorship, and democracy – are all best understood as masculinist projects, involving

masculine institutions, masculine processes and masculine activities” (1998, p. 243). She claims that “national scripts are written primarily by men, for men, and about men” (Nagel, 1998, p. 243). Similarly, in her book *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, Cynthia Enloe also underlines that “nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” (2000, p. 45). She asserts that women have rather symbolic and minor roles compared to men within the national narratives (Enloe, 2000).

Therefore, position of women within that narrative is determined in relation to men, as wives, sisters, mothers, daughters of men; “women often are considered to be bearers and incarnations of national and masculine honor... honor is seen more as men’s responsibility, and shame as women’s... honor is seen actively achieved while shame is seen as passively defended” (Nagel, 2003, p. 162-63).

Thus, women are mostly associated with ‘motherland’, which needs the protection of men against the invasion of the enemies from outside. Women are seen as the bearers and producers of ‘pure nations’; thus, the moral boundaries of their sexuality are defined within the national borders. In other words, women as good citizens should know whom they should or not have sex with, they should not have sex with ‘the enemy’; “they need to be sexually available to the right men” (Nagel, 2003, p. 163).

Nationalism also sets boundaries for sexuality of men as well. Nagel claims that national governments around the world have tendency “to exclude women and homosexuals from what are defined as the most important national institutions such as those involved in war making and governance... Masculinist heterosexuality is a core component of the bedrock upon which nationalist boundaries rest. Feminism, unruly female sexuality and homosexuality are three cracks in that foundation” (2003, p. 166-67). Therefore, nationalist discourse projects a certain image of masculinity in opposed to femininity and homosexuality.

## **2.1. AKP ERA, NATIONALISM AND GENDER**

AKP as a political that adopts a religious and traditionalist stance and labels itself as a Muslim Democratic Party, was elected in 2002 and has been in the power with the leadership of

Recep Tayyip Erdogan since then. It can be said that leadership of AKP for such a long term created “a movement of political attractiveness in the eyes of the tradition bound, conservative masses of the Turkish right” (Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, p. 6).

AKP adopted a mindset which was derived from Islamic ideology and traditions as a reaction to Kemalism; according to Park, roots of AKP’s Islamic thought in essence stresses; “the unitarian, communal and civilizational character of Islam, and enabled the AKP leadership to stress the alien and ‘foreign’ nature of the Kemalist elite, the individualistic and materialist civilization of the West and its corrupting impact on Turkey’s liberals and secularists, and the anti-populist leadership in the Middle East” (Park, 2017, p. 171).

Park explains how AKP promotes Ottoman values by juxtaposing Turkey’s Kemalist order and Ottoman times; he presents former prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu’s speech as an example, which describes Kemalist order as a regime which “left behind artificial borders, conflicted identities and culturally alienated leaderships” (2017, p. 171) and Ottoman era as the times when “peoples could freely interact culturally, economically and politically” (2017, p. 171).

There is no doubt that, AKP has adopted neo-ottoman values and a populist attitude by evoking strong nostalgic emotions regarding tradition, nation and religion by referring glorious Ottoman victories and conquests as well as the idea of integration and unified society. Neo-ottomanism AKP adopts can be seen as one of the appearances of neo-liberal nationalism. Thus, AKP nationalism constructs nation on the base of shared Islamic values and Ottoman Past (Şen, 2015). Şen (2015) explains the Muslim Nationalism of AKP and refers to White (2013) who analyzes new model of Turkish nationalism which is articulated in Islam and describes the fundamental elements of nationalism as blood, purity, militarism, being Muslim and Turk. Therefore, AKP brings together Muslim conservatism and nationalism, which are seen as the traditional elements of Turkish right-wing, and constructs nation-state identity (Şen, 2015). It is possible to observe the perception of AKP nationalism in discourses of AKP as well. For example, AKP has adopted “one nation, one flag, one land, one state” motto to address people in the society for long time.



In summary, Kalaycıoğlu describes current conservatism and right wing in Turkey and says that;

It seems as if the current ideological background of the right in Turkey consists of a peculiar amalgam of expectations of upward social mobility, improved social welfare, economic growth, married with a moral order encompassing agricultural society and its traditional values, mores and customs, among which religiosity is definitely predominant, where parochialism, nationalism, which often extends to cover chauvinism and xenophobia also occupy a part. (2007, p. 8)

Acar and Altunok elaborates on AKP's neo-conservative stance and claim that during recent years AKP government revealed a discourse "that undermines gender equality by emphasizing the centrality of the family institution by glorifying traditional gender roles" (2014, p. 17). To provide examples on that, President Erdogan often emphasize importance of family and suggest married couples "at least three" children; "as a prime minister I advise at least three children. This is my natural right. I tell my sisters to grant three children for this nation. This nation needs to be strong... Mothers will raise people in this society. I trust mothers who set their hearts on AKP" (Çetik, Gültekin and Kuşdemir, 2008).

Erdogan uses a nationalist discourse which promotes traditional gender roles by associating woman as the carrier of pure nation and mothers; "furthermore the emphasis on the Turkish nation also allowed him to draw the "ethno-sexual boundaries" of the womb" (Nagel, 2000; Mutluer: 2018, 13). Moreover, state often stresses on motherhood and woman's care-giver role in a family by mostly identifying womanhood with exclusively motherhood (Acar and Altunok, 2014). Another example is that Erdogan criticizes women who does not prefer to have kids as they do career and states that "the woman who chooses career over her children denies her own womanhood...Woman who rejects motherhood is incomplete" (Hacaloğlu, 2016).

In addition, AKP officials disapprove and find abortion totally unacceptable and refer it as a murder and mothers having abortion as murderers. One of his speeches, Erdogan expressed that "abortion is murder. Each abortion is Uludere" (*Erdoğan: Her Kürtaj Bir Uludere'dir*, 2012). To clarify, Uludere, also known as Roboski massacre is the incident where 34 Kurdish citizens died as a result of the airstrike of Turkish Air forces on 28th December 2011.

In another example, AKP lawmaker Ayhan Sefer Üstün, the head of Parliament's Human Rights Commission stated that “rapist is more innocent than the victim of rape who has abortion. Raped women should not have abortion” (*Fitrattan kahkahaya*, 2015).

Moreover, AKP government adopted a discourse which identifies woman with honor and dignity. For example, former prime minister Bülent Arınç expressed his opinions about how men and women should behave properly. In his speech, Arınç stated that dignity is essential for woman. He stated that woman should not laugh loudly in public. She also should not be flirtatious but protect her dignity (*Fitrattan kahkahaya*, 2015). Mutluer claims that Erdogan and AKP positions women discursively “as second-class citizens to be confined in the privacy of their family, by publicly admonishing them for not behaving as they were supposed to behave (i.e. modestly and submissively)” (2018, p. 14).

Therefore, AKP adopts patriarchal values which are constantly reflected in public discourses, laws and policies. Regarding that Acar and Atunok states that; “modern states play a significant role in regulating gendered bodies, sexualities and reproductive capabilities. Gendered subjectivities, in particular womanhood, are produced and controlled through the private domain” (2012, p. 15).

## CHAPTER 3

### MASCULINITY: WHAT IS MASCULINITY AND WHAT ARE THE MARGINS?

According to Homi Bhabha, “margins more and more constitute the center... the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing” (1997, p. 30). In this case, defining margins of masculinity constitutes the idealized and normative masculinity. As one of the leading scholars in masculinity studies, Connell (2005) argues that there are multiple masculinities which are hierarchical and establish power relations among themselves. She defines those relations as “relations of alliance, dominance and subordination” (2005, p. 37). Connell (2005) also discusses that these relations are established through relations of exclusion, inclusion, intimidation and exploitation etc. Building upon different power dynamics within masculinity, Connell (2005) suggests four kinds of masculinity; hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalized.

Connell describes ‘hegemonic masculinity’ by borrowing Gramsci’s concept of *hegemony* (1971) which involves “persuasion of a greater part of population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear ‘ordinary’ ‘normal’ or ‘natural’” (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645).

According to Connell (1987), hegemonic masculinity is reinforced culturally through exemplars such as fantasy figures or film characters in ballads, westerns, and thrillers as well as real life figures such as Australian Rules footballer Ron Barassi or the boxer Muhammed Ali. Therefore, masculinity wins the hegemony through the consent and persuasion of the majority. Connell stresses that “the public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support” (1987, p. 185). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity does not suggest a fixed character type but rather a masculinity “that occupies the hegemonic position, a position always contestable” (Connell, 2005, p. 76).

However, hegemonic masculinity is demanding because it requires being tough, unfeeling, soldierly, obedient, masculine, all of which are basically constructed against what is 'feminine.' According to Kimmel, masculinity is mainly constructed as 'anti-feminine'; and, he claims that "whatever the variations by race, class, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, being a man means 'not being like women.' This notion of anti-femininity lies at the heart contemporary and historical conceptions of manhood, so that masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than who one is" (2009, p. 62).

Therefore, hegemonic masculinity sets standards for the manliness and manhood; and cripples the men who cannot fulfill the requirements of masculinity. Connell (1995) claims that 'hegemonic masculinity' as an idealized and naturalized form of manhood maintains and reinforces the male dominance. She defines hegemonic masculinity as; "configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and subordination of women" (1995, p. 77).

She also explains that this kind of masculinity is institutionalized by its display on spheres such as business, military and government (Connell, 2005). According to Connell (1987), hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to subordinate masculinities and women. It is basically heterosexual and closely connected to the institution of marriage; and the key form of subordinate masculinity is male homosexuality (Connell, 1987). Connell (2005) suggests that gayness and femininity, which are associated with each other, are expelled from hegemonic masculinity in patriarchal gender order.

