

**(FIRST LOVE): COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GAY EXPERIENCE
DURING THE COMING OF AGE IN ACIMAN AND TOSUN**

by
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis comparatively analyzes two authors who produce in English and Turkish, who are Andre Aciman and Yalçın Tosun, through a queer lens. The aim of the thesis is to “queer” homonormativity by focusing representations of the male same-sex desire existing in *Call Me by Your Name* by Aciman and selected short stories by Tosun, which is referred as “gay experience” as characters don’t necessarily identify as gay despite having same-sex encounters with other men. Thus, their sexualities are left blurred, meaning there is no clear self-expression of “gay identity”. Specifically, the thesis explores gay experiences of young men during coming-of-age periods, used to refer to the period of pre- or early period of young adulthood, adolescence, puberty or teenage periods. Drawing on theories on gender, sexuality and the Queer, the thesis compares the similarities and differences of gay experience presented by these two authors in relation to issues like class and ethnicity. By doing so, it aims to queer homonormativity, which idealizes a singular and conformist gay identity. Having the queer approach, the thesis brings together different particularities of gay experiences or expressions to challenge homonormativity as the production of normative codes. Underlying these particularities, the thesis tries to pose alternatives to the homonormativity and to contribute to a global identity, consisting of different expressions. Since both Aciman and Tosun narrate non-Western particularities, their works are functional to deconstruct the ideal White homonormativity. For, these non-Western experiences add up to the gay experience that is limited by this homonormativity.

ÖZET

(İLK) AŞK: ACIMAN VE TOSUN METİNLERİNDE GENÇ YETİŞKİNLİK
SÜRECİNDE EŞCİNSELLİK DENEYİMİNİN KARŞILAŞTIRMALI ANALİZİ

SÜLEYMAN BÖLÜKBAŞ

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Anahtar Kelimeler: karşılaştırmalı edebiyat, queer teori, Aciman, Tosun, toplumsal
cinsiyet

Bu tezde, İngilizce ve Türkçe dillerinde eserler veren Andre Aciman ve Yalçın Tosun'un metinlerinin, queer perspektiften karşılaştırmalı analizi yapılmaktadır. Tezin amacı, Aciman'ın Call Me by Your Name romanındaki, ve Tosun'un bazı hikayelerindeki erkek eşcinsel arzu temsillerine odaklanarak, homonormativiteyi "queer"leştirmektir. Bu arzu, karakterlerin başka erkeklerle eşcinsel ilişkiler yaşamalarına rağmen açık bir kimlik beyanında bulunmadıkları için, "gay deneyimi" olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Karakterlerin cinsellikleri netleştirilmediği için, açık bir "gay kimliği" beyanı yoktur. Tezde, özellikle, yetişkinliğe geçiş evresindeki genç erkeklerin eşcinsellik deneyimlerini incelemektedir. Tezde bu evre erken genç yetişkinlik dönemi ve/veya öncesi, ergenlik ve ergenlikten yetişkinliğe geçiş ve gençlik dönemleri için kullanılmaktadır. Toplumsal cinsiyet, cinsellik ve Queer teorilerinden faydalanarak, bu tez gay deneyiminin yazarlar tarafından sunulan benzerliklerini ve farklılıklarını, sınıf ve etnisite. Bu sayede, tek tip uyumlu bir gay kimliğini idealleştiren homonormativiteyi "queer"leştirme amacı taşımaktadır. Queer bir perspektifle, tez, gay deneyimlerinin ve ifadelerinin farklı hususlarını bir araya getirerek homonormativiteyi normatif kuralların bir sonucu olarak sorgulamaktadır. Bu hususların altını çizerek, bu tez homonormativiteye karşı alternatifler sunmaya ve farklı kimliklerden ve ifadelerden oluşan bir global gay kimliğine katkı yapmaya çalışmaktadır. Hem Aciman hem de Tosun Batı dışı istisnalar kurguladıklarından, metinleri ideal Beyaz homonormativiteyi "queer"leştirmek için işlevseldir. Çünkü, bu Batı dışı bireylikler homonormativite tarafından sınırlandırılan gay deneyimini genişletmektedir.

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*To my mother
and sister*

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1. INTRODUCTION

“In 1955 the British journalist and playwright Peter Wildeblood explained in *Against the Law, an apologia pro vita sua* ...that society should tolerate good homosexuals like himself, but not ‘the pathetically flamboyant pansy with the flapping wrists...corrupters of youth, not even the effeminate creatures who love to make an exhibition of themselves’. Wildeblood’s argument for tolerance works by opposing a notion of decent homosexuality, which he believes should be legitimized, to demonized constructions of homosexuality – the elderly predator, effeminate queen – from which he distances himself. The kind of opposition is precisely the kind of gesture challenged by ‘queer’ theory and activism” (Stevens 2011, 81).

Homonormativity, as the quote illustrates, is the type of identification that promotes a singular gay identity that fits in and conforms to all the norms of society; i.e., it is a gay identity that does not challenge the heterosexually coded society¹. And clearly, this heteronormativity-friendly homonormativity is strictly conformist in the sense that it does fit in the traditional masculinity codes which exclude all body constructions that perform femininity in quite visible ways. That is to say, whereas the masculinity in homosexuality is appreciated and cherished, the femininity in a gay body does not have a high status, as Stevens also points out in the statement by Wildeblood who calls feminine homosexuals “flamboyant pansy” that corrupts youth and like to show off. This perception of homonormativity, thus, acknowledges only the gay identities shaped by the behaviors that do not challenge the norms of masculinity. Only when a gay identity is cleaned from effeminate acts, does he achieve a respectable and acceptable status, accordingly. However, as noted by Stevens, the queer theory does not accept this conformist perception of gay identities and therefore rejects the acceptance of one kind of gay identification. It functions to challenge these norms as part of its struggle against heteronormativity, and inevitably homonormativity:

¹ i.e. homonormativity, which will be discussed in Chapter 1 through the ideas of Lisa Duggan

“...Heterosexuality is a complex matrix of discourses, institutions, and so on, that has normalized in our culture, thus making particular relationships, lifestyles, and identities, seem natural, ahistorical and universal. In short, heterosexuality, as it is currently understood and experienced, is a (historically and culturally specific) truth-effect of systems of power/knowledge. Given this, its dominant position and current configuration are contestable and open to change (Sullivan 2004, 39).

The quote states that heteronormativity has been idealized and normalized. It does not exist naturally; it emerged historically, and its norms have been developed through a set of practices. And it also suggests that heterosexuality (and therefore heteronormativity) as the norm has been “naturalized” owing to the ongoing practices and achieved its current status. Yet, because it is “open to change”, it is not the ultimate truth that is legitimate for all types of individuals. Queer theory is the critical perception of this heteronormativity, since it ignores all other sexual behaviors, regardless of their being heterosexual or not, that do not fit in its set of actions. And if the heteronormativity is a set of behaviors whose constructions could be queered, so does homonormativity as it is similarly constructed with the norms fitting in homonormativity. The homonormative nature of gay identity as a social construction is explained by David M. Halperin: “just because you happen to be a gay man doesn’t mean that you don’t have to learn how to become one. Gay men do some of that learning on their own, but often we learn how to be gay from others” (Halperin 2012, 5). That being a gay is something people can learn, especially from other gays, means that gay identity is a social construction that requires certain types of acts to be categorized as such. And these acts are learned by others, which suggests that those acts have become a type of norms that have been institutionalized through circulation among gay men. As a result of it, just as heterosexuality and gender identities of men and women, gay identity also creates homonormativity that is learned by imitation and practices and put into performance as Judith Butler argues about “gender performativity” (Butler 1988, 519).

In this regard, a piece of gay and lesbian literature, or simply a literary work with LGBTI content, becomes a perfect tool to “queer” homonormativity. Hugh Stevens claims that “[i]t isn’t surprising that gay and lesbian fiction has often been concerned with sexual questions, but queer novels have never been ‘just’ about sex and sexuality. Their representation of sexuality has been varied and complex, and they cannot be seen as

constructing a uniform and consensual position on queer sexual behavior and politics” (Stevens 2014, 627). Accordingly, the queer novels, in Stevens’ terms, present us the fragments of particular experiences related to sex and sexuality. The experiences of sexuality might be the main concerns of those texts. However, the experiences they represent are developed by many dynamics existing in them, which means that the representations in those works would make a gay identity or sexuality expression, having plural layers. In that sense, even the texts that portray gay male sexuality in stereotypical ways and how they portray such clichés would offer valuable insights into gay experiences. Therefore, their analysis will inevitably provide the material to present alternatives to homonormativity. For, obviously recognition of different (homo) sexualities will deconstruct the idealized conception of homonormativity.

In this thesis, I will be doing a comparative analysis of representations of “gayness” – or gay identity – in works of literature produced in English and Turkish by close-reading certain texts by two authors, André Aciman and Yalçın Tosun. The texts that will be analyzed in this thesis are *Call Me by Your Name* by Andre Aciman (published first in 2017) and the selected short stories by Tosun (published from 2009 to 2013 in first editions), which are “Damdaki,”² “Yaralı Bir Kaplan,”³ “Kibritçi Kız,”⁴ “Muzaffer ve Muz,”⁵ “Kıpırtılı Bir Yorgan”⁶ and “Homoeroticus”. The aim of the thesis is to compare these works and explore how same-sex desire is experienced by characters, namely Elio of Aciman and several young boys from Tosun’s short stories. The primary focus of the thesis is to look into the experiences of young gay men in these texts who are in the period of coming-of-age⁷ or *bildungs*⁸. Coming-of-age is instrumental to refer to the characters who could be in their pre- or early period of young adulthood, in adolescence puberty or teenage periods. By comparing and analyzing coming-of-age experiences in both authors, the thesis aims to “queer” homonormativity based on the idea that the homonormativity does not represent a global & singular gay experience and thus could be queered by proposing alternative experiences of gay male sexuality and desire through a comparative approach.

² Trans. On the Rooftop

³ Trans. A Wounded Tiger

⁴ Trans. The Little March Girl, probably a reference to the fairy tale by Andersen by the author.

⁵ Trans. Muzaffer and the Banana

⁶ Trans. A Moving Quilt

⁷ Coming of age: “someone's coming of age is the time when that person legally becomes an adult and is old enough to vote” and “the time when someone matures emotionally, or in some other way” (Cambridge Dictionary).

⁸ This term is discussed in Chapter 2

My purpose to use “gay experience” to refer to the same-sex affections of the characters has two reasons. First is the ambiguity of sexualities that is left by authors in their works. While Elio, the whole plot is about the summer love Elio, the protagonist, develops for their summer guest Oliver, he has relationships with girls, as well. But, in either of his relationships, he does not embrace gay as an identity. Nor does he refer to himself as bisexual. He experiences his same-sex desire with Oliver without attaining himself any kind of sexual identity. In Tosun’s short stories, we do not see characters embrace their homosexual desires as “gay”, with few exceptions. Sometimes, the author leaves the sexual identity vague or blurred, only hinting references in the subtext. But, the scope of this thesis is entirely to compare and analyze how these young men express their homosexual desires. Thus, in order to attain characters a sexual identity, I am using gay experience to refer their attractions to other men in the narrations owing to the ambiguous portrayals of their sexual orientations. Same-sex and/or homosexual desire, homosexuality and gayness will occasionally be used interchangeably, as well.

And the second is the purposes of texts themselves. Neither Aciman nor Tosun does claim that they write for a gay or LGBTI audience or they necessarily create LGBTI fiction, although they explore such themes in their works. Aciman’s novel is well-received by LGBTI people and is practically included in LGBTI literature as Colm Toibin says in the comments of the book that “it will rest artfully on the shelves between James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* and Edmund White’s *A Boy’s Own Story*...”⁹ Positioning *Call Me by Your Name* with two classic literary figures demonstrates the significance it has achieved in LGBTI literature or literary works with these themes. But, Aciman himself does not really think his novel merely a gay novel as we see in one of his interviews: Noting his work “more than a story of gay romance”, he states that “I wanted to avoid the typical challenges of a gay love story.” (qtd in Daily World, 2017). Clearly then Aciman does not attempt to create a piece of LGBTI fiction. As for Yalçın Tosun, I think his portrayal of gay experiences also makes his works more than just gay fiction. For, Hikmet Hükümen acknowledges the homosexuality or homosexual moments of the characters are presented along with other things related to their lives (Hükümenoğlu, 2013). Göksenin Abdal also realizes this by saying that “LGBTI identities are natural aspects of daily life as much as heterosexuality in Yalçın Tosun’s stories” (Abdal 2017, 48). Therefore, we

⁹ see the metatext section of 2017 edition of the book for Tobin’s remark

could claim that Yalçın Tosun's exploration of gay themes in his works comes from his diversity, not from his attempt to write LGBTI fiction. Therefore, since either of the authors does not claim to create LGBTI fiction, I prefer to refer to the same-sex experiences of their characters as gay experience.

