RECONCILING RELIGION AND SEXUALITY: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF YOUTH IN TURKEY

by
ZEYNEP KUYUMCU

Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Sabancı University
August 2020

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Approved by:

Prof. Ayşe Gül Altınay .....
(Thesis Supervisor)

Assoc. Prof. Hülya Adak .....

Asst. Prof. Evren Savcı .....

Date of Approval: August 17, 2020

ABSTRACT

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ZEYNEP KUYUMCU

CULTURAL STUDIES M.A. THESIS, AUGUST 2020

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Ayşe Gül Altınay

Keywords: LGBT Muslims, Sexuality, Islam, Turkey, Ethnography

Based on participant observation, oral history and ethnographic interviews with LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans) Muslims from Turkey, this research investigates sexual and religious negotiations of LGBT Muslims. How do LGBT Muslims in Turkey narrate themselves and their religious and sexual experiences? How do they interpret their spiritual and sexual practices in relation to their Muslim identity? What are some of the ways in which LGBT Muslims negotiate their position as non-normative sexual subjects in a country where Muslims constitute the majority and as religious subjects within predominantly secular LGBTI+ communities? What are the existing theoretical and political frameworks with which one can make sense of LGBT Muslim lives, particularly in the Turkish context? Situating the experiences of LGBT Muslims in Turkey within the global context and literature, this research shows the ways in which LGBT Muslims have developed creative approaches to the tensions that exist between Islam, sexuality, piety and spirituality. Based on ethnographic research in Turkey where there has been a lack of research in this area, this thesis aims to contribute to the growing transnational literature on sexuality, spirituality, piety and Islam.

ÖZET

DİNİ VE CİNSELLİĞİ BARIŞTIRMAK: TÜRKİYE'DE BİR GENÇLİK ETNOGRAFİSİ

ZEYNEP KUYUMCU

KÜLTÜREL ÇALIŞMALAR YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, AĞUSTOS 2020

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Ayşe Gül Altınay

Anahtar Kelimeler: Müslüman LGBT, Cinsellik, İslam, Türkiye, Etnografi

Bu çalışma Türkiye'de yaşayan Müslüman LGBT'lerle (Lezbiyen, Gey, Biseksüel, Trans) yapılan katılımcı gözlem, sözlü tarih ve etnografik mülakatlara dayanarak Müslüman LGBT'lerin cinsel ve dini müzakerelerini araştırmaktadır. Türkiye'deki Müslüman LGBT'ler kendilerini, dini ve cinsel deneyimlerini nasıl anlatıyorlar? Spiritüel ve cinsel pratiklerini Müslüman kimlikleri bağlamında nasıl yorumluyorlar? Müslümanların çoğunluğu oluşturduğu bir ülkede normatif olmayan cinsel özneler; sekülerliğin ağır bastığı LGBTI+ topluluklarda ise dindar özneler olarak kendi konumlarını nasıl tartışıyorlar? Türkiye bağlamında Müslüman LGBT hayatlar mevcut teorik ve politik çerçevelerde nasıl anlamlandırılabilir? Türkiye'deki Müslüman LGBT'lerin deneyimlerini küresel bağlam ve ulusötesi literatür çerçevesinde tartışmayı amaçlayan bu araştırma, Müslüman LGBT'lerin İslam, cinsellik, dindarlık ve spiritüellik ekseninde yaşanan gerilimlere yönelik geliştirdikleri yaratıcı yaklaşımları incelemektedir. Bu alanda yetersiz araştırmanın olduğu Türkiye'de gerçekleştirilen bu etnografik çalışma, cinsellik, spiritüellik, dindarlık ve İslam konularında gelişmekte olan ulusötesi literatüre de katkı sunmayı amaçlar.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I cannot thank my supervisor, Ayşe Gül Altınay, enough for her strongest faith and encouragement in my research. This thesis would not have been possible without her support and tremendous contribution throughout this research. I also express my gratitude to my thesis jury, Evren Savcı and Hülya Adak who were pioneers to shape my thesis by reading patiently and giving their valuable feedbacks. Thanks to their insightful comments and suggestions, I am satisfied from the work I have completed successfully.

My thesis companions' support in this research needs to be noticed here. Nazlı Hazar and Berfu Serçe, who are two brave researchers, accompanied me through this journey. By sharing our concerns, happiness, worries and doubts, I felt their existence made this journey joyful and less painful, which I am indebted to them.

I am blessed with many beloved people who always promote my academic works with their love and endless companionship. Many thanks and love go to Meryem Zişan Köker, Celile Zeynep Demir, Tuğba Yavuz, Tuğçe Tunçel, Büşra Budak, Sena Tepelioğlu, Ayşe Feyza Göksu, Ecmel Ertaş, Kaan Kurt and Zeynep Oyan. I cannot express enough how I feel gratitude for each of them. Sümeyye Koca, who is my lifetime bestie, showed an enormous interest in my research even from the time I had not get the acceptance letter from any master program till the very end stages of this thesis. I can never express her enough for the great support and love she gave me. Without her precious existence, I could not complete my thesis.

Last but not least, the bright people who contribute this research anonymously deserve many thanks. Their courage and strength enriched this research much more than they would think of.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Are there any LGBT Muslims? If there are, where are they? How do they express their sexualities? I remember the time when I asked these questions as if it were yesterday. I was attending a lecture of Professor Ferhat Kentel who was teaching "Modernization and Social Change" class during my junior year at the Istanbul Sehir University. He was pushing us to think about how thinking inside a monotonous and monolithic society leads us to ignore relatively minor identities. While the class stayed silent, he assigned this question as a take-home paper and wanted us to think deeply about this question.

Although I had no idea about what to write on for this homework, sometime later, my excitement as a recent subscriber to an LGBT magazine helped me. I had subscribed to the Kaos GL Magazine which is a non-academic LGBTI magazine[1] published in Ankara, Turkey. The first issue that arrived at my dormitory address was "Queer Studies" and there was an article called "İslamda Eşcinsellik" ("Homosexuality in Islam"). I read the whole article in one sitting and I was delighted to find out that the reference list was the same as my already-have-read-list. However, I wondered why the article was written in such a reserved manner. Later I recognized that this article was a rare attempt to write "objectively" on this subject. After reading that article, I searched the internet and found almost nothing about the experiences of LGBT Muslims or LGBT inclusive Islamic interpretations in Turkish, except for one BlogSpot site (Eflatoon). That was an important moment in my life because I realized how Muslim identities' representation is limited to the heterosexual matrix and that, in general, LGBT individuals with intersectionally complex identities in Turkey has limited representations.

This research aims to address the experiences of LGBT[2] Muslims in Turkey, focusing

[1] Kaos GL Magazine identifies itself as LGBTI

[2] Throughout the paper I use the term "LGBT" although the terms LGBTI and LGBTI+ are more commonly used today. The reason why I use the term "LGBT" is that my research is limited to lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender individuals, whom I had access to. Unfortunately, I could not conduct interviews with individuals who define themselves as intersex, pansexual or with other sexual identifications. I explain this issue in the methodology part of this chapter.

on their own narratives of self-identification, as well as their religious, spiritual, pious and sexual practices. To be clearer, I approach LGBT Muslims as an identity in the which the participants in this study perceive being an LGBT Muslim as an identity. In addition, I do not aim to define the identity of LGBT Muslim in order to prevent any inconsistency between my definition and LGBT Muslims who can have different definitions. For this reason, I focus on my participants' understanding of being LGBT Muslims, which they do not treat as an experience but an identity. This research aims to find out the following question: How LGBT Muslims have reshaped Islam in the course of their lives, and how they interpret their spiritual and sexual practices in relation to their Muslim identity constitute the main questions of this research.

What makes the research participants in this study peculiar is that they fall out of and challenge the existing social science and humanities literature on (1) LGBT Muslims in the world, (2) the history of non-normative sexualities in Muslim-majority societies, (3) LGBT and queer lives in Turkey. In this chapter, I review the existing literature on these three axes to elaborate on the absence of LGBT Muslim representation in Turkey. What are the existing theoretical and political frameworks with which one can make sense of LGBT Muslim lives, particularly in the Turkish context? After situating my study in the literature; I explain the main questions of this research along with the methodology, my positionality and overview of chapters.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Studies on LGBT and Queer Muslims in the Global Context

I believe that separating the existing literature on LGBT and Queer Muslims into two contextual categories would be useful: Muslim minority contexts with a secular legal framework and Muslim majority contexts without a secular legal framework. In what follows, I first explore the literature on these two contexts in terms of how LGBT and Queer Muslims are situated and researched. Then, I discuss the representations on non-normative sexualities in the medieval Islam and Ottoman Empire, and LGBT and Queer lives in the context of Turkey and situate my own

research.

In the countries where Muslims are in the minority and the secular legal framework is dominant, especially in European countries and United States, LGBT and Queer Muslims are considered as diasporic subjects and are often studied in terms of their "cultural difference", citizenship status, sexual minority status and Islamic subjecthood (Peumans 2017; Yorukoglu 2010). Most often, the secular legal framework provides safety, recognition and acceptance to LGBT and Queer Muslims in front of the laws, as well as shaping their lives and politics:

> "It would seem that the only option offered to LGBTIQ Muslims in the West and/or legally protected societies (with the exception of remaining celibate, maintaining a position of invisibility and silence relating to one's sexuality, and/or possibly verbalizing one's condition by way of an avowal of its unlawful nature) is to seek acceptance through the secular framework." (Mahomed 2016, 61)

However, portraying the secular framework as the only possibility for recognition and rights reproduces the orientalist and fundamentalist views on LGBT and queer Muslims in Muslim majority countries (Mahomed 2016, 62). Typically, acceptance and tolerance are constructed as part of U.S. or European exceptionalism, in opposition to Muslim majority countries and the religion of Islam at large (Puar 2007). Ayisha A. Al-Sayyad uses the concept "constructed contradiction" to formulate the binary construction of Islam and "monolithic Western views of queer identity or practices" in her study conducted with queer Muslims living in North America (Al-Sayyad 2010, 374). In a similar vein, Armanc Yildiz makes a significant contribution to the literature on homonationalism and orientalism via the example of the "Turkish Boat " which was organized for the 2012 Canal Pride Parade in the Netherlands (Yildiz 2017). The "Turkish Boat" was aimed at representing immigrants from Turkey who symbolize the liberation from the "taboos" of Turkish culture by adopting the tolerance of Dutchness (Yildiz 2017, 702). According to Yildiz, this form of Canal Pride Parade demonstrates "a crystallized manifestation" of how Dutch, Turkish and gay identities are situated historically and "how difference is regulated in the Netherlands" (Yildiz 2017, 710). In a similar vein, Ibrahim Abraham (2009) analyzes the diverse strategies articulated by queer Muslims living in Australia who avoid "hegemonic queer identity" situated in the political and cultural discourses which they encountered as Other in Australia (Abraham 2009, 89). There is a growing body of literature that criticizes the monolithic orientalist and essentialist views on queer and LGBT Muslims who live in Muslim minority countries.

Research on LGBT and queer Muslims in Muslim majority countries has introduced a different set of questions such as support through community organizations (Kugle 2014), negotiations with families and inner struggles (Kramer 2010; Maulod and Jamil 2010), individual and collective reinventions of spiritual Islam (Abraham 2009; Yip 2016), adopting queer lenses on Qur'an and Islam (Siraj 2016), and cultivation of piety (Maulod and Jamil 2010). With the exception of studies by Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip and Wim Peumans, the aforementioned analyses are not in direct conversation with studies conducted in Muslim minority contexts.

In terms of the research on LGBT and queer subjects in Muslim minority contexts, studies of Yip (2016) and Peumans (2017) demonstrate the most detailed ethnographies that aim to reflect the multilayered stories and diversities of their subjects. Yip analyzes the ways in which the theological capital of Islam in the West promotes inclusive and progressive approaches of Islam for LGBT Muslims to develop "contestation, negotiation and renewal" (Yip 2016, 63). Yip's study highlights the agential subjectivities of LGBT and queer Muslims living in England illustrating their efforts at negotiating internal struggles, looking for queer friendly Islamic hermeneutics, and reinventing Islamic traditions. On the other hand, Peumans focuses on the dynamics of moral selves in the sites of transnationalism, migration, piety, and sexuality among non-practicing Muslim queers living in Belgium (Peumans 2017). Peumans' study is a striking example of how moral selves depend not only on religion or sexuality but also on structures of mobility, especially during the asylum process of queer Muslims in the context of Belgium. As the concepts of spirituality and moral selves introduce a new set of questions to understand LGBT and queer lives and struggles, I find it important to take them into consideration in my research.

In short, although the literature on LGBT and queer Muslims has greatly expanded in recent years, there is still room for diversification and attention to different sites of sexuality, spirituality and morality. This research contributes to this literature with its unique focus on Turkey and to different forms and sites of religious, spiritual and sexual expression. Before concentrating on Turkey, I would like to discuss non-normative sexualities in Muslim majority societies in order to show early forms of non-normative sexual practices among Muslims.

1.1.2 Non-Normative Sexual Visibilities in Muslim Majority Societies

It is important to note that what I call non-normative sexualities does not refer to only LGBT or queer identities since the terms "LGBT" and "queer" remain

extremely limited when it comes to conceptualizing and understanding sexualities outside of European and North American historical contexts. Borrowing Afsaneh Najmabadi and Serkan Delice's emphasis on thinking beyond the existing modern categories like homosexual or LGBT, I find the term non-normative sexualities, to enable new imaginaries in transnational sexuality studies (Delice 2010; Najmabadi and Babayan 2008). Delice focuses on how seeking identity categories makes researchers fail to think and understand practices while limiting the practices into identities (Delice 2010).

> "We should deploy a set of new concepts in order to be able to grasp the volatility of intimacy, instead of reiterating the anachronistic, rhetorical question of whether the Ottomans had a separate conception of homosexuality, and whether they deemed same-sex desire as a deviation per se. What makes these questions anachronistic is the very inadequacy, not only of sexual identity categories such as "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality," but of desire, sexuality and individual in investigating historical forms of male and female intimacy. As we stay within the usually taken-for-granted framework of sexuality and desire, we assume and remain tied to a self-autonomous system that specifies and pathologizes individuals in line with the object of sexual desire." (Delice 2010, 117–118)

Building on Serkan Delice's important contribution, I incorporate non-normative sexual practices in my literature review to not only de-construct "normative" sexualities in the context of Turkey but also to demonstrate diverse sexual practices in Muslim-majority societies. Conceptualizing non-normative sexualities is important to separate LGBT movement from early representations on diversity in sexualities because they are not continuum of each other. Non-normative sexual performances and practices in Muslim majority societies can only be understood by considering historicism, contextualization and traditional meanings within a specific time and place. Therefore, since this transition should not be taken as a historical process but paying attention to different and similar performances in the Middle East context, I attach importance to make this separation before going into non-normative sexualities in Muslim majority societies and LGBT Muslims in the context Turkey.

Studies show that non-normative sexual practices and lives can be observed in the memoires, literary texts, visual arts and societies from 16th century to late periods of Ottoman Empire (Amer 2009; Delice 2010; Habib 2008; Najmabadi and Babayan 2008; Roscoe and Murray 1997; Schmitt and Sofer 1995). Even though tracing the first appearances of non-normative sexualities in Muslim-majority societies is not an

easy task, studies on medieval expressions of non-normative sexualities suggest the existence of diverse sexual practices and gender identities (Amer 2009; Habib 2008; **?**). Among these studies, Sahar Amer demonstrates crossdressing culture of women in Arabic culture, but also embraces Bennett's concept of "lesbian-like women" in order to conceptualize Arabic tradition of eroticism, female crossdressers who were free from the autonomous male and cultural expressions of desire (Amer 2009, 226). On the other hand, Samra Habib points out the continuities and discontinuities of "sexual erotic systems" although she critically approaches the essentialist and constructionist approaches of medieval sexual cultures (Habib et al. 2007, 21). I find Habib's formulation of "sexual erotic systems" to be important in investigating the everyday lives of non-normative sexual subjects. To illustrate, Paula Sanders examines the Islamic Law regulations on everyday lives of hermaphrodites which was called "khunta mushkil", when they need to perform in the sex-segregated spaces such as prayers and funerals (Sanders 1991). All these studies investigate and make visible the traces of non-normative sexualities in medieval Islamic societies.

Talking specifically about the Ottoman context, Abdülhamit Arvas explores same-sex sexual encounters in the visual and written resources from early Anglo-Ottoman encounters (Arvas 2016). In the same vein, Uğur Kömeçoğlu highlights Ottoman coffeehouses as "heterogenous sites" for the practice of "otherness," where "unorthodox sexualities" were accommodated (Kömeçoğlu 2005, 15-16). Implying a similar characteristic of coffeehouses, Delice (2015) also focuses on hammams (public bath houses) exploring male same-sex intimacies between janissaries and shampooers in the late period of Ottoman Empire. Moreover, Delice analyzes the same-sex relationships in the historical narratives of the late period of the Ottoman Empire through a new set of concepts: "friendship, sociability, and masculinity" (Delice 2010). Similarly, Khaled El-Rouayheb states the political history of sexual diversity through a series of diverse concepts indicating "beloved" ones in the Arabic written love poems from the Early Ottoman Period, 1500-1800 (El-Rouayheb 2005, 4). Along the same lines, Schick looks into sexual intimacies in Ottoman erotic literature, stating that the fluidity in the choice of sexual partner was "a matter of practice, not identity" (Schick 2004).These studies on same-sex sexual relationships in the Ottoman context make it possible to both observe contemporary normativities and the potentials of diversity in sexual practices and sexual expressions.

In brief, a growing body of literature that demonstrates that sexually diverse subjects have been observed in different Muslim-majority societies including Ottoman context. Thus, paying regard to earlier representations on diverse sexual subjects, I demonstrate the unique historical and political context of LGBT and queer lives in Turkey. In the following section, I briefly introduce academic studies on the LGBT

movement and Muslim LGBT lives in the context of Turkey.

1.1.3 LGBT and Queer Lives in Turkey

Looking at the history of the LGBT[3] movement in Turkey, we observe that it has a distinct history due to its social and political encounters with other social movements and political conjuncture of Turkey. Erdal Partog (2012) presents a detailed history of the LGBT movement in Turkey, comparing it to LGBT movements in other countries and analyzing Turkey's unique characteristics. Portag illustrates that the LGBTT struggle in Turkey had an "identity construction period" from 1993 to 2000 and explains it as a construction that had both individual and collective dimensions (Partog 2012, 172). According to Partog, this focus on "identity" within the LGBTT struggle developed as a response to the negative representations of LGBTT individuals in mass media, where they were often referred to as sinners and sick people, as well as in connection to other social movements which seek equality in Turkey. Accompanying with other social movements until 2000s, Partog emphasizes that LGBTT struggle changes into an explicit movement asking for social, economic, and political rights (Partog 2012, 172-173).According to Partog, in the late 2000s, the LGBTT struggle became more visible in the media, mainly thanks to the solidarity with the feminist movement (Partog 2012).

Partog makes an important critique on the LGBTT struggle in Turkey. He says that contrary to "relying on a dialogue between practice and theory, LGBTT struggle is pressed as an active battleground between the state and practice" (2012, 164). Struggling with the state and demanding rights compressed the LGBTT struggle only to the identity ground and pushed the power and freedom discussion into the background (2012, 164). Partog points out the reason behind LGBTT struggle heading towards liberal right demands as the difficulties of "compulsory representation" (2012, 173). He also shows the differences within the movement: Whereas Kaos GL Magazine and Kaos GL Association as a group oriented their work towards demanding liberal rights, another group, LambdaİstanbuI, has been seen as having an anarchist tendency (2012, 173-174). Although the hardships of "compulsory representation" may have limited the visibility of the LGBT movement, attending May 1st protests and Anti-War Demonstration in the early 2000s shows the texture of

[3]After 2013, "LGBTI+" has been used with I and + (plus) although the naming has changed throughout the years in the movement in Turkey. Before 2013, in Turkey, LGBTT was used and because Erdal Partog mentioned the movement as LGBTT struggle, I use LGBTT only when I refer to Partog's article.

LGBT movement as anti-militarist, anti-war, and against labor exploitation (Partog 2012, 174).

On the other hand, LGBT movement has never embodied an Islamic or religious texture, most probably due to the common belief that Islam rejects homosexuality. While there is a significant body of literature that discusses the place of homosexuality in Islam in non-accommodating terms, there have also been queer-friendly Islamic hermeneutics which problematize the traditional approaches on Islam and situate themselves as inclusive/progressive Islam (Hendricks 2010; Kugle 2010; Zahed 2019). Although, these discussions derive from theological perspectives, studies on actual practices and lives have remained limited, specifically in Muslim-majority contexts. Returning back to Turkey, the only study on LGBT Muslims belongs to Şebnem Keniş (2012) who focuses on the strategic challenges of LGBT Muslims in the face of dominant Islamic perceptions. While it is a significant contribution to the literature, Keniş's study includes only four LGBT Muslims and does not give place to their experiences and ideas beyond the challenge they pose to mainstream discourses (Keniş 2012, 6).