Connell (2005) argues gender as a social practice which is often involved with social structures; therefore, she claims that gender is interacted with race and class as well as nationality. She discusses marginalized masculinities and asserting existence of hegemonic masculinity among different races and classes within societies. She suggests that hegemonic masculinity, white men's masculinity, can be constructed against black men as well as white women. She argues that marginalized masculinities are mainly result of exclusion of black masculinities by white supremacy. According to Connell (2005), authorization of hegemonic

masculinity of dominant group creates marginalization for black men. Therefore, hegemonic masculinity imposes white heterosexual man image that is not feminine or homosexual as well as not Black, Indian, Jew or Asian- which would be considered as subordinate masculinities (Nagel, 1998).

As fourth kind, Connell (2005) discusses complicit masculinity; she defines as a masculinity of men who do not meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity yet gain from its hegemony and take advantage from subordination of women. She also describes complicit masculinities as alliance with hegemony and claims that they are “constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy” (Connell, 2005, p. 78). Connell (2005) provides illuminating examples of men who embody complicit masculinities; men who respect their mother and wives and never use violence against them, feel responsible to bring wage to home as his traditional share of housework, and they easily be convinced that feminists are generally bra-burning extremists.

It is important to bear in mind that each man does not necessarily belong to one group of masculinity. Depending on social relationships and power relations, men can perform different masculinities in different situations. Therefore, performance of hegemony sheds a light on how hegemonic masculinity becomes normative and sets inclusion/exclusion boundaries.

### **3.1 PERFORMANCE OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND MALE HOMOSEXUALITY**

Simone De Beauvoir’s statement “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” reveals that gender is not a stable and presumed identity but rather it is constituted through time (2011, p. 283). Although Butler criticizes Beauvoir’s statement as it reduces gender to a form of choice, she also builds upon it in terms of unstable gender identity by suggesting performativity of gender as; “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance

of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1999, p. 33). Moreover, Butler (1999) asserts that there is no authentic gender but only imitation of it and therefore, identity is performed, and gender is performative. She stresses gender identity does not exist beyond gendered acts and expressions of gender; “identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler, 1999, p. 33).

Butler (1999) asserts that gender is constituted through ongoing discursive practice, which is open to intervention and resignification. According to Butler (1999), performativity is a constitutive process which is basically a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. For example, she explains how sentences such as “it is a boy” or “it is a girl” attributes so-called authentic gender identities discursively, which becomes a norm when it is performed and copied repeatedly (1999). According to Butler (1999), this repetition creates the illusion of authentic gender in the similar way linguistic interpellation does in Althusserian (1971) sense.

Butler reveals how performativity works as a tool to establish hegemony and power relations. She claims that performative repetition of gender identities naturalizes heterosexuality; “the replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original” (Butler, 1999, p. 31). In other words, proliferation of gender identities is hindered by compulsory heterosexuality which is reinforced through repetition of gendered performances. According to Butler (1999), gender works as a regulatory construct that privileges heterosexuality and projects dominant ideals. This regulatory construct is possible through an exclusion and inclusion mechanism, which constructs cultural configurations of gender by aiming to form a unity of gender (1999). According to Butler, gender identity is assured and reinforced through stabilizing concepts of sex, gender and sexuality as well as through “regulating gender as binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term”, and this differentiation is accomplished through institutionalized and naturalized heterosexual desire (1999, p. 22).

Combining Connell’s (2005) hegemonic masculinity and performativity, the way gender is performed is essential to observe the way hegemonic masculinity is replicated and performed

in non-hegemonic frames. In this context, performance of hegemonic masculinity or hegemonic heterosexuality is directly connected to power and status of the privileged, dominant, group. Therefore, performing hegemonic masculinity constructs non-hegemonic subordinate masculinities because concept of hegemonic masculinity rejects both femininity and homosexuality. In other words, performance of hegemonic masculinity requires distance from femininity and homosexuality and adopting conventional male role which performs overcompensating heterosexual and/or homophobic behavior.

Within the hegemonic masculinity literature, Donaldson (1993) claims that male homosexuality- subordinate masculinity- is 'counter-hegemonic' by presenting three main reasons. Firstly, hostility towards homosexuality is fundamental for male heterosexuality; secondly, male homosexuality is mostly associated with effeminacy; and finally, form of homosexual pleasure is considered as subversive (Donaldson, 1993). Donaldson (1993) stresses that fulfilling the requirements of hegemonic masculinity provokes homophobia (meaning homo-negativity) among heterosexual men and rewards them with a social support and reinforcement of their manliness. For Donaldson, "male heterosexual identity is sustained and affirmed by hatred for, and fear of, gay men" (1993, p. 648).

Similarly, Kimmel (2009) also claims that masculinity is reinforced and assured by the hatred for and fear of gay men by claiming that homophobia is fundamental for cultural definition of manhood. He stresses that masculinity is constructed and performed for other men's approval and acceptance; thus, men often consider wealth, power, status and sexy women as markers of manhood and yearns for approval and praise from other men desperately (2009). Therefore, Kimmel (2009) defines homophobia as the fear of emasculation and humiliation by other men; therefore, men are ashamed to be unmanly and show their fears among other men. He claims that "fear of being seen as sissy dominates the cultural definitions of manhood" (2009, p. 65); and that is why, men try to overdo the traditional rules of masculinity to compensate their manliness.

### **3.2 TURKISH HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY**

Turkish normative masculinity is constructed and shaped around nationalism and militarism as the obligatory military service in Turkey is seen as the most important practice for manhood.

Military service, which is seen as an important factor in establishment of modern nation-states continues to be only male-specific social-political activity. Although security of nation is a public issue which concerns both men and women, men attributed as the ‘protectors’ of the nation as well as women and family through militarism (Sancar, 2008). According to Sancar (2008), this situation is the biggest invention of patriarchy and functions as the authority mechanism of modern male domination interwoven with hegemonic masculinity values. In all places where there is security concern, military service has become a dominant structure and hegemonic masculinity has started to be practiced among young men to prove manhood (Sancar, 2008). Mutual relationship between militarism and hegemonic masculinity is achieved by sexist and militarist nationalist discourse. Nationalist discourse establishes firm and exclusivist gender definitions by portraying man as warrior and protector and women as mothers and wives.

In Turkey, military service has become obligatory only for male citizens in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, it has become one of the main factors that shape the nature of the relationship between (especially male) citizens and the state. Generally, women are allowed in military only as officers or in professional armies yet not allowed in obligatory citizenship-based military service and male homosexual individuals are thrown out from military. Militarist ideology of Turkey plays an important role in determining the hegemonic masculinity and in positioning men and women within the gender order of the state. Therefore, military has become a school where the most tough and firm masculinity is thought and where femininity and homosexuality are not allowed (Altınay, 2004).

It is important to stress that the hegemonic masculinity definition attributed by militarist ideology starts to be taught at schools and in family in very early stages in order to naturalize and normalize it. Altınay refers to National Security Knowledge text book that was taught at



schools in 1990s and provides an example for definition of military service; “military service, the most sacred service to the nation and the homeland, prepares young people for real life situations. A person who does not do his military service is no good to himself, to his family, or to his nation” (2004, p. 70).

This description reveals that military service is established as duty for his nation, his family, and himself rather than for the state (Altınay, 2004). In this way, men could be convinced and made sure about the necessity of military by “mythologizing Turkish military spirit” (Altınay, 2004, p. 85). Altınay argues that military service is built as a cultural and political practice by claiming that “military service became divorced from wars and citizenship and redefined as a cultural/national/racial characteristic” (2004, p. 86). In this way military service becomes hegemonic and establishes the normative masculinity.

Similarly, Selek (2008) discusses that normative masculinity is controlled regulated by obligatory military service. Therefore, she describes military service as a masculinity laboratory for becoming a man, which is a process of *getting ripe as men* (Selek, 2008). She also claims that military service also prepares men to be both physically and emotionally tough by systematically training their bodies and challenging them with difficult situations (Selek 2008). Selek (2008) also states that men construct their masculinity within the hierarchical order of masculinity by forming an interaction with young soldiers and competing with their masculinity. She also explains that military service strengthens patriarchal values by attributing weakness and cowardness to women and expect soldiers to show no emotions and be tough (Selek, 2008). Therefore, men come back their home after military service in the form of *state* and becomes a protector and soldier of the family as well because they are rationalized and disciplined according to their normative gender role and duties in society (Selek, 2008).

Finally, obligatory military service is an essential phase of hegemonic Turkish masculinity and establishment of traditional gender roles. It imposes nationalist, militarist and heteronormative masculinity upon men and promote patriarchal values. It also constructs a hierarchy within different masculinities through competition and challenge. Therefore,

military service becomes an essential space for establishment of hegemonic and non-hegemonic (marginalized, subordinate and complicit) masculinities.



## CHAPTER 4

### AKP ERA AND POLITICS OF SEXUALITY

In Turkey there is not a legal punishment against same-sex relationships in the law. However, there is specific recognition or a law to protect LGBTI+ individuals from discrimination derived from their sexual orientation as well. Since 1970s, especially starting from 1990s, there has been a very strong and active LGBTI+ rights movements and protests in Turkey. Lambda as the first LGBTI+ organization of Turkey was founded in 1993. Then in 1994, for the first time a political party banned discrimination against sexual identity and sexual orientation within the party. One of the most important LGBTI+ organizations today in Turkey, Kaos GL was founded in 1994 with the claim that freedom of same sex individuals will also emancipate heterosexuals. The first Gay Parade, Istanbul Pride was organized by Lambda in June 2003 on Istiklal Street in Taksim. However, Gay Parade organized by Gökkuşığı (Rainbow) LGBTI+ Organization, was cancelled because of extreme reactions from conservative side of the residents in Bursa in August 2006 (*Türkiye’de LGBTI+ Hakları*, n.d.). In 2013, especially during Gezi Resistance LGBTI+ organizations and activists increased their visibility considerably.