In the first chapter, I am basically trying to construct the theoretical framework of the research. Drawing on scholars and theorists, such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Judith/Jack Halberstam, Eve Sedgwick etc., and some recent scholarship about gender and sexuality, I attempt to explain how homonormativity comes into being and functions as an oppressive 'institution' for gay male sexuality or identity both in the heteronormative/patriarchal culture and in the gay community.

In the second chapter, I try to review a basic survey of how young gay male sexuality is represented in both Anglo-American (and in some pieces of Western) and Turkish literature. While I acknowledge that same-sex desire between males has been existing in the literature of both culture since the pre-modern periods, I am trying to limit my major focus to the modern and contemporary era. Thus, including brief references to the earlier periods, this chapter mostly focuses on the representations in contemporary literary works. It is observable in both kinds of literature that young gay male sexuality is repressed as doomed to be a marginal identity, and his life is always either corrupted or full of struggles due to his homosexuality. And this is what makes the works by Aciman and Tosun significant and worth recognition. It is because while questioning of sexuality might be the center topic or one of the key points in both authors' works, they do not present it as the sole issue going on in the texts. Nor are they presented as victims of their sexualities who end up finding no way out and inevitably die. We have the chance to read through what characters go through in their lives while exploring and experiencing their sexualities, allowing us to different aspects contributing to the way they are and experience their sexualities.

In the final chapter, I attempt to do detailed close-readings of works by the authors to bring up similar and different experiences of same-sex desire to demonstrate how they can become alternatives to the homonormativity. Initially, the solidarity is very much influential in the emergence and development of desire in both Aciman and Tosun. Comparison of both authors in terms of solidarity shows us how different types of

solidarities function similarly for homoerotic desires. To clarify this point, while Elio's desire is very much influenced by the solidarity coming out of sharing the same ethnic identity, the young boys of Tosun develop solidarity as a result of struggling with peer pressure and of finding shelter in one another, which leads to the same-sex desires. Later on, I am exploring how this gay experience – or homosexual desire – takes on a gender-bending norm. Both Aciman and Tosun create moments of homoeroticism, where both romantically and physically charged sexual affection goes beyond the norms of gender. The realization of desire by the characters seems to follow a similar pattern in narrations by both authors. Both Aciman and Tosun portray their protagonists in a state of discomfort and anxiety upon being imposed to the same-sex desire when facing it physically (or maybe romantically) for the first time, due to the fact that they encounter something unfamiliar. Yet, this anxiety does not last, not at least because of the gender of the objects of desire. Even though both Elio and Tosun's boys display regrets or hate or similar feelings related to their affections, it never resulted from their homosexuality itself. Instead, the characters worry about things such as their behaviors. But they also embrace their desires and try to act upon them even if they cannot express it freely. However, the difference comes in the ways the characters experience their desires in relation to the environment in which they dwell. Pictured in a very much welcoming environment, Elio of Aciman could freely experience his sexuality without necessarily hiding it, whereas Tosun creates atmospheres where characters have to hide it or have to deal with pressure if their homosexuality becomes visible. Consequently, the way the characters practice their desires changes in accordance with where they practice it. In a welcoming environment, Elio could openly express his desire to the man he is attracted to. But, in Tosun's works, we observe that characters cannot really speak their desires out loud. They cannot even share it with their friends, let alone their objects of desire due to the possible pressures when they are somehow out.

By concluding these similarities and differences existing in the selected works by the two authors from different genres and languages – English and Turkish – the thesis aims to critique the perception of homonormativity as the idealized singular type of gay identity and/or desire. Obviously, coming-of-age is a process of growing up, thus inevitably is also a period of experiment. These characters, either in their youth, pre-adulthood, or puberty, experience their sexualities as part of their personal growth. Their experiences shaped by their daily lives present outcomes that are alternatives to the singular type of

gay experience designed by homonormative norms, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 3. Thus, the thesis ends with the comments on how the Westernized ideal gay image of homonormativity cannot represent a global gay experience and should be opened up with alternative experiences of representations that are not necessarily Western. Henceforth, the thesis tries to queer gay/homosexual identity. In other words, it does what queer theory does to the heteronormativity. Just as the queer theory brings up particularities to deconstruct the heteronormative gender and sexuality constructions, the thesis also focuses on particular experiences of gayness to show the impossibility of a singular gay expression and experience. By placing characters of Tosun and Aciman in opposites of the singular expression of homonormativity, the thesis tries to bring up the sexualities that are left blurred or are not strictly defined in terms of construction and practice, which will show the fluidity of (homo)sexuality.

Along with the authors' attitude, the other issue that makes those two authors worth comparison is the contexts they belong to: They both portrays more or less non-Western particularities in their works. Despite the fact that setting is Italy in *Call Me by Your Name*, Aciman, being a Jewish himself, narrates a love story of a Jewish boy, who is attracted to a Jewish man. Tosun, meanwhile, presents us with stories, settings of which are in Turkey. Thus, both authors create non-Western experiences of same-sex desire, and therefore their comparison in that sense would contribute to the understanding of global gay identity as plural and multidimensional, instead of a singular representation covering only a limited number of people.

2. QUEERING “HOMONORMATIVITY” AND GAY MALE SEXUALITY

In this chapter, I mainly aim to conceptualize what I call “homonormativity” in its relation to heteronormativity and other discussions on gender and sexuality. I argue that just as heteronormativity creates a singular ideal and appropriate way of expressions for gender and sexuality, homonormativity similarly forces upon the individuals very limited and stereotypical ways of expressions of homosexuality, if not singular altogether. By discussing the accounts of the Queer theorists, I will attempt to “queer” homonormativity to demonstrate the possibilities of different forms of homosexuality, primarily gay male sexuality as the topic of this chapter, as opposed to the idealized male homosexuality. Basically, homonormativity is a reflection of the norms of heteronormative and patriarchal culture. And it is as much oppressive and limiting as the heteronormativity for gay male sexuality both within and outside of the gay community.

To begin with, I would like to discuss some of the main theories on gender and sexuality and why they could be “queer” to set the ground for my main argumentation. In *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, Michel Foucault states that due to the morals Victorian Era (19th century), “legal” sexuality is merely limited within the bonds of marriage as he says “a single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social spaces...but it was utilitarian and fertile one: the parent’s bedroom” (Foucault 1978, 3). His underlying of heterosexuality legalized by marriage as the idealized form of sexuality is functional to discuss and conceptualize homonormativity. It is because his concept of this type of sexuality suggests sexuality is limited by social institutions, which means other sexualities apart from the ideal one do also exist, which means they could also have norms, or could normatively be constructed.

He addresses sexualities other than the norm by having a critical approach to what he calls “repressive hypothesis”. He states “what sustains our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of repression is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures; to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervor of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights” (Foucault 1978, 7). While he seems to support the idea that sexuality is repressed in the discourse, he criticizes it in fact. For he does not simply agree that the discourse of his era needs opening up the hidden truths to create the possibility of desire, freedom, and enlightenment. Instead, he suggests that the act of telling out and loud is a tool for the power holder. It is because according to him, sexuality is quite in the discourse in different ways, which functions for the power holder -any type of body that exercises power on the subject- to regulate and categorize them. In other words, the power turns the discourse on different sexualities into objects of confessions which regulates it. Thus, instead of repressing sexuality, the power simply paves the way for open and clear expressions of “deviant” sexualities such as confession, etc., so that it can divide them into categories like ideal, unauthorized or marginalized (Foucault 1978, 3, 4). And Foucault’s queerness comes from the fact that he refers to ways of desire and pleasure that fall outside of the mechanism of knowing and categorization. He focuses on productions of sexualities more than repression.

Accordingly, his motive for discussing sex is triggered by the desire to notice the sexualities outside reproductive heterosexuality. It aims to expand to an extent where more than one way of sexuality will become visible. In other words, because Foucault’s account of sexuality includes all types of sexualities in accordance with their regulations, he could be argued to have a queer methodology to approach sexualities. It is because Foucault tries to show that so-called repression of sexuality is used as a tool to conceptualize different types of sexualities and to categorize them either ideal or marginal, which makes up the norms of sexuality. Sexualities, according to Foucault, are outcomes of discursive production. And within the discourse, they are systematically categorized as ideal, normative, or non-normative. A similar approach is also observable in Halberstam. Discussing heteronormativity in reproduction and family time, Halberstam refers to individuals staying out of this family zone:

“...here we could consider ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed. Perhaps such people could productively be called ‘queer subjects’ in terms of the ways they live (deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity) during the hours when others sleep and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned, and in terms of the ways they might work in the domains that other people assign to privacy and family” (Halberstam 2005, 10).

Here, similar to Foucault’s tracing down unauthorized sexual practices in brothel and hospitals, Halberstam touches upon those who do not meet the expectations of heteronormativity and thus live outside family space. Therefore, she clearly queers sexuality by pointing out what is out there, and so does Foucault in terms of sexualities outside of the one legally approved, which is also what he does when he discusses the power that shapes discourse on sexuality: “On the contrary, it acted by multiplication of singular sexualities. It did not set boundaries for sexuality; it extended the various forms of sexuality, pursuing them according to lines of indefinite penetration. It did not exclude sexuality but included it in the body as a mode of specification of individuals” (Foucault 1978, 47). According to Foucault, such a power somehow has given way to the possibility for sexualities outside without moral codes of the 19th-century bourgeoisie, which he calls as “peripheral sexualities” that I argue is similar to queer subjects of Halberstam while shaping the ideal way of sexuality. For both Foucault and Halberstam define sexualities by specifying them “others ones” as opposed to the appropriate ones.

While he focuses on limits designed for the practice of sexuality, Foucault refutes what he calls as “the repressive hypothesis”, stating the claim that sexuality has been repressed & censored has achieved currency since the 17th century and coincides with bourgeoisie and capitalism. By saying “Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered,” (Foucault 1978, 24). Foucault draws attention to the government’s need to have control over the population due to such reasons as labor capacity, birth rate, etc. And he claims that such a control is centered on the control over the sexuality of individuals making up the whole population of a society:

“At the heart of this economic and political problem of population was sex: it was necessary to analyze the birthrate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile or sterile, the effects of unmarried life or of the

prohibitions, the impact of contraceptive practices--of those notorious ‘deadly secrets’... (Foucault 1978, 25).

This quote summarizes Foucault’s understanding of the government’s need to regulate the sexuality of its population. According to Foucault, the 18th-century bourgeois society has to regulate and have control over both idealized and marginalized sexuality, so that the society itself could also be regulated. As the quote illustrates, this regulation requires consideration of both reproductive/desired and its opposite sexuality, both ideal reproduction and premarital births. Consequently, such a regulation that power, exemplified by government, demands and brings the existence of those peripheral sexualities into the discourse. And the discourse including such sexualities simply refutes the repressive hypothesis. Sexuality is not repressed, it is instead spoken more than ever in this era: “what distinguishes these last three centuries is the variety, the wide dispersion of devices that were invented for speaking about it, for having it be spoken about, for inducing it to speak of itself, for listening, recording, transcribing, and redistributing what is said about it” (Foucault 1978, 34). For Foucault, the means that are specifically created to talk about sexuality due to power exercise on it, are not resulted in repressing it. Throughout Part Two, he gives examples of how those peripheral sexualities are brought into the discourse. He refers to children’s sexuality, which was silenced before, and homosexuals’ becoming an identity whereas the sodomy used to be punished as a crime, the confessions of sex in church, the anonymous accounts of sexuality and medical discourses on sexuality to support his argument that sex is not repressed but regulated. He says that all those once denied voices come to existence in this era: “No doubt they were condemned all the same, but they were listened to; and if regular sexuality happened to be questioned once again, it was through a reflux movement, originating in these peripheral sexualities” (Foucault 1978, 39).

Yet, even though regulation means production of sexualities in the discourse, I argue their regulation does not only bring them into existence, but it also still represses those sexualities by labeling and defining them, which causes cultural shape of sexuality and gender as suggested by Judith Butler, or causes those individuals to become “queer” or marginalized people as outcasts of society as Halberstam suggests. Taking the power as governing on culture as well, I argue that *regulation on gender still regulates the sexuality* – and gender- in Butler’s terms as it follows: “Gender is also the discursive/cultural means

by which “sexed nature” or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “pre-discursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts” (Butler 1990, 11). Clearly, gender is a social construction and so is sex. Thus, construction is obviously related to regulations on sexuality, and since this gender construction is a means of production for nature and sexuality, culture – as a part of power exercise- creates the sex of individuals in accordance with “gender”, which means cultural means represses sex into a singular type: “This production of sex as the pre-discursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by gender” (Butler 1990, 12). Clearly, both gender and sexuality as social constructions, force upon individuals certain types of acts, which results in the exclusion of those who are not culturally approved, meaning that the existence of sexualities regulated as deviant or marginal always poses a threat of repression into limited, dangerous and vulnerable places as Halberstam’s accounts demonstrates.