Before looking into the representations of Muslim LGBT individuals from Turkey in the Kaos GL Magazine, I want to shop how Islamic, religious and public morality discourses are constructed in a contradictory or conflicted way with regard to homosexuality, LGBT lives and non-normative sexualities in Turkey. In her MA thesis written in 2012, Sumru Atuk discusses how Islamic and conservative approaches of AKP[4] government created an explicit perception of dichotomy between Islam and homosexuality. Atuk (2012) examines hegemonic power operating "in every aspect of the social" through the debates on homosexuality in the mass media and the political arena (243). This debate started with Aliye Kavaf's announcement that "homosexuality is a sickness" in an interview with a newspaper in 2010 and was picked up in newspaper columns and in Civil Society Organizations' (CSO) declarations. According to Atuk, all CSOs partaking in this debate in 2010 identified themselves as Islamic NGOs working on human rights. Aside from Islamic CSOs' supportive declarations, some Muslim columnists confirmed Aliye Kavaf's announcement by saying that it is a freedom of speech (Atuk 2012, 7). Hence, starting in 2010, there has been a hegemonic public discourse on homosexuality being a sinful and immoral act, especially in the statements of official and public figures.

Along with these debates, Evren Savcı analyzes such concepts as "public morality" and "religious/moral values" produced against homosexuality under the "monopolized definition of Islam/Muslimhood by the current Turkish government" (Savcı

[4]AKP is the abbreviation of Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi).

2016, 164-167). Pınar Ilkkaracan also states that "the rise of the Islamic religious right, nationalism and militarism" brought up the polarized environment in the political arena (Ilkkaracan 2016, 46). Moreover, Ilkkaracan highlights that rising visibility of feminist and LGBT movements led to "increased contestations concerning morality" (Ilkkaracan 2017, 83). The starting point of these discourses on public morality and religious/moral values against homosexuality relies on the division of East and West, and the polarization of Westernized cultures and Eastern cultures (Keniş 2012, 45). Keniş puts an emphasis on how West is perceived as "immoral secular local elites" and the East as an "authentic Muslim identity" according to the proponents of this position (2012, 45). I find Keniş's point valuable for addressing the role these political debates played in creating a polarized categorization and an orientalist view between the supporters of LGBT rights and individuals, and Muslims or individuals who are relatively devoted to morality, religion and/or culture. Hence, LGBT Muslim subjects are totally ignored in these political debates. It is as if they do not exist.

Aliye Kavaf's view on homosexuality as sickness hardly remained a marginal view, when it came to mainstream conservative politics. Similar statements have been made by official figures such as Recep Akdağ, Fatma Şahin, Melih Gökçek, Mehmet Ali Şahin, Türkan Dağoğlu, Ahmet İyimaya, Burhan Kuzu, Efkan Ala and Bülent Arınç (Engin 2015; ?), and more recently Ali Erbaş who is the head of Religious Affairs Directorate. The polarized categorization was reinforced by predominant discourses such as protecting public/common morality, patriarchal norms and Islamic beliefs against homosexuality and LGBT (Baba 2011; Cindoglu and Unal 2017). It should be noted that these statements against homosexuality were typically made by political leaders of AKP portraying "moderate Islamic tones" (Baba 2011, 56). Cenk Özbay points out the "homophobic approach that popular press and even politicians do not hesitate to use out of blue" is an exclusive experience of today's Turkey for "sexual minorities in urban Turkey" (Özbay 2015, 873). I would argue that public morality and religious/moral values do not only justify homophobic attitudes, but also serve the construction of queer secularity with the polarization political environments. Here, I benefit from Jasbir K. Puar's concept of "queer secularity" and his argument that polarizing political environments conduce a secular framework into homosexuality and thus the LGBT movement (Puar 2007). Therefore, Islamic backlash of AKP and the polarization of the political environment work as a two-way-traffic in the sense of valorizing morality and religious values and at the same time limiting the possibilities of LGBT and queer identifications vis-a-vis secular values. Considering this particular political context in Turkey, I argue that the politicization of Islam and morality against homosexuality does not only hinder

the embodiment of Muslim identity for LGBT individuals, but also puts them at a distance from LGBT communities. Hence, I find it important to pay attention to the role of contemporary political discourses, especially through the lens of LGBT Muslim subjects who have been ignored by all sides in the political arena.

While the political arena totally ignores LGBT Muslims, there are very few representations of LGBT Muslims in the social and activist context of Turkey. Through the longest-running LGBT media of Turkey, Kaos GL Magazine, I aim to look into the public portrayal the underrepresented subjects of this research. In doing so, my intention is not to criticize the Kaos GL Magazine for their limited representation of Muslim LGBTs in Turkey, but to underline the significance of this research as well as further research on this issue.

1.1.3.1 *Kaos GL Magazine*

The name of Kaos GL is an abbreviation of "Kaos Gay ve Lezbiyen Kültürel Araştırmalar ve Dayanışma Derneği" which means Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Studies and Solidarity Association.[5] Kaos GL was founded in Ankara in 1994 as one of the first LGBT organizations established in Turkey. The periodical magazine of Kaos GL started to publish during the same year in September. The *Kaos GL Magazine* explains its aim as creating an open space for the expression of LGBT concerns in their own words and the sharing of current issues towards a sexual politics for LGBT people.[6] The *Kaos GL Magazine* describes its aim and mission on its website as:

> "[...] Kaos GL Magazine is published in order to enable LGBTI people and homosexuals in Turkey to have their own words, make a claim to their own problems, and share their thoughts and experiences.
>
> Celebrating its 24th year in 2015, Kaos GL Magazine has been an alternative platform for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans) people, who have always been invisible or ignored within society, to say their own words, set their own agenda, and discuss their own issues. The magazine has also adopted an important mission against gender discrimination by reaching various fractions such as women organisations, NGOs, academi-

[5] Kaos GL Derneği, "Code" in Kaos GL Derneği, last accessed 2017, http://www.kaosgldernegi.org/belge.php?id=tuzuk

[6] Kaos GL Dergisi "Kaos GL Dergisi." Kaos GL Dergi. Last accessed 2017. http://www.kaosgldergi.com/dergi.php

cians, artists, etc.

> Being the longest-standing and the sole LGBT publication in Turkey, Kaos GL Magazine has been continuing its publishing life, as the most important document of LGBT life and culture in Turkey, in order to contribute to the sexual politics in the country." ("Kaos GL Magazine", 2020, translated by Cihan Alan)[7]

It defines itself as the only and oldest LGBT periodical magazine of Turkey contributing to both sexual policies in Turkey and being a significant document of life and culture of LGBTs. *Kaos GL Magazine* publishes regularly every two months although there have been times when they had to postpone issues due to financial problems (Alan 2019). The articles in the issues of *Kaos GL Magazine* mainly consist of global news translated to Turkish, articles sent by academics and activists and letters from its readers. Starting from the issue published in September-October 2011, *Kaos GL Magazine* has been dedicating each issue to a particular theme. 173 issues have been published between September 1994 and August 2020.[8] Besides operating a long-running magazine, Kaos GL's influence on the LGBT movement and representation in Turkey holds noteworthy significance since it was the first official association organizing LGBT individuals and seeking LGBT rights in Turkey. (Ali 2014; Bakacak and Ōktem 2014; Özbay 2015; Partog 2012).

The issues of *Kaos GL Magazine* from 1994 to 2020 indicate a progressive development in terms of body, the number of pages, visual content, language, the frame of the discussions and diversification of approaches to gender and sexuality politics. Therefore, not only the design of the magazine, but also the content and topics of the articles show an enhancement and variety. In addition, *Kaos GL Magazine* describes itself as being free of any ideology, on the contrary mentions the individuals from diverse ideologies contributing with their articles to the *Kaos GL Magazine*(Öztürk N.d., 60). As such, visibility and admissibility of articles published by *Kaos GL Magazine* help us to trace the agenda and representations of LGBT lives in Turkey. I attempt to investigate the ways in which Muslim LGBT lives are covered in *Kaos GL Magazine*, as it is the main site where one can follow the LGBT agenda of Turkey.

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[7] http://www.kaosgldergi.com/dergi.php

[8] Kaos GL Dergisi "Kaos GL Arşivi." Kaos GL Dergi. Last accessed: 26th July 2020. http://www.kaosgldergi.com/arsiv.php

1.1.3.2 Seeking LGBT and queer Muslim representations in *Kaos GL Magazine*

Among the 173 issues of Kaos GL Magazine from September 1994 to August 2020, there were only two issues (103rd and 151th issues) themed on Islam, religions and homosexuality.[9] These were "İslam ve Eşcinsellik" (Islam and Homosexuality) published in Nov-Dec 2008, and "Din ve Eşcinsellik" (Religion and Homosexuality) published in Nov-Dec 2016. Before elaborating on these two issues and the articles on Muslim LGBT individuals from Turkey, I will briefly mention relevant articles published in other issues of Kaos GL Magazine.

Aside from "İslam ve Eşcinsellik" (Islam and Homosexuality) and "Din ve Eşcisnellik" (Religion and Homosexuality) special issues, nine articles were published from 1998 to 2015 in the other issues of Kaos GL Magazine. The first article that focuses on Islam and homosexuality is published in April 1998 with the title "Din ve Eşcinsellik" (Religion and Homosexuality). From the first article to the latest, "İslamda Eşcinsellik" (Homosexuality in Islam) (Oğuz 2015, 36-40) published in Sept-Oct 2015, in general, were discussed to seek potential inclusiveness towards homosexuality in the traditional interpretations of Islamic teachings. These articles do not claim that Islam includes or excludes LGBT subjects; however, they question the way Islam has been presented. Some common frameworks include: the inclusivity of Islamic mysticism, homosexual desires in Ottoman Empire, written homoerotic sources in Arabic and Ottoman literature, secularism and current discourses in politics of Turkey and hermeneutics related to homosexuality in Qur'an. None of these articles include any Muslim LGBT representation in Turkey but investigate these topics in an abstract way. The first time a self-identified Muslim gay appeared in the magazine was March-April 2002. The author of "Kimlik Sorgulaması" ("Investigating Identity") expresses his identity as a practicing Muslim gay, but remains anonymous.[10] In *Kaos GL Magazine*. In the article, the author talks about his critiques about orientalist views of the current news and the controversial situations he found himself about his religious identity and sexual orientation. On the other hand, this article does not focus on being Muslim and homosexual, but the challenging encounters of the author derived from being openly gay and Muslim in his inner circle.

In the 103rd issue of Kaos GL Magazine, there are six articles which were written

[9] Coşkun. 1998. "Din ve Eşcinsellik." Kaos GL Dergi, April 1998. Oğuz, Mücahit. 2015. "İslamda Eşcinsellik." Kaos GL Dergi, September-October 2016.

[10] Dara.2002."Kimlik Sorgulaması".

under the topic of the issue's theme. Three of them talk about Muslim Hendricks who as a gay Muslim imam gave a talk in the Pride week and had a major impact on Kaos GL interviewers. The interview with Hendricks is presented as follows:

> "We came across a lot of important names during the sessions that took place 16th LGBTT Pride Week. However, the most remarkable one was Imam Muhsin Hendricks who attended as a speaker from South Africa as a prominent country of homosexual rights in the World. Hendricks did not refuse our interview invitation and he used two words which were seemingly impossible to come together, Islam and homosexuality."[11] (Sulu and Gürcan 2008, 22)

I would like to point out the last sentence which is "he used two words which were seemingly impossible to come together, Islam and homosexuality". In this sentence, Islam and homosexuality were reflected as mutually exclusive concepts although the interview and other articles do not claim such a belief.

In the 103rd "Islam and Homosexuality" issue published in 2008, only two of the articles focus on LGBT Muslims from Turkey. These articles were titled "bir yemin ettim ki dönemem" (I made a vow I cannot break) and "ne eşcinselliğimden ne allah'ımdan" (Neither my homosexuality nor my Allah). Before examining these two articles, I would like to mention the other two articles written for this theme. One of them talks about homophobic memories related to Islam from a homosexual who was raised as a Muslim in Turkey. The other article approaches religions as an invitation to think about self, norms and people.

Returning back to the "bir yemin ettim ki dönemem" and "ne eşcinselliğimden ne allah'ımdan" articles, both of the articles consist of interviews with male gay Muslims who are anonymous. One of them talks about the process of investigating homosexuality in Islam through Alo Fetva and Islamic hodjas in mosques. The article ends with: "I cannot say this is not a sin. However, I do not care as much as before, its price will be paid at the end" (Kaos GL Magazine 2008, 33).[12] The other interview, in the article titled "ne eşcinselliğimden ne allah'ımdan", was conducted with an imam who lives in a small city of Turkey, raised as a devout Muslim by his father who is also an imam (Kaos GL Magazine 2008, 36). While the previous article fo-

[11] "Bu seneki 16. LGBTT Onur Haftası oturumlarında birçok önemli isimle karşılaştık. Ama en dikkat çekeni de eşcinsel hakları konusunda dünyadaki birçok ülkeden ileride olan Güney Afrika Cumhuriyeti'nden konuşmacı olarak katılan İmam Muhsin Hendricks'ti. Hendricks söyleşi isteğimizi kırmadı ve yan yana gelmesi imkansız görünen iki kelimeyi, 'İslam ve Eşcinselliği' aynı cümle içinde kurdu."

[12] "Bu, günah değil, diyemiyorum. Ama eskisi kadar takmıyorum, bedeli ne ise bir şekilde ödenecek."

cuses on the investigation of homosexuality in Islam through the experiences of the interviewee, this article elaborates on the life story of the interviewee because the interviewee says that he already knows that Islam does not accept homosexuality. He says: "I believe that I do my other religious duties. I commit sin by sheltering in God's mercy and grace. God says that if you commit a sin knowing that it is a sin, then there is a way to be saved. However, if you do not accept a sin as a sin and commit that sin consciously, then you go to hell"(36).[13] Thus, both of the interviews present a similar belief about Islam although they both recognize their faith and homosexuality.

In the 151th issue, "Din ve Eşcinsellik" ("Religion and Homosexuality"), there are four articles related to Islam, two about Christianity and one about Judaism. Among these articles, only one of them gives place to religious LGBT experiences, which is about a Christian queer. Among the articles about Islam, one is written by Ludovic Zaheed, another by amina wadud, a third one about an inclusive mosque in Canada and the last one about an organization in U.S. called Muslims for Progressive Values. All of these articles related to Islam, elaborate on Islam as a non-patriarchal, progressive and inclusive religion for LGBT and queer subjects (Kaos GL Magazine 2016), yet none are related to Turkey or give voice to LGBT Muslims from Turkey.

To sum up, in the 173 issues of the Kaos GL Magazine, the coverage on LGBT Muslims from Turkey has been limited to three articles that give voice to three gay Muslims. All three articles show gay male Muslims who have negotiated and, in different ways, reconciled with Islam and their sexuality. I should note that in the preface of "Din ve Eşcinsellik" (Religion and Homosexuality), the Chief Editor Aylime Aslı Demir mentions that they are ready to open more space for discussing Islam, especially Sunni Islam, in the following issues due to the encouraging emails they have received regarding this theme (Kaos GL Magazine 2016). Yet, in the 4 years that followed this special issue, no article has been published about discussing Sunni Islam or LGBT Muslims from Turkey. Overall, the lack of representation of Muslim LGBT lives in the longest running LGBT publication, Kaos GL Magazine, highlights the social and activist context of Turkey within which the participants of my research are situated. As my research findings show, it has not been easy for LGBT Muslims in Turkey to find a social and activist space of belonging and connection.

Taking the Kaos GL Magazine and political context of Turkey into consideration, I discuss that Turkey has a unique position in terms of contextualizing LGBT and

[13] "Diğer dini vecibelerimi yerine getirdiğime inanıyorum. Artık Allah'ın merhametine, rahmetine sığınarak da böyle bir günah işliyorum. Allah diyor ki; günahın günah olduğunu bile bile yaparsan kurtuluş yolu var. Ama günahı günah olarak kabul etmeyip bu işi ısrarla yaparsan direkt cehennemliksin."

queer lives (Özbay 2015). For this reason, I look into the ways in which LGBT and queer lives in Turkey differ from other social and political contexts where Muslims are seen as minority and majority. Although I find the above-mentioned literatures helpful for my research, the fact that Turkey is shaped by both a secular legal framework and hegemonic Islamic discourses on homosexuality complicates the situation and introduces possibilities for asking new questions. In my fieldwork, I observed the existence of certain orientalist views and some of the analyses from Muslim majority societies seemed particularly pertinent prevalent. Therefore, before situating my research in the literature, I visit three particular studies conducted in Turkey with LGBT individuals that focus on religion, sexual orientation and sexual identity. After briefly mentioning these studies, I turn to the aims and methodology of my own research.

First, apart from Keniş's partial but noteworthy study on LGBT Muslims, unfortunately, there has been no other research focusing on the context of Turkey. In two other studies, the question of religion and sexual orientation have been addressed, though in a limited fashion. The first study conducted by Tarık Bereket and Barry D. Adam analyzes how gay identities formulate new strategies about their beliefs and the belief system in general (Bereket and Adam 2008). Their study was conducted with twenty gay men reached through Kaos GL Association, in Ankara in 1995. The results of the study show that gay individuals mostly give up religious practice and belief after they come out as a gay. However, looking at the results and selection of participants in this study, it suggests a very limited understanding of the complexity of contemporary non-normative sexualities. The study's narrow focus on gay respondents and main finding of individuals quitting religious belief and practice does not represent the complexity of the religiosity/spirituality of sexually non-normative individuals.

Aside from this research, Ali Ayten and Evrim Anık has published an article on "Religious Belief, Representations of Religion and God, and Religious/Spiritual Coping Process among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual Individuals" based on her MA thesis in the Faculty of Theology at Marmara University in 2014. Ayten and Anık's study is an ethnographic study that seeks to locate and measure LGBT individuals' spiritual tendencies and attachment to any belief system. Ayten and Anık's research remains limited to the perception of religion among LGBT individuals and to measuring their religiosity, without giving any subjectivity and agency to their understanding of devoutness to Islam. While these studies seek to reveal the extent to which LGBT Muslims are practicing or believing in Islam, they fail to identify non-normative sexualities among devout Muslims, indirectly contributing to an essentialist perspective of Islam.

More recently, Ali Yıldırım (2018) conducted a research with LGBT Alevis where he addresses the diversity in Alevi beliefs and practices as well as variety of sexual affiliations through the experiences of his research participants. Yıldırım's endeavor to demonstrate Alevi identity formation and attachment to the Alevi identity via intersections of Alevi LGBTs is worthful to explore normative perceptions of faith, sexuality, gender and heteronormativity in the context of Turkey. Moreover, I find similarities between his fieldwork and my field in terms of having negotiating relationships of faith and sexualities, and heterogenous texture of our research participants. Therefore, I believe that our research does not only deliver the experiences of under researched intersectional identities, but also shows the hegemonic boundaries constructed by historically and politically.

In short, despite the unique context of Turkey, where there is both a secular legal framework and a Sunni-Muslim religious majority, there have been very few studies that have focused on the intersection of religion, sexual orientation and gender identity. My research on the lives and struggles of devout Muslim LGBTs in Turkey has sought to address this gap.

1.2 Methodology

In her article "Thinking Piety and The Everyday Together," Lara **?** seeks to complicate the literature on piety in general and pious Muslims in particular (95). She asks, "why restrict the critique to highlighting how only 'other forms of (pious) conduct' are ignored; why not broaden it further?" to the problem of making "the pious Sunni Muslim[s] as the only Muslim[s]" (95). Deeb offers the solution as "by troubling or at least ethnographically unpacking our understandings of the boundary between what counts as piety or the pious and what does not, and by beginning to conceptualize that boundary itself as a moving target that is part of Muslims' own ongoing discussions" (95). Taking Deeb's critique into account, this research does not define piety or measure it in any way. Boundary-making questions on piety construct a hierarchy amongst Muslim individuals who are asked to measure themselves in accordance with an imaginative "true" Muslim figure in terms of the hegemonic understanding of Islamic. Rather than positioning my research participants on a superficial Muslimness scale, I have opted for leaving the question of piety behind. In a similar vein, Sherine Hafez (2011) discusses the ways in which we can understand religious activism beyond discursive Islamic understanding by deconstructing

the direct connection between agents' actions and Quranic rules:

> "Labeling religion as a universal and anachronistic category is an exercise that subscribes to a particular cultural vision, and whose futility is its unquestioning point of departure. It is not merely how we define religion, and consequently religious activism, but how we recognize religious activism when we see it. What epistemological processes inform the cognition of religious activism as separate from other forms of activism?" (Hafez 2011, 42)

Building on Deeb and Hafez, I seek to understand the ways in which Muslim selfhood is constructed by my research participants, rather than how pious or devoted they are. How do LGBT Muslims narrate and perceive their actions in terms of religious intentions? What kind of ideas regarding religion and thinking processes accompany these acts? These questions are important to understand their way of being Muslim, pious, and moral, rather than defining how religious they are from "our" perspective.