When it first was founded, AKP was described as a political party which defends democratic and laic rule of law and accepts laicism as guarantee of democracy and as the fundamental element of social peace and respects fundamental qualities of Turkish Republic (Akdoğan, 2004). It was also stated and emphasized that AKP would construct a bridge between society and politics and would expand fundamental rights and freedoms as much as possible within the boundaries of rule of law and the constitution (Akdogan, 2004). Moreover, AKP especially emphasizes fundamental terms such as democracy, rule of law, laicism and freedom human rights freedom (Akdogan, 2004). AKP also claimed that government should be involved in social politics which protects aggrieved and indigent individuals of the society and emphasized the importance of private sector, volunteer organizations and NGOs (Akdogan, 2004).

AKP talked about LGBTI+ rights for the first time in 2002; Erdogan stated that “homosexuals’ rights and freedoms should be legally protected. We don’t find it human to discriminate against homosexuals” (*Abbas Güçlü ile Genç Bakış TV Programı*, 2002). Although AKP emphasized and proved strong commitment to Western democratic values with the aim of complying with EU standards, after 2007 AKP adopted patriarchal and moral values derived from religion (Acar and Altunok, 2012). Therefore, for the last decade AKP has increased its neo-conservatism and extended his authority and moral regulation over sexual matters (Acar and Altunok, 2012). In the following years AKP started to defend conservative Turkish and Muslim values increasingly and put more emphasis on heterosexual Muslim and Turkish family structure, which caused the support for equal LGBTI+ rights to disappear (Mutluer, 2018). Instead, politics of sexuality in Turkey has started to be perceived and discussed as “the defense of conservative family values with a dose of nationalism (Turkish) and religion (Muslim) added” (Mutluer, 2018, p. 9).

Altunok and Acar finds the discourse promoting traditional family values within conservatism strategic because; “family is crucial to the functioning of the neo-conservative mentality and not only is it the legitimate domain for experiencing sexual and reproductive capabilities, but it also plays a crucial role in producing and sustaining the desired moral order” (2012, p. 20).

Moreover, AKP officials have adopted a hostile language against LGBTI+ activists and organizations. For example, AKP government rejected the law draft regarding sexual orientation to protect discrimination against LGBTI+ individual in 2004 by a justification which claims that adding “sexual orientation” is unnecessary because gender already corresponds to it. Minister of State Responsible for Women and Family Affairs, Selma Aliye Kavaf, claimed that “homosexuality is a biological disorder; a disease and it needs to be treated... Homosexual marriages are not an issue Turkish society can accept... This is a fact that the healthiest relationship which is monogamous and between man and woman” (*2001'den 2015'e*, 2015).

Generally, AKP government regards “homosexuality” as a sexual deviance and mostly claims that same sex relationships and marriages do not fit into Turkish conservative and

religious values. AKP officials and members mostly regard family only as a heterosexual institution. Thus, homosexuality is actively denounced and the basis of discrimination in society (Acar and Altunok, 2012). Birdal also claims that “sexual deviance, signifying ultimate degeneration of the nation, constitutes the main dilemma for the rearticulation of Turkish conservatism” (2013, p. 123).

Moreover, Boellstorff explains heterosexual structure of family within Muslim cultures in relation to nationalism by giving example from Indonesia; “national belonging and heterosexuality are mutually defining and supporting, and those who fall outside official sexual norms are failed citizens. Marriage in Muslim communities throughout Indonesia is usually seen as the very foundation of sociality, determining boundaries of kinship and ethnicity” (2005, p. 578).

Acar and Altunok (2012) elaborate on discrimination against transsexuals and reveal that transsexuals are the most disadvantageous group in Turkey because their sexual identity is the most “visible” and “different” one although it is recognized in Turkey since 1988. It occurs often that transsexual individuals are forced to sex work because they are denied access to employment. Eventually this leads to several problems regarding social exclusion, harassment and humiliation (Acar and Altunok, 2012).

In summary, demands for equal LGBTI+ rights and same-sex marriages threaten directly the “traditional heterosexual family structure” (Acar and Altunok, 2012, p. 19). Moreover, they also claim that in this context, “regulation of sexuality becomes a central concern of the neo-conservative rule. As the treatment of issues such as abortion, homosexuality or the sexuality of youth or unmarried women shows any challenge to the heterosexual and patriarchal family structure is strongly rejected” (Acar and Altunok, 2012, p. 19).

Considering LGBTI+ rights under these conditions in Turkey, Birdal points out that “the conservative discourses on the LGBTI+ present significant evidence of how such a majoritarian conception of human rights and democracy provide a basis for discrimination, misrecognition, and humiliation” (2005, p. 125).

## CHAPTER 5

### HOMOSEXUALITY AND CONSERVATISM

Although LGBTI+ organizations are mostly associated with left-wing/liberal ideologies and political parties, there are nowadays several right-wing LGBTI+ groups all around the world. There are many examples of it from USA to Britain, France and to Germany among many others. By combining right-wing nationalism and homosexuality, Jasbir K. Puar coins a term called *homonationalism*, which builds itself “upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary” (2007, p. 2). She defines homonationalism as “an exceptional form of national heteronormativity is now joined by an exceptional form of national homonormativity” (Puar, 2007, p. 2). Puar describes homonationalism as a form of “sexual exceptionalism that corresponds with exceptionalism of United States” (2007, p. 2). According to Puar, “homosexual sexual exceptionalism does not necessarily contradict or undermine heterosexual sexual exceptionalism; in actuality it may support forms of heteronormativity and the class, racial, and citizenship privileges they require” (2007, p. 9). Rahman elaborates on homonationalism by discussing that “homosexual identities marshaled in the service of nationalist identities and discourses to disavow terrorist bodies, particularly Muslim and Arab ones” (2014, p. 44).

Puar question boundaries of normative queerness in relation to dominant national identity within the framework of biopolitics (Puar, 2007). She contrasts how Western/white and traditional/Muslim queer identities are constructed within the racial and sexual hierarchy in the society (Puar, 2007). It is possible to observe the pattern in the real world as well. To provide an example for that, AfD (Alternative for Germany), a right-wing to far right political party in Germany, launched a billboard campaign to attract homosexual voters. The billboard featured a gay couple saying: "My partner and I don't want to get to meet Muslim immigrants who believe that our love is a deadly sin" (Thomas, 2017). These anti-Muslim sentiments are widely shared across European countries. Another example is from UKIP's MP and a gay figure David Coburn. He told in his interview with BuzzFeed that “many of these people, as we've heard, are ISIS. I don't know about you, but I am a homosexual and I do not want to

be stoned to death” (Ross, 2015). Right-wing parties adopt pink-washing which aims to justify their racism and xenophobia by attracting homosexual voters over the idea that refugees are Islamophobic. Therefore, right-wing conservative LGBTI+ organizations attract voters by constructing a whiter privileged queer identity which is reflected as superior than traditional through homonormativity. Homonormativity constructed by West determines state of exception for Muslims whom they position as terrorists (Puar, 2007).

Considering Turkey’s case, it is not possible to refer to exactly same pattern of homonationalism because AKP government and religious institutions adopt derogative attitude against homosexuals. However, AKP stated that they have brought freedom for LGBTI individuals by claiming that Turkey is a country where Gay Pride can be organized. During the election times, AKP distributed their political campaign brochures, on which photos from Gay Pride from Taksim Istanbul are used and a position is questioned; “People who do not support AKP and people who are not conservative believe their life style has been invaded. Do you think do you invade other people’s lives who are different than you?” (*Bakın AKP'nin seçim broşüründe ne yazıyordu*, 2015).

Question was also answered in the brochure;

Turkey is a country which can organize a Gay Pride on Taksim in the middle of Ramadan month. The fact that conservative people are more visible does not mean that other people’s lives are intervened... AKP had never intention to intervene someone’s life and will never have. For 13 years, there has been struggle only for equality for aggrieved part of society. (*Bakın AKP'nin seçim broşüründe ne yazıyordu*, 2015)

AKP aims to spread a tolerance and acceptance for LGBTI+ visibility and life style in Turkey through the message on the brochures by trying to attract and address to potential LGBTI+ voters. Unfortunately, Gay Pride during Ramadan has been banned officially due to security reasons and there has been considerable police violence against LGBTI+ individuals. Thus, AKP has not been able to get support and sympathy from majority of LGBTI+ individuals so far. Considering AKP’s approach to Gay Prides, AK LGBTI has been seen as a controversial group as they consist of mostly male AKP supporters who consider themselves conservative and Muslim homosexual men.

AK LGBTI is a group whose members identify with policies of AKP, which embraces religious conservatism and a nationalistic ideology. To clarify, AKP is Turkey's far-right ruling party developed from Ottoman past and its Islamic identity and AK LGBTI. By embodying Turkish right-wing conservatism, nationalism, Islam, and homosexual identity, AK LGBTI positions itself in a relatively contradictory position considering mainstream LGBTI+ movement in Turkey. Although there have been discussions on Islam and LGBTI+ movement in Turkey, AK LGBTI is the first group who brings up Turkish right-wing conservative homosexual identity into discussion.