Further, I argue that such construction does not only repress and label individuals into a singular type of sexuality -regardless of whether it is legitimized or not-, it also constructs specific types of behaviors for sexualities it attains on people. There emerge types of behaviors that individuals are simply repressed to perform and practice according to their sexualities. And since regulations define sexualities as either acceptable or unauthorized, the latter is excluded from the society, which means it is repressed even if it is visible and spoken of in the discourse. The repression forced on queers – unauthorized sexualities – is exemplified by Halberstam: “In a small town, the violence tends to be predictable...since the locals often initiate violence against the strangers or outsiders; but in the city, violence is random and unpredictable” (Halberstam 2005, 15). To be defined as a stranger or an outsider, one has to act in certain ways, which suggests the idea of the type of behaviors attained on people. And since violence is always present in both a small town and a city, it implies a kind of repression going on against people with different sexualities. If we think of “strangers” as those who have non-normative sexualities, we could observe repression of sexuality even if it is visible in discourse. Because non-normative sexualities are attained different behaviors, they stand out and simply their visibility threatens the dominant heteronormative culture and consequently, they face the possibility of violence. While discourse includes them in it, it still poses ways to repress it into certain types of behaviors, which is mirrored in the practices happening in society. All in all, sexuality and its peripheral or non-normative versions are brought into the discussion. But it is not

meant to liberate it. Instead, it regulates & represses sexuality and forces those who do not fit in the ideal out of society. And since certain types of acts are forced upon people, while excluding those not fitting, there emerges heteronormativity, which idealizes reproductive heterosexuality between a male and a female embracing traditional codes of masculinity and femininity while either disapproving or marginalizing other types of sexualities such as nonreproductive (hetero)sexual acts or homosexuality. Within this discussion on the gender and sexuality, since both gender and sexuality are social constructions, then, they are also performative identities that are learned by repetitive practices and imitations, which Butler argues "...gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 1988, 519). Thus, should gender also determine sex and therefore sexuality, homosexuality should also be considered as a performative identity, of which Foucault suggests: "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault 1978, 9). As "species" symbolizes homosexuality is conceptualized as an identity by Foucault, which means it requires certain types of acts to be defined as such, indicating that it is a performance that is learned.

When it comes to the emergence of homonormativity, its patterns are similar to those of heteronormativity. For, just as heteronormativity idealizes a certain type of heterosexuality, homonormativity similarly creates idealized types of gay male sexuality and stereotypes, some of whom are favored by it while others are disregarded. Thus, homonormativity presents a set of behaviors as an idealized identity, which gay men learn and put into practice as David M. Halperin argues:

"It is not enough for a man to be homosexual in order to be gay. Same-sex desire alone does not equal gayness. In order to be gay, a man has to learn to relate to the world around him in a distinctive way... On this account, 'gay' refers not just to something you *are*, but also something you *do*. Which means that you don't have to be homosexual in order to do it...Gayness, then, is not a state or condition. It's a mode of perception, attitude, an ethos: in short, it is a practice. And if gayness is a practice, it is something you can do well or badly" (Halperin 2012, 13).

Apparently, Halperin argues that gays learn how to be gay from other gays within a community and they become a gay, similar to the fact that people learn how to be man or woman according to Butler. This shows the performative side of gayness as “an identity”. What is problematic with this learning and imitation practice, I argue, is that it creates stereotypes and ends up idealizing a type of ideal gay identity, which results in homonormativity. Homonormativity, therefore, is made of socio-cultural practices. It becomes a set of practices that are specifically associated with the gay identity. And it is something a man, with same-sex desire or who defines himself as gay, has to perform certain acts to be stated as gay, as he has to behave “in a distinctive way”. Thus, this distinction of certain behavior for gay identity means that it also creates norms for such identity, and leads to the construction of homonormativity.

This homonormativity is defined by Lisa Duggan as “...‘a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption’” (Duggan 2002, 179). Accordingly, then, Duggan explains that homonormativity is shaped by heteronormativity and therefore reproduced its traditional norms for gay men, for which they expect to conform to become the ideal gay images, which limits expressions of gayness clearly, then. Although Duggan uses the term to refer to a neo-liberal issue, I argue that it is still functional to have an understanding of what type of body and identity construction is promoted as the ideal gay identity and behavior. As for the ideal image of gay male sexuality within this homonormativity, it could be argued that the ideal gay identity is the one who could embrace the norms of the traditional masculinity that is predominantly masculine, well-shaped and muscular, young, powerful either in wealth and education, White and generally sexually-aggressive. While describing young gay boys’ sexual experiences, Mutchler also expresses in his article “Seeking Sexual Lives” that their sexualities are influenced by traditional masculinity codes, which recalls stereotypical ways of both and sexuality constructions: “In the case of two gay men having sex with each other, both partners learn to be accountable to some masculinity scripts for sex such as romantic love and erotic adventures. Gay men's sexualities are done in the context of socially and culturally produced masculinity expectations” (Mutchler 2000, 17). Such an influence of cultural and social masculinity codes on gay men’s sexuality inevitably idealizes those masculine figures within the gay community, as Mario, one of the boys in the study reflects: “In fact, Mario's fantasies and

crushes on men are rich with images of masculine, muscular, and "straight-acting" gay men" (Mutchler 2000, 20). The way Mario describes his dream partner image is in line with Peter Nardi's account on how the masculine type of gayness has historically been idealized while the femininity or traits associated with womanhood have historically been "marginalized" even within the gay community. Nardi explains that the images of gay men have had two clear-cut and distinctively different stereotypes, which are the most feminine men -who are sissies or queens- and the most masculine as its opposite. And Nardi suggests that the latter has always been idealized and desired as the "right figure" since the increase of visibility of homosexual men in the U.S through representations in media, discourse or merely everyday life: "Yet, these effeminate men were often interested in masculine men who were depicted in paintings, cartoons, jokes, and erotic stories as sailors or blue-collar manual labor workers on construction sites or at the docks" (Nardi 2000, 3). The fact that feminine men desire masculine ones inform us about two things: the first is that gays that fulfill traditional masculinity norms are the ideal types of homosexuals and the second is the traditional gender roles are also internalized within the gay community, as well, which is why while the ideal is the most masculine, the feminine ones should be in search of the masculine for partnership as they take on the female role. Nardi also verifies this argument by stating that "Almost 100 years after the invention of sexual inversion and the effeminate homosexual male, the perpetuation of a gender-based system of categorization for same-sex sexuality is displayed both inside and outside the gay subculture" (Nardi 2000, 5). And this representation of gay male sexuality has a degrading influence for the gay men that have feminine bodily acts or structures. Again, Nardi states:

"Although rejecting hypermasculinity and effeminacy, many gay men embrace a "very straight gay" style by enacting both hegemonic masculinity and gay masculinity in their daily lives, as R. W. Connell (1992) argues. In the very act of engaging in sex with other men, gay men challenge dominant definitions of patriarchal masculinity. The hegemony of heterosexual masculinity is subverted, yet at the same time, gay men enact other forms and styles of masculinity, ones that often involve reciprocity rather than hierarchy" (Nardi 2000, 5).

Here, taking on Connell's account, Nardi argues that embracing of "straight acts" challenge the norms of heterosexual hegemonic masculinity. However, such a construction of gayness obviously creates a stereotypical and hegemonic gay image that

is most powerful, educated and rich. It is because enaction of hegemonic masculinity with the gay masculinity obviously portrays an image that is a gay man embracing norms of traditionally dominant male image. And we could argue that power, wealth and education are those that make up this dominant masculinity. These as norms of masculinity is acknowledged by Guillermo Avila-Saavedra. While this image reinforces the codes of hegemonic masculinity, which is quite homophobic in many ways, it also deprives the gay image that does not fit representation in popular images, which could be observed in the contemporary representations of gay males in the American television as part of popular culture, according to Avila-Saavedra: “In today’s mass media, a man can be at the same time openly gay and masculine. However, media’s gay masculinity is predominantly ‘young, white, Caucasian, preferably with a well muscled, smooth body, handsome face, good education, professional job, and a high income’ (Avila-Saavedra 2009, 9). Avila-Saavedra’s account on male homosexual representation is almost identical with the emergence of masculine gayness described by Nardi. While performing the same-sex desire or gayness, the masculine gay image embraces, and practices sets of behaviors that are associated with hegemonic masculinity, and such a representation is presented as the ideal image of gayness, as in the cases discussed by Nardi. And when it comes to the opposite image of gayness, which is the feminine one, while they might be no longer a total marginal figure, their purpose in the media is different from the ideal figure. Avila-Saavedra argues that they are primarily represented as sexless and harmless (to heteronormativity) figures: “They can also be described as a group of five asexual fairy godmothers that appear, transform a straight man’s love life, but are themselves denied love lives of their own. Not only is there not the smallest hint of sexual tension between five healthy, good-looking homosexual men, but viewers are also denied any information about the ‘fab 5’s’ personal love lives” (Avila-Saavedra 2009, 13). Clearly, “fairy” indicates the femininity potential and the only possible way for them to find a place in the media representation is that they do not threaten the heteronormativity and exist as entertainment objects, which clearly idealizes the masculine gay while denying a total insight into gay peoples’ actual lives.

When it comes to the gay identity construction in Turkey, Cenk Özbay’s study on gay men from middle-upper class in Istanbul provides a similar result. Accordingly, the imitation of heterosexual life style or at least a life style that does not challenge the heterosexual codes of the society is embraced by the middle-upper class gay men of

Istanbul. Özbay notes that homonormativity requires gay men to try to be respected and accepted, and to imitate heterosexual codes. He also states that it is not the idea of having sex with straight men. Instead it is more about embracing a heterosexual lifestyle, without becoming a heterosexual. And he goes on stating that those who do not perform conventional bodies or genders fall outside of this homonormativity (Özbay 2018, 244-245). While this does not openly indicate idealizing of masculinity within gay men in Turkey at first, I argue that imitating straight men inevitably includes behaviors associated with traditionally masculinity, which means that ideal image of gayness in Turkey also promotes an assertive masculine behavior. Furthermore, Özbay's account clarifies that those who are not conventional in terms of their gender and sexual identity constructions are not part of this homonormativity. This does demonstrate that non-normative masculinity performances of gay men are disregarded by this homonormativity as "conventional" apparently recalls the traditional masculinity that is associated with heterosexuality, as well. In his another study, Özbay states cherishment and appreciation of masculinity among gay community in Turkey more clearly. Narrating his experiences with men who have sex with rent boys, who are male sex workers, in Istanbul, he states that " 'although some rents look like menacing bandits who steal horses (*at hirsizi*) and act in weird ways, it is still better than dealing with self-indulgent and spoiled gays. They are all (like) women (*hepsi Kadın*). ' *Hepsi kadın...* describes gay men as not just womanly, sentimental, soft, vain or extravagant; but also useless" (Özbay 2017, 3). Even though Özbay takes on a sociologist perspective and uses the homonormativity in a way similar to Lisa Duggan, his study on gay men in Istanbul is still functional. It is because while imitating heterosexual men suggests masculinity is the ideal body type, the statement above shows that masculinity is also the ideal body as the object of desire among gay men in Turkey. It is because, if womanly men – who are also self-defined gay men – are useless for those who are willing to pay to rent boys for sexual encounter, then, it could be concluded that the masculinity in men is ideal body type to be desired among gay men or men who have gay sexual relationships, which contributes to the homonormative construction of gay male sexuality, which is also "straight act" that embraces the codes of traditional masculinity while defying the other body and identity types of gay male sexuality.