While this research does not tackle the question of how pious my research participants are or what piety is, questions of piety and religion have been an important part of our interviews and conversation. I argue that the specific cultural, social and religious background of my research participants have a tremendous effect on how they understand Islam and interpret organized religions in general. I have observed significant variety in the way they construct and interpret Islam or understand what it means to be a Muslim. I have found that paying attention to these singular and personal journeys with Islam and being a Muslim, will help us develop a more nuanced understanding of Islam from the perspective of sexually non-normative Muslim subjects. For this reason, this research has two methodological standpoints. The first one is that I seek to understand the self-perceptions of the research participant regarding their attachment to Islam rather than using any specific criteria to "measure" their devoutness. The second is that I use the oral history method to give them an opportunity to historicize and contextualize their standpoints.

Through the oral history method, I have aimed to give some space to the participants for contextualizing their backgrounds, meaning-making processes and semantic world. I believe that oral history helped me to minimize our undeniable hierarchical relationship as a researcher and the researched. On the other hand, I found the chance to listen to their multilayered stories which gave me an extensive perspective to observe their traumas, religious breakdowns, and emotional attachments derived from their intersectional identities. Besides, the main questions of

my study, how LGBT Muslims experience Islam and their sexualities, can easily become risky in the classical format of semi structured in-depth interviews, evoking their identities as "marginal". Therefore, oral history gave me the chance to ask them about their life stories in the frame of their first encounters with religion, their journey with recognizing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and how they perceive Islam and their sexualities.

My fieldwork took place between August 2018 and December 2019 with fourteen LGBT Muslims living in four different cities. I relied on oral history interviews and participant observation. Additionally, I conducted in-depth interviews when I felt the need and managed to find a chance. I conducted oral history interviews with nine LGBT Muslims from three different cities. I conducted six of these oral history interviews with Derya, İdil, Hale, Azad, Şafak in Istanbul. Our interview with Eren also took place in a cafe in Istanbul, although he actually lives in a small city in the Marmara region. I also visited a city in the Aegean region of Turkey where I conducted interviews with Birce and Yağız. All interviews took place in public spaces such as teahouses, cafes, and university campuses, except our interview with Yağız. I interviewed him where Sinem and her family were hosting me. Apart from these oral history interviews, I met four LGBT Muslims with whom I could not get a chance to conduct an interview but spent some time with informing them about my research and my position as a researcher. They were people I met through Pride weeks, friends of other participants, social media and the LGBT community located outside of Istanbul. Before "entering" in the field, I aimed to reach potential participants via a private Facebook group called “Kuir ve Müslüman- Queer and Muslim”. Although I accessed Derya, Yağız and Eren through this Facebook group, after some time, I recognized that this group is very inactive. However, after the fieldwork, I realized that some of the participants in this study are actually members of this Facebook group. For this reason, other than reaching my participants through this Facebook group, I believe that snowball technique helped me gain the trust of these participants. Furthermore, I also found Ceren through my personal contacts. Lastly, Zümrüt and Hale found me in a Muslim feminist conference where I gave a talk about my research. After my talk, they approached me and offered to be included in my research.

I believe that this study distinguishes from other studies in terms of sampling, regarding the randomness of the age and sexual diversity of the participants (Abraham 2009, Kugle 2014). Among the participants, Hale (aged-22), Zümrüt (aged-19), Ceren (aged-28) and Birce (aged-22) introduce themselves as Muslim lesbian women; Azad (aged-35), Şafak (aged-25), Fevzi (aged-33), Hakan (aged-25) and Eren (aged-28) introduce themselves as gay men; Derya (aged-25) and Sinem (aged-32) are two

trans women; while İdil (aged-24) identifies as bisexual and Yağız (aged-31) as trans man. All of the participants describe themselves as Muslim, including Birce who is Alevi and holds the belief that Alevi is a part of Islam. She practices both Alevi and Sunni Islamic rituals.

During my fieldwork, I participated in activism schools, talks and seminars of LGBT associations, although I found none of my participants via these events. However, attending these events were important to realize the ways in which I was o perceived as an outsider in these spaces. Through our talks after the interviews, I recognized that a very small number of the participants in this study have participated in LGBT events. While some of them had quit after a while, some had never stepped in, and others had their own LGBT friend circles and expressed that they did not need to attend other LGBT events or communities.

I have not experienced any major obstacles during my fieldwork. However, I should express my hesitation to ask my research participants about their sexual experiences and practices, which were generally talked about at the end of our first interviews or in the second interviews. Although some participants initiated the talk on their sexual practices even though I did not direct any question, some participants implied that sexuality is still a subject that they do not want to talk about even with their partners. These kinds of statements stopped me from asking more about their sexuality not only because I respected their choice of not speaking but also because I tried to avoid othering their sexualities with my questions about their sexual practice. As Başaran rightly criticizes, LGBT subjects often face questions from researchers and others that marginalize them. She also states that repetitive questions of curiosity about sexual practices point to the making of stereotypes (Başaran 2003). Therefore, I situate my reluctance to ask questions about their sexual experiences and practices not as a safety measure, but more as an effort to undo an unwelcome academic and public gaze.

1.2.1 My Positionality

Wearing a headscarf is interpreted as an expression of Islamic belief in Turkey (**?**). Conducting this research as a veiled Muslim in Turkey, I felt how my participants show their respect and trust to me because they regarded me as a veiled Muslim who cares about Muslim LGBTs' lives in the academic field. As our interviews went on, some of my participants criticized the meaning of headscarf in Turkey. I found that my being veiled made them talk about their perspectives and experiences about

wearing headscarf more openly. During the interviews, even though I never said anything about my belief, headscarf or covering the body, most of the participants made several notes about headscarf such as their mothers' or sisters' veiling style or how much I resemble a beloved acquaintance of them. Hence, I should admit that wearing a headscarf in this fieldwork played a role for me to gain the trust of my participants and have open communication and warm relations with them.

I believe that wearing a headscarf had also a critical importance while attending LGBT events and activities. Even though I did not prefer to talk much about myself and my sexuality in the LGBT and pride events that I attended, my existence as a "visible" Muslim believer made me witness how other participants were gazing at me. In some interviews, the veiled women participants asked me how I could survive in those events or how they were afraid to attend such events. After we talked, they admitted that they were afraid that people would not believe in their sexuality or that they would not show respect to their Muslim identity. Asking such questions in our second and third meetings made me realize that some of my participants who are veiled cis and trans women associated their identities with mine and perceive me as abla (older sister) to consult our potentially common and/or similar struggles that we have experienced in LGBT communities and events. Therefore, I can say that cis and trans women participants typically perceived me as an "insider" who has overcome some difficulties or (as they called) "hesitations" with the same concerns on the basis of being visible as Muslim in LGBT events and activities.

Other than being abla (older sister) for the veiled participants, my position as a researcher in this field was predominantly considered as "insider" rather than "outsider" or "stranger" since I am also a self-identified queer Muslim. Although none of the participants asked me my sexual orientation or gender identity, after our interviews ended, I tried to express my sexual orientation in our chats. I told them how I share similar concerns, or I had similar struggles derived from my identity. Some of them asked me about my relationship with my family and we also talked about these issues in our small talks. I believe that these talks made our relationship less hierarchical and more sincere at the end of the day. However, experiencing similar struggles and concerns does not mean to be completely an insider since each LGBT Muslim has gone through various emotional and physical processes during their reconciliation with Islam and their non-normative sexuality.

Portelli defines oral history as a site of dialogue although the interviewer and the interviewee can have dissimilar reasons to be in this dialogue (Portelli 2019). His emphasis on common ground and distance summarizes my relationship with the participants both as an insider and not feeling as an insider:

> "The root meaning of the word dialogue is 'to speak across,' 'to speak beyond.' This suggests that the crucial element is space, both social and geographic: the distance, the difference, the otherness between the two partners involved. After all, the reason we are seeking the interview is because we are different: even so-called native anthropologists are different from their interlocutors, if only in terms of age, education, and profession. Of course, the interview could not happen unless there was some common ground—if only a common language, or the mutual willingness to meet and talk. But what the interview is about is the distance we have to cross in order to speak to each other. Similarity makes the interview possible; difference makes it meaningful." (Portelli 2018, 241-242) (Portelli 2019, 241-242)

To sum up, I believe that my complex positionality in this study contributed to my relationship with the participants as a veiled Muslim, abla, an insider and not an insider at different moments. However, our dialogue with each other made this study both possible and meaningful not only for academic endeavors but also for their will to express themselves.

1.3 Outline of The Thesis

This research initially asks the question of how LGBT Muslims experience sexuality and religion. However, thanks to the fieldwork, I could observe the diversity among LGBT Muslims, not only on their self-perceptions but also their diverse approaches on piety, sexuality, spirituality, Islam and intimacy. Relying on my fieldwork observations, their life histories and stories, I attempt to discuss LGBT Muslim experiences as in the context of under researched subjects in Turkey. In doing so, my research invites to consider hegemonic and normative understandings of Islam, sexuality, piety, spirituality as well as LGBT texture and contemporary politics of Turkey. Thus, I explore not only the experiences of LGBT Muslims in Turkey but also related issues surrounding the participants' intersectional lives.

In the Chapter Two, I address two main struggles experienced by LGBT Muslims in Turkey. First is the belief of Islam bans homosexuality. The second is the lack of self-identified LGBT Muslim in Turkey. I discuss these two struggles in relation to contemporary politics and religious sermons to show how these struggles were predominant in the context of Turkey. Moreover, I analyze what constructs these struggles also reinforce the regulatory queer and queer secularity in the LGBT

communities in Turkey. Although all participants of this research have expressed these struggles, they experienced in various ways. In Chapter Two, I elaborate on the variety and diversity of their experiences derived from these struggles where I argue their efforts of deconstructing binary opposition of being a Muslim and an LGBT. At that discussion, I benefit from Donna J. Haraway's article (1991) "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in The Late Twentieth Century". Haraway (1991) helps me to recognize LGBT Muslims' diverse efforts to demolish binary perceptions of Islam and LGBT subjects. Through the LGBT Muslims' notice of historically constructed normative perception, they all conflict with the orientalist, hegemonic, political discourses and show reconciliation with their identities.

In the Chapter Three, I address pious, spiritual and sexual practices of LGBT Muslims who investigate *inclusive/progressive* Islam with their efforts. In the context of Turkey that lacks religious and spiritual consultancy, they investigate the orthodoxy of traditional and normative teachings of Islam and reinvent a heterodox Islam. Through their investigation, I address their creativity in the ways which they re-imagine and re-construct their spiritual, pious and sexual practices. Their creative attempts can be observed at most through ongoing negotiation between Islam and their sexualities as well as the change in their emotional attachments to Islam. Gloria E. Anzaldua shows that for people who live in intersections, they need to operate constant negotiation to go across the borders of categories (Anzaldúa 2015). Along with observing the experiences of ongoing negotiation and the change of emotional attachment to Islam, I explore how they adopt individual and unique spiritual and pious practices as well as embrace regulations for their sexual practices. Therefore, I show their individual way of creating these practices.

To conclude, I believe that my research contributes to the literature with its intersectional approach to religion and sexuality and with its focus on the diversity of LGBT Muslims. Besides, it seeks to respond to the relative lack of a discussion on religion and spirituality in the existing literature on gender and sexuality in Turkey.

2. HOW TO (DE)CONSTRUCT *BEING PERFECTLY LGBT*: UNFOLDING LGBT MUSLIMS' STRUGGLES

*

In this chapter, I focus on the diverse experiences of LGBT Muslims: some with experiences of coming out, some having been involved in LGBT circles and/or communities in Turkey, and others who have neither experience. Although the experiences of participants in this chapter are quite unique in each case, they have all suffered from orientalist perceptions of Muslim identity which I have discussed in the previous chapter.[1] The lack of inclusive spaces for LGBT Muslims has been expressed as a common depiction in their narratives. The limitations regarding inclusiveness in the LGBT spaces create constraints for certain queer forms and identities, including those of LGBT Muslims. What kind of queer forms and identities are absent from LGBT communities? How do LGBT Muslims experience their intersectional identity with other LGBTs in Turkey? How do they narrate their experiences in relation to Muslim and LGBT communities in Turkey after they have acknowledged themselves as LGBT Muslim?

2.1 Approaching LGBT Muslims Through Their Encounters

Azad who migrated to Istanbul after his graduation from university told me about his first encounters with LGBT individuals and communities[2] as being "surprising".

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[0]This title is inspired by the article of Lisa Duggan, which was originally "Making It Perfectly Queer". To see the article: Duggan, Lisa. 2006. "Making It Perfectly Queer." In Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture, edited by Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, 149-164. New York: Routledge.

[1]I explain by what I mean by orientalist perception in detail in the following part.

[2]Azad met and came out to a well-known LGBT community which I do not mention their name here because I do not want to harm their name by only Azad's experience.

The reason why he was surprised was that he had not met with a person like himself, who is homosexual, before coming to Istanbul. When he met with people who introduced themselves as LGBT, for the first time in his life, he could relax about his sexual orientation. After several months, he came out as a religious person to the same community.

> "When I went to the association the first time, I could not fully express myself. But in the following visits, the second or the third month, I was telling them (about myself). I am religious. I am a religious homosexual. Both I believe in God and I am like this. People were finding me weird. Because if you are religious, the religion does not accept you, so you should not believe in God. Then go to the mosque, what are you doing here? I mean, I was exposed to these pressures."[3] (Azad, aged-35)

In the above quotation, Azad expresses his coming out as a "religious" (dindar) homosexual to an LGBT group after several months of interaction. Most of the participants in this study questioned Islam and contextual perceptions of Islam, transforming these perceptions for themselves and coming to a conclusion that "my religion recognizes me." After that, some of them came out to their friends and families. And yet, for some, there was a second phase of coming out, this time as a Muslim within the LGBT community where the belief Islam rejects homosexuality and LGBT subjects is predominant. In short, the participants in this study have confronted two major challenges: The first is the taken-for-grantedness of the statement that Islam rejects homosexuality (consciously or unconsciously) by both the LGBT and Muslim/Islamic circles. The second challenge is the absence of self-identified Muslims in LGBT circles.

I attempt to contextualize these two challenges in the background of discourses on sexual orientation and gender identity as means of "loud heteronormalization" starting from the 2008s till today in Turkey. For this reason, I begin with a review of contemporary political debates on homosexuality and Islam, focusing briefly on a debate on sermons that took place during my fieldwork. I argue that the orientalist views in these political debates has shaped not only LGBT but also religious Muslim circles. Predominant in these debates has been the orientalist perception that homosexuality and Islam are mutually exclusive. Hence, these contemporary

[3] "Ben derneğe ilk geldiğim zamanlar, kendimi tamamen anlatamamıştım. Ama ilerleyen ikinci üçüncü ayın sonunda anlatıyordum. Ben dindarım. Dindar bir eşcinselim. Hem allaha inanıyorum hem böyleyim diyordum. İnsanlar da beni değişik buluyordu. Çünkü dindarsan din seni kabul etmiyor, senin normalde allaha inanmaman lazım. Sen o zaman git camiye, burada ne işin var. Yani böyle baskılara da maruz kaldım."

political debates have contributed to the erasure of the actual lives of LGBT Muslim subjects in Turkey. As a category, they remain "unthinkable".

In this chapter, after reviewing these political debates and their role, I analytically engage with Puar's concept of "regulatory queerness" through Azad's and Derya's narratives on their struggles as LGBT Muslims in particular LGBT circles. Also, I touch upon that the orientalist perception that Islam bans homosexuality appears outside of LGBT circles. Through these struggles, I aim to demonstrate how LGBT Muslims develop diverse strategies that I read as destabilizing binarism through their embodiment of homosexuality and Islam (Haraway 1991). Following Haraway, I attempt to show "the reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other "in the experiences of LGBT Muslims. Lastly, I address the hegemonic gaze on the veiled body through Derya and Ceren's experiences, and the inexperience of Zümrüt. Owing to the veiling experiences of Derya and Ceren, I argue that the expression of veiling should be discussed beyond binary attributions to femininity-masculinity as well as Muslim versus queer subjects.

I should note that, in this study, some of the participants have never stepped foot in LGBT spaces or have experience with the kings of struggles that Azad and Derya share. Thus, I pay particular attention to observing my participants in their personal histories and contexts, rather than generalizing them.

2.1.1 Contemporary Political Debates and Sermons in Turkey

According to Evren Savcı, it is significant to consider "complex transnational economic and political developments" in order to not to erase the "historical and current secular movements within Muslim-majority societies" (Savcı 2016, 161-162). Adopting this point of view in my study, I aim to contextualize the narratives of the LGBT Muslims in this study within contemporary public debates and statements about homosexuality. In what follows, I focus on public debates and statements by official public figures, as well as those aired in the media, on regarding homosexuality, the headscarf-ban and Islam.[4] I also delve the "historical and current secular developments" which transmit the instrumentalization of human rights and politicization of Islam as political tools in the context of Turkey (Ilkkaracan 2017; Savcı 2016, 162).

[4]I had discussed these official public statements and debates in more detail in Chapter One. For this reason, I barely mention them here and want to draw attention to their significance on shaping the politics in unrecognizing queer religious subjects in Turkey.

To trace the origins of the public debates and statements on homosexuality and Islam, Savcı scrutinizes the roots of "Turkish westernization, secularization and nationalism" which brings us to the "silence on heterosexualizing/heteronormalizing practices of Republic" (Savci 2011, 44). The collapse of what Savcı calls "quiet heteronormalization" corresponds to the first public statements of Burhan Kuzu[5] (The Prime Minister of TBMM Constitution Committee) and Aliye Kavaf[6] (The Minister of Family Affairs) who declared their position against homosexuality (Atuk 2012; Keniş 2012; Savcı 2016). After these official statements, Hayata Çağrı Platformu, involving twenty-one Civil Society Organizations (CSO), published an open letter which supports Aliye Kavaf's statement (Atuk 2012; Keniş 2012). The importance of these official statements and the supporting open letter are related to not only supporting the "quiet heteronormalization" of the Republic but also advocating the discourses against homosexuality as a sin and medical disorder relying on the Islamic canon (Savci 2011, 44). At the same time, between 2008 and 2010, the debates on removing the headscarf-ban and rights for homosexuals were discussed together in terms of equality and freedom in newspapers' columns and particularly in the Teke Tek, the media program (Savcı 2011). In the television program Teke Tek, the host openly directed questions about the equal rights for homosexuals to women with headscarves. Savcı criticizes these questions regarding homosexual rights as a "litmus test" for the women with headscarves (Savci 2011, 169). The comparison between rights has created a heated debate among Muslim and LGBT activists. In this context, women with headscarves and LGBT activists had been forced to compare their rights, which politicized these subjects' rights in an exclusionary manner. Also focusing on the mass media, Atuk has explored the ways in which the debates on Islamic perception of homosexuality have revealed the divisions among Muslim subjectivities, some opposing homosexuality on religious and moral grounds, others on medical grounds (claiming that is a form of sickness), while there are also emergent voices of acceptance (Atuk 2012, 95). In short, contemporary political debates in Turkey have created a binary opposition between Islam and homosexuality, based on public morality, the perception on Islam condemning homosexuality regarding it as a sickness. On the other hand, I attach importance to the weekly sermons (hutbe) written by Religious Affairs Administration of Turkey (Diyanet)[7] as much as the above political debates which constitute and (re)produce the perception of Islam against homosexuality. During my fieldwork and in the process of writing this thesis, from 2018 November to 2020 July, Diyanet delivered at least five sermons

[5]https://www.kaosgl.org/haber/kuzu-lsquobunlarin-da-derdi-baskarsquo

[6]https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/escinsellik-hastalik-tedavi-edilmeli-14031207

[7]From hereupon, I call Diyanet in the rest of the thesis.

related to LGBT individuals. These sermons referred to homosexuality and "women who feel like a man" and vice versa (referring to trans subjects) as a great sin, a psychological disorder and an immoral act.[8] As I observed, most of the LGBT Muslims in this study do not take into account these official sermons as valid Islamic teaching but as a political tool of the AKP government. During the interviews, I never asked the participants about what they thought of the official sermons or the Religious Affairs Administration, Diyanet, because my focus was on how they reconciled their sexuality and Islam rather than their Islamic and political stance. However, two participants initiated to talk about sermons since the interview took place at a time when those sermons were delivered. Both of them expressed that they do not trust and believe in Diyanet because of its homophobic and transphobic stance. I have observed that LGBT Muslims in this study are not pleased with Diyanet's stance and sermons as they foster the perception of a binary opposition between Islam and homosexuality.