## **CHAPTER 6**

### **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

In this chapter, the research reflects upon patterns of AK LGBTI's discourse using, analyzing and interpreting data obtained from interviews and internet research from an analytical and critical perspective. The chapter is divided into six sub-categories; first one is self-identification part, which reflects upon masculine homosexual identity by analyzing the gender politics within masculinity which is shaped "through relations of alliance, dominance, and subordination" (Connell, 2005, p. 37).

The second is other genders and sexualities part, which discusses how AK LGBTI members regard other genders and sexualities by discussing women, feminism, traditional family values and LGBTI+ discussions in Turkey. The third is their organizations and other organizations part, which argues position and visibility of AK LGBTI within mainstream LGBTI+ and queer movement in Turkey. This part also reflects on AK LGBTI's perspective about and criticisms against main LGBTI+ organizations in for being provocative and disrespectful against the moral values of majority. The fourth is Politics part, which discusses statist, conformist a pragmatist approach of AK LGBTI towards LGBTI+ rights; and finally, nationalism part, which discusses how AK LGBTI builds a nationalist LGBTI+ identity and prioritize it over their sexual identity. All sub categories aim to serve as a tool to argue how AK LGBTI establishes a conservative, nationalist, right-wing, statist LGBTI+ identity as individuals who identify themselves as homosexuals.

#### **6.1 AK LGBTI'S SELF-IDENTIFICATION**

AK LGBTI members identify themselves as conservative and Muslim LGBTI+ individuals. By preserving conservative and religious values, the group members reveal a masculine identity and have a traditional approach towards femininity among gay individuals. As gay individuals, AK LGBTI members suggest moderation in psychical appearance, clothing and behavior and claim that homosexual men should avoid extreme feminine clothes and

behaviors in order to avoid negative reactions from their environment and society. They argue that acting otherwise can provoke homophobia by portraying homosexual individuals as if they reject the traditional and religious values of Turkish society. Samet says

As LGBT individuals, we like to be always on the edges, to be visible and to attract attention. For example, in Germany or in the Netherlands, it is hard to point out people who are homosexual because they seem like proper ladies and gentlemen. On the other hand, in our country men are (referring to LGBTI+ individuals) are more feminine, and women are more masculine. For me this is very weird. A person should choose if they want to be woman or man. This betweenness creates sensations.

Samet claims that male and female LGBTI+ individuals who do not reveal they are homosexuals seem like proper ladies and gentlemen, in contrast to general stereotypic LGBTI+ individuals who prefer to attract attention by being extreme feminine or masculine. Therefore, Samet's statement presents a demand for normalization of LGBTI+ individuals because it supports the mindset which accepts man and woman as the main and only genders and makes the distinction between them clear. Samet defends and support the normalization and moderation among LGBTI+ individuals and disapprove the betweenness. This statement shows similarity to Butler's definition of sexes determined by heterosexuality. As Butler explains, for heterosexuality there should be two sexes; "discrete and uniform, and they will be expressed and evidenced in gender and sexuality, so that any social displays of nonidentity, discontinuity, or sexual incoherence will be punished, controlled, ostracized, reformed" (1996, p. 65).

Similarly, Samet conforms to this kind of standardization and clear distinction of genders and sexes determined by heterosexual set of mind. In addition, most group members believe that the 'exaggerated' feminine behaviors such as dressing like women, doing make-up as well as showing nudity and therefore, insulting the values of Turkish society provokes homophobia and reduces the tolerance for LGBTI+ individuals. For example, Samet refers to the Gay Pride during the Ramadan and finds it very disturbing because of nudity exposed by LGBTI+ individuals. He claims this kind of behavior provokes homophobia and holds LGBTI+ individuals responsible for the increasing homophobia.

Furkan as well supports this statement by claiming that performing exaggerated behaviors intentionally and insistently will provoke and frustrate people. He refers to the incident, in which a photo of a man who has a beard and wears high-heels and a purse was taken in subway and shared online. He claims that this is a method to impose the feminine image of gays on society. Furkan further claims that

everything must be in proper amounts. Of course, you can dress like that, but this is contradictory and no LGBT individual actually does that... This perception is created to provoke normal heterosexual part of the society against gays... This photography was only taken to provoke and to give people opportunity to make fun. Heterosexual people are making fun of that guy right now.

According to members, AK LGBTI promotes an acceptable and tolerable LGBTI+ within conservative community by adopting a masculine homosexual identity. Can claims that

people used to swear and stare negatively. They would say 'look what kind of dress that faggot wears' or 'look how that faggot did his hair', 'these are homos', 'they dress like women' etc. But they are surprised when they get to know us. They tell us 'no you cannot be a faggot. Faggots wear women's dresses, go out naked, walk like a woman and put on lipsticks.' Then I say, this is who we are and do not assume all LGBT individuals are same. I also agree with them; the way a person dresses are very important for society's perspective... LGBT doesn't mean - sorry but- wearing revealing clothes. It does not mean walking entirely naked. When we act like that, the society will exclude us... Do you think a society who has seen these kinds of things can think positively?

Similarly, Ozan disapproves effeminacy among gays and describes the night when he went to a bar and an LGBTI+ individual who dressed 'extremely feminine'. He claims that those people think that; "oh, everyone checks me out. But they were just sitting in a café and you attracted their attention. You thought they looked at you with admiration, but everyone actually thought that you are weird. That's why, they stared at you. They wanted to figure out if you are man, woman, homo or a faggot."

Group members believe that mixing the boundaries of traditionally set gender roles causes abnormality and confusion, which can result in getting negative reactions from their environments. AK LGBTI members support the idea that each sex should conform to its established gender and try to normalize themselves by disapproving the betweenness while performing gender. Therefore, members mostly reveal defensive attitude against

homophobia and provocation of the conservative heterosexual people in society. The group emphasizes that homosexuality is mainly associated with effeminacy, which is for them is a huge misperception. For example, Can states that homosexuality is misunderstood in Turkey;

There is a common belief that men are the ones who feel like women and women are the ones who feel like men. I do not think so it is like that. If you have feminine motives, you can be transsexual or travesty. That's another story. But dude, if you are a man, you are just a man. You do not need to act like, dress like and complain like a woman.

Moreover, the group members make distinction between homosexuality as natural and God-given and homosexuality as disease. Members claim that homosexuality might be seen as disease or abnormality when it occurs later or is experienced 'wrongly'. Samet says that homosexuality is not something to be ashamed of if it comes from birth. However, it is a disease if it occurs much later one's life and is a perversion when it is experienced 'wrongly' as described in the story of Lot in Koran. He says "LGBT is so much classified even within itself. For example, bisexuality, activity passivity, transsexuality etc. Besides those, there are many more fantastic incidents within the sexuality. Some of them are really pervert. I do not find it right and can only associate those things with the story of Lot."

They believe sexual identity is something to be kept behind the closed doors and should be expressed in privacy. Furkan claims that sexual identity of a person should stay in the bedroom. He also believes that there is a common misperception like every person should understand and accept LGBTI+ individuals, He does not agree with that statement by claiming no one has obligation to accept each other, and thus, he states that LGBTI+ individuals as well as women repeat a known fact, over emphasize it and disturb people by protesting for their sexual identity and use mottos such as 'I am woman' or 'I am homosexual.'

Members were asked their opinions about reclaiming and reversing the slurs for LGBTI+ by owning them, like in the case of 'faggot' word in Turkey where several LGBTI+ groups owned the word and used it against discrimination with the banner *Velev ki İbneyiz?* (What If We Are Faggots?) during LGBTI+ Istanbul Pride. Furkan approaches this situation negatively and believes that this is humiliating for LGBTI+ individuals. He claims that there

is a bigotry in the fact that LGBTI+ organizations, which own the word “faggot” and use it to demand LGBTI+ rights, use same language with the people who insults LGBTI+ individuals. He also points out the problem of representation by stating that even though LGBTI+ organizations are supposed to be representatives of LGBTI+ individuals, they do not represent him. Furthermore, it would be relevant to refer to a photo that was published by one of AK LGBTI followers and retweeted by AK LGBTI Twitter account in 2017. Photo was taken from a voting cabin during Turkish constitutional Referendum in 2017, which was organized to vote on proposed amendments brought up to change existing parliamentary system into presidential system. In the Twitter post, there was a photo of a ballot stamped to support presidential system. There was a small note next to the ballot; “I was born as faggot, but I will not act like a faggot to my country. That’s why, I say yes” (2017). AK LGBTI official Twitter account retweeted this post on their official Tweeter account. To clarify the meaning, “acting like a faggot” is a slang phrase in Turkish, mostly used with a negative connotation. It has two meanings; first one is ‘a man acting feminine’ and second one ‘someone acting dishonestly’. In this twitter post, the latter is implied. Although they find owning and reclaiming the word faggot wrong, they also use it with negative connotation. Considering the twitter post, being a faggot and acting like a faggot are seen as bad qualities for both person and society.

Therefore, AK LGBTI adopts a masculine homosexual identity which conforms to the traditions and moral values of Turkish society. They believe that masculine, conservative and religious image of AK LGBTI will provide an acceptance of majority within the society, which LGBTI+ organizations generally do not reach because of their radical discourse and ‘disrespectful’ behaviors disregarding morality and customs of Turkish society. The group members regard homosexuality as God-given thing and sexuality as a private issue. According to the members, homosexuality should not be seen as a life-style; if it is experienced as a life-style and or in a sexually ‘deviant’ way -not traditionally-, which is defined by Samet as ‘fantastic incidents’, then homosexuality can be regarded as disease or perversion.