Thus, the gayness becomes a singular type of identity, or at least it is promoted as such. While the feminine type of gay male sexuality in the popular media coverages is

represented as sexless and harmless identities, those who are traditionally masculine are eroticized, which is also acknowledged by Dennis Altman. Referring to “illustrations of muscular (white) men on the posters”, he states “in the distinction between the image and the reality lies much of the paradox of the apparent globalization of postmodern gay identities (Altman 2001, 19). Clearly, he does not only acknowledge the idealized norms of gay identity as masculine, but he also realizes that it is problematic in the sense that it overlooks many other behaviors of gay identities. Drawing attention to the globalization and its effects which he calls “global gay”, Altman describes how the homonormativity shapes gay identity into a singular type: “It has become fashionable to point to the apparent internalization of a certain form of social and cultural identity upon homosexuality. He...is conceptualized in terms that are very much derived from recent American fashion and intellectual style: young, upwardly mobile, sexually adventurous, with an in-your-face attitude toward traditional restrictions and an interest in both activism and fashion” (Altman 2001, 20). Clearly, the “global gay” represents an ideal that is shaped by very limited features, which does not necessarily require a male to give up on the traditionally masculine features demanded from men. Realizing that identification of modern male homosexuality while bearing conventions of masculinity, which is “macho gay” in today’s ideal male homosexuality, Altman characterizes modern homosexualities in three features: (1) a differentiation between sexual and gender transgression; (2) an emphasis on emotional as much as on sexual relationships; and (3) the development of public homosexual worlds” (Altman 2001, 24). All of these, combined with either embracing or forcing the Western ideals of traditional masculinity upon gay men, create a homonormativity that creates stereotypes either hyper-masculine identities or feminized ones. And from a queer perspective, it is problematic. The problem emerges in two levels, first is the idealization of the masculine type of gay identity, and the second is the binary system enforced on the categories of gay identities, which limits and represses gay males’ behaviors since it ignores the other possibility of identities. Nikki Sullivan says of the queer that “queer is a positionality rather than identity... it is not restricted to gays and lesbians, but can be taken up anyone who feels marginalized as a result of their sexual practices” (Sullivan 2004, 44). Queer becomes instrumental to undermine homonormativity in the sense that it either marginalizes some types of gay men or stereotypes them into undesirable. Halperin also problematizes such a conceptualization of singular gayness:

“But gay male desire actually comprises a kaleidoscopic range of queer longings—of wishes and sensations and pleasures and emotions—that exceed the bounds of any singular identity and extend beyond the specifics of gay male existence...All this commercial and political and cultural infrastructure of gay identity remains a perennial letdown, leaving many members of its gay constituency perpetually unsatisfied. Gay identity—gayness reduced to identity or understood as identity—fails to realize male homosexual desire in its unpredictable, unsystematic ensemble. It answers to only a single dimension of gay male subjectivity” (Halperin 2012: 69).

The core argument in this quote is that if a gay identity is shaped by singular norms of category, it fails to represent a whole range of identifications and to open ways for irregularities that will add or bring into new ways to how gay men could identify themselves or shape their own identities. Yet, when the homonormativity dominates the identity politics of male homosexuality, it will only cover “a single dimension of gay male subjectivity”, which will leave all the others unrepresented if not appreciated and accepted. I argue it is and should be a significant task for the Queer theory to acknowledge the various identifications of gayness since those non-homonormative gays also are marginalized due to the fact that they practice their sexualities in “non-desirable” ways.

So, how do we get to queer the homonormativity? The first and foremost answer would obviously be the recognition of acts of gayness that go unnoticed by homonormativity. For instance, Joseph Boone tries to do it in his article, where he discusses the (homo) eroticization of the Orient by the West. Recognizing both that the West puts stereotypes on Eastern ways of homosexuality and that East embraces them in some levels (Boone 2001, 44), he defines his work as an attempt to undermine Westernized categories of homosexuality in the field of gay & lesbian studies: “I hope to push by showing how contingent and Western its conception of ‘homosexuality’ – as an identity category, a sexual practice, and a site of theoretical speculation- often proves to be when brought into contact with the sexual epistemologies of non-Western cultures, particularly when encounters of ‘East’ and ‘West’ are crossed by issues of colonialism, race, nation, and class” (Boone 2001, 46). He basically compares and contrasts categories of same-sex practices in both the Occident and the Orient to show that the former has a singular way of categorizing. To prove that homosexuality as an identity goes beyond the assumptions he presents “a series of collisions between traditionally assumed Western sexual categories (the homosexual, the pederast), and equally stereotypical colonialist tropes (the beautiful brown boy, the hypervirile Arab, the wealthy Nazarane)- collisions that generate

ambiguity and contradiction rather than reassert an unproblematic intellectual domination over a mythic East as an object of desire” (Boone 2001, 46). Moreover, instead of merely comparing categories in the distinct approaches, he actually seeks the irregularities arising in the comparison, as “collusion” suggests. Thus, he does not only define categories, but he also queers them by pointing out those that do not fit in the categories that are stereotypically designed. Similar to Boone, Denis Altman attempts to add the other possibilities the ideal Western gay identity ignores or refuses to see: “Sexuality, like other areas of life, is constantly being remade by the collision of existing practices and mythologies with new technologies and ideologies” (Altman 2001, 35). This suggests that gay male homosexuality and its practice are processes that evolve progressively, or they are constructions that are affected by different circumstances, conditions, situations, etc. By illustrating this, Altman simply queers the homonormative and singular way of gay identification, as this inevitably means that changing conditions obviously produce different identity expressions. Altman also states more specifically that “Gay identities may emerge in different ways and without the overtly political rhetoric of the West” (Altman 2001, 34). Here, Altman shows the possibilities that may fall outside of the homonormative identification, which leads us to conclude that even if he does not give specific examples, he queers homonormativity by principally paving the way for gay male sexualities that do not specifically fit in the idealized norm.

The other way of queering homonormativity is to simply find “queer moments” as Sullivan calls or expressions that will challenge the norms. One of its examples is “the notion and practice of camp” (Sullivan 2004, 190). “While camp may have originated in and may be peculiar to drag-queen cultures, it also travels as a cultural style and allows for a gay counter-public site to influence and ironize the depiction of femininity in mainstream venues. [C]amp shows up in many sites that are not gay, as an aesthetic mode detached from one type of identity” (Sullivan 2004, 196). Accordingly, camp may be found almost everywhere, regardless of hetero or homosexuality of the space. While this is itself a queer expression, what is important here is the attention paid to the femininity. As mentioned above, femininity is disregarded by homonormativity. Thus, the act of camp itself is to queer this normativity because it unapologetically presents femininity in a male body in the faces of others. When it comes to the notion of it, to recognize and appreciate its visibility is also functions to queer homonormativity, as homonormativity attempts not to recognize it. Overall, the practice and recognition of femininity in a male

body would queer homonormativity by helping its existence as opposed to a force that overlooks it.

The final way of queering the homonormativity I am discussing here is to undermine the erotic meanings attached to the muscular, White, young male body. Eve Sedgwick states “One used, for instance, to hear a lot about a high developmental stage called “heterosexual genitality, as though cross-gender object choice automatically erased desires attaching to mouth, anus, breasts, feet, etc.” (Sedgwick 1990, 35). She clearly refers to the fact that sexual desires are aroused and satisfied by most of the times different parts of a body, which obviously changes from person to person. That bodily pleasures depend on different aspects of body simply suggest that different types of bodies might be attractive for different people, as well. In the discussions above, we observed the erotic connotations attained to the muscular, young, White gay bodies, which is, of course, a singular way of homoeroticism and desire. Sedgwick simply queers this type of desire by pointing out different ways of pleasures, which undermines the assumption that there could only be one single way of having pleasure on a male body. In other words, homonormative desire could be queered by acknowledging the possibility that each individual is unique, which applies for gays as well, and thus their ways of pleasure and desire accordingly differ from one another.

To conclude the chapter, I would like to demonstrate concern in the Queer theory in its relation to norms. Thanks to its defiance of norms that limit individuals’ ways of sexual utterances, it recognizes every kind of sexual practices marginalized when people do choose to express and openly live their sexualities. Acknowledging its embracement of the non-normative behaviors, I argue that the Queer poses some forces upon those who choose to be normative, instead. And I argue that this simply confronts the aims of the Queer as it means to illustrate the existence of every possible sexual practices and identities. For instance, Tuna Erdem defines the limits of the Queer so strictly in her work in which she discusses Queer in Turkey. She says that “homosexuality is undeniably part of the Queer so long as it is placed at the bottom of this hierarchy. But, when it is practiced in accordance with all the “norms”, it loses its queerness and could be accepted” (2012,

46).¹⁰ There, she defines such strict limits for homosexuality to be queer that it becomes harmful for the Queer's promise of acceptance the whole range of sexualities. Simply, what if a gay wants to be normative yet is supportive all possible of sexual orientation, categories practices? From this point of this, this person can never be categorized as queer since s/he does not conform to be non-normative. In another part, she again says that "...if two people of the same-sex, between whom there is a suitable age gap, lead a monogamous relationship, it is not queer" (2012: 47).¹¹ From this quote, one might rightfully ask what is the limits of the Queer? Who defines those limits? Such an approach would obviously indicate that instead of supporting individuals' freedom, the Queer attempts to classify them, intervene with the decisions on how to lead their lives. Thus, instead of acknowledging all types of sexual identities, behaviors, performances, etc, the Queer becomes such a limited area of expression that is not very much different heteronormativity or homonormativity which forces upon people certain types of acts. Consequently, while the Queer may help all marginalized, ignored or disapproved sexualities be recognized and accepted, it stands on such an unstable line to cross over to force upon people the norms of being non-normative.

In conclusion, there has been classification and regulation on the gender and sexuality practices of people since the 19th century, as Foucault argues. As a result of these actions, reproductive sexualities are legalized, non-productive ones are classified as deviant or marginal. Consequently, this resulted in heteronormativity. And similar to this, there emerged homonormativity within the gay male sexuality due to the performative nature of gender. Homonormativity has shaped the idealized gay image as muscular, White, young, sexually aggressive and wealth & powerful gay male, which makes up to the traditionally Western-style masculinity. Such a homonormative discourse created stereotypes that are very limited in terms of representing all spectrum of gay identities and it also caused disapproval of the feminine bodily expressions as part of gay identity. from a queer perspective, this is something that should be problematized because the Queer means to destroy all boundaries within which people are tried to be captivated. By bringing into the existence and visibility of all other gay forms of identity and practices

¹⁰ My translation: "Eşcinsellik, bu hiyerarşide atlarda konumlandığı oranda queer cinselliğin bir parçasıdır kuşkusuz. Ancak diğer tüm "normlara" uygun bir biçimde yaşandığında, queer'liğini yitirmekte ve kabul edilebilmektedir" (Erdem 46, 2012).

¹¹ My translation: "...aralarında makul bir yaş farkı bulunan iki hemcinsin, tekeşli bir ilişki yaşaması, 'queer' değildir" (Erdem 47, 2012).

that are underrepresented or overlooked – for instance by the appreciation of camp as feminine queen, irregularities that do not correspond to the idealized image, recognition of different types of bodily pleasures-, homonormativity could be queered. On the other hand, while the Queer functions to take people out of normative norms, it might end up forcing upon them the norm of being non-normative by deciding strictly what is queer or what is not queer or simply by intervening with the way they choose to lead their lives. Nonetheless, despite queer’s possibility of oppression over people, I consider it to be useful for analysis. Thus, in this thesis, I am embracing queer’s approach to the existence of non-normative sexual practices while criticizing the gay experiences. Having a queer lens, I will try to queer homonormativity by locating forms of gay experiences that do not fit in homonormativity. To locate the non-homonormative gay experiences, I will compare and contrast *Call Me by Your Name* by Andre Aciman and selected short stories by Yalçın Tosun. Having different settings – Aciman’s novel set in an upper class family in the 80s in Italy while Tosun sets his stories in Turkish context – these works present same-sex desire instances that do not fit in the homonormativity. For, through a queer approach, the two authors seem to portray characters that do express different types of desiring or identification as opposed to the homonormative gay male sexuality. All in all, this thesis aims to queer homonormativity through the works by Aciman and Tosun by demonstrating the alternative and/or “irregular” expressions of same-sex desire between men. And those alternatives might point out that the idealized homonormativity represents only a selected group of gay men and queer the homonormativity by adding it differently expressions or experiences.

3. REPRESENTATIONS OF GAY MALE DESIRE IN COMING-OF-AGE NARRATIVES

In this chapter, my main focus will be the representations of teenage gay male sexuality in literature. In order to look for those representations, when it comes to contemporary works fiction, I have limited my focus with coming-of-age stories or young adult fictions with LGBTQ characters or works that are predominantly aimed for young adults and teens yet still accepted by a wider audience. And as for the fictional works of earlier periods, I will be looking at representations of same-sex friendships or same-sex desire (love). When it comes to the similar themes in Turkish Literature, due to the lack of studies relating to young gay male sexuality in Turkish Literature, I will generally be examining LGBTI themes in Turkish Literature, coming up with examples of gay male sexuality. While I am referring to the Ottoman poetry and same-sex love between men, my main focus is the modern Turkish literature.