Although very similar sermons had been delivered in the previous years, in the last days of April 2020, there was a new layer of political debate added to them with President Erdogan making a statement on these sermons. In his statement, President Erdogan confirmed that the Religious Affair Administration is affiliated with the state, that the sermons are "correct" and are supported by the state.[9] This statement was made in the context of the legal proceedings against the hate speech and discriminatory advice expressed in the sermons of the Religious Affairs Administration. Since it was the Holy month of Ramadan for Muslims, the debate became quite heated. Almost every day, there was a column or essay written by LGBT organizations and activists against the speech of President Erdoğan.[10] This statement constitutes one of the remarkable moments that the "quiet heteronormalization" became a "loud heteronormalization" through the politicization of Islam against non-normative sexualities. Borrowing Savcı's conceptualization of perverse politics, I locate the political debates and statements in Turkey, as well as the official sermons by Diyanet as a political tool against homosexuality and LGBT subjects through the politicization of Islam. In this context, perverse politics "where 'fundamental rights and liberties' are treated as a totality, yet, not everyone's relationship to the discourse (and exercise) of fundamental rights and liberties is seen as equally

[8] To see relevant news: https://www.kaosgl.org/haber/diyanet-in-cuma-hutbesinde-nefret-islam-escinselligi-lanetliyor https://www.kaosgl.org/haber/diyanetin-cuma-hutbesinde-nefret-ahlaki-bozulma-ve-sapkinlik

[9] To read his speech of this public statement: https://www.kaosgl.org/haber/erdogan-dan-diyanet-aciklamasi

[10] To see some articles: https://www.kaosgl.org/haber/onur-ayi-haziran-da-homofobik-nefret-salgini https://www.kaosgl.org/haber/akp-baskan-yardimcisi-unal-hem-kimligi-sorun-gormuyorum-dedi-hem-de-dayatilmasin https://www.kaosgl.org/haber/onur-ayi-ve-lgbti-toplumu-nefret-siyasetinin-hedefinde https://www.kaosgl.org/haber/onur-haftasi-nda-lgbti-lara-nefretin-bilancosu

genuine" has been efficient in reinforcing the belief that Islam rejects homosexuality (Savcı 2016, 172). Moreover, perverse politics emphasize that contemporary politics of Turkey support restricted adoption of liberal human rights and takes Islam "as a homogenous entity" (Savcı 2016, 179). In this context of Turkey, the contemporary political debates over homosexuality and Islam ignore and silence LGBT identities along with LGBT Muslim subjects (Partog 2012; Savci 2011).

From here, I return back to Azad's above quotation. Azad expresses how he felt during the time he came out as a "religious"[11] gay to the LGBT association he was familiar with. The time he moved to Istanbul was early 2000s when he recently graduated from the university. Hence, Islam versus homosexuality debates were current issue at the time of his arrival which can partially explain why Azad was hesitant to come out as a "religious" person. In other words, for Azad's situation, perverse politics were developing in the roots of political debates which makes hard to come out as a "religious" homosexual at that time.

In the *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Puar points out the binary perception of gay and Muslim identities among homosexual Muslims' narratives: "The 'also' of 'I am a homosexual also,' a sort of 'deal with it' kind of insistence, signals to multiple audiences the conjuncture of Muslim and queer identities, thus challenging the mutually exclusive Orientalist versions of Muslim and homosexual" (Puar 2007, 15). Hereby, Orientalism portrays queer and Muslim bodies as opposed to each other in the sense of the perceptions/representations/generalizations of modern, dominant, civilized and colonialist queer bodies versus unmodern, subordinate, uncivilized and colonized Muslim bodies. What Puar points out is that in the narratives of Muslim homosexual individuals the "also" is an indicator of Orientalist viewpoint and an embracement of being the "other". Thus, here Puar emphasizes the orientalist imaginaries are not produced by only the modern, dominant, civilized and colonial body, but (re)produced also by Muslim homosexual bodies when the "also" is indicated. In the above quotation of Azad, I observe a similar orientalist leaning. He stated that he could not express himself completely, and only after two or three months, he came out as a "religious" homosexual. I read his hesitation to come out as a "religious" person and the sentence starting with "both" as "deal with it" attitude as Puar's points. Therefore, Puar's attention on the discourses helps to indicate the orientalist viewpoint in Azad's narrative, which I argue that it is embedded with the first challenge, the perception that Islam rejects homosexuality. Hence, I approached the construction of this perception through the related

[11] Azad talks about himself as dindar, which is translated as religious in this chapter. However, I mention "religious" in quotation to refer his narrative, not for the terminology of this study. I prefer to call Muslim instead of generalizing religious as Muslim.

contemporary political debates and recent sermons in Turkey.

2.1.2 The Absence (and the Presence) of Self-Identified Muslims

The second challenge, the absence of self-identified Muslims in the LGBT circles, defends the understanding of non-existence of LGBT Muslims in Turkey and indirectly the perception that Islam rejects homosexuality. This second challenge should not be taken separately from contemporary political debates in Turkey, but it should be seen as the product of the first challenge. Addressing the absence of self-identified LGBT Muslims, I trace the participants' experiences in the LGBT circles. In doing so, I aim to interrogate the regulatory queerness and queer secularity in this part, without ignoring the limited experiences and representations about LGBT Muslims I had accessed in my study.

I consider Azad's quotation that I mentioned earlier, is important to remind us his first struggles encountered in an LGBT circle in Istanbul. The time his coming out as a "religious" gay happened in the early 2000s when the contemporary political debates about homosexuality and Islam were a hot topic in the media as well as among political figures. Before starting our interview, we were chatting with Azad about my study and its aims. He nodded as he knew very well when he was listening my arguments about why I was conducting this study. He mentioned that he and his friend also attended in some researches like mine. His friend who defines herself as a Muslim trans woman, has been interviewed much more than him in order to take active part as a Muslim trans woman. However, Azad stated that her efforts did not turn out very well. When our interview ended, I asked him if he knows any person among his friends or acquaintances as a potential participant for this study. He repeated that he has only the above-mentioned friend and said: "She has spent many efforts earlier and now she does not want to talk with any person neither for research nor for news, because it did not help us. Maybe you know her, she's Öykü Ay". Öykü Ay is one of the representatives of Muslim LGBT individuals that I had known from the LGBT online news. However, I could not offer an interview with her due to Azad's opinion that Ay would be uninterested in these interviews for a while. However, the answers why Ay might be uninterested to my potential offer might be a site of inquiry for this chapter.[12]

[12]To learn more about Öykü Ay and her activism: https://t24.com.tr/haber/tesetturlu-trans-kadin-oyku-ay-genelevlerin-olmadigi-yerlerde-tecavuz-ve-tacizde-artis-olur,300372

What Azad and Öykü Ay have experienced in the LGBT spheres are peculiar for the time when they were active in the LGBT spheres. Although, I observe similar narratives between Azad and Derya, there is a non-ignorable difference between them. Hereupon, I unpack Derya's narratives about the experiences with her friends in LGBT circles.

In our first meeting, Derya who was actively participating LGBT circles in two big cities of Turkey complained about the discrimination from both Muslim and LGBT friends of her when she started to wear the headscarf recently. In the below quotation of Derya, she tells her embracement of Muslim identity and the common discourses about her presence in LGBT circles:

> "Because we were oppressed, slaughtered, and we have been a community in which some specific societies produce hate speech to us. I mean, we were called luti. This was said in the years of the 1000s, it has been said in the years of 2000s. Most probably, it will be said in the years of 3000s. However, we as the luti people, I mean yes, we happened to be like a tribe. But we have not happened to be a lut tribe. Another thing- we were excluded, we did something and, well, as I said before, I have not seen this in Islam."[13] (Derya, aged-25)

Derya speak of her Muslim identity referring the historical connotations of "oppressed" and "slaughtered" from the World History narratives. While her Muslim identity becomes prominent and she embraces her Muslim identity as "oppressed", the hate speech she mentions about the luti people comes from the discourses from the belief where Islam rejects homosexuality. Therefore, she intersects both oppressed narratives together and adopts them as she says "yes, we happened to be like a tribe". In her narrative, I recognize her attempt to situate her identity in the position of the oppressed for being Muslim and non-normative sexual body. Kathi Weeks (2018) emphasizes in the projection of feminist standpoint:

> "[...]then, the product of two mechanisms of selection: irony and self-valorization. Irony, as a deconstitutive mechanism, helps us disengage from that which weakens and disables us; self-valorization, as a constitutive mechanism, is a means by which we engage what we can do." (Weeks

[13] "Çünkü biz genelde baskılanan, hep katledilen, işte üzerinden belli başlı insanların hep nefret söylemi ürettiği bir topluluk olduk. Yani bize işte hep lutiler dendi. Bu bin yılında da dendi, bu iki bin yılında da deniliyor. Bu büyük ihtimalle üç bin yılında da denilecek. Ama aslında biz lutilerin, yani evet biz bu anlamda maalesef bir kavim gibi olduk. Ama Lut Kavmi işte olmadık. Başka bir- sürekli dışlandık, şey yaptık ve ı dediğim gibi bizim İslam'da ben öyle bir şey görmedim."

1998, 273))

Recognizing Derya's attempt to situate herself in a position, I argue it as her feminist standpoint which interplays in the complex discourses of history and politics. In consideration of two mechanisms of selection, I offer to look at Derya's statement of "happened to be like a tribe" as an illustration of irony and her differentiation from Lut tribe as a self-valorization. Then, her standpoint "politically" engages the irony and self-valorization in which she positions her identity through this very political and historical attachments (Weeks 1998, 253). In this vein, Puar examines homonationalism in parallel with the historical and political economies embedded in the modernity, orientalism, nationalism and racialization. The method of her study reveals homonationalism via the relations between "history making" and "history vanishing" moments (Puar 2007, xix). From this perspective, Derya's standpoint is the accumulations of history-making and history-vanishing moments of Muslim and queer sexualities that she embraces. What does Derya's standpoint selects as the history making and the history vanishing moments? The following narratives of Derya might help to trace these moments:

> "What people feared of, when I covered, is this Islamist, this follower of sharia, this thingy, conservative fanatical thingy against the society. They were violencing us. For instance, one of them dished on me most recently. (It was said that) I know you call all your friends infidel. I was saying infidel to people. Gosh. But I would not (laughs). It could be a coincidence, I would have blurted out. To tell the truth, on the one side all these things make me happy, because I embraced more when I uncovered (took off my headscarf), I made sure of myself in the point of not the way they were afraid of me, but from the discourses they were afraid of. Because they were very horrified really. They were too Islamophobic. Very terrified really."[14](Derya, aged-25).

In this narrative, Derya talks about the people who were her friends and acquaintances from LGBT circles. She believes that they are afraid of violence, conservative approach, law of Islam (sharia) which represented through Derya's veiled body. According to Derya, when she started to wear the headscarf, her friends' thought of her

[14]"İnsanların korktuğu, ben kapandığım zaman, işte bu İslamcı, bu şeriatçı, bu bilmem ne, muhafazakar mutaassıp bilmem ne topluma karıştı. Bize şiddet uyguluyor işte. Biri mesela iftira attı en son. Sen işte bütün arkadaşlarına kafir dediğini biliyorum. Ben insanlara kafir diyormuşum. Allah allah. Demezdim ama (güler). Denk gelmiş demek ki, ağzımdan çıkmış. Artık göz göre göre iftira bu tarz şeyler. Açıkçası beni çok mutlu ediyor bir yandan, çünkü mesela açıldığımda da daha da bir sarılmış oldum, daha da bir emin olmuş oldum kendimden ama mesela onların korktuğu şekilde de değil, ama çok onların korktuğu söylemlerden. Çünkü çok korkuyorlardı gerçekten. Çok islamofobiklerdi gerçekten. Çok korkuyorlardı gerçekten."

with a baggage of norms that Muslim bodies bear. At the same time, she repeated the fear of her friends several times and called them Islamophobic. As her last sentences show, the empowerment she had developed derives from these reactions and the baggage of norms on the Muslim bodies. Returning to Weeks' version of feminist standpoint theory, she theorizes the projection as "not given but "achieved" and "selective" (Weeks 2018, 254). I believe that Derya's standpoint selects the baggage of norms on the Muslim bodies which she holds strongly, and she feels empowered as a result of an achievement of struggling with these norms. I consider Derya's struggle against to the norms on the Muslim bodies and her empowerment as a result of these struggles, as her feminist standpoint. The feminist standpoint of Derya renders Puar's critique of regulatory queerness and its outputs on Muslim sexualities.

According to Puar, regulatory queerness as the means of the formation of "queer liberal imaginary", is against to any kind of normativity such as in the religion (Puar 2007, 13). She discusses forms of queer secularity to clarify regulatory queerness and describes queer secularity as:

> "Queer secularity demands a particular transgression of norms, religious norms that are understood to otherwise bind that subject to an especially egregious interdictory religious frame. The queer agential subject can only ever be fathomed outside the norming constrictions of religion, conflating agency and resistance." (Puar 2007, 13))

In Puar's description of queer secularity, I find valuable to draw the attention on religion which fosters deconstructing the "religious norms" through "conflating agency and resistance". I focus this part because Derya's feminist standpoint could be originated from her resistance coming from *oppressed* narrativization of her Muslim and non-normative sexual body. To be clear, I put an emphasis on "agency and resistance" here to show Derya's standpoint as "the queer agential subject". The discourses about being "Islamist", "follower of sharia" and "luti" bind her to "egregious interdictory religious frame" which she knows very well so that her standpoint empowers herself from all these *disturbing* norms. Remembering Derya's words of "happening to be like a tribe but not like a luti tribe" and "as I said before, I have not seen this in Islam" are worthy to notice not only her critique of the baggage of norms Muslim bodies bear, but also queer secularity exercised among her LGBT friends.

I argue Azad's experience as a dissimilar version of resistance to queer secularity

from Derya. Although Azad's experiences with LGBT circles were in the time of 2000s when the Islamic exclusion of homosexuality discourses were hot topics as I mentioned earlier, I want to state the queer secularity was prevailing outside of LGBT circles that even of those individuals do not hold Islamic beliefs necessarily:

> "They were saying to me that, son, you both believe in god and you are gay. What are you, are you crazy? My friend was atheist and the other one also does not believe (in anything). He says that son, god does not accept you, he rejected you, he does not even count you as a part of the system, you will go to hell forever, you do not have a place in this society. How do you come to believe still? I was surprised for sure. And saying them, then, who has created you? He also created me. And he created me like this, he created you with blue eyes, him with green eyes, the other with no arms. It is not a reason to deny the god. So, you are saying I should not believe because he created me like this, I cannot be a muslim, I cannot go to the mosque."[15] (Azad, aged-35)

The conversation between Azad and his roommates took place when he was going to the university in a city located in the Black Sea region. His roommates judged him relying on the norm of Islam versus homosexuality. This norm, Islam rejects homosexuality, is derived from biblical explanation from Islam. Although Azad's roommates are not Muslim, they discuss the validity of Azad's queer Muslim subjectivity on the basis of Islam. Azad's opposition also comes from a similar perspective that relies on the belief of "everybody has been created by God" in Islam. Azad's surprise and his answer to his friends illustrate his agential subject for conceptualizing his queer Muslim sexual body as part of the God's creation.

I should note that regulatory queerness can be valid outside of so-called the religious-secularity opposition, even for this study as well. Here, I want to question regulatory queerness for conceptualizing LGBT Muslims in itself for this study. If there is a certain queer subject, when it positions itself standing against all norms, does not it also re-produce a limited understanding of queerness by re-making the certainty as a norm? Then, for instance, is it impossible to think of being queerly Muslim for LGBT Muslims in Turkey? Because being a queerly Muslim can be anything outside of accepting traditional, patriarchal and normative understandings of Islam.

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[15] "Bana şey diyorlardı, oğlum hem allaha inanıyorsun, hem geysin. nasıl bir şeysin sen, manyak mısın. çünkü arkadaşım ateistsi, diğeri de inanmıyordu. oğlum diyordu, allah seni zaten kabul etmemiş, reddetmiş. seni sistemin bir parçası saymıyor, ebediyen cehenneme gideceksiniz, bu toplumda zaten yeriniz yok. sen nasıl inanıyorsun? ben tabii böyle şaşırıyordum. ulan sizi kim yarattı diyordum kendi kendime. sizi allah yaratmadı mı? beni de yarattı. beni böyle yarattı, seni mavi gözlü yarattı, onu yeşil gözlü, kolsuz yarattı. Bu allahı inkar etmek için bir sebep değil ki. yani böyle doğduğum için allaha inanmayacak mıyım, müslüman olamayacak mıyım, camiye gidemeyecek miyim."

If it is impossible (to be a queerly Muslim), the power relations here contribute a specific kind of Muslim queerness which cannot be considered as *queerly* in the light of the definition of queer. This paradoxical nature of regulatory queerness helps to understand clearly contextualizing LGBT Muslims who even cannot be generalized to the context of Turkey. Puar calls regulatory queerness as "an especial threat to LGBTIQ persons, organizations, communities, and spaces of congregation" (Puar 2007, 25). Even though Puar's focus in her study is Europe -Britain and Netherlands, I consider her evaluations are relevant in much more contexts, including my research as the diversity and variety of the participants' experiences show (Abraham 2009; Kugle 2014; Peumans 2017).

Both Derya and Azad experienced queer secularity from different angles in different contexts and historical backgrounds of Turkey. From this point, it gives us at least clues about the operative arguments of queer secularity in both LGBT circles and outside of LGBT circles. While Derya's narrative holds strongly the historical and political discourses about Muslim subjects, she developed a feminist standpoint strategically to resist the regulatory queerness. On the other hand, Azad's narrative empowers itself from a spiritual perspective, from his Islamic rationality. I argue that these differences cannot be evaluated ignoring the individual contexts which forms their agential subjects. Hence, I emphasize the dissimilarity of the experienced regulatory queerness and queer secularity in which Azad and Derya developed different "embodiments" with the struggles they encountered (Haraway 1991, 180). Furthering Haraway's rich contribution of "A Cyborg Manifesto", I argue that Azad and Derya's strategies denote the "challenging dualisms" in the realm of religious-secular and queer-religious dichotomies (Haraway 1991, 177):

> "The self is the One who is not dominated, who knows that by the experience of domination, which gives the lie to the autonomy of the self. The be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, two are too many." (Haraway 1991, 177))

Although Haraway formulates cyborgs through destabilizing "nature" versus "science" binarism to show "the late twentieth century in United States scientific culture", her approach on problematizing the binarism in political-materialist actions of U.S. is inspirational for analysis of contextualizing LGBT+ Muslims in Turkey (Haraway 1991, 151-153). Limiting *becomings* between the one and other alongside

with "totalizing" the reality help us to recognize how to approach dualisms critically (181). In the following parts, I revisit cyborg imagery in order to discuss the dissimilar experiences of the veiled body beyond the dualism that Haraway theorizes.

2.2 Body Image: The Veiled Body

In the previous parts of this chapter, I introduced contemporary politics of Turkey and the absence of LGBT Muslims' representation in relation to the regulatory queerness in the context of Turkey. In doing so, I questioned some queer forms in the light of queer secularity through the narratives of Azad and Derya. In the following part, I consider the gaze as one of the implications of regulatory queerness recognized by some of the participants in this study. Detecting the gaze and the body gazed on might be functional sites to think about the diversity in the experiences of regulatory queerness. How do some bodies sense the meaning of the gaze? How to understand the meanings behind the gaze? How to think on the gaze as a desired, a less feminine expression, or a less masculine expression? I discuss these questions with the experiences of veiling through Derya, the fear of Zümrüt and Ceren's coming out story in the following parts.

2.2.1 The Hegemonic Gaze on The Veiled Body

A sunny day of December 2019, I am excited about one meeting with unknown members of a secret group: Muslim lesbian women friends. This meeting was organized after I gave a talk called "How to Understand Islam and Sexuality through The Stories of LGBT Muslims in Turkey" at a first Muslim Feminist conference held in Turkey. After my talk, some of the participants in the conference approached me to talk more about my research or requested some sources to read about LGBT Muslims in Turkey. Among all these participants, there were a group of friends who came out to me as Muslim lesbians personally, asked my contact information to meet up together for another time.

In our group meeting, Zümrüt who is 19 years old Psychology student in the university, asked me how I was able to attend activities of LGBT organizations and

associations as a veiled woman. Although I was aware of the gazes when I attended any kind of activities organized by LGBT associations, I have not experienced any negative attitude or discriminatory behavior from people in LGBT circles. On the contrary, as I enjoyed every event without any problem, I felt at ease and affiliated with more activities as much as I could attend. However, when I talked with Zümrüt, I have recognized that I only attended more academic activities or activities related to activism. I did not prefer to attend the activities and events which were aiming fun or having intimate relationships such as coming out or sharing some thoughts.[16] Although my experiences were not representative because they are intersecting with my intention of "entering" the field, the participants in this study have experienced various discriminatory behavior and negative attitudes for being Muslim in their personal or public environments, including but not limited to LGBT circles.