Finally, by conforming to the fundamental moral values and traditions of majority, AK LGBTI members identify themselves with a collective group identity and therefore, reveal an urge to be normal and feel sense of belonging the majority. AK LGBTI identity is maintained and reinforced by strong rejection for effeminacy and with the fear of emasculation and humiliation of other men. According to Taywaditep, anti-effeminacy attitudes among gay men can be seen as the extension of the dominant ideology, hegemonic masculinity, which considers that men are superior to women and femininity; “as in heterosexual men, many gay men would establish the masculinity-based power stratification, leading to the valuation of masculine gay men and devaluation of effeminate gay men. Viewed this way, gay men’s anti-effeminacy prejudice is in continuity with other manifestations of hegemonic masculinity ideology in society, including sexism, antifemininity, subordination of women, and homophobia” (2008, 17).

From Kimmel’s (2000) perspective, it might be said that AK LGBTI members as well construct their masculine homosexual identity in contrast to effeminacy by conforming to normative masculinity. Clarkson (2006) elaborates on the anti-effeminacy attitudes among gays and claims masculine gays can oppress feminine gays in a similar manner hegemonic masculinity excludes gays and non-white men.

Finally, by promoting clear distinction among genders and normative masculinity as male homosexual individuals, AK LGBTI members conform to hegemonic masculinity definition. Members try to perform hegemonic masculinity while they are as well subordinated by normative heterosexuality and their conservative environments as gay men. Therefore, their masculinity performance interchangeably moves between hegemonic and subordinate depending on their social relationships. They position themselves masculine and disapprove femininity while performing hegemonic masculinity over feminine homosexual men. On the other hand, they are also subordinated by hegemonic masculinity as homosexual men by being excluded from their conservative environment as well as mainstream LGBTI+ community. While members try to perform hegemonic masculinity, they also try to earn normalcy, regularity and naturality as subordinated homosexual men

## **6.2 AK LGBTI'S APPROACH TOWARDS OTHER GENDERS AND SEXUALITIES**

AK LGBTI members reveal a heterosexual mindset while expressing their opinions on marriage and family. They believe both marriage and family are both heterosexual institutions; therefore, they consider marriage between gay people not plausible. For instance, Furkan claims that “it is natural that a man and woman gets married. It is natural that you can get married and have kids but there is nothing like that for LGBT individuals because gays do not have any physiological connection to marriage.”

Similarly, Ozan expresses his longing for a family and claims that if there was a treatment for homosexuality, he would get it. He asserts homosexuality does not provide opportunity to start a family and imprisons person either to lonely life or forced marriage. Similarly, Samet claims that several gay men get married with women just not to feel lonely, have a family and someone to take care of them. Therefore, AK LGBTI members project heterosexual ideals for marriage and family.

AK LGBTI members adopt a conventional stance in terms of heterosexual family structure, which is accepted and seen as the most fundamental institution of society in societies and promotes traditional gender roles by projecting women as mothers and men as caretakers and breadwinners.

AK LGBTI members reveal a negative approach towards how feminism is conveyed in Turkey and claim that it creates antipathy in society by provoking people. Furkan states that people already give importance to women, which is derived from Islam and Prophet Mohammad. He explains and refers the times when women were killed by inquisition when girls were buried alive. By comparing with the previous times, he claims that there is no more discrimination against woman in today's world. Thus, he states that feminism in this sense is not functional in Turkey. He also considers feminism unnecessary because it bothers people by insisting upon showing someone's sexual identity of which everyone knows, woman. In this sense, Furkan reveals a conservative stance regarding women rights and feminism.

As AK LGBTI believes that there is no discrimination against women, they also claim that there is a considerable amount of freedom for LGBTI+ individuals in Turkey. The members also claim that this freedom is secured particularly by AKP Government. To demonstrate, Samet states that

LGBT should appreciate and pray for the current time. They are so free. I remember that ten or fifteen years ago, my friends were feminine and acted normal outside but feminine when they came to LGBT cafes. They dressed masculine outside and carried their feminine clothes with them to change it in the café. They would wear shorts and more feminine clothes. When we consider today, they walk on streets holding hands, kiss, and no one cares about their clothes.

Other members also state that Gay Parades started with AKP Government and have continued for almost 15 years. They consider AKP as liberating in this context and use Gay Parades as counter-arguments against claims of homophobia. Members claim that if there was homophobia, there would not be gay parade in Turkey. They also attribute the current ban on gay parade to other LGBTI+ organizations that provoke government. AK LGBTI members also mention President Erdogan's talk in 2002, when he said that "homosexuals' rights and freedoms should be legally protected. We don't find it human to discriminate against homosexuals" (*Abbas Güçlü ile Genç Bakış TV Programı*, 2002).

However, they also claim that Erdogan could not keep his promise because there have been serious problems in Turkey since then and LGBTI+ rights could not be the main focus of the government. Furkan takes it further and claims that there is too much freedom by claiming that there are even applications such as hornet, which government could block if they wished so. Similarly, Can also claims that everyone is treated equally in Turkey from another perspective. He compares current LGBTI+ rights within the current government and the government in 1980s. He claims that during those times, police would arrest transsexual sex workers, take them to police stations, wash them with cold water, shave their heads and then throw them outside almost naked on streets. He says that when transsexuals work as sex workers today, police do not interfere. Can stresses that the current time is better in terms of treatment to transsexual sex workers than before by comparing these two situations. He also adds that it is not easy for society to employ transsexual people as well.



Under those circumstances, it is plausible to say that AK LGBTI members have traditional and conservative stance towards other genders and sexualities. The members regard family as a heterosexual structure and criticize the way women conveys feminism and create antipathy in society because of demanding rights over their sexual identity in public sphere. Generally, AK LGBTI regards sexuality as private issue and suggests that women or LGBTI+ rights should not be associated with sexuality because it can create an antipathy and provocation against women and LGBTI+ individuals within the conservative part of society.

Finally, AK LGBTI's understanding of sexuality in terms of experiencing and demanding rights depends on the moral values and traditions of the society. In other words, AK LGBTI suggests that women and LGBTI+ individuals should take conservative and moral values of the majority into account and keep their sexuality private if they wish to be tolerated and accepted by the society. Therefore, it is plausible to say that AK LGBTI adopts a conformist attitude towards sexuality.

### **6.3 AK LGBTI'S UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGION AND TRADITION**

Islam and homosexuality are often seen as fundamentally incompatible terms within public discourse primarily because Islamic doctrines originating in Koran strictly condemn same-sex sexuality, especially sodomy. However, re-appropriations of Koran have brought different approaches toward this paradoxical relationship. These approaches open a space where Islam and homosexuality can co-exist. For example, the progressive approaches towards Islamic LGBTI+ puts the emphasis on the difference on predilection and practice claiming there is no specific prohibition on same-sex tendency. Amreen Jamal, one of the most influential scholars in this area, says; “perhaps Islam, too, especially in the Western Society, may have to differentiate between queer sexual activity and queer tendencies, also taking a step towards accepting if not the former, at least the latter. It seems, after all, that the focus of the Qur'an is on the sexual act or behavior itself, and not necessarily on the orientation” (Jamal, 2001, p. 70).

Scott Kugle (2010), another scholar from with a progressive approach, discusses non-heterosexuality should be seen as God's divine creation. Similar to Jamal (2001), he also claims that there is no strict prohibition against sexual orientation in Koran explaining how Koran embraces diversity. Moreover, there are several evidences regarding that homosexuality is commonly practiced in Ottoman Empire (Murray, 1997). Among various ideas and assumptions within the progressive approach, Muslim LGBTI+ organizations mostly perceive non-heterosexuality as god's divine creation and underline the difference between sexual act and the orientation claiming Islam accepts diversity within the sexual orientation. Then, they create a coexistence between Islam and homosexuality.

Likewise, AK LGBTI perceives homosexuality as natural and God-given while they consider practicing sexuality as a sin. The members claim that illicit sexual intercourse (*zina*) is a sin regardless sexual orientation for everyone. They also regard sexual identity and religion as two separate concepts which are not relevant to each other. Although members accept practicing sexuality as a sin, they also state that God is forgiving and committing sin is not a reason to abandon religion.

Samet explains homosexuality within religion referring to Koran and says; "God may say 'He is a homosexual, but I will forgive him because he has done a good deed.' Homosexuality in Islam is based on Lot. In Lot, it is not intercourse with men, I mean homosexual intercourse. It is also incestuous relations, challenging God's authority, defaming the prophet, corrupting society."

Similarly, Furkan mentions a conversation where he discusses about his homosexuality with an Imam at the mosque which he visits sometimes. He states that Imam said to him; "I am responsible for my own sins, so are you for your own. I am responsible for my good deeds, so are you for your own. I cannot express an opinion about you. Maybe you have such a strong faith, you would be even considered less sinful than I am."

Therefore, it can be said that AK LGBTI members regard homosexuality as a sin which should be compensated with good deeds. Consequently, Islam plays an essential role while

establishing and experiencing the Muslim homosexual identity as the members consider homosexual acts as sin and regard themselves as sinners.

Muslim LGBTI+ identity is highly essential to AK LGBTI. The group wants to change the non-believer image of LGBTI+ people, as they believe this image is created by liberal/left-wing LGBTI+ organizations in Turkey. They construct their LGBTI+ identity on the basis of Muslim morality and regard liberal/left wing LGBTI+ organizations as immoral and provocative for the society, by referring to public nudity and sexual acts that occurred in the LGBTI+ parade during Ramadan three years ago. Samet states that seeing these 'shameful' images from parade have motivated them to establish AK LGBTI. He says AK LGBTI wants to show that there are Muslim and conservative homosexuals too, as opposed to what is generally believed. In other words, AK LGBTI constructs its Muslim and conservative identity in contrast to liberal/left-wing LGBTI+ organizations.