3.1. Earlier Representations of Same-Sex Desire in Coming-of-Age Narratives

To mention the texts from the earlier periods, from the 1700s onwards to early 1900s, they were simply produced in ways that are not identical to the 21st century. For, even the homosexual as a word was first used in 1869 to refer to the romantic and/or sexual attraction between two parties of the same sex. Robert Tobin explains this as “Because the vocabulary was different, the language of erotic love and desire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century centuries is not immediately legible to the twenty-first-century reader” (Tobin 2016, 254). As for the homosexual in particular, Tobin states that it was perceived as sodomy and therefore as an offence that was possible to be penalized

by death punishments in some places, while it was perceived as an offence that should be discouraged, instead of punishing severely (Tobin 2016, 256). And since those eras did not have the identity expressions for both gender and sexuality that are currently in use, the homosexual desire or identities between two males did not present itself in the literary texts as we would expect them today. Instead of explicit expressions, homosexuality between two males is observed in social relationships such as romantic friendships, homosocial bonds, homoemotional interactions or even father-son-like relationships in which a male party substitutes for the father figure until the other one becomes fully adult. Another way to observe the expression of homoeroticism between two males is the erotic triangles where the conflict between two men, supposedly competing for a singular female object of desire, becomes so much significant that the tension between these two parties is almost eroticized and the desire seems to be channeled one another by these males. Eve Sedgwick, who draws on Rene Girard to conceptualize the triangle, explains that: “in fact, Girard seems to see the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle as being even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved” (Sedgwick 1985, 21). She clearly underlines that the tension creates a homoerotic desire that they direct to one another. Thus, the erotic triangle drawn by Sedgwick is one of the ways to observe the homosexual desire between two men in literary texts before the 20th century. The other significant way to observe homosexual desire is the homosexual panic, as in Sedgwick’s term. Accordingly, homosexual panic is the emergence of desire without open and clear expressions. Simply, the character could not really express his homosexuality or desire, even if there are signs and indications within the text about it. Or he just reacts very aggressively – maybe as an act of denial or defense – when the desire actually emerges. Sedgwick states “so-called ‘homosexual panic’ is the most private, psychologized form in which many . . . western men experience their vulnerability to the social pressure of homophobic blackmail” (Sedgwick 1985, 89). Clearly, then, the possible emergence of homosexuality cannot be explicitly demonstrated by the character as it is dangerous, which means his homosexuality or homosexual desire poses a threat to the heterosexual surrounding around him. Consequently, it goes unspoken or hidden in the subtext or in the relations between characters. Sedgwick goes on explaining that “in the work of such writers as Du Maurier, Barrie, and James, among others, male homosexual panic was acted out as a sometimes agonized sexual anesthesia that was damaging to both its male subjects and its female non-objects (Sedgwick 1990, 188). Thus, despite the presence of a female,

homosexual panic is a sign that the desire is not directed to her and it cannot be articulated by the male subject or the aggressive take on, which Sedgwick calls “defense” (Sedgwick 1990, 20, 21). And either as a lack of articulation or defense, the homosexual panic is self-destructive.

When it comes to the presence of male homosexual desire in its relation to the coming-of-age and teenage period, the ways aforementioned seems to be much more significant. It is because “many classics of Anglo-American children’s literature are fundamentally homosocial, or concerned with same-sex friendships and family bonds” (Pugh 2014, 88). In light of this, this type of literature lends itself to possible queer readings or determining of possible same-sex romances due to inclusion of homosocial bonds, which are almost homoerotic. Furthermore, the texts, the center of which is the boys in the coming-of-age period, often include two boys. And in these stories, we come across young boys’ struggle with themselves, their surroundings and their masculinity. Typically, they develop into a more mature and masculine sense as the stories proceeds. And in these stories, we observe that one of the boys is somehow less masculine and grown-up if not effeminate, whereas the other one is much stronger – in the sense of both physical and emotional strength. And during this process of growth, the “stronger” boy functions as a mentor or guide in order for the other to complete his personal maturity and thus masculinity. Analyzing magazine fictions aimed for boys, Claudia Nelson observes this in school stories, which she describes as “a fertile area for inquiry because romance in this genre necessarily comes from the exaltation of the passionate friendship between boys.” (Nelson 2014, 15). Here, she does not classify these male-bond or romantic friendships as exactly as homosexuality but as homoemotionalism due to the lack of sexual encounter (Nelson 2014, 16). Thus, homosexual desire simply comes alive in these texts within the romantic nature of same-sex friendship. Nelson observes the emergence of homoemotionalism in three different patterns:

“One common story requires that an adolescent gradually win his father’s regard by gaining the respect and love of an intermediary male, or more generally, by proving himself within his peer group. In the second, the protagonist frees himself from the clutches of a predatory ‘false father’ (there is usually no biological tie) and turns to the healthier love of a boy his own age. And the third shows the boy transferring his loyalties from one adult male to another” (Nelson 2014, 17).

Although these stories do not necessarily include explicit sexual encounters between boys, the passionate undertone evokes that these are merely friendly or brotherly affections. Scheming these patterns, Nelson also suggests that within these relationships, “romance of sameness” becomes important. Furthermore, the less effeminate boy reaches a level where he can prove and assure his masculinity and value thanks to the guide of the other. And, the two parties make up a relationship consisting of “hypermasculine” and “hyperfeminine”, where they function as “protector” and “moral guide”, which is asexual still is “characterized by physical expressions of affection”, or the boy’s affection is turned from “ ‘bad’ homoeroticism to ‘good’ homoemotionalism” (Nelson 2014, 18, 21, 22). Accordingly, then, homosexual desire in coming-of-age phase, deprived of its physical encounters, is rooted in the romantic bonds of boys where they find shelter and guidance in one another up until to the point where they gain their own adult respected manhood in the texts pre-existing contemporary fictions of young adult literature. This is also acknowledged by Tribunella who says “homoerotic or homoaffectional friendships continued to be the main expression of the same-sex desire in children’s and young adult literature through the mid-twentieth century” (Tribunella 2016, 701).

About such narratives, it is also stated that “works about boys at school, usually boarding schools, often focus on the close friendships of the boys, their hijinks and adventures, and their experience of maturation” (Tribunella 2014, 121). And while the same-sex bonds or friendships are highly pivotal for those texts, they temporarily function for one of the boys to complete his maturation and then the friendship somehow dissolves. Referring to *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857) by Thomas Hughes and *Eric, or Little by Little* (1858) by Frederic Farrar, Eric L. Tribunella explains that “...through the experience of friendship and loss, the surviving boy or the reader is helped along in the process of maturation, and the outcome of the boys’ school story is usually the successful manhood of the protagonist, who leaves behind school and the friend he associates with childhood” (Tribunella 2014, 121). Therefore, the homosocial friendship, which might hide itself in homosexual romance without much of a physical attraction, presents itself as a temporary phase in the life of the protagonist, who is a young male, on his way up to maturity as a grown-up man. Another example brought up by Tribunella is *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles, which was published in 1959, yet still continued the similar pattern with the earlier texts (Tribunella 2014, 121). In his article, he discusses that despite the homoerotic and passionate nature of the friendship between Gene and Finny, the way Gene grows up

eliminates this queer potential (Tribunella 2014, 122, 123). About the maturation process Gene goes through over the course of narration, he says that “Gene’s maturation throughout the novel represents his movement away from an effete intellectualism and ‘adolescent’ homoerotic relationships. His ‘moral’ progression involves abandoning the queer possibility and accepting a hegemonic and necessarily heterosexual masculinity that adolescent readers ...are tacitly encouraged to emulate and valorize” (Tribunella 2014, 125). Hence, in *A Separate Peace*, the homoerotic friendship between two boys is presented as a phase where less mature boy is guided by the other boy to the adult manhood and then the friendship is eliminated, ending the homoeroticism between Gene and Finny, which is never explicitly expressed but exists only in the subtext of the romantic friendship.

3.2. The Bildungsroman and Homosexuality

In addition to these types of texts, the bildungsroman is also very significant genre to observe the emergence of homosexual desire in its relation to coming-of-age, as *bildung* basically means “coming-of-age”. *Bildung*, more or less, refers to the process of growing up. Having its origins from *Bildungstrieb*, which means “the developmental drive” (Tobin 2016, 259), it means the process of an individual’s gaining the characteristics that s/he is supposed. And it consists of two elements: biological and cultural.: The concept of *Bildung*, thus, has two strands: Blumenbach’s more biological notion of the development that is predestined by the innate characteristics of a species and Herder’s and Goethe’s more cultural and social concept of the development that takes place because of one’s education, cultivation, and environment” (Tobin 2016, 259). Tobin, then, clarifies that while an individual has inner characteristics that s/he eventually and inevitably complete, those are also shaped by the cultural environment in which s/he is cultivated, which creates open possibilities for individuals to develop different means of pleasure in terms of sexuality.

The bildungsroman, similarly, narrates stories where the protagonist goes through this process to develop into maturity. And because it tells stories of an individual and his/her relation to the environment, the bildungsroman bears stories where the coming of age

period of young boys as protagonist include developments of desire to fellow male figures over the course of narration.

“The bildungsroman is classically the story of the development or acculturation of (typically) a young man who discovers who he is and how he fits into society. Because the novel has traditionally focused on love and Eros, the bildungsroman made the connection between Bildung and sexuality explicit: the protagonist’s love life documented his identity and his relationship to society. Although the typical bildungsroman had a relatively heteronormative telos, the presuppositions of Bildung implied that every individual had a distinct destiny. Moreover, quite frequently the protagonist of the bildungsroman pass through deep emotional and even erotic relationship with other men” (Tobin 2016, 261).

It is clear that the bildungsroman does not necessarily narrate the story of homosexual boys, as it is typically structured within the heteronormative norms. However, the narration includes same-sex romance in different forms. Tobin goes on suggesting that classical ancient Greece had influenced authors from Age of Goethe as he calls in terms of same-sex romance and bildungsroman. Looking at *Agathon*, which “is often considered as the first bildungsroman”, by Christoph Martin Wieland, he states that it “documents explicit male-male sex, ranging from the morally objectionable (a priest’s efforts at abusing the young hero) to the comical (a sailor’s passion for a boy who is actually a girl in disguise) to the laudable (Socrates’s love of Alcibiades)” (Tobin 2016, 261). In this bildungsroman, we encounter several examples of same-sex romance in this process of development as a result of Greek influence. Furthermore, those bildungsroman novels from that era include homoeroticism emerging out of friendship and admiration, as well. One instance of this would be *Ardinghello and the Blessed Isles* by Wilhem Heinse, which brings together *Bildung* sexuality (Tobin 2016, 261). Accordingly, this relationship of friendship and admiration includes both romantic and physical attraction or appreciation in the novel. Tobin, who suggests that “...Heinse embraces this cult of friendship wholeheartedly” (Tobin 2016, 264) in the novel, describes the homoerotic friendship as:

“In the opening scene, handsome stranger rescues the narrator from the waters of Venice. His wet clothes revealingly cling to his tall, well-built, youthful body, his eyes sparkle with light and fire, and a lovely beard surrounds his spell-binding lips. The two embrace passionately, and the narrator’s bosom heaves as an ember catches the fire within...As David Grambling argues, ‘the erotic voltage of Benedikt and Arnold’s first meeting’ homoerotically structures the entire novel” (Tobin 2016, 264, 265).

In this novel, the protagonist seems to open up his journey, which will see him grow up into a better person or find his own place in the world, with a homoerotic encounter in the very beginning. Even though this incident does not necessarily recall a sexual encounter right away, the objectification of youth male body through the lens of another male and the tension manages to create an atmosphere for homosexual desire to exist in this bildungsroman. Thus, all in all, the earlier bildungsroman examples also provide us with the representations of male homosexual desire in regard to young men. For, “the ideology of *Bildung* – of the discovery of the embryonic self and the hopefully harmonious unfolding of that self in society – fits in well with modern notions of ‘coming out’”. (Tobin 2016, 268). This clearly indicates that those texts used to portray coming of age as a process of discovery and therefore while the protagonists discover and develop their personalities, they also discover their sexualities, which allowed those texts to include homosexual attractions.

3.3. Contemporary Literature with Gay Male Sexuality Representations

From the late 1940s to 60s, the American literature witnessed publications of significant novels that explore gay themes. Among those novels are *Other Voices, Other Rooms* by Truman Capote, *The City, and the Pillar* by Gore Vidal; both these novels were published in the 40s. In the 50s and the 60s, some important novels published were *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin, *City of Night* by John Rechy and *A Single Man* by Christopher Isherwood (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 3).

And in works like that of Baldwin and Vidal's novel, we got to observe exploration of gay male sexuality during the coming-of-age period. In the 50s, the pulp fiction was also significant in constructing gay male sexuality in literature as well. While depicting very masculine homosexual bodies (Bronski 2016, 679), the pulp novels included covers depicting unhappy young gay men and the plots typically were not happy ending for gays due to homophobia, although it was sympathetic for gay characters (Bronski 2016, 689). The issues of censorship were also significant in creating unhappy endings for characters having homosexual desires, as well (Bronski 2016, 686).

The contemporary young adult novels that represent homosexuality tend to include cliché or stereotypical representations of gay teens or teens in regard to homosexuality due to their nature as problem novels: “That homosexuality was viewed by many at that time as a social problem only exacerbated the tendency to regard literature with gay content as belonging in the ‘problem novel’ category, which robbed homosexuals of individuality and perpetuated stereotypes” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 18). Thus, the characters represented in the books tend to be following a similar pattern that almost applies all narrations including such topics, instead of original and singular experiences. Quoting Jan Goodman, Cart and Jenkins explain the stereotypical representations as it follows:

1. “It is still physically dangerous to be gay.
2. Your future is bleak if you are gay
3. Gay people lead lonely lives, even they’re happy with each other.
4. Gay adults should not be around children because they’ll influence them to be homosexual.
5. Something traumatic in a gay person’s past makes him/her homosexual
6. Gay men want to be women and lesbians want to be men.
7. SEX: Don’t worry. If you do “it” once, you may not be gay. It may only be a phase.
8. Gay relationships are mysterious.
9. All gays are middle/upper middle-class and white.
10. As far as young children know, there’s no such thing as a gay person” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 18).