Returning to the question of Zümrüt, after I replied like the above, I have asked her if she has ever attended any LGBT activities or events. She explained my question:

> "Since I am veiled, if someone asks me why I am here or what I am doing here, I do not feel like I can give a proper answer. Okay, I want to be there, I want to watch the activities, I want to listen to them but I am afraid of what people say (to me) or *the way they look at me*.[17] And all these can happen because I wear a headscarf. If I were uncovered, nobody would say anything to me, I guess, I mean most probably."[18] (Zümrüt, aged-19)

Zümrüt's concerns rely on what has not been experienced. However, her imagination of attending in LGBT activities is gutless because of a possible and potential judgement due to her headscarf which will marks her as Muslim. Veiling or wearing headscarf have been studied in the great number of researches in terms of its perception, practices and meanings in different contexts as well as in Turkey (Göle 1992; Lazreg 2009; Olson 1985). These studies demonstrate veiling and/or wearing a headscarf as a tool of Islamist, political and/ or pious identity. Meanwhile, there have been recent studies that focus on the practice of veiling is neither an Islamic, nor a political nor pious symbol (Koca 2020; **?**). These studies illustrate

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[16] To be clear, I did not attend sunday talks (pazar sohbetleri) or tea talk meetings which are two weekly organized events for conversations with LGBT individuals in different LGBT associations.

[17] Italic emphasis is mine.

[18] "Kapalı olduğum için biri bana neden geldiğimi, burada ne yaptığımı sorsa cevap veremem gibi hissediyorum. Tamam, orada bulunmak, etkinlikleri izlemek, dinlemek istiyorum ama insanların bana bakışlarından, sözlerinden de korkuyorum. Ve başörtüsü kullandığım için olacak bunların hepsi. Açık olsam kimse bana sen burada ne yapıyorsun demeyecek herhalde, yüksek ihtimalle yani."

that women who take off their veils are resisting to those mainstream symbols of veiling which were attained to them in the context of Turkey and Malaysia. Although these studies open new discussions about the practice of veiling, I consider the normative perceptions on the veiled Muslims are dominant significantly in the context of Turkey. Therefore, Zümrüt's concern about being seen as the veiled body is derived from being seen such as a political, Islamist and/ or pious subject since she predicts that LGBT circles do not have those subjects.

Zümrüt's question to me and her answer to the same question reminded me of the similar hesitation of Azad as I mentioned in the former parts of this chapter. What is different in Zümrüt's narrative from Azad, is her hesitance which does not only because of the potential negative attitudes or reactions to her visibly Muslim body, but also the way of people's looks onto her body. Zümrüt points out the gazes that she has not experienced in the space of LGBT circles, when she talks about her fear as such "...the way they look at me". I reckon that Zümrüt's lack of experience also fosters the fear of being seen in the way of the discourses in the contemporary politics of Turkey. In her mind, she constructed queer circles as originally exclusive to invisibility of queer Muslim subjects. Identically, Puar reviews the ways queer secularity works and organizes queer Muslim bodies as such:

> "The (white) secular norms by which queerness abides contributes greatly to (racist) Islamo- and homophobic representations of terrorists. That is, the queer transgressive subject accrues its legitimacy and currency at this historical juncture through an inability to disentangle these representations via a broader articulation of queer religiosity. Queer secularity is constitutive of and constituted by the queer autonomous liberal subject against and through the reification of the very pathological irrational sexualities that are endemic to discourses of terrorist culpability." (Puar 2007, 13-14)

As Puar criticizes the secular norms carried on by the queerness, Zümrüt's fear corresponds to the hesitation of Azad. On the other hand, Zümrüt who knows the recent history of Islam and homosexuality discourses took place in the contemporary politics of Turkey, is aware of the "legitimacy and currency" of the lack of queer Muslim representations. However, I want to draw attention to Orientalism and the veiled body in Zümrüt's narrative. I tackle with her fear of "the way of looks" that signifies the way of being seen as "exotic", "strange" and "mysterious" in LGBT spaces. Edward Said states that "[...]the word "Orient" was wonderfully, ingeniously connected to exoticism, glamour, mystery, and promise. But it was also a sweeping historical generalization." (Said 2003, 341). Considering Said's approach on Orient,

Zümrüt's fear connotes the "historical generalization" of being seen as the Orient in the LGBT spheres. Here, I take the gaze as power on conducting the Orient and Orientalist. From this point, I approach the power of gaze partially employing the "male gaze" (Mulvey 1999). According to male gaze, the gaze itself is the subject with the ability to look, and what is gazed is the object with the inability of look but being looked at. Initially, the framework of male gaze was theorized as the male gaze looking at the female body in the films and photographs (Mulvey 1999). I address the formulation of male gaze being the subject; however, I take it as the "hegemonic gaze" since the heterosexual matrix of male gaze is not useful for my study. Based on this theoretical framework, the gaze speaks from the position of subject and Zümrüt's fear comes from being an object like the Orient. Then, the language of gazes does not only determine the subjects and objects, but also shows how to be seen as an object such as "exotic", "strange" and "mysterious". Consequently, the subject who follows the object's characteristics contributes to the regulatory queerness in its gaze.

Another aspect of the fear in Zümrüt's narrative marks her veiled body. Why some Muslim bodies are veiled? Or, what is the purpose of veiling the body in Islam? Since these questions search for the reasons of a *religious*[19] practice which I have no intention to seek in my study, I have never asked any person among the participants. However, all cis-women and trans-women in this study have talked about their opinions or experiences about veiling their bodies. I believe that talking about the veiling bodies and being *visibly* Muslim for cis and trans women demonstrate two important contributions of this research. The first is that discussing their veiling bodies with me opens new perspectives to understand regulatory queerness in the context of Turkey, as I mentioned in the earlier. The second is the gendered aspect of the practice of veiling which bears the Islamic, pious, exotic and gendered signifiers. I touch upon the second contribution in much more detail in the following subtitles.

I turn back to interrogate the regulatory queerness via indicating Derya's experience of wearing headscarf and taking off her headscarf:

> "X friend was saying, she was with me, they do not look at you because of decency, since you are veiled. But I was saying that they shall look at me (laughs) to her. But there is this kind of mechanism when you look at it. On the one side, like disciplining the self (nefs) maybe, and I found this side difficult. I mean, well, I found it difficult for the reason of smoothing the ruffled feather of that aspect in the self (nefs). Also, I

[19] Although the practice of veiling does not have to be religious, I call it religious here because the participants in this research expressed the common idea of veiling as religious.

> felt like I was put in such a way when I was veiled. Like, when you are veiled, people see you in only that one way. Always, you are seen in only one way. And I was experiencing that a lot as being a trans. Being seen in one way (as a trans), it added one more time, I became the other of the other. The society does not accept me, this environment does not accept me, nobody accepts me. And everybody looks at me like that. It pushed me too hard when I was veiled."[20] (Derya, aged-25)

Here, Derya explains how she felt during the time she was veiled. The beginning of her narrative situates her desire to be seen. However, the way she was seen does not satisfy her because she recognizes that people look at her in "only one way". Her narrative shifts from the desire to be seen to the uncomfortableness of being not seen in the desired way. I perceive that this shift is important to observe her emotional attachment to the meanings of the gazes. More precisely, the desire to be seen conflicts with the aim of veiling for Derya who considers veiling as disciplining the self which was regarded as hard since it makes to be seen in "only one way". Also, the sense of covering her subjectivity reduces to a veiled body which reminds her the time she was seen as a transwoman and her feelings about nonrecognition. The narrative of the feelings about the exclusion from being a veiled and trans woman embedded in her narrative which separately enables her to divide the society into two binary oppositions. By making this division and feeling unaccepted from "both sides", she comes to a conclusion of "nobody accepts her".

The exclusion from "both sides" and her division of "the society" and "this environment" represent norms in the power of "both sides". The homophobic, transphobic and Islamophobic representations of bodies set barriers against to queer Muslim bodies. In this vein, I believe that visiting queer theory is worthwhile to understand the modes of "gaze" and the construction of "both sides". Employing one of the first critiques of liberalism and nationalism in queer communities, Lisa Duggan defines potential premises that queer theory offer:

> "They stake out a new stance of opposition, which many theorists now call 'queer'. This stance is constituted through its dissent from the hegemonic, structured relations and meanings of sexuality and gender, but

[20] "X arkadaşım şey diyordu işte o dönem, yanımdaki bir arkadaşım, edepten bakmıyorlar sana, kapalı olduğu için bakmazlar diyordu. Ben de diyordum ki, ne var ya, bana baksınlar (güler). Ama şimdi baktığın zaman böyle de bir mekanizma var, bir yandan nefsin de öyle bir yönünü törpülemek için belki de, hani o da bana açıkçası biraz ağır geldi. Yani. Iı o anlamda ağır geldi. Bir de hep böyle bir konuma koyuluyormuşum gibi hissettim. Hani hep böyle bir şekilde görüyor insanlar seni kapandığın zaman. Hep bir, bir şekilde görülüyorsun. Ve ben onu zaten trans olmakla çok yaşıyordum. O bir şekilde görülmeyi, şimdi bir daha üstüne eklendi, ötekinin ötekisi oldum. Toplum da beni kabul etmiyor, bu çevre de kabul etmiyor, kimse kabul etmiyor. Ve herkes bana böyle bakıyor. Beni bayağı- o süreç bayağı zorlamıştı o anlamda kapandığım süreç."

> its actual historical forms and positions are open, constantly subject to negotiation and renegotiation. ” (Duggan and Hunter 2006, 159)

Duggan emphasizes that "actual historical forms and positions are open, constantly to negotiation and renegotiation" in the queer stance. Considering the regulatory queerness, the norms which have been produced in this vein are against the queer stance. Then, can we understand some norms through the *visibly* Muslim bodies' experiences of gaze? How can the gaze take the shape of "only one way" when the medium is the looks? How have been the gaze considered as against the queer stance and as supporter of queer regulatory? I argue that raising these questions allow us to see LGBT Muslims' concerns about queer forms. In the next two sub-parts, regarding on two experiences of formerly veiled participants, I demonstrate the ambivalent nature of gendered aspects in veiling experiences.

2.2.1.1 A less feminine expression of the veiled body

This sub-part explores Derya's narrative on the time she was wearing a headscarf. I attach importance in her narrative not only for its content but also the flow in her narrative shifts. I argue that nonlinear nature of the narrative is valuable to observe her memory about the time she was veiled. In the below narrative, Derya talks about her critiques on Islamic norms of veiling and, immediately, she changes her critiques about her desired look:

> “It cannot be one day you are veiled, and the other day you are not. Why not? Of course, it can be. I was veiled for one and a half months and then I was unveiled. I had to unveil (because of people) and at the same time, I preferred to unveil because it was so hard to me. It was triggering my dysphoria more. Because even if by taking hormones, it was a womanhood gained later, in inverted commas, made me feel like a man to me when I was veiled. It was not a bad thing, maybe I could veil in a different way or whatever, but it was like- there are a lot of base thoughts, but I am longing for veiling again. I have an urge in one day (that) I can have that much confidence. Striving with that violence because I want to live it like that. But, on the other hand, my nefis (human soul) do that, which is hard to resist.”[21] (Derya, aged-25)

[21] "Bir açılıp bir kapandı olmaz ama. Ya niye olmaz, oluyor işte. Kapandım, bir buçuk ay kapalı kaldım, açıldım. Yani hem açılmak zorunda kaldım, hem de ben de tercih ettim açılmayı, çok zordu benim için çünkü. Benim disforimi biraz daha azdırıyordu. Çünkü her ne kadar hormonlarla da olsa işte sonradan

Here, Derya's narrative shows both her complaints about stereotypes attached to the practice of veiling and her impression on veiling as a transwoman. As she stated in her first sentences, the practice of veiling is a relatively difficult decision for people who want to veil or take off their veils. The reason why it is difficult is making the decision to veil or unveil is understood as a lifetime decision in the society. Even though Derya criticizes this aspect as a norm in the practice of veiling, she explains her reasons why she was unveiled. In our first interview, Derya complained about ending the friendships she had in LGBT circles after she started to veil. The reason why they behaved like this, according to Derya, is because she represents authoritarian religion in the power in Turkey which her friends marginalized her body image. I refer the authoritarian religion in power as the dominant Sunni Muslim discourses consisted of Diyanet, AKP government and media. All these discourses were attached to Derya, so that she represented the power which her friends are against.

On the other hand, Derya expressed the reason why she took off her veiling by voicing her triggering "dysphoria" and "feeling like a man". Here, the practice of veiling causes problems for Derya and her affection to her body. In her narrative of "I have an urge (to veil) in one day (that) I can have that much confidence", I perceive that the conflictual feelings of Derya's body image and Islamic practice of veiling put her into hardship not because of the stigma of veiling but her affection to both the practice of veiling and her sex appeal.

I suggest thinking of the practice of veiling in the sense of the representation of authoritarian religion in the power and the hardship on the desired appearance together with the hegemonic gaze. From the perspective of hegemonic gaze, Derya is uncomfortable to be seen as the authoritarian religion in the power which puts her as an object. In parallel with this perspective, her discomfort of being less feminine also avoids the gazes which give look at the sexualized and gendered bodies.

I observe similar engagement in Derya's following narrative below:

> "Do not get me wrong but if I were a cis woman, I mean vaov, like Adriana Lima or a fairy, that's OK. It could have been hard to veil for me. Because men show you an interest. Or I will show them. Even it does not have to be men, it could have been women or some asexual.

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olma bir kadınlık tırnak içinde, hani ın bana erkek gibi geliyodum ben kapandığım zamanlar. Hani kötü bi şey değil, belki daha farklı kapanabilirdim, belki daha başka bir şey olabilirdi ama bu bir yani- bir sürü alt düşünce vardı ama çok istiyorum yeniden kapanmak. Yani bir gün gerçekten çok istiyorum, o özgüvene sahip olmak. O şiddetlerle mücadele etmek çünkü ben böyle onu yaşamak istiyorum. Ama işte bi yandan nefsim de şey yapıyor, onunla mücadele etmek çok zor."

> Anyway, like that. However, when I look at the current me, there are no men who show interest in me. It is overweighting me. I mean I do not feel like I am hiding my beauty, but I am becoming even uglier (laughs). I mean, before, I was veiled because I was uncomfortable with the gazes. But after then, I have realized that I thought differently because this time, it was like, nobody looks at me."[22] (Derya, aged-25)

Looking at her narrative here, Derya does not feel comfortable and confident with her sex appeal when she wears headscarf. In the part that she says, "I do not feel like I am hiding my beauty, but I am becoming even uglier", I consider her undesired sex appeal damages her femininity, for her; alongside with "triggering (her) dysphoria". In this regard, I claim that she wants the looks on her sexualized and gendered body, while the hegemonic gaze looks her veiled body, which puts her discomfort.

I would draw an attention on Derya's feminist standpoint which bears the political and historical baggage of Islamic norms in Turkey. On the one hand, the sex appeal she desires evokes her queer body which she wants to show. Here, I also problematize the desired appearance in the standards of femininity and masculinity, which exclude the veiled bodies as unsexy, ungendered and undesired in terms of femininity, at least as it appeared in Derya's experiences. Apart from this brief problematization, I discuss the discomfort of Derya due to the lack of gazes. Since Derya wants the gazes on her sexualized and gendered body, it shows a sign of objectifying female bodies for the gazes. However, her veiled body experience illustrates that being an object for the gazes distracts the subjects and she cannot be seen other than in "only one way". More clearly, I perceive the desire to be the object of gazes and the discomfort of being seen as the object of the authoritarian religion in power are essentially different. This difference has a unique importance because it proves ignoring the validation of being *visibly* Muslim and having gendered desires, like Derya narrates.

I have no doubt that Derya's narratives can open more new discussions on the gazes, veiled bodies and sex appeals of queer Muslim bodies. However, I note that the relationship between beauty and femininity/ masculinity, and veiled bodies in the way I argue above can be contradictory in other experiences of LGBT Muslims. In the next part, I scrutinize Ceren's veiling experience of feeling *less masculine* which

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[22] "Benim böyle ne bileyim, yanlış anlama hani cis bir kadın olsaydım ve ım hani işte böyle vaov Adriana Lima gibi, peri kızı gibi olsaydım, ım amenna. Kapanmak daha zor gelebilirdi gözüme. Çünkü erkekler de ilgi gösteriyor mesela. Ya da ben ilgi göstereceğim. Erkekler bile olmayabilir bu, kadınlar da olabilir veya aseksüel olabilirdi. Her neyse, vesaire, vesaire. Ama şu anki şeyimden baktığımda bana çok ilgi gösteren bir- yani erkek de yok. Ama bana çok ağır geliyor. Yani sanki böyle güzelliğimi saklıyor gibi hissetmiyorum da ben (güler) iyice çirkinleşiyormuşum gibi hissediyorum. Yani önceden rahatsız olduğum bakışlardan dolayı kapanmıştım. Sonra fark ettim ki aslında birazını yanlış düşünmüşüm çünkü bu kez de şey olmaya başladı, kimse bana bakmıyor."

seems conflictual with Derya's experience. Nonetheless, I consider this conflictual approach of my participants valuable to understand the ambivalent attachments on the veiled body, being *visibly* Muslim and the body image.

2.2.1.2 A less masculine expression of the veiled body

In our interview with Ceren, I noticed that she talked about her sexual orientation much more than her approach on Islam and her Muslim identity. As our interviews were about to end, she mentioned how much she struggled with her sexual orientation due to Islam and she said "it was a process in the way that I do not want to maul myself this much. Because even I had tried veiling at this point. And I tried it for a long time. Not counted as a short term."[23] When she mentioned that she tried to veil for a while, I could not bring myself to not asking her veiling experience. Also, she mentioned veiling to show how much she resisted to acknowledge her sexual orientation. Therefore, I asked her about her veiling experience, and she said:

> "It turned out to be a thing which wears a bone, a topcoat from going outside wearing shorts and t-shirts in winters. I was not wearing makeup at that time, and I do not wear it now too. Because I am not a feminine in character, I am not too masculine either. But I am not a feminine either in character that I have not used makeup at that time."[24](Ceren, aged-28)

During our interview with Ceren, she often had played with the words and expressions in a humorous way. Like her above quotation, Ceren tried to show me that her veiling is an unusual decision even for her in terms of her dressing style because she feels hot even in winters. She had talked about veiling as an unpleasant experience because it does not reflect her. When I asked about when and how she decided to take off her headscarf, she replied that she decided to take off her headscarf when she embraced her sexual orientation. However, she waited to graduate from university to take off her headscarf because she does not want to be seen unveiled to the

[23] "Kendimi bu kadar hırpalamak istemiyorum şeklinde bir süreçti. Çünkü ya tesettürü bile denedim ben bu noktada. Ve uzun bir süre de denedim. Kısa sayılmayacak bir süre denedim."

[24] "Bonesini takan, uzun pardesüsünü giyen, bir yandan böyle kışın şortla ve tişörtle dolaşan birinden öyle bir şeye döndü. Makyaj ben o zaman da kullanmıyordum, şimdi de kullanmıyorum. Yani çok dişil bir karakter olmadığım için, çok maskülen de değilim. Ama dişil bir karakter olmadığım makyaj hiç kullanmadım hani o dönem."

people in her social environment whom she needs to explain the reasons. She stated that those times when she wears headscarf, she does not feel attached to her veiling and it was too hard for her. She said that as soon as she graduated, the next day, she unveiled and felt free. In the same day she took off her headscarf, she cut off her friendships except for two people from the university and afterwards, went to an LGBT association for the first time.

Ceren clearly said that taking off her headscarf and accepting her sexual orientation overlaps. For this reason, she did not attend any LGBT spaces before taking off her headscarf. In addition, she said that she is still arguing with Islam whether Islam is inclusive for LGBT individuals or not. I argue Ceren's Islamic stance in detailed in the next chapter. What I want to focus on here, the intersection of Ceren's decisions about her headscarf and her acceptance of sexual orientation. As soon as Ceren takes off her headscarf, she became aware of her appearance like the ways in which she wants to be not seen. The above quotation expresses her opinions about herself, as neither feminine, nor too masculine in appearance. Aside from this quotation, she mentioned that she felt uncomfortable with wearing red shoes which were a first birthday present from her mom. She continued to talk about not wearing makeups and skirts in which she does not feel them reflecting her. She also stated that during the time she was veiled, she had never worn a skirt but trousers under her topcoat (*pardesü*). Her detailed explanation about her choices of dress made me think of that she is well aware of her appearance and give importance on the appearance as a reflection of her. Ceren does not want to wear red shoes, makeups and skirts as much as headscarf which she perceives the veiling even as a barrier to prevent her from acknowledging her same-sex sexual desires.

What makes me think of Ceren's veiled body as a *less masculine* expression, had happened in our second interview. At that time, she stated that she considers herself as the *masculine* one in her romantic relationships. Although she did not consider herself butch, she said that she is attracted to women who are more feminine than her. After then, I realized that she takes a position on the so-called masculinity compared with femininity. Her attention to her appearance as a not feminine and the decision about taking off her veil illustrates that veiling is the least suitable expression for her desired appearance. Ceren is someone who does not want to be seen as a feminine, but she can be seen as masculine if it is necessary. Regarding her position in the spectrum of masculinity and femininity, Ceren proposes that the practice of veiling tends to be closer to femininity, that she feels less masculine in the time she was veiled. Therefore, according to Ceren, the veiled body as a less masculine expression does not suit her that what she desired is different from the reflection of the veiled body.