AK LGBTI's perception of religion as homosexuals shows a great parallelism with Boellstorff's description gay Muslims in Indonesia; "gay Muslims exist, inhabiting spaces of incommensurability between gay, Muslim, and Indonesian. The religious beliefs and practices of gay Muslims are "complementary, overlapping accounts" (Brodwin 2003:86) of faith, habitations of incommensurability involving movement between individual and community" (2005, p. 583).

AK LGBTI members strongly embraces the traditions and claim that they base their conservative identity on traditions of Turkish society. Furkan says;

when we say we are conservative, they ask us what we conserve. We preserve our Turkish culture customs, and traditions. We are trying to conserve our honorable stance rooted in our history... If we are deprived from our culture and traditions, we cannot be the Turkish nation and we would resemble some other nation. Every country has culture and tradition for their own and they have to preserve them.

Furkan also presents an example for Turkish culture and claims that it is a Turkish tradition that a woman does not flirt or have sex with men before she gets married. He states that it would not be considered appropriate within Turkish culture.

Furthermore, Samet explains AK LGBTI tries to create an LGBTI+ group which embraces and preserves Turkish traditions and customs to build more empathy and reduce the tension between society and LGBTI+ individuals. He says;

if we can make LGBT appropriate for Turkish customs and traditions as well as nature of Turkish nation, problems could be solved. We can break the peace within society if we always take this to extremes. Our aim is to be understood and accepted by society. For example, if you go and tell society that there should be same-sex marriage -even if a referendum is hold on it, there can be maybe ten or eleven percent of vote approving. Even that's a low possibility.

Therefore, traditional and religious approach are fundamental for Turkish conservative LGBTI+ identity. AK LGBTI embraces traditionalist and populist approach to find a common ground with the rest of society by addressing dominant Turkish values with which conservative society can identify.

## **6.4 AK LGBTI AND OTHER LGBTI+ ORGANIZATIONS IN TURKEY**

It is important to stress that AK LGBTI is different from mainstream LGBTI+ organizations in Turkey. In order to understand this difference and how AK LGBTI evolved from the mainstream LGBTI+ movement, the background and history of queer and LGBTI+ movement of Turkey should be taken into consideration. Therefore, this chapters and its sub-chapters will shed a light on brief history of queer movement in Turkey, reactions against AK LGBTI from mainstream LGBTI+ organizations, AK LGBTI's criticisms for mainstream LGBTI+ organizations and dynamics of moral values of society and the tension with the government. The chapter analyzes AK LGBTI's agenda, social and political attitude and AK LGBTI's position within Turkey's queer movement.

### **6.4.1 Brief History of Queer Movement in Turkey**

Same-sex relations were commonly practiced and decriminalized during Ottoman Empire Era in 19<sup>th</sup> century (Murray, 1997). Since then, homosexuality has been legal and not

penalized in Turkey although there are not legal rights protecting LGBTI+ individuals. During 20<sup>th</sup> century, although there was not any officially active LGBTI+ organization in Turkey, future queer movement was shaped through political problems in 1970s and 1980s. Modern and secular Turkey of 1970s aimed to provide gender equality between man and woman by giving women more opportunity to be visible in several spheres of life in society. Therefore, any idea beyond heteronormativity was ignored as a result of focusing only women rights in relation to men (Çetin, 2015). In 1974, the government had to make a coalition with a conservative and Islamist party, which destroyed queer movement and oppressed LGBTI+ individuals socially and economically in society. Especially after 12 September 1980 Turkish coup d'état, efforts for LGBTI+ organizations were completely terminated by the government. All political parties as well as LGBTI+ organizations were banned; freedom of protest, speech and press were seriously restricted. Political and queer activists were jailed, extensively tortured and even in some cases denaturalized by the state. Because of oppressions, many activists including queer individuals migrated to Europe and USA and joined to antimilitarist, environmentalist, and feminist groups, which determined the ideological background of queer movement of Turkey later. Especially in 1980s, transgender individuals especially, transsexual sex workers were exported from city centers to suburbs by trains. They were also arrested and physically tortured in police stations. Several transsexual individuals lost their jobs and houses. Because of the severe conditions, lesbian, gay and transsexual individuals started to protest and organize collectively in public sphere. They became visible after they got support from feminist, leftist and human rights organizations. In late 1980s, lesbian and gay individuals started to protest collectively as well as transsexual individuals.

In 1990s LGBTI+ organizations started to be officially visible and increased significantly in number in 2000s. As the first LGBTI+ organizations of Turkey, Lambda Istanbul and Kaos GL, which are still two important LGBTI+ organizations, were established in 1990s. Since then, several more important LGBTI+ organizations such as Black Pink Triangle Association, Rainbow LBTT Association and Pink Life LBTT Association among many others have been established until now.

#### 6.4.2 AK LGBTI and Reactions from Other LGBTI+ Organizations

Since 1970s, most LGBTI+ organizations have been considered as left and liberal organizations. Most of them have identified themselves with anti-militarist, anti-racist, anti-fascist and feminist background by opposing the government policies. Therefore, AK LGBTI is considered different than prominent LGBTI+ movement of Turkey because of its conservative and right-wing ideological background.

AK LGBTI members claim that their aim is to show that conservative and Muslim LGBTI+ individuals exist in Turkey. The members express that they don't feel any belonging to the already existing LGBTI+ organizations, which mostly address people with left/liberal views rather than conservative and Muslim LGBTI+ individuals. Members also believe that most LGBTI+ organizations project the atheist or non-believer image of LGBTI+ individual. Thus, they state that they felt excluded and isolated from LGBTI+ organizations, which was their motivation to establish AK LGBTI. They express that what brings them together is being conservative and LGBTI+ individual. They are also open to anyone from different views as well.

After AK LGBTI opened an LGBTI+ flag in one of the AKP rallies (*AKP'li eşcinseller Erdoğan'ın önünde*, 2014), the group gained a considerable visibility and started to give interviews to several magazines and journals. However, when one of the magazines used the photos of the group members to publish the interview, members' identities were revealed, which resulted many members losing their job. Therefore, several members of the group stopped being active; and, AK LGBTI became less visible. The members claim that they want to stay less visible because their most important aim was to prove their existence. Samet states that as a group they don't want to distract government from the important agenda of Turkey. Moreover, he explains that the aim of the group is to change people's perspective by being visible; "we are not how they see us. Conservative, AKP supporter and Erdogan fan. We are just trying to remove the prejudices."

The group members express a disappointment about the hostile reactions they have got from other LGBTI+ organizations so far. Samet states that it is not possible to discuss and reach

to a compromise because they always criticize AK LGBTI members for being die-hard supporters of the ruling party. Especially Ozan shares his negative experiences with the people who support different political parties. He says that one person was disgusted from him and told him that he wants to kill him as a joke when he learned that Can is an AKP supporter. He also says that one of the most common reactions they got was AK LGBTI supports a political party who wants to kill themselves. However, as whole group they strongly disagree this statement and find it quite absurd and unreasonable. Can even claims that if government wanted to kill them, they would already. He says that there are around five people whose names are revealed as AK LGBTI supporters and they are easy to be found; government could easily find them if they wanted to.

#### **6.4.3 AK LGBTI's Criticizations For Mainstream LGBTI+ Organizations in Turkey**

AK LGBTI members criticize several left/liberal LGBTI+ organizations, especially Lambda, Kaos GL, and Black Pink Triangle LBTT Organizations, for being radically against the government. Ozan claims that the main aim of other LGBTI+ organizations is to be in opposition with government. Similarly, Samet states that they are very destructive in terms of the way how they communicate with the government. He says that no one can demand any rights by insulting government or the President. Like other members, Samet suggests that LGBTI+ organizations must be less radical and more modest towards the government adopting friendlier attitude; otherwise, they would have government as enemy rather than an ally for themselves because government would always associate their behavior with the LGBTI+ activists from Gezi occupy.

AK LGBTI members criticize other LGBTI+ organizations firstly with provoking the government by rejecting the rules of the system. Can states that;

they could do the parade after only 10 days. Every country on the world does not celebrate gay pride on the same day...The officials tell them to do the parade on another date. But they insist doing it on the date they want. They intentionally want to create provocation. If you provoke, you won't reach any

solution. No institution will take you seriously... You know system has banned that and you still insist on it... Which one is more appropriate? To do what system banned or to do what system offers you? You must obey the system so that it will protect you. The police would protect you if you did your parade ten days later. But again, the same police throw gas and plastic bullets to you because you do not obey the laws. We don't have patience at all... Whomever bans and allows the parade is the same system. Nevertheless, we have done that well for ten years.

AK LGBTI members claim that their modest attitude is what makes them distinctive from other LGBTI+ organizations. They claim that they do not want to be recognized by the government like other LGBTI+ organizations who radically oppose the government because they want to communicate to the institutions of government. Members say that they do not want to be identified with especially LGBTI+ organizations that protested in Gezi Resistance. Samet states that; “we have a very thin line. There are all other LGBT organizations, but we are on our own. They are together, but we are alone.”

Moreover, according to AK LGBTI members, other LGBTI+ organizations disregard culture, traditions and religion, and moral values of Turkey. All members criticize especially the Gay Parade during Ramadan. They all claim that LGBTI+ individuals disrespected the religion of the majority during Ramadan by exposing nudity, dressing ‘immorally’ and insulting the government and religion. Samet states that;

Gay Parade didn't have to be during the Ramadan. It could be any other week... If we expect respect from people, first we need to be respectful. It is not considered appropriate that this kind of parade is organized, and nudity is openly exposed during such a Holy day. We live in a sensitive society and in a Muslim country. We are laic yet; most people are Muslims. Finally, we demand freedom but also restrict someone else's freedom.