According to Cart and Jenkins, these patterns start with the publication of *I’ll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*, as they state “*I’ll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* remains tremendously important three-and-a-half decades after its publication, not only because it was the first book for young readers to deal with homosexuality, but also because it established – for good or ill – a model for the treatment of the topic that would be replicated in many of the novels that followed in the 1970s” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 14). For, in the course of the narration we observe a boy with parental problems (an alcoholic mother, lack of father figure and his masculine presence) and the text shows “homosexuality both as a rite of passage experience with no long-term meaning or consequences (Davy’s father tells him “a lot of boys play around in a lot of ways when they’re growing up” [166].) and also a matter of conscious choice” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 18). On the other hand, we see in the novel that Davy’s dog dies after the characters Davy, the protagonist, and Altschuler, his romantic interest, make out. And the novel presents this incident as Davy feels guilty for his homosexual encounter as he sees his

beloved dog's death. And the boys have a fight, which results in Davy's being badly injured (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 11, 12). Thus, these patterns are predominantly observable in the following decades after this book. This novel sets the tone for the upcoming books that include young gay male characters. It is because after this book young adult literature with gay content "tended to focus on...understanding and naming romantic and sexual feelings, constructing an identity as LGBT, coming out, accepting gay family members, and dealing with homophobia" (Tribunella 2016, 704) their homosexuality is something to be regretted or as a guilt, which leads a catastrophic end somehow. Another example that bears these stereotypes is *The Man Without a Face* (1972) by Isabel Holland. In the novel, Chuck, who is again a teenage boy with paternal problems and lack of a father figure, develops romantic feelings to his tutor McLeod, the actual man without a face and a homosexual, and they have sex, which is narrated as "it" in a moment when Chuck desperately needs affection. Chuck does not talk about it afterwards while McLeod is trying to calm him down. After the incident, they are separated, and McLeod dies before they meet up and talk about what happened between them (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 19, 20, 21). While the novel tries to create a romantic story, what it actually does is the reinforcement of the stereotypes as Cart and Jenkins states that what we see in the book about homosexuality of McLeod is

1. Being hideously injured in a car wreck
2. Becoming an embittered, tormented recluse
3. Being rejected by a boy whom you have sought only to mentor, comfort, and reassure
4. Exiling oneself to a life among strangers
5. Dying prematurely of a heart attack no doubt brought by 1, 2, 3, 4." (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 21, 22).

Therefore, the novel clearly presents a homosexual identity isolated from his environment in a lonely and tormented state. And his homosexuality becomes scary for even the one who is actually attracted to him, Chuck in other words. And he dies in the end, which even reinforces the idea that "the only good homosexual is a dead homosexual" (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 21). Even though this seems related only to McLeod's situation, I argue that Chuck's experience in the novel is no better and does not set a good model, either. It is because that he does not want to talk about is a clear sign that he is not comfortable or even feel guilty or regret of having sex with him, despite his desire and admiration. And as the novel proceeds, he does not get another chance to see McLeod, which leaves their

relationship incomplete and Chuck's same-sex desire as a guilt or as something that just happens during passage to adulthood without a lasting impact, which is again a stereotype as homosexuality in the earlier novels of 70s is presented as "a rite of passage on the way to mature...adulthood" (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 26). The novel by M. E. Kerr, *I'll Love You When You're More Like Me*, seems to realize these norms and stereotypes and kind of challenge them and those about homonormativity, which this thesis aims to undermine. Charlie, a secondary character in the novel, is an openly gay who realizes the masculinity fetishism in the representation of gay males as opposed to "the stereotypes effeminates" since he is "supposed to live up to some kind of big butch standard", he "can Indian-wrestle anyone in the bar to the floor, or produce sons, or lift five-hundred pound weights over his head without" his "legs breaking" (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 26). Charlie's expression clearly touched upon both femininity that is associated with homosexuality as tough and masculine guys do have same-sex encounters only as passage during their young adulthood, and the stereotypical obsession with masculinity. Along with these, Charlie struggles with other stereotypes, too as his parents are not accepting him, he is suffering from "ostracism and disgrace", as well (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 26). However, he does not die in the end:

"...Charlie remains well-adjusted, cheerful, and self-deprecatingly humorous, and a lively three dimensional gay character at a time when young adult literature was portraying homosexual characters as guilt-ridden loners who are destroyed by self or society. The closet Charlie comes to death his (ironic?) decision to work in Wally's father's funeral home business" (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 27).

All in all, the way Charlie is presented in this novel seems to parody the clichés and stereotypes about homosexuality in young adult fiction or characters in those processes. He is aware of his situation and thus others. And through his self-awareness, we come to see that homosexuals were not really given happy endings as they die or are banished either because they are not accepted by others or they cannot accept themselves, which also creates the stereotypical expression that all gays are saint while all heterosexual people around them are sinner, which decreases the impact of the story (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 30, 31).

The final cliché I intend to touch upon about the fiction of the 70s with young gay content is the lack of a queer community. In David Rees's novel called *In the Tent* (1979), Tim is

a loner up until another gay boy, Roy, comes and shows him the existence of a gay and/or queer community and notes that they can't live like this. There must be other gay people in the world (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 31). Therefore, the point is that gays are portrayed as lonely people who try to survive in a world they do not actually belong to. Their only chance to belong to their community is to be in the closet, as *Trying Hard To Hear You* by Sandra Scoppettone (1974) shows us. In the novel, Phil and Jeff fall in love each other, which leads their isolation by their community and eventually leads to death of Phil (Cart and J Therefore, it could be concluded from the novel that “the closet is the price that the gay/lesbian character must pay in order to belong – and continue to belong – his/her community of friends and family of origin” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 32).

When we move from the 70s to 80s, the number of the novels including gay themes increase even if the quality of the texts in terms of representations do not really change:

“Unfortunately, of the forty GLBT titles published in this decade, only seven would offer notable contributions to the field in terms of thematic innovation or literary quality: *Annie on My Mind* by Nancy Garden; *Dance on My Grave* by Aidan Chambers; *Night Kites* by M.E. Kerr; *The Arizona Kid* by Ron Koertge; *Weetzie Bat* by Francesca Lia Block; *Jack* by A. M. Homes, and *In the Tent* by David Rees (its first U.S. edition appeared in 1985)” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 40).

Therefore, while the novels shown here bring into something new to the field of young adult literature with gay content, I argue that the remaining novels take over the traditional representations from the novels of the 70s. Also, these novels include gender segregation in terms of gays and lesbians as where gays characters live, we cannot come across a lesbian character while lesbians and gay people do make friends in reality (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 40). And in these novels, visibility becomes the key factor as it is stated that “...homosexual visibility (i.e., coming out and related issues) remained the single most important focus of GLBTQ literature in the 1980s” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 41). Meanwhile, it is also significant that the gay characters in the coming of age period are notably and usually the secondary characters, which means their stories are seen through a distant lens (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 51). As mentioned earlier, the explicit sexual encounters could not find themselves a place in the novels as sex is referred as “it”. The novels of the 80s continue this trend: “While this lack of sexual desire is evident throughout most YA

literature, fictional gays and lesbians seem to have *extremely* limited sex lives” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 52). Similarly, the perception of homosexuality as a passage exists in those novels (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 52). Along with these stereotypes, the novels become didactic in this era, as well.

When we look at Frank Mosca’s novel called *All-American Boys* (1983), we both see the homosexual visibility and didactic approach as well. Neil, 18th years old-protagonist of the novel who has known he is gay since he was 13, shows no sign of denial as he says he thought everyone was gay before he came to things telling he should be depressed, etc. and when he meets Paul, the plot proceeds into a coming-out narrative: “The agony of coming out becomes the theme of this book when Neil meets Paul, whose family has just moved to town (where would young adult literature be without the obligatory new kid in town?”, and the two fall in love?” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 57). We see Paul is attacked by gay-bashers and beaten. And surprisingly Neil has a black belt in kung-fu and he beats the bashers” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 57). I personally see this as a stereotypical representation of masculine gay, while it could also cherish self-defense. On the other hand, this still supports demonizing of heterosexual people. However, one thing the novel tell us about the era is Neil’s self-acceptance. Cart and Jenkins say that “...It is refreshing to see a protagonist who realizes his sexual identity at such an early age and accept it without guilt or self-hatred” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 57). This remark upon the novel actually tells us that many novels with young gay people do continue to picture people denying, struggling, or regretting homosexuality. Yet, Cart and Jenkins still realize the didactic tone of the novel (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 58). Furthermore, despite the increased sense of gay community in the works of this era, the gay characters were still portrayed in an isolated state and in search for a gay community (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 69,70).

When it comes to the works produced in the 90s, we observe a kind of a shift from the traditional portrayal of gay youth, the stereotypes predominantly exist, though. Noticing that gay characters were limited to stereotypes, Cart and Jenkins state that “whether such negative depictions are preferable to invisibility is subject to debate, but, happily, some books have included realistic GLBTQ characters who are integral to the plot and whose stories even provide the novel’s central narrative”

(Cart and Jenkins 2006, 84). Stating one of the key thematic issues of those works is “coming-out” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 90), they give two different examples from the era: One is *Face the Dragon* (1990) by Joyce Sweeney, where we see coming out of Paul to his best friend, only to get the response that it is not very safe to be open, which puts him as “the sad loner” in an isolated state. The other is *The Method* (1990) by Robert Walker. In this one, Albie comes out to Mitch in a gay restaurant full of queer people around them and Mitch accepts Albie for who he is (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 83). Thus, while the first one describes a gay boy’s life as lonely, the other shows a gay community and acceptance (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 84). While some books portray LGBTI youth in a varied way, the others portray them one dimensional that is “sad loner”: “While the loner is played by teens of all sexual orientations at various points in their teenage years, such a consistently one-note portrayal of gay male teens has become a cliché in YA fiction.” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 92). On the other hand, referring to the texts set in other Western societies, Cart and Jenkins show that coming out and self-acceptance are painful experiences commonly shared by gay youth in the Western world in the fiction of the 90s (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 92).

Coming to the novels featuring gay youth and/or for young adults with LGBTI and queer content, from the 90s to 2000s, the content of such texts gradually (but slowly) became more inclusive in terms of representations of gays in relation to issues like race, class, etc. The plots were previously dominated by the stories of white, suburb gay boy stories, though (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 114). It is noted that these texts started to include more complex plots, characters, issues, etc. than the traditional problem novels (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 130), still they were creating stereotypical portrayals despite more this more inclusive homosexual visibility in the plots. “Even though there is clearly more visible support for GLBTQ teens in the twenty-first century than previously, discovering one’s sexual identity, agonizing over whether or not to come out and suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous homophobia remain as central to current YA fiction as they have been from the earliest days of the genre” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 133, 134). Therefore, it was still common that gay boys or boys that have homosexual desire or attractions must go through a great deal of pain. In Catherine Atkins’ *Alt Ed* (2003) and James Howe’s *The Misfits* (2001), for instance, we observe the price that is paid by

characters for coming out. This also marks the fact that those texts were produced for didactic purposes such as educating the reader (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 144). Therefore, despite the increased visibility, the works of the 2000s still carried the traditions that were handed down by literary works of past decades in terms of struggles and pains that characters had to put up with: “Guilt, self-hatred, social opprobrium, and homophobia with their corollary threats of violence – either self-imposed or imposed by others – remained fixtures of many homosexual visibility novels throughout this period” (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 134).

Nevertheless, one innovation that this decade added to those types of fiction is the number of gay characters included in the texts. While they used to be either one or two characters, the 2000s saw works that include more characters and thus more different daily experiences (Cart and Jenkins 2006, 146). While this could be an outstanding feature, I argue that it still has its problems like reproducing stereotypes, as we see in *The Rainbow Boys* (2003) by Alex Sanchez. For, the novel creates gay characters within the traditional norms as the gay relationships consist of “ a ‘masculine’ and/or a ‘feminine’ counterpart” (Crisp 2014, 215). Moreover, the book, while attempting to be original, still creates stereotypical homonormative gay identities with its three protagonists who are Jason, Kyle and Nelson, all of whom somehow embody stereotypes of gayness such as “jock”, “easygoing and friendly” and “queer and proud” (Crist 2014, 215). And the book and its sequels constantly cherish masculinity as Nelson, as the queerest and most feminine one among the three, faces the issue of HIV, having a relationship with an HIV positive boy (Crisp 2014, 225). Also, in the book “ the ‘masculine’ is routinely privileged... ‘Tragic Closet Jock’ Jason gets both the first and last chapter of the book...allowing him more opportunity for his voice to be heard...” (Crisp 2014, 227). Therefore, the book and sequels create stereotypical and cliché representations of gay boys, which is also verified by Thomas Crisp: “...these novels rely upon previously established gay affirmative didacticism” (Crisp 2014, 229). And it still carries on the traditional representations of being gay as “the gay experience for adolescents is depicted as a struggle, usually reflecting reality for many young people but also reinforcing the notion of being gay as difficult and painful” (Tribunella 2016, 705). This, therefore, shows that although works of this era attempt to create diversity in gay characters and their experiences, they are still prone to normative expressions.