The gendered aspect of the veiled body is worthy to observe the looks of Ceren and Derya whose attachment to the veiling is quite different from each other. When Derya was uncomfortable with the lack of gazes on her gendered body, I interpret Ceren's veiling as a less masculine expression for her. I employed these two experiences together because the ambivalent nature of veiling expressions for queer Muslim subjects indicates how to subverts dissimilar veiling experiences. Thus, I discuss that subversion of the perceptions on queer and Muslim subjects as well as the veiled, gendered and sexualized body images through Derya and Ceren's desired expressions, presents us seemingly strategic identities as in Haraway's cyborg manifesto (Haraway 1991, 155). Considering cyborg concept of Haraway, Derya and Ceren, illustrate "lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of" their mutually exclusive appearances and identities (Haraway 1991, 154).

2.3 Summary/ Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempt to portray some of the participants' experiences through regulatory queerness which is articulated in the contemporary political debates on homosexuality from the perception of Islam condemns homosexuality. I put forward specifically the experiences and feelings of Azad and Derya to understand the workings of dissimilar struggles with LGBT communities after they came out as a Muslim. I approach queer secularity as part of the regulatory queerness concept of Puar to trace the re-making norms through the intersections of contemporary political debates and the absence of self-identified Muslims in the LGBT communities. I believe that asking questions on what sorts of power have been operated on LGBT Muslim subjects is significant to be able to conceptualize LGBT Muslims outside of U.S. context without ignoring their diverse strategies and varied becomings. In this vein, I demonstrate the workings of orientalist and homogeneous perspectives as a two-way trafficking through illustrating both some concerns of Azad, and Derya, Zümrüt and Ceren. I argued that the embodiment of Azad and Derya exhibits breaking binarism and embracing the "irony" *in binarism* as granted (Haraway 1991, 149). In the next chapter, I approach creativity of my participants to be able to show constant negotiation and emotional attachments in the sites of sexuality, piety and spirituality. I observe their creativity through unique experiences within each other, but I attach equally importance on this uniqueness since all the experiences invite us to comprehend and validate what

creativity can look like in the lives of LGBT Muslims in Turkey.

3. CREATIVITY AT THE SITES OF SPIRITUALITY, PIETY AND SEXUALITY

During the COVID-19 pandemic, by the increased number of online events, I had the chance to attend some webinars and workshops on activism, Queer lives and progressive voices of faith, particularly those associated with Islam and Christianity. In these events, I was able to observe the ways in which Muslim LGBT activism organizes in Muslim-majority countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, as well as in some multireligious countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Philippines. Attending these webinars and workshops helped me understand the importance of religious consultancy in which LGBT organizations and associations in Muslim majority countries provide their consoles. By providing religious consultancy on well-being, healing methods, and spirituality, these organizations and associations become significant resources for LGBT individuals who have questions regarding these intersections. I cannot forget how amazed I was when I first encountered examples of religious and spiritual consultancy for queer Muslim and Christian subjects. This surprise came from my lack of knowledge about LGBT activism in Muslim-majority and multireligious countries, raising some questions related to the lack of religious and spiritual consultancy for queer Muslim subjects in Turkey. Facing this lack of institutional or collective support, the queer Muslim subjects in this study had to look for such a consultancy on their own.

All participants in this study engaged in their own investigation regarding the inclusivity of non-normative sexualities in Islamic resources in their efforts to find religious and spiritual consultancy. I discuss these efforts and investigations for an *inclusive/progressive* view of Islam and address my research participants' nonlinear religious belonging in Chapter One. In Chapter Two, I address the constructions of orthodox approaches to LGBT individuals in the realm of Islam and within Turkish politics, and consequently, the diverse strategies of LGBT Muslims' stances against the portrayal of this orthodoxy. In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate LGBT Muslims' creativity in approaching their intersectional identities with the spiritual engagements and emotional attachments of Islam as a consequence of reconfigur-

ing orthodox approaches and discourses into "heterodox" Islam (Karolewski 2008; Langer 2010).

In this chapter, and in this research at large, I neither aim to formulate a particular approach to Islam among LGBT Muslims in Turkey, nor do I look for a consensus on the epistemology of Islam. Rather, I note that being asked to discuss how and when they learned about Islam and religious teachings has opened a space for my research participants to articulate their contemporary relationship to Islam. Thanks to these initial questions, the participants had a chance to express why they consider themselves Muslims, which some anthropologists offer as the main question for the anthropology of Muslim subjects (Peumans 2017; **?**). Most of the participants initiated a conversation about their Islamic practices and beliefs to highlight how pious they are or how they embody In this chapter, and in this research at large, I neither aim to formulate a particular approach to Islam among LGBT Muslims in Turkey, nor do I look for a consensus on the epistemology of Islam. Rather, I note that being asked to discuss how and when they learned about Islam and religious teachings has opened a space for my research participants to articulate their contemporary relationship to Islam. Thanks to these initial questions, the participants had a chance to express why they consider themselves Muslims, which some anthropologists offer as the main question for the anthropology of Muslim subjects[1] (Debevec Schielke 2012; Peumans 2018). Most of the participants initiated a conversation about their Islamic practices and beliefs to highlight how *pious they are* or how they embody *spirituality*. Some of them went further to talk about their moral, religious and pious values in the context of their sexual practices. Much of our conversations revolved around the ways in which sexual and pious practices intersect with their everyday lives. Considering these observations, I analyze my participants' initiatives to talk about their spirituality, piety and sexuality in terms of their ongoing navigations of their Muslim subjectivity in everyday life.

Samar Habib states that "[j]ust as we come to expect multitudes in terms of gender and sexual expressions, so do we find multitudinous formulations of identity around Islam and queerness." (Habib 2013, 334). Adopting Habib's perspective, I attempt to regard the varied approaches to Islam and queerness as their "individual religion" (Bacchiddu 2012; Orsi N.d.; **?**) which decenters the normative and orthodox understandings of Islam in the context of Turkey (Peumans 2017, 185). From this point of view, "individual religion" provides us the potentialities of "heterodox" Islam

[1] As you see, I use the term "Anthropology of Muslims" consciously rather than using "Anthropology of Islam". There are two reasons why I do not use "Anthropology of Islam": First, this research does not ask the kinds of questions that are predominant in the Anthropology of Islam. Secondly, there is a great accumulation of studies in the anthropology of Islam "which ends eventually (as) theology". For these reasons, I try to specify what my initial attempt is by aiming to observe the diversity of positions in relation to Islam and spirituality (see Marranci 2008).

among LGBT Muslims. What I call "heterodox" Islam is that it "depend(s) to a high degree on the socio-political context and on the distribution of power between the heterodox and orthodox" (Karolewski 2008, 456). In the previous chapter, I attempted to demonstrate the orthodox nuances of Islam through discourses of contemporary political debates, sermons, and regulatory queerness in the context of Turkey. The reflection of these in orthodox Islam develops a diversity in LGBT Muslims' approaches to Islam as well as differing from traditional and normative Islam appearing as "individual religion" (Bacchiddu 2012; Orsi N.d.).

To be able to observe "individual religion", everyday lives and "emotional attachments" are three premises which offers insightful and helpful questions to anthropology of Muslim subjects (Marranci 2008; Orsi N.d.; **?**). Bacchiddu (2012) demonstrates the interconnected bonds in the integrity of everyday lives and religious expressions in her study with Christians in Apiao. Moreover, McGuire (2008) suggests that looking at everyday religious practices of believers provides avoidance of conceptual confusion between the religion and its believers. Following Bacchiddu and McGuire's suggestions, I employ LGBT Muslims' emotional attachments with Islam, who develop their "individual religion" on the basis of intimate relationships with the religion. Marranci (2008) emphasizes the importance of emotional attachment:

> "Yet a person defines himself or herself as Muslim because, in one way or another, 'Muslim' has a particular value attached. The value can certainly be explained rationally, but it is not rationally driven. For many people professing their credo in Islam, 'Muslim' has an emotional component attached to it. They feel to be Muslims. Then, and only then, the 'feeling to be' is rationalized, rhetoricized, and symbolized, exchanged, discussed, ritualized, orthodoxized or orthopraxized. Of course, people feel to be Muslim in different ways, which are unique to each of them, and they express this feeling in the form of discourse." (Marranci 2008, 7-8)

In other words, I offer to look at LGBT Muslims' emotional attachments to Islam to understand that their intimacy, sexuality, piety, and spirituality have bounded each other. Looking at their emotional attachments in their everyday practice of Islam, I attempt to demonstrate that the ongoing negotiation of being Muslim and non-normative sexualities becomes apparent mostly through the moments of "feeling to be" Muslim (Marranci 2008; Maulod and Jamil 2010; Peumans 2017; Yip 2016; Yip and Khalid 2010). I emphasize that LGBT Muslims in this study contribute significantly to the appearances of "struggle, ambivalence, incoherence and failure"

in their everyday Islam (Marsden 2005; Soares and Osella 2009). These emotional breakdowns are significant moments to show their engagements with spirituality, piety and sexuality as my fieldwork has demonstrated.

Spirituality and emotional attachments to Islam have an incommensurable but directly linked connection, especially in moments of internal struggles (Peumans 2017, 191). Such internal struggles that derive from faith/religion and sexuality can steer queer Muslims to conversion or departure from the organized religion (209). In that vein, Bereket Adam illustrate the "insoluble tension" between sexuality and religion leading gay men to lose their "religious convictions" (Bereket and Adam 2008, 218). Researching British Muslim LGBs, Yip shows that some continue to believe in organized religion despite their experience of such tensions (Yip 2005). Yip addresses organized religion as a "seemingly homophobic institution" which is "immune to such progressive change", and he draws attention to the reasons why British Muslim LGBs choose to stay in such an institution (275). Remarkably, his analysis shows that the role of "spirituality/sexuality politics" has transformative potential in the formation of "ontological security" and "the authenticity of difference" for British Muslim LGBs (286). Yip explains the spirituality/sexuality politics as follows:

> "Sexuality and spirituality are flip sides of each other—to be sexual is to be spiritual; and to be spiritual is to be sexual. They are inseparable. Spirituality entails asking fundamental questions about the self (e.g., 'Who am I?'), others/community (e.g., 'How do I love others?'), and God (e.g., 'How can I have a meaningful relationship with God?'). When LGB believers ask themselves such questions, sexuality is featured prominently." (Yip 2005, 276)

In the case of my fieldwork, I argue that spirituality appeared in multiple ways. I attempt to show some participants' ways to spiritual engagement with Islam and as well as my own interpretation of their spiritual presentation of the self. In what follows, I first examine how the bond between spirituality and emotional attachments to Islam has provided empowerment which I argue that as "erotic power" enabling the participants to embody creativity for their identities (Lorde 1984)(. In the light of their experiences, I discuss that the lack of consultancy provides a space for diverse forms of individual religion revealing their empowerment and creativity. Secondly, I address transforming the self and identities into "mestizaje" through indicating their relations with the constant negotiation and emotional ruptures as part of spirituality. Hereupon, I offer to look at spirituality and identity from Gloria Anzaldúa's perspective, where LGBT Muslims appear to "find themselves in the

cracks between the world" (Anzaldúa 2015, 72). In doing so, I attempt to elaborate how to observe mestizaje, "the new hybrid" and "a new category of identity" among LGBT Muslims in this study. I argue that destabilizing identity categories through "constant trafficking, negotiating, and dialoguing across the borders" is not easy for many LGBT Muslims (Anzaldúa 2015, 71-73). Lastly, I trace the regulations on sexual practices of LGBT Muslims. In that discussion, tracing the regulations of sexual practices of LGBT Muslims helps exploring the link between emotional breakdowns and creative embodiments at the site of sexual practices among LGBT Muslims in this study. Overall, I would argue that adopting heterodoxy in Islam paves the way for means of creativity at the sites of spirituality, piety and sexuality which is observed at best through emotional attachments to Islam.

3.1 Empowerment and Creativity in a Spiritual Way

3.1.1 Reverting to Islam and Losing the Fear

Eren, who was formerly an atheist, told me that he is not afraid of "losing" his faith after converting to Islam. Raised as a Muslim in a small city in the Aegean region, Eren identifies his conversion process to Islam and becoming a Muslim for the second time as having a transformative role in shaping his approach to Islam:

> "Here, this part of religion related to emotions is important in Islamic mysticism (tasavvuf). The balance of hope and fear. We all have traumas about religion which is taught through fear. And at some point, life makes you experience what you are afraid of. I mean, for example, after I reverted to Islam when I was an atheist, I was no longer afraid. I had a fear before consciously choosing Islam. I mean, like, what if I happened to... like lose the iman (faith) and it becomes something out of reach. I had the fear of losing God. But once you lose it, you face this fear. That fear-hope balance becomes something that you practically experience."[2]

[2]"Ya burada dinin zaten duygularla ilgili kısmı tasavvufta çok önemli. Ümit ve korku dengesi. Hepimizin bu toplumda dinin korku üzerinden öğretilmesine dair travmalarımız var. Ve bir şekilde hayat aslında korktuğun şeyi sana yaşatarak seni büyütüyor. Hani mesela ben ateist olup tekrar İslam'a döndükten sonra artık tekrar bir korkmadım. İslam'ı iradi olarak seçmeden önce bir korkum vardı. Hani ya, ya şey

(Eren, aged-28) (Yip 2005, 276)

In his narrative, Eren states the trauma of learning religion on the basis of fear in "this society." In Chapter One, I mentioned the fearful representation of Islam through Derya's experiences of going to mosques during her childhood. Here, apart from the fears related to early trauma, he has the additional fear of losing his faith (iman) and God, both of them becoming unreachable once lost. However, his conversion to Islam provided him with an "experience" of losing and finding it again, so he is not afraid of losing his faith (iman) and God anymore. What I would like to highlight here is that Eren's narrative delivers two important points. The first is that Islam denotes fears and trauma for some LGBT Muslims like Derya and Eren. Although they have traumatic experiences, they end up reinventing Islam in a way that helps them reconcile Islam with their sexualities. The second point is that Eren puts the balance of fear and hope in the center of his spiritual engagement with Islam. He reflects his former emotions of the time before his conversion and the emotions of the present time together. Following Eren's self-reflection via spiritual engagement, I offer to review Eren's narrative through Audre Lorde's (1984) powerful explanation of systematic principal horror:

> "The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need — the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment." (**?**, 42)

> "We have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings. But, once recognized, those which do not enhance our future lose their power and can be altered. The fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women." (Lorde 1984, 43)

This empowerment originates from his spiritual stance of embodying conversion

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olursam. İman gerçekten yitip gidip bir daha böyle ulaşılamayacak bir şeymiş gibi. Hani Allah'ı kaybetme korkum vardı. Ama hani bir kez kaybedince, o korkuyla da yüzleşmiş oluyorsun. Hani o korku-ümit dengesi senin için daha deneyimlediğin bir şey oluyor." (Eren, 28)

and emotional attachments to Islam. To put it differently, through the conversion process, Eren claims his "cravings" and turns his emotional attachments with Islam into love and hope as he says in our interview. Since Eren shows that his current relationship with Islam is much more different from his previous one, I emphasize his empowerment as an enhancement of his creativity and "erotic power" (Lorde 1984). Young points out the possibilities of erotic power from Lorde: "Derived from internal recognition and creativity (rather than from external acquisition and conformity), the erotic is one form of power that both illuminates oppressive forces and puts them in danger" (Young 2012, 302). Therefore, Eren acknowledges his previous approach to Islam leading him to fear and trauma as a result of teachings from institutional and organized understandings of Islam.

Although Eren shows his empowerment through his "internal recognition" and "creativity" coming from erotic power, the fear and trauma are predominant emotional attachments of orthodox understandings of Islam for LGBT individuals. Taking the lack of religious and spiritual consultancy into consideration, the empowerment and creativity shows only one side of the story. There have been many LGBT individuals who ended up in forced marriages or committing suicide for various reasons, including the lack of religious and spiritual consultancy (Erdoğan N.d.; Yalçınoğlu and Önal 2014; Yasemin 2008). These cases depict the existential problems emerging from institutional and organized understandings of normative Islam and the hardships of reinventing a non-normative Islam. Thus, embracement of Islamic mysticism for Eren demonstrates the challenge of interiorizing erotic power and approaching Islam based on love and hope.

3.1.2 Finding Queerness in Spirituality

In 2018, I attended a panel discussion called "Queer Methodology" in Cezayir İstanbul which hosted many talks, panel discussions, and activities during the Pride month of June in Istanbul. After attending the talk with one of my close friends, Burçin, she said that she saw an acquaintance in the panel discussion. Then, Burçin and I waited for her friend, Gül, in front of Cezayir. After a short time, Gül approached us along with her two friends, Hakan and Ufuk. As soon as we all met together on the hoof, Hakan enthusiastically asked me: "Are you also an ally?" With a big smile, I answered: "Why? Can I just be an ally but not queer?". He smiled back and said he is also a Muslim. After a quick introduction, we decided to drink something on the way and went to a teahouse in Taksim. Although Hakan, Ufuk,

and I talked about Islam while we were out of breath during our short walk, when we sat at the teahouse our conversation became even more heated. Hakan told me how he has some unique Muslim sensitivities like standing up when he hears the azan and how he expects the same thing from his partner, implying Ufuk, who had been sitting beside him and listening carefully.

At first, I thought Hakan's enthusiasm comes from his character. However, as our conversation proceeded, I recognized that he is enthusiastic because he found a person who identifies herself as a queer Muslim.[3] He asked me if I know other queer Muslims, explaining his sexual morals and Islamic values coming from his profound spirituality as parts of his queer spiritual identity. He told me that what makes him Hakan that others do not have is the queer embodiment in his perception on Islam. Also, he expressed his belief in Qur'an being intrinsically queer with its contradictory and complementary parts, providing endless possibilities of interpretation. I found Hakan's approach to Qur'an and his spiritual queer identity noteworthy because it is a striking example of how some LGBT Muslims introduce them queer readings of Islamic texts and practices. Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to conduct an interview with Hakan because he was a busy senior at a university outside of Istanbul at that time. However, I include our short conversation with Hakan for two reasons.

The first one is that Hakan approached my headscarf as a symbol of Muslim subjecthood and assumed that I was an ally. He had also introduced himself as a queer Muslim after I introduced myself as queer. Obviously, I was the first person who introduced herself as a queer Muslim within his circles, which surprised him. As I discuss in Chapter Two, there is a lack of self-identified queer Muslims in the context of Turkey, which limits the possibilities of LGBT Muslims to become a part of the organized movement.

Another point I want to draw attention to is Hakan's understanding of Qur'an as a sacred book harboring queer approach. He perceives Qur'an as harboring various possible interpretations of similar topics and for him, this makes Qur'an a *queer* source as a sacred book. I recognize Hakan's way of Islam to be similar to queer-friendly-hermeneutics in Islam (Habib 2008; Kugle 2010). Although his case is distinctive for approaching Qur'an from a *queer* perspective, his adoption of Qur'an is also authentic among other participants in this study. A very similar approach to Islam and the Qur'an is adopted in the book *We Have Always Been Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir* by Samra Habib, who is a writer, photographer, journalist, and activist living in Canada. In the quotation below, she talks about her queer

[3]Here, I am talking about myself

embodiment of her Islamic identity:

> "The reality is that this identity has shaped the way I see the world, and the way others see me, in a way that is beyond my control. Being Muslim is one of the only absolutes about myself I can be sure of. It serves as an anchor when I'm lost at sea. It helps me come back to myself, and it leads me to others who've struggled to reconcile seemingly disparate parts of themselves. For me, it's not denying that my identity as a queer Muslim is the lens through which I see and engage with so many aspects of my daily life: fashion, music, literature, social media, politics, history, activism, sexuality, gender, faith, art. Basically, everything." (Habib 2019, 214)

Thinking through Hakan's approach and Habib's narrative, their approaches to Islam and Qur'an invite to develop a spirituality evolving around queerness. Going beyond this observation, I would point out Hakan's way of speech, mimics, and enthusiasm which made me think that he discovered that Islam celebrates his sexuality. This celebration of Islam derived from embracing queer approaches in Qur'an. Similarly, Eren mentioned Omer Hayyam and drew a conclusion from that story in finding the grace in his sexual identity. Eren thinks of his sexual identity as a favor from God, which makes him experience becoming a powerful Muslim figure by adopting his sexual non-normative identity. His sexual identity is one of the reasons behind his existence which he does not need to hide but show that he is proud of being a gay Muslim. Although I find dissimilarities in Hakan's and Eren's approaches to Islam, I notice their common approaches on the basis of celebrating the sexuality in Islam are similar.