Furkan criticizes other LGBTI+ organizations for their disrespectful behavior towards religion as well as their attitude towards government by pointing out problem of agency. He especially criticizes the banner which has religious references in the Gay Parade during the Ramadan by claiming that they are highly insulting to religion. He especially refers to the banner on which it was written: “Şaban'la Recep'in aşkına Ramazan engel olamaz,” which can be translated as “Ramazan cannot stop the love between Şaban and Recep.” In Islamic context, Recep, Şaban and Ramazan are used to name three successive months considered to



be holy before the month of Ramadan starts. They are also commonly used male names in Turkey. Recep is also first name of Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The banners were found disrespectful for religion by Turkish officials. The activists carrying the banner were sued. Therefore, he states LGBTI+ organizations insult people's religion, way of living, traditions and customs by ignoring the fact that most of them are Muslims and believers although they are supposed to act as representatives. He says that using this kind of banners that insult religion, especially during Ramadan, is not tolerable. The group members express a great disturbance from nudity exposed during the Gay Parade. They believe that this kind of behaviors are quite pornographic and could be hurtful to see for kids and families as well. For example, Samet describes Gay Parade as threatening to the traditional family values as well as indecent due to inclusion of public nudity and openly sexual behavior.

Similarly, Ozan criticizes LGBTI+ organizations about provoking government by insisting to do Gay Parade during Ramadan. He states that they just want to destroy moral values of the society. He says that people become nervous while they are fasting, so it is quite normal they get aggressive to see this Parade during Ramadan. In that case, they consider LGBTI+ individuals as devils to be stoned. One of the interesting facts is that AK LGBTI members attended Gay Parade during Ramadan wearing fez and holding Turkish flag. Ozan claims that because of their fez and Turkish flag, police did not attack them by assuming they are not part of Gay Parade. This also gave them opportunity to move around freely in the Gay Parade. Ozan says that "I do not know we would be treated in same manner if we had LGBT flags with us. We would be probably insulted and sworn by them. They could attack us."

AK LGBTI members state that the reason why they wore fez and carried Turkish flags was to show their respect for Turkish nation and traditions. They claim that is the reason why they did not come across with any negative reactions. The group also shared an announcement on their Facebook page (2017) about the LGBTI+ parade as a screenshot of the email that they sent to several LGBTI+ organizations. In that announcement, they warned AK LGBTI supporters to be 'decent' and sensitive about Turkish traditions and values by caring the clothing and behavior.

#### **6.4.4 Moral Values of Society and Tension with The Government**

LGBTI+ organizations' approach towards sex work is also heavily criticized by AK LGBTI members. Within the group, it is commonly believed that LGBTI+ organizations promote sex work by claiming rights for sex workers. Furkan openly claims that LGBTI+ organizations encourage sex work by demanding decriminalization of sex work. He further states that LGBTI+ organizations treat transsexual individuals as sex objects by claiming rights rather than trying to stop it. Similarly, Samet criticizes both LGBTI+ individuals and organization by disapproving transsexual sex workers as he believes that someone could not be forced into sex working because earning money in "clean" ways is always possible. Samet also claims that LGBTI+ organizations normalize prostitution and lead transsexual individuals to sex work by claiming rights and freedom for sex workers.

According to AK LGBTI members, LGBTI+ organizations cannot succeed to maintain a healthy relationship between LGBTI+ individuals and the rest of the society because of their radical attitude against government, disrespecting cultural and religious values of society and promoting sex working. Thus, LGBTI+ organizations give a negative connotation of gayness and provoke intolerance against gays within the society where the majority of people is Muslim and conservative. Ak LGBTI members suggests that LGBTI+ organizations should adopt more populist attitude by addressing people' nationalist and patriotic emotions to create a bond and a positive image. For example, the members claim that donating money for martyrs, sending books and clothes to the kids in eastern Turkey, and opening shelters for cats and dogs among many others could improve the acceptance and tolerance for LGBTI+ individuals in the society. Furkan states that acting otherwise can increase the tension between society and LGBTI+ individuals, which could result with hate murders. He also strictly argues that hate murders are not political; they are rather committed by people whose hate is provoked by LGBTI+ organization. By addressing to LGBTI+ organizations, Furkan says that; "government is not murderer; the murderers are the people whose hate is fueled by you. Hate murders are not political. Hate murders are particularly brought about by LGBT organizations."

He believes that people within the society will regard LGBTI+ individuals as their enemies because they would assume LGBTI+ individuals are mostly atheist or non-believer. According to Furkan, people can also get aggressive and violent because LGBTI+ individuals insult majority's religion and way of living.

Furthermore, AK LGBTI members explain how other LGBTI+ organizations are funded generously by claiming that the funding organizations from abroad do not approve nationalist and Islamist approach. LGBTI+ organizations are aware of the fact that they will not be funded if they adopt a nationalist and Islamist approach.

Other members also discuss that LGBTI+ organizations mainly try to get as much fun as they can get from abroad and do not use their budget efficiently to improve rights of LGBTI+ individuals; they rather use the funds only to cover their own costs. Therefore, the group members assert that their organization will not be funded because AK LGBTI is an organization that supports Turkish government and concerns about the people within the society.

Regarding LGBTI+ rights, AK LGBTI members sort out certain priorities in terms of importance. For example, while several LGBTI+ organizations throughout the world claim same-sex marriage, AK LGBTI believes that the focus must be on more fundamental rights such as right to life, right to work and housing right claiming that same-sex marriage is not currently necessary to improve LGBTI+ rights and can also arouse a growing antipathy towards LGBTI+ individuals within the conservative society.

Finally, AK LGBTI is founded to create a space where Muslim and conservative LGBTI+ individuals can feel belonging. However, AK LGBTI regards homosexuality as a problem to be accepted and tolerated by people within society, by implying that LGBTI+ organizations should be good terms with both people and the government, so that they can be accepted and tolerated in the society. The group members consider that LGBTI+ individuals could be integrated into society only if they respect the common moral and religious values of the majority. Within AK LGBTI discourse, left/liberal LGBTI+ is occasionally positioned as potential danger that can be seen as a threat for the moral values of the society. Instead of

criticizing the nature of this threat, AK LGBTI prefers trying to reach a compromise with the majority by promoting and adopting dominant values of society. Therefore, instead of accepting and embracing the differences of LGBTI+ individuals, AK LGBTI adopts an agenda which aims to normalize LGBTI+ individuals within the rest of the society.

## **6.5 AK LGBTI'S STANCE ON TURKISH POLITICS**

AK LGBTI reveals statist, conformist and pragmatist while positioning themselves as citizens. AK LGBTI members aim to construct strong relations with the state in order to be more visible and heard for LGBTI+ rights. They believe that having strong ties and being good terms with the government is the way to demand rights. For example, Ozan describes situation employing a metaphor and says that when people want to change something in the house they are living in, they first need to ask and have permission from the landlord. Therefore, it is always useful to be in good terms and avoid conflicts for a healthy communication. He claims that “in a similar way, we need to be close to the power in order to achieve something”. Ozan also stresses that he firstly priorities his country as a citizen. He presents the reason behind supporting AKP as supporting the government by claiming that individuals need a strong government to be able to demand rights from it. That's why, AK LGBTI members disapprove other LGBTI+ organizations attitude towards government and criticize them for being too radical and disrespectful against government during their protests. Furkan argues that as organizations recognized by government, LGBTI+ organizations must be on good terms with government. He explains the government is the main respondent for LGBTI+ organizations to demand LGBTI+ rights. Under those circumstances, the government will surely not recognize these organizations that cause conflict.

Although AK LGBTI members criticize the common perception that LGBTI+ individuals support either CHP (Republican People's Party) or HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party). CHP is known to be Kemalist and social-democratic political party while HDP is known to be generally left-wing pro-minority one. They object this statement and point out that LGBTI+

individuals do not have any obligation to support liberal parties just because they are homosexuals. They also object to the idea that HDP came out to be a most LGBTI+ friendly political party, which caused LGBTI+ individuals to support HDP. AK LGBTI claims that they want to change the perception that HDP equals to LGBTI+ by juxtaposing their own conservative LGBTI+ existence with HDP. Can explains that no other political party besides AKP suits his ideas and ideologies because he believes that other parties do not reflect upon national and religious values in a unifying way as much as AKP does. Similarly, Samet also explains AK LGBTI members mostly support AKP not because of a specific person or a specific political party but because they support the government. He states that he does not know Tayyip Erdogan will always stay as president; when there will be another president, they will support the other president. Although there is obvious sympathy towards President Erdogan in the group, Samet claims that their connection to AKP is not based on one person but it is based on their commitment to the government.

AK LGBTI members claim that their group embraces people from various political views and backgrounds. However, the members criticize CHP and HDP also about not being sincere and honest about their views on LGBTI+ rights. AK LGBTI claims that HDP and CHP presents LGBTI+ candidates to parliament from such positions and regions which offer low possibility to be chosen as MP. In other words, AK LGBTI states that although HDP and CHP officials are aware of that fact, they still insincerely present LGBTI+ candidates only to attract more votes from LGBTI+ individuals. Although they accept the fact that AKP does not even try to present any LGBTI+ candidates, they believe it is because Turkey has more significant problems right now.