3.4. Representations of LGBTI Identities in Turkish Literature

When it comes to the representations of gay male sexuality and the coming of narratives as part of it, we see that it is an underdeveloped field. Sevcan Tiftik states that “Turkish ‘LGBTI literature’ is a very recent phenomenon and has not acquired a status as a formal period in Turkish literary history” (Tiftik 2017). Consequently, because it is an underdeveloped field in the literary history of Turkish literature, I plan to track gay themes in Turkish literature within the broader context of LGBTI themes in Turkish literature. In her article called “Beyond Borders: Murathan Mungan’s Texts” by Sevcan Tiftik gives an idea about LGBTI themes and representations in modern Turkish literature. In the article, she states “LGBTI... identities have been manifested in Turkish literature since the 1960s.

In the era, pre-existing the 1900s, we encounter male homosexual desire mostly in poetry. Noting that love is a very much popular topic in early modern Ottoman poetry, Abdulhamit Arvas demonstrates that “same-sex male erotic desire from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century is central to various genres from *gazel* (lyric poetry) to *mesnevi* (narrative poem) and shadow theatre from *şehrengiz* (catalogue of beautiful men) to *tezkire* (biography) and *bahname* (medico-erotic treatise)” (Arvas 2016, 145). Clearly, then, male homosexual desire (though it would be highly different from the 21st century) presents itself in many different forms, which means it is actually a convention for early modern Ottoman poetry. Arvas especially notes male homoeroticism in the *gazel* as he states “the *gazel* (lyric poetry) is the prevailing genre of poetry, and the trope of *love for a young boy* features as the hallmark of this poetry” (Arvas 2014, 149). Thus, we can conclude young homosexuality is presented as the desired, not an entirely active participant, while the poet is in competition with other poets for the love of this young beautiful boy Arvas goes on explaining the symbolic meaning of the poem itself. As the poet describes the body of the beloved youth, the poem actually becomes the body of this boy (Arvas 2014, 149). From this era, the Divan poet Enderûnlu Fazıl is a significant figure in terms of homosexual desire. Remzi Altunpolat in his article declares his *Hûbân-nâme* (The book of beautiful boys) as one of the masterpieces of homosexual literature, where the poet describes the beauty of boys from different nations and is not shy about expressing his erotic desires (Altunpolat 2013). While there were such expressions of homosexual desire in the Ottoman poetry, the Westernization had its impact on these

topics according to Arvas, who says that heteronormativity changed “beloved into the perverts” (Arvas 2014, 145).

When we come to the 1900s, the constitutional period does as an era before the 60s stand out. It is because this era witnesses expressions of homosexual desire in modern Turkish literature, such as those in *Bir Zambak Hikayesi* (although it is a lesbian narrative) by Mehmet Rauf, two short stories by Baha Tevfik, which are “Aşk, Hodbini” and “Ah Bu Sevda” (Oksaçan 2016). However, the connotational period is preceded by a much stricter era, which disallowed authors to explore those themes. Still, while mainstream topics were religion, patriarchy, etc., among rare writers including homosexuality with ambiguous references were Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar, Nahid Sırrı Örik, Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar (Oksaçan 2016).

Starting with Sait Faik Abasıyanık, Bilge Karasu, Leyla Erbil, and Tezer Özlü, homosexuality and homoerotic moments begin to be depicted openly in novels and short stories rather than with an ambiguous and closed expression”. from the 60s onwards (Tiftik 2017). This indicates that homosexual desires had been existing before this period. However, they had been portrayed in either implicitly or in different ways up until those aforementioned authors, who created rather more clear depictions of homosexuality. For instance, Bilge Karasu deals with homosexual desire and romance in detail in *Troya’da Ölüm Vardı* in 1963, and Reşad Ekrem Koç narrated Ottoman-style entertainment and daily life in his historical novels and while doing so he also mentioned homosexuality and pederasty, as well (Oksaçan 2016). Kemal Tahir, on other hand, demonized homosexuality. In his *Devlet Ana*, published in 1967, he refers to homosexuality as something that does not exist in Turkish culture (Oksaçan 2016). As homosexuality is associated with “animalism, physical aggression, immorality and evil” and therefore it does not belong to the Turkish culture (Altunpolat 2013). From the 70s, Atilla İlhan could be an example. In his *Hangi Seks* (1976), he talks about gay male sexuality, along with lesbianism and transvestitism and suggests that they are subjects of marginalized individuals and closed and degenerated groups (Oksaçan 2016).

When we come to the 80s, this decade was highly affected by the 1980 coup d’état. Oksaçan explains that nationalism was highly promoted and influenced every aspect of life. Thus, every differences and irregularities that did not fit in this ideology were

oppressed. Inevitably, homosexuality was perceived as a disease that threatens Turkish traditions and customs and the national identity and homosexuals were perceived as those needing discipline (Oksaan 2016). During this era, Atilla Ilhan was also among the authors that dealt with homosexuality in his works, such as *Fena Halde Leman* (1980) and *Haco Hanım Vay* (1984). Again, the homosexuals in his novels were portrayed as marginal identities (Oksaan 2016). Necmi Onur was also among the authors that portrayed homosexuality negatively and stereotypically in his novel called *Kör Sait'in Ođlu* in 1981 (Altunpolat 2013).

Meanwhile, there are some rare authors whose books did not portray homosexuality with the negative and disregarding language and perspective developed in the 80s onwards. Some of them were Selim Ileri who wrote *Her Gece Bodrum* in 1977, *Ölüm İlişkileri* in 1979, *Cehennem Kraliçesi* in 1980 and *Cemil Şevket Bey, Aynalı Dolaba İki El Revolver* in 1997, Bilge Karasu, producing works like *Kılavuz* and *Narla İncire Gazel* in 1990 and 1993 respectively, and Murathan Mungan - who is to be discussed later on – with his works called *Son İstanbul* (1985) and *Üç Aynalı Kırk Oda* (1999) (Oksaan 2016). For these authors, it is stated that they managed to depict the fluidity of sexual identities and labels in their works (Oksaan 2016).

Remzi Altunpolat in his article states that during the 2000s, the numbers of the novels that either center on LGBTI identities or with LGBTI themes increased. Among these novels, *Parampara* by Duygu Asena is an example (Altunpolat 2013). In her novel, Asena simply reflects the spirit of the time. For, since the late 90s onwards, the use of the internet had increased and thus people started people through online ways. And, the novel tells a love of the story of two men that meet under such circumstances (Oksaan 2016).

According to Tiftik, many forms of representations are stereotypically marginalized as “they are presented as corrupt, immoral and with a sense of otherness” (Tiftik 2017). Among the texts that portray LGBTI people in that way are “Atilla Ilhan’s *Fena Halde Leman* (1980), *Haco Hanım Vay* (1984), and *Yanlış Kadınlar Yanlış Erkekler* [Wrong Women, False Men] (1985)” (Tiftik 2017). This kind of stereotypical portrayal of homosexuality in Turkish literature is also acknowledged by Özkan Ali Özdemir. Özdemir claims about Turkish literature that happy stories mostly do not exist in the works narrating homosexuality. It is a result of social pressures, imposing understanding

and a system that tries to impose its singular hegemony (Özdemir 2016). Yet, among those authors and works, those by Murathan Mungan stands out. It is because Murathan Mungan does offer a different type of representations of LGBTI characters in his works. For, his stories on LGBTI people do not necessarily portray them in heteronormative and conformist ways open different possibilities apart from the stereotypical images, which in the end queers his narrations. Tiftik gives the example of baths as the queerness in the narration where men have a chance homoerotic way of socializing. She also acknowledges one of his short story collection book, which is called *Son İstanbul*. In “ÇÇ”, one of the stories in the book, Mungan narrates the lives of gay and bisexual men. Furthermore, the story includes lots of elements borrowed from the jargon used by LGBTI community in Turkey, which is called Lubunca (Sevcan 2017).

In *From l'Écriture Féminine to Queer Subjectivities*, however, Hülya Adak presents another alternative that corresponds to the stereotypical representation of gay males in Turkish Literature, which is *Ali and Ramazan* by Perihan Mağden. The novel could be identified as a coming-of-age narrative due to the fact that both Ali and Ramazan are two young men. While acknowledging the possibilities of queerness in the text due to its intersectionality related to class and gender, Adak also problematizes the novel. In the novel, with its emphasis on the ‘innocence of the love’ between Ali and Ramazan or of “gay love ” versus the corruption of the outside world, the malice of the metropolis of Istanbul is depicted perhaps in extremes” (Adak 2016, 110). She clearly suggests it is problematic to portray dichotomies in the novel in such clear-cut ways. It is because while the novel might intend to narrate problems of LGBTI people as queer subjectivities, it also creates a world in which there is no way out of this ongoing pain and struggle. While this type of portrayal of queer life is itself a stereotyping, the ending of the novel is no different. Similar to traditional novels, both Ali and Ramazan die in the end, which is again problematized by Adak as she states “I would like to point out that a more progressive and radical, sex-positive ending might have depicted Ali and Ramazan’s survival despite all odds” (Adak 2016, 110). Adak’s comment on the ending clearly indicates that the novel ends by suggesting that Ali and Ramazan as queer subjectivities are default disadvantaged and since they are the others, their life, which is full of misery, will eventually end as a catastrophe despite their “pure love” for one another in the case of Ali and Ramazan.

Another author that could be placed in this category is Ayşe Kulin. Kulin, who once stated that “There is a very firm perspective on homosexuals. I wrote” order to ‘normalize’ the ‘normal’ love happening between two homosexual people (Tiftik 2017, 43) is the author of four books that are thematically gay. They are *Gizli Anların Yolcusu*, *Bora'nın Kitabı*, *Dönüş*, and *Handan*. While these books attempt to normalize homosexuality, they still portray male homosexuality in stereotypical ways, as well. For, first of all “a gay man is creative, talented, artistic, having a good taste, stylish...” (Tiftik 2017, 38), which are definitely characteristics of gay male expression in Turkey. Furthermore, even the characters seem to regret their homosexuality as their own words about it in the books are “being odd, a flaw” (Tiftik 2017, 38). Also, the relationship between İlhami and Bora is similar to father & son relationship, which means the novels reproduce a stereotypical homosexual desire where the mature one and the young one are attracted to one another (Tiftik 2017, 40). On the other hand, the novel portrays homosexuality in the ways reproducing heteronormativity and homophobia as whenever the subject is brought on in the novel, it is called as names like “sin, shame, hate, scandal” and when İlhami’s wife finds he cheated on her, she reacts to being cheated with a man, instead of disloyalty, itself (Tiftik 2017, 37). Due to the fact that Bora, as a boy coming from the rural area, has no anxieties about his sexuality but İlhami does, the novel’s portrayals of homosexuality represent only the upper-middle class (Tiftik 2017, 44). The criticism by Küçük Iskender about the novel and the portrayal of Bora, in particular, gives us an idea about how the novel portrays male homosexuality in its stereotypical corrupted ways. And I argue that since Bora is a young man and thus he is in the process of coming-of-age as Iskender defines him as “someone who has ambitions for the social climb” (Iskender 2012). Consequently, this novel presents young male homosexuality, similar to negative representations of homosexuality as well. It is because apart from what is mentioned above, Iskender says Kulin creates this character as “money-grubber, ambitious for fame, caring for brands, a victim for his sexual desires to have sex with others despite his love” (Iskender 2012). He also underlines that his first encounter with homosexuality is he was raped as a child and his salvation is suicide (Iskender 2012), which obviously does only contribute to the negative representations and perspectives on male homosexuality. Iskender also realizes this as he points out Kulin practically adds no innovation to literature with gay themes (Iskender 2012).

On top of that, Bora dies at the end (Tiftik 2017, 44), which again reproduces the clichés that gay men's lives are catastrophic, and all gays must die.