How does one reflect this celebration of Islam having queer approaches? Hereupon, I offer to look at how both of them celebrates and Hakan's ritual of standing up when he hears the recitation of *azan*. Instead of controlling their expressions to same-sex desire, the celebration of their sexualities contribute to the subversion of the normative understandings of homosexuality in Islam. Turning this subversion into a celebration of their love, I view their self-recognition and creativity as an erotic power (Lorde 1984). From this perspective, I took Hakan's unique ritual as a creative act in terms of the demonstration of his very individual way of respect for azan. Hakan's creativity in his ritual shows an acknowledgement of his spiritual queer identity. Therefore, the empowerment, creativity, and acknowledgement of Eren and Hakan invite one to think on Lorde's approach to the "erotic as power"(Lorde 1984, 43). Lorde emphasizes the erotic as a resource coming from "sharing of joy" and "capacity for joy" that enables one to be free of "being satisfied with suffering and

self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society". Following Lorde's emphasis on the erotic power, I consider Eren and Hakan's creativity as a response to their suffering of "loneliness" as a queer Muslim. However, I claim that this loneliness, along with the lack of religious consultancy and of self-identified LGBT Muslims, opened a "space built on possibilities" (Young 2012, 301) through an erotic source of power. Thus, they managed to embody Islam in a distinct way differing from normative and traditional Islam.

3.2 Tracing the Ongoing Negotiation

3.2.1 Spirituality in the State of Negotiation

According to Ceren, the reconciliation with Islam has not been completed for her. She said that she is still unsure about whether LGBT is compatible with Islam. However, she left revisiting this question of compatibility behind, because she wanted to carry on her life without living with an "existential crisis"[4]. During this process, Ceren mentioned Roger Garauday, who has played an important role in changing her approach to Islam. Since Garauday was one of the first Islamic scholars who influenced her to question the lived Islam[5] in the context of Turkey, she got the chance to modify her Islamic views through his apocalyptic discussions. After reading Garauday's articles and writings, Ceren was convinced that her perception of Islam was different from the traditional practices and interpretations of Islam. However, since she did not have knowledge of any *inclusive/progressive* interpretations on sexual orientation and gender identity, she was still questioning how to overcome the idea of rejection of homosexuality in Islam. Therefore, she came to the conclusion that she cannot know everything about Islam and left some of those things in ambiguity:

"He says, about Qur'an, that it adapts itself, that it is a very exceptional

[4]I quoted this expression because it is Ceren's words, "varoluşsal kriz".

[5]Here, I am referring to concept of "the lived religion" developed by Meredith B. McGuire. To see: McGuire, Meredith B. 2008. Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life. New York and NY: Oxford University Press

> book. But, he says, well, that people use the former 1400-years' practice (for today), actually they need to use its essence and perform it in today's lives, he has these kinds of thoughts (about Qur'an). I really like his approaches. I also think that we confuse this. Well, I mean, we are taking the former 1400-years' solutions and integrate them to these times. It is not that, it should not be like that. I think, it should move with its essence. But what is the essence? I mean, how to find it, unfortunately, there is no answer available."[6] (Ceren, aged-28)

In Ceren's quotation above, she thinks that there can be some "essence" of Islam. Although she does not know what this "essence" is, its existence makes her feel relieved and helps her to move away from traditional interpretations of Islam, including the relevant topics about non-normative sexualities.

Similar to Ceren, Birce also mentioned that reckoning some fundamental basics of Islam is what makes her a Muslim. She believes that Islam teaches and supports justice as an essential principal. For this reason, she embraces the justice supported by Islam and adopts it in her life:

> "I think the essential principle of Islam is refraining from claiming someone else's rightful due. Not hurting people. It is not about performing salaat (namaz) and fasting. Of course, they are also important but the essence (of Islam) is refraining from claiming someone else's rightful due. I mean, there are people who perform salaat (namaz) five times a day and commit theft in the evening (of the same day)."[7] (Birce, aged-22)

According to Birce, the Islamic practices are important but not as much as embracing the essential principles of Islam. Therefore, she considers herself a pious Muslim who is careful to respect others and to not get one's rightful dues. Taking into consideration the essence of Islam in Ceren's and Birce's narratives, I would like to point out the similar findings of Yip and Khalid's research Yip (2016)(2016) with British LGB Muslims.

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[6] "Şey diyor, kuran diyor, kendini yenileyen bir kitap, çok ender bir kitap. Ama diyor, ı insanlar bunun 1400 yıl önceki uygulamalarını alıyor, aslında özünü alması gerekiyor ve şu anki hayatında uygulaması gerekiyor diyor, böyle düşünceleri var. Hoşuma gidiyor yaklaşımı. Ben de bunu çok karıştırdığımızı düşünüyorum. Iı yani 1400 yıl önceki çözümleri alıp şu yıla entegre etmeye çalışıyoruz. Öyle değil, öyle olmamalı. Bence özüyle hareket ediyor olmak lazım. Ama tabi bu özü nedir? Yani nasıl bulunur, o konuda ne yazık ki cevap yok."

[7] "İslam'ın temeli bence kul hakkına girmemek. İnsanları kırmamak. Yani namaz kılmak, oruç tutmak değil. Tabii bunlar da önemli ama özünde bence kul hakkına girmemek var. Yani 5 vakit namaz kılıp da akşam hırsızlık yapan insanlar da var."

> "However, instead of adhering to the commonly understood behavioral prescriptions of Islam, manifested in religiously-legitimized cultural practices, the participants framed their spirituality in terms of the essence or the spirit of Islam. This essence tended to emphasize notions such as equality, diversity, justice, and love for all humanity. The focus on the commonality of humanity, rather than religious observances and practices, constitutes the basis of a form for spirituality that is ultimately self-based, but outward-looking not in terms of standardization and conformity to a hegemonic model, but the valuing of difference." (Yip 2016, 116-117)

Ceren and Birce's emphasis on essence of Islam can be illustrative on Yip's analysis in terms of "the focus on the commonality and humanity" which he interprets as a sort of foundation for spirituality. Following Yip's suggestion, I state that this foundation for spirituality demonstrates the shift in their perception (Anzaldúa 2015, 85) of Islam and crafting their self apart from "religiously legitimized cultural practices" (Yip 2016, 116). In this manner, Ceren and Birce imagine the essence or "the spirit of Islam" on the basis of a non-temporal model focusing on the common values of Islam. I argue that searching for and underlying the essence of Ceren and Birce grow out from their creative embodiments including "making conventional definitions of otherness" in Islamic spirituality and piety as well as their sexuality (Anzaldúa 2015, 89). Thus, here the creativity can be observed through doubting the conventional definitions of Islam and its essences. Hence, regarding their doubt and will to change their perception of Islam, Ceren and Birce rely on their emotional attachments to Islam and supervise into a spiritual engagement outside of orthodox understandings of Islam.

Apart from their spiritual engagements, although I have not asked any participants whether they are practicing Muslims, some of them made such critiques of themselves as if I might be judging them regarding their piety. To illustrate, Birce and İdil gave me legitimate explanations on their pious practices and they stated that they are not consistently performing those practices. Their attempt to explain their pious practices was like showing an evidence of their piety. Therefore, I offer to elaborate on the link between the explanation of the essences of Islam and the legitimization of piety.

The way of asserting their pious practices, İdil and Birce prevent any misunderstandings on my side. Since I might be judging them in accordance with the traditional interpretations and norms of Islam, they specifically told me in which ways they criticize *normative* approaches to Islam and what their position looks like. However, their critiques provided them with the reinvention and adoption of a self-made non-

normative Islam which they wanted me to understand. Hereupon, I take advantage of Anzaldua's healing processes for spiritual activism to recognize their attempts to explain their pious practices. I perceive that their journeys were isolated so much so that sharing their wounds and connecting with me put them a fragile position (Anzaldúa 2015, 90). From this perspective, İdil and Birce made adjustments to show their "vision of reality" in order to change their fragility in the eyes of an ally: me (Anzaldúa 2015, 87-88). Thus, their efforts to explain the essences of Islam and the legitimization of their piety demonstrate the "processing changes" which is "entangled with" religious and pious "conditionings"(Anzaldúa 2015, 88).

By displaying their self-made *non-normative* Islam and legitimizing their piety, the LGBT Muslim subjects in this study tended to show the intertwined nature of sexuality and spirituality in their narratives. Among the LGBT Muslims I have met in the fieldwork, sexuality and spirituality were merged as two interconnected topics. When our talks proceeded to sexuality, they made justifications for their sexual acts and activities via Islam and their negotiations with Islam. As Yip and Khalid Yip (2016) calls it the inseparable relationship of spirituality and sexuality, my fieldwork also addresses the constant negotiation as a leading source to spirituality for some LGBT Muslims. For this reason, some narratives show that sexuality, Islam, and spirituality intertwine with one another. For instance, İdil mentions her negotiation on spirituality, sexual practices, and Islam as following:

> "I had fought a lot. In terms of belief and lovemaking, feeling sinful or bad. Right now, those thoughts are diminished immensely. From time to time, very rarely, they come. They come when I feel very empty. Therefore, I try to pray as much as possible, to be a good person, at the same time, I try to satisfy myself and help people who are in need of help. In my opinion, above all, I know how to be grateful."[8] (İdil, aged-24)

İdil's narrative is significant in terms of demonstrating the intertwined relationship between the performance of sexual activity and the practice of piety. As she says, when she remembers "feeling sinful and bad", she tries to pray and to be a good person as much as possible. In her narrative, her constant negotiation emerges in relation to being sexually active in consideration of *normative* Islamic views.

[8] "Bu savaşı çok verdim. İnanç ve sevişme konusunda kendimi günahkar gibi hissetme, kötü hissetme. Artık o düşünceler çok azaldı. Çok arada böyle tek tük geliyor. O da böyle boşlukta hissettiğimde. O yüzden mümkün mertebe duamı ediyorum, iyi bir insan olmaya çalışıyorum, bir yandan da kendimi tatmin etmeye çalışıyorum, yardıma muhtaç olan insanlara yardım etmeye çalışıyorum. Bence şey yani, en önemlisi her zaman şükretmesini biliyorum."

Although she struggled a lot because of these concerns, right now, she manages to overcome them through the practice of piety.

Other than intertwined narratives on sexuality, piety, and spirituality, I would point out her reflection on her emotional attachments of "feeling sinful or bad". To put it differently, what had caused İdil to struggle was normative Islam; by revising those attached norms of sexual activities, İdil embraced some practices (praying, being a good person, and helping people) as a spiritual consultation of her ongoing negotiation. Here, where I want to draw attention is her revision to Islam, the embracement the new form of Islam and the practice of spiritual consultation by means of praying. I argue that all these are consequences of her healing process. I especially address her last sentence, "be grateful above all". In our interview, İdil repeated these words time to time and said that giving thanks to God is important for her. Because, she said, it reminds her of the state of health, wealth, happiness, and satisfaction she had. According to İdil, what makes her pious compared to other people is that she remembers giving thanks to God all the time. I indicate İdil's exclusive Islamic practice of giving thanks is a part of her spirituality, as a queer Muslim subject.

Taking into consideration Ceren and Birce's search for the essence of Islam and Ceren and İdil's constant negotiation, I argue that adopting a non-normative and individual understanding of Islam brought them to seek spirituality in the site of piety and the reconciliation with sexual practice. In the next section, I examine the ways of cultivating spirituality and piety during the times of struggling with inner negotiations of Ceren and İdil.

3.2.2 Cultivating Piety and Sexuality

"For us, veiling is more sacred than believing in Islam" echoed in my ears for a while in the following days after our talk with Derya. She said this sentence during our first meeting, in August 2018, when she just took off her veil. In this sentence, Derya marks the label on the veil as a symbol of piety in the context of her Muslim circles. In Chapter Two, I argue about the diverse veiling experiences of Derya and Ceren to show how they attached varied (less feminine and less masculine) expressions to veiling. In this part, I will offer to look at the ways of cultivating piety and spirituality through Ceren and İdil. I point out Ceren's narrative of veiling that indicates her cultivation to be pious, in parallel with *restraining* herself from accepting her same-sex desires. In Ceren's narrative below, I consider the practice

of veiling "presumed" as an instrument to suppress her same-sex desires.

> "I was seeing homosexuality as a trial. I was thinking that it was something to fight with, but I am not too sure about it. Even now, I do not know if it is something to fight with or not, but I made peace with myself on this issue. Yes, I am homosexual. And it has been ever present. And it was a period where I did not want to do – I didn't want to beat myself up this much. Because, I even tried to veil at that point. And I tried it for a long time, too. I tried it for a period of time that cannot be counted as short."[9] (Ceren, aged-28)

Ceren assumed that the practice of veiling could orient her homosexual desires to piety and Islam. However, in our interview, Ceren showed some self-reflexive critiques about her veiling practice. She said that "only two people really know about why I veiled and took of my veil. It was a bad idea to do that, but I am not regretful". When I asked why only two people know the real reasons of her veiling experience, she said that the decision-making process of veiling and unveiling does not reflect her, and she really does not like to talk about those times.

In our interview, I felt that she was critical of Islam in general, specifically of the heterosexual matrix in Islam. Except for her two friends, she thinks that Muslims, *categorically*, are homophobic. From this perspective, I argue that Ceren's narratives demonstrate how she perceives the categories of Muslims and LGBTs as separate and opposing identities. The constant negotiation of her sexuality and Islam, as well as the ambiguous idea of Islam she adopted, as I mentioned in the previous sections, put pressure on her due to so-called binary identities.

While suppressing same-sex desires by cultivating piety, what has Ceren experienced in her inner negotiation of her sexuality and religion? I wish to talk on Ceren's experiences of those times, although I initially did not ask her about it since she does not feel comfortable to talk about those times. However, orienting herself to the cultivation of piety as an act of the "opposite" of her same-sex desire helps us observe her experience of constant negotiation. Her approach of Islam and LGBT are categorically incompatible, as much as that she did not know how to cross the *borders* (categories), while she found bearing the cultivation of piety as a *solution*.

According to Anzaldúa (2015), "a profound new mestizaje" is emerged in the "con-

[9] "Ya ben eşcinselliği bir imtihan olarak görüyordum. Bunun mücadele edilecek bir şey olduğunu düşünüyordum ama şey yani bundan çok emin değilim. Hala mücadele edilebilecek bir şey mi, değil mi bilmiyorum ama sadece bu konuda barıştım kendimle. Evet, ben eşcinselim. Ve bu hep vardı. Ve artık şey yapmak istemiyorum- Kendimi bu kadar hırpalamak istemiyorum şeklinde bir süreçti. Çünkü ya tesettürü bile denedim ben bu noktada. Ve uzun bir süre de denedim. Kısa sayılmayacak bir süre denedim." (Ceren, 29)

stant trafficking, negotiating and, dialoguing across borders". Moving beyond exterior social identities and locations is only possible through "unchain[ing] identity from meanings that can no longer contain it" (Anzaldúa 2015, 73). During my fieldwork, I got the chance to meet some LGBT Muslims who were still negotiating and trafficking with their Muslim values and sexualities, like Ceren. However, those who expressed that they are reconciled already has declared that they have gone through such rough times during their constant negotiation about being Muslim and queer. As Ceren's narrative above shows, she is reconciled and still lives in a negotiation. To clarify, I do not claim this inconceivable, on the contrary, the ambivalence is the nature of reconciliation for many LGBT Muslims. Moreover, it approves that Anzaldua's approach is a hard task although Anzaldua also highlights the "war of identities" and explains that "[t]o re-image identity in new ways requires that we change the focus of the lens trained on our faces and shift our perceptions"(2015, 74). Besides changing the trained focus, Anzaldua also mentions settled categories: "We must push against any boundaries that have outlived their usefulness. Rigid borders hinder communication and prevent us from extending beyond ourselves" (2015, 75). To put it simply, the cultivation of piety, in Ceren's perspective, fosters the rigid boundaries of her queer Muslim identity. However, her meeting with Garauday provided her with a change of the lenses which were previously trained with a traditional and *normative* understanding of Islam. The transformation of Ceren's approach to Islam and her non-normative sexuality is worthwhile to consider, as well as her process as a spiritual one as Anzaldua expresses the extending beyond the borders.

Aside from the instrumental role of cultivating piety, the constant negotiation also leads LGBT Muslims to cultivate piety to relieve their concerns about their sexual activities. In our interview with İdil, after she talked about her sexual practices, and said that sometimes she feels empty and insecure about her actions. She told me that she recently consulted this issue with her mother and her mother's words helped her get rid of those feelings:

> "I talked with mom. I said, mom, I feel kind of sinful. Surely, she does not know anything (she is referring to her sexual relationships). She asked me why. Have you killed a man? I said no, I said it was because I do not perform salaat (namaz kılmıyorum) and I do not perform such religious rituals, so these make me feel sinful. She said, no, do not think like that. Even if you kill a man, God always says make a wish from me. For this reason, do not abandon yourself to despair. Abandoning oneself to despair is one of the things God does not like. So, always pray, He is your creator and He is almighty who forgives you. Actually, yes. This

> talk has happened two days ago, and it putted me at ease. It puts my mind at rest incredibly."[10] (İdil, aged-24)

The suggestion of İdil's mother relieving her of despair and giving her the security which İdil affiliated with making a wish from God. Also, her mother's advice of "abandoning oneself to despair is one of the things God does not like" was influential on İdil in terms of relying on God about her desperate feelings. I accept these affiliations with Islam and God as practicing and cultivating piety. As part of the cultivation of piety, emotional attachments with Islam and God have an influence on cultivating this piety. To be more clear, emotional attachments to God and Islam make İdil feel both desperate and relieved. The constant negotiation shows itself the most through emotional attachments to Islam. In the case of İdil, cultivating piety crosses the rigid borders between Islam and sexual activities which allows İdil to "extend beyond" herself in the sense that Anzaldua expresses (Anzaldúa 2015, 75). Also, by communicating with her mother and God, İdil realizes the "visual space" she has in Islam and in the eyes of God (Anzaldúa 2015, 75). Hence, the spiritual relationship she has with Islam and God appear in the recognition of emotional attachments and the orientation of them to the cultivation of piety.

3.3 Regulating Pious and Sexual Practices

Another juncture of the intertwined relationship of spirituality, piety, and sexuality is regulating sexual activities in accordance with *normative* and *non-normative* approaches to Islam and to sexual values. There is no doubt that the adoption of diverse Islamic perspectives brings diverse meanings to sexual activities for LGBT Muslims. Here, Azad expresses the role of Islam in his non-engagement with specific sexual activities, such as sexual intercourse:

> "The religious part of me has not allowed me live my sexuality. I always restricted myself. I made love but did not take a step further. I never,

[10] "Anneme anlattım biraz. Anne dedim ben kendimi biraz günahkar hissediyorum dedim. tabii bunların hiçbirini bilmiyor filan. neden dedi, adam mı öldürdün dedi. hayır dedim, namaz kılmıyorum filan, dini ritüelleri biraz yapmadığım için kendimi günahkar hissediyorum dedim. hayır dedi, hiç öyle düşünme dedi. sen bir adam öldürsen ki, allah her zaman dileyin benden diyor. o yüzden hani ümitsizliğe kapılma. ümitsizlik allahın hiç sevmediği şeylerden biridir. yani hep dua et, o senin yaratıcın ve o seni affeden yüce biri. Aslında evet. Bu da iki gün önce konuşuldu ve çok rahatlattı beni. İnanılmaz içime su serpildi. "

like, took it further. When I took it further, it was three years ago."[11] (Azad, aged-35)

According to Azad, Islam restricts him from having sexual intercourse although he had some sexual practices. He says that he endured himself for the sake of following his Islamic belief which does not allow him to have sexual intercourse. I would remark that his endurance derived not only from having same-sex sexual intercourse as a Muslim, but also from his belief of Islam that only allows sexual practice on condition of marriage. From a similar perspective but with a different conclusion, Eren also expressed that since Turkey does not recognize same-sex marriage before the law, then, *zina*[12] cannot be evaluated as a criterion because there is no equivalence of legal marriage in Turkey for same-sex couples. For this reason, Eren considers having sexual practices as not sinful in the context of Turkey, although doing it with a significant other is essential for him. While Azad restrains himself from having specific sexual practices; some participants, like Eren, Zümrüt, Yağız and Hale, stated that engaging in sexual practices with a partner requires religious recognition in order for one to have a clear conscience. On the other hand, Can, İdil, Derya and Birce consider that engaging in sexual practices with a partner requires only mutual consent and they expressed that they do not feel guilty about their sexual practices. Except Birce, all participants believe that a significant other is a condition to have an intimate relationship. What I would like to point out by illustrating all the participants' positions is that there are diverse perspectives in sexual practices among LGBT Muslims in this study.

As a distinct narrative, feeling sinful after sexual practices appears in some narratives which highlights the emotional attachments to Islam and the ongoing negotiation of LGBT Muslims. Here, Azad expresses his first and last sexual intercourse which took place when he was 28 years old. It was with someone he met via Facebook. They had met because Azad was looking for an employee for his family's parking lot, and the person he reached was looking for a job by posting announcements on Facebook. Azad said that they chatted on Facebook a little and Azad complimented his looks through his photographs. After their meeting in front of a mall, the other party invited Azad to his house which was near the mall. Rather than going to a teahouse or a park as Azad had suggested, they went to the house. Azad told me

[11] "Dindar tarafım hiçbir zaman cinselliğimi yaşamama izin vermedi. Ben hep kendimi kısıtladım. Seviştim ama ilerisine gitmedim. Hiçbir zaman, şey olarak, ı ilerisine götürmedim. İleriye ne zaman götürdüm, bundan bir üç yıl önceydi." (Azad, 35)

[12] Here, zina expresses having sexual activities outside of legal marriages in Islam according to Sunni Muslim scholars. However,it should be noted that zina in Islam has been interpreted much more differently (even contradictory with other interpretations) by Maliki, Hanbeli and Shia sects as well as Muslim feminist scholars: See more Kecia Ali: Sexual Ethics and Islam, 2012. One World Publications

these moments at length, and he was remembering those times very vividly.