Finally, AK LGBTI positions itself different from both other political parties and LGBTI+ organizations with their conservative identity. They support AKP because of their nationalist and conservative views as well as being part of the majority and closer to the power. By promoting nature of hegemonic masculinity and adopting conformist and pragmatist approach to be closer to the power, masculinity performance of AK LGBTI can be considered as *complicit* within the political context (Connell, 1995). Connell (1995) defines *complicit* masculinity as masculinities who do not completely fulfill hegemonic masculinity but rather

gain and benefit from it. Despite their performance of hegemonic masculinity through strong disapproval of effeminacy, AK LGBTI masculinity is not considered as hegemonic because male homosexuality is considered to be a subordinate masculinity within normative masculinity context. The group members also support a political party that produce derogative discourse against homosexuality and promote traditional gender roles, to be stronger as a part of majority and closer to the power to achieve their aims. Therefore, AK LGBTI members benefit from the power and hierarchy and do not attempt to challenge heteronormativity. At this point, AK LGBTI's complicit masculinity performance also becomes political and pragmatist by identifying themselves with a political background as well as adopting a statist attitude in order to obtain power.

Moreover, it can be said that their group motivation is mostly rooted in common political interests as almost all members have a great sympathy for AKP and Erdogan. Samet refers to the incident when they waved the LGBTI+ rainbow flag during Erdogan's speech on one of the AKP rallies and says "he could disapprove and send us out. But he did not. We take it as a good sign. It means that he understands and supports us." Samet also describes the incident and says; "It is like going to a Galatasaray game with a Fenerbahce flag." (Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe are the biggest rival football teams in Turkey.) ...We could be lynched. It was a great courage." Moreover, on one of their interviews, one of members said that; "If he said, 'put down the flags', we would say 'as you wish chief' and leave the rally area" (Durgun, 2014). This indicates that the group is ready to denounce internationally recognized LGBTI+ symbol (rainbow flag) if only encouraged to do so by the AKP leader. Thus, AK LGBTI seem to determine its borders of LGBTI+ existence and visibility in accordance to the will of the man they regard as moral authority. Although the members disapprove AKP's prejudiced discourse against homosexuality, they base their citizenship on supporting the government (Yalcin, 2017). Eğılmez (2016), in her article "Sexual Citizenship: AK LGBTI" discusses AK LGBTI within sexual citizenship concept by Weeks (1988) through positioning the question if AK LGBTI members could be considered as sexual citizens or not. According to Weeks (1988), sexual citizenship in modern age could be understood as demand for an institutional belonging and inclusion to the system as non-

heterosexuals by claiming social, economic and legal rights to choose their partner, sexual life, to adopt a child or not and what to do with one's own body. In other words, sexual citizens can claim equal protection by the law, equal rights at work, in parenting, for social status in easy circumstances. Therefore, it can be said that, sexual citizenship creates a space where intimacy becomes a legal right beside a personal choice. Eğılmez (2016) describes what Weeks (1988) calls breach as occurrence of non-heterosexuals as homosexual and lesbian individuals and challenging society with carnivalesque spectacles such as Gay parades and kissing in public. Moreover, for Weeks (1988) the breach, which exist within the frame of sexual subjectivity, is the bearer of new private and daily life politics. Eğılmez (2016) further refers to the interview where members tell their story of opening LGBTI+ flag in front of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was the prime minister during that time. She states that AK LGBTI's visibility attempt can be still considered as radical because Erdogan did not say to put the flags down. Nevertheless, homosexual representations presented by AK LGBTI members defines the borders that sexual citizenships breach, even if they do not put the flag down. She asserts that, according to AK LGBTI members, it is determined that how an acceptable homosexual can dress and live their sexuality (Eğılmez, 2016).

## **6.6 AK LGBTI'S PRIORITIZING NATIONALIST VALUES UPON LGBTI+ RIGHTS IN TURKEY**

As supporters of AKP, AK LGBTI members reveal a very nationalist, patriotic, conservative and traditionalist attitude. Different than left-wing/liberal LGBTI+ groups in Turkey, AK LGBTI does not struggle for official recognition of their rights (partnerships, child adoption etc.) but rather focuses on its efforts to stand for basic human rights such as living, working, housing, safety etc. The members assert that their priority is to protect Turkey's national interests, claiming that they should support their government first to be able to demand advancement of LGBTI+ rights. They also state that LGBTI+ organizations do not and should not represent a political party or ideology because there are various kinds of people within LGBTI+ organizations. Moreover, LGBTI+ organizations are expected to care about their country and government as Turkish citizens. Furkan presents an example by referring

to Afrin Operation on the border with Syria and says that all citizens as well as LGBTI+ organizations must support that operation and stand by the government as citizens concerned about safety and unity of their country. He also criticizes prominent LGBTI+ organizations as they do not promote the importance of nation and government. Similarly, Samet claims that as LGBTI+ individuals, they do not want to distract and change the agenda of Turkey while there are serious problems both internally and externally. Furkan clearly states that “benefit of my country comes before my sexual identity. If this country does not exist, I cannot find a place to have my sexual identity...My nation and country come before everything.”

When they are asked about their opinions regarding obligatory military service, two of them claim it should not be obligatory, Furkan and Samet think that military service is an essential duty for someone who loves his land. Samet claims that regardless someone’s ethnic background, people who are raised in Turkey and benefit from its facilities owe government a debt of gratitude. Similarly, Furkan also claims that obligatory military service is a must and everyone who lives in Turkey is responsible for protecting their land. For him, military service is a determining factor to see the difference between people who does and does not love their country. Although both Samet and Furkan suggests that military service is a must, they also clarify that this is only their personal idea and does not mean that everyone needs to follow it.

Ozan and Furkan claims that if homosexual men want to serve in military, they should not openly express their sexual identity. They say they both could fulfill their duty for the country because they did not reveal their sexual identity. Particularly Furkan explains that a homosexual man can go to military service only if he can control his behaviors and his sexuality. He believes that if he cannot control his sexuality, he could sleep with all the men in the troop. In other words, he claims if he reveals he is gay, he should not serve in military at all. He states that revealing homosexual identity within such an environment for one year can create serious problems for him and he could be insulted by other men.



Nationalism as an ideology and national narratives are created and established for heterosexual men. Militarism, nationalism and heterosexual masculinity go hand to hand within these narratives. Nationalism also promotes and contributes to the heteronormativity by imposing certain roles for men as fighter, father and savior and women as mothers, bearers of the pure nation and caretakers. Therefore, by promoting hegemonic masculinity as well, homosexuality and femininity are excluded from national institutions (Nagel, 2003). However, regarding homonationalism, Puar discusses that “some homosexual subjects are complicit with heterosexual nationalist formations rather than inherently or automatically excluded from or opposed to them” (Puar, 2007, p. 4). Moreover, it is also important to stress that nationalism and militarism are essential sentiments for formation of normative Turkish masculinity. The obligatory military service is seen as the core of becoming man and the values such as bravery, duty and martyrdom are always associated with masculinity. Therefore, performing hegemonic masculinity in Turkey requires to be nationalist, patriotic and militarist.

At this point, it is necessary to bring up a question here; Is a nationalist LGBTI+ possible? If nationalism adopt heteronormative and homophobic discourse, how nationalist LGBTI+ be considered within the queerness which creates new spaces for new identities?

## CONCLUSION

The research tries to reflect upon the process of AK LGBTI's formation, how gender and sexuality are shaped around conservative and national politics of Turkey through AK LGBTI identity and finally how AK LGBTI masculine homosexual identity is performed and become political.

In order to understand evolution of AK LGBTI, it is important to stress that generally in Turkey, LGBTI+ communities hold left-wing and liberal views and reject and question the dominant gender patterns imposed by the authority. They also fight against dominant ideologies that cause discrimination such as homophobia, heteronormativity, patriarchy and fascism. Moreover, generally within LGBTI+, queer movement object hegemonic classifications and categorizations of gender and sexuality by reproducing and embracing differences of LGBTI+ individuals as well as questioning and de-constructing traditional gender roles of the society.

On the other hand, AK LGBTI adopts a masculine, nationalist, patriotic, conservative and religious homosexual identity. Moreover, AK LGBTI's identity and group visibility are based on moral values of society derived from religion and tradition. In this regard, AK LGBTI is an unorthodox group because of their nationalist, conservatist and anti-feminine attitude as an LGBTI+ group. Moreover, AK LGBTI members perform Turkish hegemonic masculinity model which promotes nationalist, militarist and heteronormative manhood. However, performance of masculinity shapes around power and status between hegemonic, subordinate and hegemonic. To clarify, performance of hegemonic masculinity as male homosexual individuals is based on strong rejection of effeminacy and fear of emasculation. Therefore, they position themselves more hegemonic and powerful in terms of being tolerated and accepted in society in contrast to feminine gay individuals. Performing Turkish model of hegemonic masculinity, in other words adopting masculine, nationalist, patriotic and conservative sentiments, presents them an opportunity to be tolerated and recognized by conservative part of society as well as their work and family environment. As male homosexual individuals, they also perform subordinate masculinity when they cannot fulfill the requirements of hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, they can be considered subordinate

within both Turkey's majority of left/liberal LGBTI+ community as well as within their conservative family and work environment, which could be considered as reason for performing hegemonic masculinity. AK LGBTI members also perform complicity with heteronormative and hegemonic values by conforming and gaining from patriarchy. The group members reveal a pragmatist behavior by adopting nationalist and statist attitude and constructing their identity on the base of Turkish tradition and moral values, in order to achieve recognition and acceptance from conservative society and the government. The constant shift between hegemony, subordination and complicity is essential to understand the dynamics of AK LGBTI's masculinity performance depending on power and social relationships and how they position themselves within the hierarchy of masculinity as well as LGBTI+ context.

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