> "After that (sexual) involvement, we went out of the house. He was going to his mom, and I said OK, so we said goodbye to each other. I was going to the mall, but I was a mess because I said eyvah, what I have done. I said I am going to hell, and for good and forever. I was fearing that it was too late, that I had already crossed that line, I am going to hell forever and ever. I wanted to talk with somebody then. I was calling people often and often; nobody was returning my calls. The azan was reciting, I felt awful. I was horrified. I was in a state where I focused on the afterlife much more. I said, what I have done? But I was angry on the other hand. Both my body and my mind were in a mess. It was a horrible period of time for me then."[13] (Azad, aged-35)

Azad's narrative highlights the rupture in his emotional stance as he recalls the azan, hell, fear, anger, and the afterlife. These words denote his thoughts about Islamic judgement of his sexual involvement. After this moment, he also mentioned that he swore off and asked God for forgiveness many times. Azad's story demonstrates not only his emotional rupture due to *feeling sinful*, but also his disappointment in himself who associated the condition of having a sexual intercourse with a significant other. Right after his narrative, he expressed his views associated to having sexual intercourse:

> "Because I had that mindset, I was always saying to myself that I would be monogamous, I would do this after I get married and I would do this with only one person forever. That if I live like monogamous families, like other normal heterosexual families, then God would not see me as sinful. This way, it would comply with other norms. I was saying that I shall have a partner with whom I will perform salaat (namaz), fast together, practice our religious obligations together. But with only one person, I want to live with him forever. I had this mindset."[14] (Azad,

[13] "O birliktelikten sonra işte evden dışarı çıktık. O annesigile gidecekti ben de tamam, yolumuz ayrıldı, görüşmek üzere falan filan dedik. Ben avm'ye gidicem ama allak bullağım çünkü eyvah dedim, ben ne yaptım dedim. Ben artık ebediyen cehenneme gidicem dedim. Artık iş işten geçti, ben o sınırı aştım, ebediyen cehenneme gidicem artık korkusunu yaşıyorum. O an biriyle konuşmak istiyorum. Zırt pırt birilerini arıyorum, kimse cevap vermiyor. Ezan okunuyor, kendimi berbat hissediyorum. Korkuyorum, ahiret boyutuna daha çok odaklanmış durumdayım. Ben ne yaptım dedim. Ama kızıyorum bir yandan da. Hem vücut olarak da, hem kafa olarak da böyle allak bullağım. Yani benim için korkunç bir gün dilimiydi o saatler."

[14] "Çünkü bende şöyle bir kafa vardı, ben hep diyordum ki, ben tek eşli olucam, bu işi evlendikten sonra yapacağım. ve sonsuza kadar bir kişiyle yapacağım diyordum. Çünkü bunun günah olduğunu o zamanlar biliyordum. Ama tek eşli, normal diğer hetero aileler gibi yaşarsam allah beni günah olarak görmez. Bu, bu şekilde diğer normlara uyum sağlar. Ben diyordum çünkü bir partnerim olsun, beraber namaz kılalım, beraber oruç tutalım, beraber dini vazifelerimizi yerine getirelim. Ama tek bir insanla, sadece onunla ömür boyu yaşamak istiyorum diyordum. Bu kafada biriydim."

aged-35)

As his narrative shows, Azad had a dream about having an ideal relationship with his significant other who would practice Islamic rituals with him. According to him, this dream of him was destroyed because he had sexual intercourse with someone, he does not have an affectionate relationship with. I will address two points about his narrative.

The first is that, by looking at the latter part of his narrative in detail, his dream was constructed on the basis of living a married life which was depicted as the norm for heterosexual families. The importance of being like a married couple with his significant other demonstrates his perception of heterosexual marriages as the only accepted way by Islam. I argue that perceiving heterosexual marriages as the norm denotes heteronormativity and excludes any form of marriage other than the heteronormative one (Warner 1991). When he his first had a sexual relationship with a person, someone other than his significant other, his dream of fitting in this heteronormativity demolished. From this perspective, the demolishment of his dream and its emotional rupture can be interpreted as a sort of virginity concern. ? in The Second Sex expresses the virginity myth in the heterosexual matrix: "Virginity is valued so highly in many circles that to lose it outside legitimate marriage seems a real disaster" (373). The emotional rupture experienced by Azad originated from his illegitimate sexual intercourse and from the virginity concern constructed on the basis of heteronormative norms of marriage.

Secondly, I address Azad's dream, which shows a creative act for the revision of Islamic rules in a way to have legitimate sexual activity relying on heteronormativity. He mediated that having a legitimate relationship is possible by adopting the norms of heteronormative marriages as a result of his negotiation of sexual practices and *feeling sinful*. As a Muslim queer subject, he regulated his sexual practices by taking into consideration the Islamic view and the norms of heteronormativity. I argue that these are his creative ways relying on traditional and normative understandings of marriage in Islam. To put it differently, Azad "strategically reinvent(s)" his sexual practices in relation to his struggle with the orthodox understandings of Islam, his will to live a pious life, and his sexual desires (Anzaldúa 2015, 75). The way he challenged the lack of same-sex marriage legislation in Turkey created a new framework for his sexual involvement with his partners (2015, 75). By interconnecting with Islam, this framework put him at ease and provided him a stable emotional attachment with Islam.

Similar concerns such as regulating sexual practices were shared by Ceren in a

different vein. During the time I met with Ceren, she was looking for a long-term partner and had met several potential partners via dating applications. Although she was very dissatisfied with the results, she was laughing and making jokes about the dates she had:

> "It was our 3rd or 4th date. I mean, sitting in the cafe and seeing each other to talk. She said that like, you are good and sweet, but you do not smoke, you do not drink alcohol, you do not have a bar life. How are we going get along, she asked. I was dumbfounded. This is it? I mean, this is it? (laughs) I was already asking this to myself. I was saying (to myself) that, Selma smokes, drinks alcohol, has a night life. Can I get along with Selma? It was the question I was asking to myself. Can I get along with you is the question I was asking to myself. Why are you asking something to me? (Because) you do not do these. Yes, I do not. So, the main concern is you. Can I get along with you? Also, she said to me that I was someone *helal süt emmiş biri*. I laughed at that because it was so interesting. She asked if I wanted to stay as friends, of course I became like... It was interesting to learn that if someone does not smoke, drink alcohol, or have a night life, then these are barriers for a relationship. After that, I have met much more interesting ones. That's why I am suffering these days. I am angry, I mean. I need to talk. Either I will change, or I will not change, but I hope to find someone like me. Or, I am not too sure."[15] (Ceren, aged-28)

In her narrative, Ceren expresses some everyday life practices such as not smoking, not drinking or not having a nightlife. In our interview, she said that the reason why she does not do them is not related to her religion, but to her lifestyle. Therefore, these concerns are not derived from her constant negotiation with Islam. However, as her narrative shows, there is still a kind of negotiation for these concerns, which depicts her desperation in dissimilar lifestyles of hers and of other parties'.

On the other hand, when we talked about her sexual practices, Ceren said that she had not experienced any kinds of sexual activity, including masturbation or even holding hands, with any person. When we were talking about these issues,

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[15] "3. veya 4. görüşmemizdi. Yani kafede oturmamız, görüşüp konuşmamız. Böyle şey dedi, ya dedi, iyisin hoşsun da, sigara kullanmıyorsun, alkol kullanmıyorsun, bar hayatın yok. Biz seninle nasıl anlaşacağız filan dedi. Böyle kaldım. Bu mu? Bu mu yani? (güler) Zaten onu ben kendi kendime soruyorum. Diyorum ki işte Selma sigara kullanıyor, alkol kullanıyor, gece hayatı var. Ben Selma'yla yapabilir miyim? Onu zaten ben kendi kendime soruyorum. Seninle yapabilir miyimi ben zaten kendi kendime soruyorum. Sen niye bana böyle bir şey söylüyorsun. Sen bunları kullanmıyorsun filan. Evet kullanmıyorum. Asıl problem sende yani. Ben seninle yapabilir miyim? Bir de şey diyor yani, tam bir helal süt emmiş birisin filan dedi. Gülmüştüm ya çok enteresan filan. İstiyorsan arkadaş kalabiliriz, sonra tabii orada bir şeyim oldu.... İnsanın ne bileyim, sigara içmemesi, alkol kullanmaması, gece hayatı olmamasının bir ilişkide engel olması bana çok enteresan gelmişti. Sonra daha enteresanlarıyla da tanıştım tabii. O yüzden bu aralar çok dertliyim. Çok sinirliyim yani. Konuşmam lazım. Ya ben değişicem ya da değişmicem kendim gibi birini ümit edicem. Ya da bilmiyorum ya."

she often mentioned her previous thoughts from the time when she did not accept her homosexuality. Making comparisons between her former and current thoughts, she said that she believed most of them are sins. For instance, when we were talking about masturbation, she said that she cannot imagine herself masturbating because, for her, satisfying herself through imagination feels like a schizophrenic action. However, she stated that before accepting her homosexuality, she did not even know that there was such a thing called masturbation. Since Ceren accepted her homosexuality after 2016, not a long time had been passed while I was interviewing her in April 2019. Therefore, comparing before-2016 and after-2016 versions of her can be considered as inevitable; yet I think of her attempt to make comparisons as her trying to be transparent for this study.

Talking about her sexuality and lack of experience in site of sexual activity, Ceren expressed her opinions and predictions about her sexual practices in the future:

> "However, my present approach is not based on religion. Yes, the body is sacred for me, but there isn't a situation that I can declare with through marriage on this land. By the way, I do not use this as an excuse, if my partner wishes, we can solemnize (our marriage)."[16] (Ceren, aged-29)

Ceren's narrative on "this land" is similar to Eren's justification for authorizing sexual practices in Turkey where same-sex marriage has no legal grounds. Although Ceren did not directly say same-sex marriage, she says that "in this land", it is not permitted to declare their relationship with her partners.

On the other hand, regulating her sexual practices not because of religious sensitives, but because of the "this land" narrative remarks the pursuit for legitimacy even if it does not have to be on a legal basis. Although she does not necessarily want to solemnize their marriage, that the "body as a sacred" entity reminds us the traditional and normative conditionings of the body in the context of Turkey. According to Göktaş (2018), the traditional perception of the body is the "property of [its] family":

> "Cis women's bodies are seen as a sacred, yet, fragile property of their family (namus), especially the male members of the family, until this

[16] "Fakat şu an ki yaklaşımım tamamen din temelli değil. Evet beden benim için kutsal ama nikah ile deklare edebileceğim bir durum yaşadığım topraklarda yok. Bunu bahane etmem bu arada, partnerim dilerse nikahımız da olur."

> property is transferred to its new owner or supervisor –their husbands." (Göktaş 2018, 69)

Thus, I argue that perceiving the body as a sacred entity demonstrates the traditional and normative nature of Ceren's marriage concept. Through the legitimization of her relationship with a significant other, Ceren may solemnize their marriage even if she does not see any need for it. I should note that Ceren's approach to a significant other is not similar to Azad's ideal relationship with his partner. However, both of them attached some meaning to imaginary significant others who might make them reconsider their religious and lifestyle choices. In the case of Azad, he is willing to have sexual intercourse with his significant other; on the other hand, Ceren can solemnize a marriage if her partner will be interested in. Then, Azad sacrifices his Islamic views on non-legal marriages through his relationship with a significant other, and Ceren sacrifices her lifestyle preferences through her wish for a potential significant other. All these speculative sacrifices show Azad and Ceren's varied creative approaches in the case of intimate relationships with their partners.

Overall, regulating sexual practices is salient among some LGBT Muslims, such as Azad, Ceren, and Eren. Although I could not discuss their sexual practices with all the participants for many reasons, such as respect for their privacy and their refusal to discuss it, as well as I missed the chance of conducting second interviews where I asked my questions about their sexual practices. I would say that the regulation of sexual activities appeared among half of the participants who had attached diverse meanings to them, like Ceren and Azad. On the other hand, Birce, Can, and Derya are some participants who did not attach a particular meaning to sexual activities derived from Islamic values, even though they also engage in sexual involvement only with their significant others.

3.4 Summary/ Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempted to demonstrate the creative engagements of LGBT Muslims in sites of spirituality, piety, and sexual practices of LGBT Muslims in this research. Addressing the sites of spirituality, piety, and sexual practices, I benefit from two lenses which helped to understand the diversity of LGBT Muslims' approach: The ongoing negotiation of sexuality and Islam, and the emotional attachment to Islam.

In the first part of this Chapter, I discuss spiritual approaches of Eren and Hakan who developed unique embodiments of Islam in the context of the lack of religious and spiritual consultancy in Turkey. I emphasize the erotic power as a means of transforming the internal struggles into self-recognition and creativity as their celebration of sexualities underlie. From this perspective, embodying a queer sight of Islam and creativity in religious rituals shows the joy as a part of the erotic power as Lorde points out. In the second sub-section, I address the constant negotiation and emotional attachments to Islam as a means of creating the search for essence, or the spirit of Islam. In that discussion, I point out that this search is a spiritual one by extending the borders and categories through adopting a dissimilar "vision of reality" as Anzaldua states (Anzaldúa 2015, 77). In the following section, I demonstrate that the constant negotiation may lead some LGBT Muslims to cultivate piety and spirituality, while some cultivate piety to suppress homosexual desires. Apart from looking at spirituality in cultivation of piety and sexuality, lastly, I highlight some regulations over sexual practices. While there are varied sexual regulations among LGBT Muslims in this study, there is a dominant significant other discourse in terms of having sexual practices with a partner. On the other hand, Azad and Ceren's sexual regulations show that these varied regulations are created through heteronormative, traditional, and normative understandings in the context of Turkey.

4. CONCLUSION

It was an afternoon in April 2020. Since it was the first week of the holy month of Ramadan, I was finding it hard to get used to fasting and was spending time resting on my bed when Eren called me. We talked about how our daytimes shifted due to fasting. After some talk about the COVID-19 pandemic and Ramadan days, he got straight to the point by telling me that he was feeling uneasy about the recent sermon of Diyanet and the announcements and articles that had been published as a reaction by LGBT groups and associations. He said that he was anxious about "those homophobic and Islamophobic comments people expressed without thinking twice." Although he said that he is familiar with these "discourses in the truth of Turkey", he also stated that he might be feeling much more depressed this time because he was in isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After I talked about how I shut my eyes to those discussions taking place in social media, he opened further to elaborate on what was in his mind. He wanted to do something about people remaining blind to the existence of LGBT Muslims. His first idea was translating some LGBT and queer inclusive Quranic verses as interpretations of *progressive* Islam. He said that he already translated one non-academic article about the verses on gender and queer identity from the Qur'an and requested to publish them on the Facebook group. He was asking this question to me, because he assumed that I knew the admin of this group. Before publishing any message on the page, the admins of the group need to confirm the publication request sent by the authors. That's why Eren wanted me to let the admins know about his translation and also his urge to do something together such as translating some resources to validate queer Muslims' voices.

Two months after this call, two websites had been created by the LGBT Muslims who have been participants in this research. One of them is based on Eren's initiative and is called "Gökkuşağının Mümin Hali"[1] (Muslim Expression of the Rainbow), the other is "İnançlı Kuirler"[2] (Queers of Faith) created by a small group of LGBT People of Faith from Turkey. Both of them publish posts on LGBT and religion, as

[1] https://gokkusagininmuminhali.blogspot.com

[2] https://inanclikuirler.wordpress.com

well as articles, news and translated works of inclusive interpretations of Abrahamic religions. As a researcher in this field, I have observed that there is a wealth of topics to explore on LGBT Muslims in Turkey. I believe that this fieldwork raises rich questions about navigating morality, spirituality, queerness, LGBT subjects, approaches to tradition, culture and Islam; gendered and racialized aspects of the politicization of Islam, and central authority of *Diyanet* and its marginalizing discourses. Apart from exploring these rich spaces, this thesis has investigated the spiritual, pious and sexual experiences of LGBT Muslims through their own narratives. I argue that LGBT Muslims in Turkey as an unorganized group of individuals are transfiguring traditional normative Islam into an inclusive one and creating their own approaches to sexuality, piety and spirituality. The participants in this research demonstrate their Muslim queer subjectivity not only by criticizing traditional normative Islam, but also performing diverse and creative forms of subjectivity in their everyday lives. Thus, based on the oral history method, this research contributes to understanding the diverse and creative signature of each participants' experiences and expressions.

In the Introduction Chapter, I introduce three bodies of literatures to contextualize the participants in this research. These literatures are 1) LGBT and queer Muslims in the global context, 2) non-normative sexualities in the Muslim-majority societies, and 3) LGBT and queer lives in Turkey. Through this literature review, I argued that politics in Turkey has played a critical role in silencing and ignoring LGBT and queer lives and practices. What are the existing theoretical and political frameworks with which one can make sense of LGBT Muslim lives, particularly in the Turkish context? Along with the limited public representation of LGBT and queer Muslims in general, the participants of this research have been under researched. A review of the existing literature shows that the experiences of LGBT and queer Muslims have been explored in a diversity of contexts such as Australia, England, North America, Belgium, Malaysia, and South Africa suggesting different possibilities for approaching homosexuality and gender identity in the context of Islam, making visible queer-friendly-hermeneutics of the Qur'an, as well as critically exploring regulatory queerness and the homonational texture of some certain LGBT communities, particularly in the context of Europe and the United States. Reviewing the literature on LGBT Muslims in Muslim minority and Muslim majority contexts, I sought to demonstrate the unique context of Turkey and struggles faced by LGBT Muslims who are caught between marginalizing political and public discourses on sexual orientation and gender identity and the lack of self-identified LGBT Muslims in the LGBT communities.

In Chapter 2, I trace the diverse experiences of LGBT Muslims in terms of how they craft their self-presentation in the background of marginalizing political debates and

sermons, many of which fall under the category of hate-speech. In doing so, I benefit from the concept of regulatory queerness as I explore their encounters with LGBT communities and critically analyze the hegemonic gaze on the veiled body and the possibilities for embodying the "other". My research participants demonstrate the ways in which the binary opposition of Muslim vs. LGBT is deconstructed in the various experiences and narratives of the participants. I use the concept of the "autonomy of the self" to show the ways in which my research participants move beyond the binarism between being Muslim and LGBT.

In Chapter 3, I look at spiritual, pious and sexual practices of LGBT Muslims to demonstrate the ways in which the lack of religious and spiritual consultancy and solidarity has led the way to a space of creativity. Their creative approaches to spirituality, piety and sexuality have contributed to the destabilization of the existing patterns and categories and the formation of hybrid identities (Anzaldúa 2015, 71-73). I argue that their ongoing negotiation of being Muslim and LGBT at the same time, and their emotional attachments to Islam are potential sites of inquiry to understand their creativity. Highlighting the multiplicity of their approaches, I explore the different embodiments of creativity perceptions and practices of spirituality, piety and sexuality.

This research tackles with LGBT Muslims' diverse and creative experiences and approaches to Islam, sexuality, spirituality and piety in the context of rising hegemonic discourses about homosexuality, Islam and politics of Turkey. Although I focus on experiences and expressions of LGBT Muslims, I believe that analyzing the Islamic perception of diverse sexualities, the political context of Turkey and politics of Muslim and LGBT communities contribute significantly to understanding the circumstances of LGBT Muslim lives in Turkey. Overall, the aim of this research has been to demonstrate the individual and collective endeavors of LGBT Muslims in terms of transfiguring Islam, sexuality, spirituality and piety in the Turkish context.

I suggest that this research is only a preliminary effort to analyze the diverse lives, struggles, experiences and representations of LGBT Muslims in the context of Turkey. I believe that there are many more possible questions to investigate not only in the lives of LGBT Muslims, but in terms of the construction of hegemonic perceptions of Islam, and the traditional and normative teachings on gender, sexuality, piety and spirituality. I argue that an intersectional lens is critical for making sense of the multilayered stories of LGBT Muslims in Turkey.

Last but not least, this research has some shortcomings that may be addressed by possible further research. To begin with, although I have reached fourteen LGBT Muslims and conducted nine oral history interviews, I did not have a chance to

include all of them in my analysis, due to framing and time limitations. Apart from expanding the pool of participants, future research projects would also benefit from conducting interviews with secular or non-Muslim LGBT activists. Exploring the limitations regarding the inclusivity of LGBT Muslims in the LGBT organizations and communities from the perspective of activists has the potential to deepen our understanding of this process, and to initiate further discussion on how other queer subjects may have been excluded, besides LGBT Muslims. Moreover, it is important to engage in further research on how LGBT politics have been shaped by the hegemonic discourses on religion, morality, and spirituality.

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