Having analyzed all the representations related to young gay male characters in their coming-of-age periods, gay male sexuality in general, the literary representations seem to consist of clichés and stereotypical portrayals generally. The narrative clichés that portray gay identities or sexualities as deviant, marginalized and doomed to die form a type normativity within themselves, as well, which is that gay can almost never be a part of the larger community, they always have to be suffering marginalized individuals. Apart from that, the stereotypical constructions of gay identities such as Bora, who is a sexually active young man, or stereotypes of joke and queen that we see in *Rainbow Boys* do also contribute to the homonormativity, with a strong presence of masculinity and its appreciation. And this is the reason why the works by Aciman and Tosun are worthy of criticism. It is because they never portray gay male sexuality in the normative ways of such fictions. Even though the characters have problems – whether it is about their sexuality or not – they are not necessarily portrayed as victims or those sexual boys, whose sexual energy will lead to their end. Instead, we see their sexualities as a simple part of their daily lives as much as anything else. And these characters simply experience and experiment with their sexualities in their lives. Thus, their portrayals do also challenge the norms of homonormativity related to the construction of gay identity and expression. The next and final chapter will be analyzing how the characters of Aciman and Tosun experience their sexualities in relation to other issues of their lives by making their comparisons in order to show how they challenge homonormativity.

4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GAY EXPERIENCE DURING COMING OF AGE IN ACIMAN AND TOSUN

In this final chapter, the gay experience in both the novel by Aciman and selected short stories by Tosun will be close read through a queer lens. Having a comparative approach, the chapter aims how different experiences presented by both authors function to undermine homonormativity by bringing upon its alternative expressions to create a gay identity or gay experience consisting of many different layers. The thematic division of comparison is divided into solidarity, gender-bending desire, emergence, reaction and practice of desire.

While the thesis examines Aciman's work through a queer lens, the novel includes portrayals that could lend the novel readings of a total opposite perspective. The portrayal of Elio's family as socially upward middle-upper class family – while both his mother and father are well-educated and seem to be coming from upper class families – fits in the traditional codes of family, considering the status of his mother and father in the family environment where the father seems to have the leading role. Thus the summer romance between Elio and Oliver that does not last long might well fit in the homonormative gay male sexuality as Elio's experience of his sexuality with Oliver does not really challenge any patriarchal aspects of masculinity or any type of stereotyped sexualities. Yet, although Aciman portrays a homoerotic romance between two Jewish men, both of whom have socially upward and mobile backgrounds, and thus creates a very homonormative type of sexual encounter for Elio, I argue he is still very much aware of the queer potential that the act of desire bears. He delivers his awareness through the voice of the poet as he is narrating his experience with a gender-fluid individual in Thailand in a meeting both Elio and Olive are attending. While this individual was flirting with him he is taken by surprise: he thought this person was a man but "he was a woman" (Aciman 2017, 195).

The poet was thinking that it was a homoerotic flirting till he saw this person was a woman but he was misguided again when he asked why she was telling she was a man as “but I am a man, she said” (Aciman 2017, 195). And upon learning again he is a man, the poet shows no sign of surprise: “ ‘You’re a man? I asked, no less disappointed than when I discovered she was a woman”. Upon this realization of the poet, it becomes a homoerotic flirting again. And poet’s reaction here reflects he acknowledges possibility of fluidity between genders and sexualities and he even shows a queer potential when the individual asks which one he prefers: “...I want you as both, or as in between” (Aciman 2017, 196). When the person acts as a man, the flirting is heterosexual, when the gender role is subverted, the flirting becomes homoerotic and as “both” and “in between” indicate the poet is open to all possibilities of flirting or emerging sexual tension between him and the individual. Thus, Aciman presents gender and sexuality in a fluid and thus such a queer way. For, the individual the poet is flirting with very comfortably alternates between gender identities and takes on different sexualities in accordance with the shift between genders, which means this individual does not embrace any stable identification and challenge or resist to the norms of such identities. Accordingly, even though the poet’s experience in Thailand is not really related to the summer romance between Elio and Oliver, this incident provides enough evidence to acknowledge Aciman’s queer potential in the novel as he seems to include a deliberate expression of non-normative sexuality. Therefore, taking this account, Elio’s experience of gay desire – although it might not be a deliberate attempt by Aciman to present an active affirmative of non-normative gay experience or masculinity – could be read as non-normative aspects of gay identity due to Aciman’s active affirmative of queerness despite the very traditionally coded family environment he lives in. When it comes the gay experience presented by Tosun in his short stories, I argue that the queerness that his characters bear is much more observable. It is because while exploring their sexualities, the characters are well aware of the threat or challenge they pose to the norms of dominant culture. This could be observed in how they try to manage their sexualities as well as how to hide them in occasions possibly dangerous to be out, which will be discussed later. Therefore, unlike Elio, those characters do not experience their sexualities in a privileged environment ideal for the homonormative gay identity and expression. However, thanks to both Aciman’s awareness of queer potentials of gender and sexuality and Elio’s own “irregular” non-homonormative experiences in his relationship with Oliver, Elio’s experience bears non-homonormative aspects. The comparison between two authors thus result in similarities

as well as differences, which might be functional to challenge homonormativity as the singular expression of gay experience or as the dominant white queer or gay identity.

In *Call me by Your Name*, the plot is narrated by 17 year-old Elio, who is the protagonist of the novel. The novel narrates the story of his summer romance with Oliver, who comes to their home for summer in Italy to work for his father while revising his manuscript for publication. In “Yaralı Bir Kaplan”, the narration is about Sissy¹² Ömer’s finding out that his best friend Atif is albino. And in their works, both Aciman and Tosun make sure that bodily pleasures make up a huge part for their characters while experiencing their sexualities.

For, Elio says “ I was going for the devious smile that would suddenly light up his face each time he’d read my mind, when I really wanted was skin, just skin. (Aciman 2017, 8)”. The word “skin”, with an emphasis of repetition, suggests that Elio’s predominant desire for Oliver includes a physical – or sexual in other words – encounter as the desire for skin could reflect his desire for Oliver’s body and this desire of body might connote the sexual desire. Accordingly, then I argue that his search for pleasures in Oliver’s body could relate to his desire to have sex with him. When it comes to Sissy Ömer, he says of the boy named Sarı¹³ Yusuf: “Atif does not know I am into Sarı Yusuf...It makes my blood boil that he asked my Atif such a thing. He never turned his head and looked at me, not even once. But I placed him in many pictures, under the quilts of sin” (Tosun 2018, 13)¹⁴. In that part, Sissy Ömer learns that his beloved Sarı Yusuf has asked Atif whether his penis is also white, as he is albino and this is how he feels inside. “Blood boil” here suggests an extreme feeling. While it could be interpreted as anger, I tend to interpret as a sign of strong passion. “Not even once” contributes to this idea as it demonstrates his desperate need to catch Yusuf’s attention, which demonstrates his desire and passion for him. “Many pictures”, on the other hand, evokes that it is both a romantic and a sexual desire and the number of the pictures, which is many, indicates that Ömer has a very high sexual desire for Atif. The sexual and bodily aspect of his desire becomes more apparent as Ömer says “under the quilts of sin”. I argue that “sin” creates connotation of having

¹² Translated: Kız, kız gibi.

¹³ Translated: Blonde

¹⁴ My translation: “Sarı Yusuf’a kesikliğimden Atif’in haberi yok...Onun bizim Atif’a gidip böyle bir şey sorması kanıma dokunuyor. Bana bir kez bile kafasını çevirip bakmamıştı oysa. Bense onu ne çok resmin içine yerleştirmiştim, günaha duran yorganların altında” (Tosun 2018, 13).

sex. What is more, it is not sin itself. It is because “quilt” also has the sexual meanings. Therefore, I claim that “quilts of sins” suggests that he has been imagining of having sex with Sarı Yusuf and masturbating while imagining, which makes his sexual and bodily desire for Yusuf more than apparent. In other words, Sissy Ömer would love to have sex with this Sarı Yusuf. However, what is significant for those experiences, of Elio and different characters of Tosun, is that they provide different parts of this experience of sexuality. In other words, sex – or the desire for the body – does not become the sole reason for them find eroticism in their objects of desires. Instead, we could observe different elements that either create or contribute desire or eroticism in similar and different ways, which is the reason why they become instrumental to undermine homonormativity as their desire focuses on more than having sex or their physical attractions towards a masculine male body.

One of the ways the gay experience present itself is the attraction developed as a result of solidarity. This could be observed the solidarity Elio and Sissy Ömer of “Yaralı Bir Kaplan” develop in the narrations. Elio belongs to an upper-class family in Italy, whereas Sissy Ömer and Atif are students who are not even in high school in Turkey (the author does not give information about their social status and as for their grade, Ömer narrates that they do not go to high school just yet [Tosun 2018, 13]). Consequently, their daily lives and surroundings lead them to develop different solidarities with people around them. Yet, although the solidarity of Elio differs from those of Tosun’s characters, they still have functions for homosexual or erotic desire to emerge. When it comes to Elio, his desire for Oliver, his love interest in the narration, is triggered by the ethnicity issue, that both are Jews:

“I saw his star almost immediately during his first day with us. And from that moment on I knew that what mystified me and made me want to seek out his friendship...was larger than anything either of us could ever want from the other, larger and therefore better than his soul, my body, or earth itself. Staring at his neck with its star and telltale amulet was like staring at something timeless, ancestral, immortal in me, in him, in both of us...With the exception of my family, he was probably the only other Jew who had ever set foot in B. (Aciman 2017, 19)”.

“Mystified” and “want” clearly indicate that Oliver’s being Jews is one of the key reasons why Elio’s attraction. “His star”, symbolizing Oliver’s Jewish identity, makes him

“mystified” for Elio. “mystified” illustrates that Oliver becomes attractive sexually and romantically for Elio. This attraction is suggested by “friendship” as it could be interpreted as a bond between two parties that bear romantic attraction and desire. And it is triggered by the Jewish identity they mutually share, if not it is the very first reason altogether. It is because I argue that Elio puts this identity a supreme and holy meaning. As he describes it as something “larger” and “better” than either of them, this shows how powerful Oliver’s identity for Elio to position him in his mind, therefore for him to develop his feelings. Moreover, we observe the romantic desire in this solidarity. Despite calling it “friendship”, Elio uses “timeless,” “ancient,” and “immortal” to describe the bond he feels. Because these words evoke something very much powerful and permanent as if almost eternal, I argue what Elio searches for in Oliver is more than a mere friendship. It is a friendship that has such strong bonds that it brings them together in a romantic way as Elio underlines by saying “in me, in him, in both of us”. Considering the strength of this bond between them for Elio, then it becomes more than friendship as thanks to the words like “body” and “soul”. These words, accompanying the immortal bond between them, portrays the idea of romanticism and eroticism evoked in Elio. “The only other Jew” is another phrase that draws attention in here for two reasons. One is that realizing they are only Jews contributes to the feeling of the sameness. It practically makes sure that he shares this Jews identity with Oliver, which strengths the bond he feels they have. The other is about how insignificant could Oliver’s gender be for Elio to develop feelings for him. In other words, the Jews identity could even be argued to be more significant than any other things, so much so that I would even argue if Oliver were a female, Elio might still develop the similar feelings. All in all, the solidarity of belonging to the same ethnic identity contributes to the emergence and development of same-sex love between them. Sharing the holy identity of being Jews creates the feeling of sameness and being a part of something bigger than both of them turns out to be romantic and erotic involvement for Elio. The solidarity Sissy Ömer feels, meanwhile, is caused by peer pressure. The peer pressure is clarified when Ömer says “in fact, boys in their classes do not leave either of us alone. His...being ‘albino’ and my being ‘sissy’ are in rivalry to catch attention after all” (Tosun 2018, 13)¹⁵. Since boys don’t “leave them alone”, it suggests both Ömer and Atif are harassed by boys, which is also suggested by “attention”. Combined together, these indicate both of them are bullied by their

¹⁵ My translation: “Aslında ikimizi de sınıflarımızdaki oğlanlar rahat bırakmıyordu...Onun...’albinol’luğu, benim ‘Kız Ömer’liğimle yarıştıyordu dikkat çekmede ne de olsa” (Tosun 2018, 13).

classmates. Inevitably because both Ömer and his best friend Atif suffer from it, they are one another's best friends (Tosun 2018,12), which causes the solidarity between them. For, different kind of peer pressures bring them together and develop a friendship. Although this does not create a romantic/sexual tension at first, their solidarity is intensified by Sarı Yusuf who wants to see Atif's penis since he is an albino to learn whether his genital is also white. I argue this changes Ömer's perspective of Atif since he says of Atif "I suddenly realized how beautiful he was while he was smiling" after learning of the incident (Tosun 2018, 14)¹⁶, while they are talking about the incident afterwards. Especially, "beautiful" indicates that Atif is gaining a new status for Ömer. Something more than friendship occurs. And it happens only after Ömer, hinted to be gay in subtext, finds a glimpse of homoeroticism in Atif. For, when his object of desire, Sarı Yusuf is curious of Atif's genital, Atif now enters into the homosexual spectrum for Ömer, which is also suggested by Ömer's realization of Atif's beauty. As this changes the gaze of Ömer of Atif. And he is no longer only "a best friend" for him. I claim that from now on Atif bears romantic attachments in the eyes of Ömer. The romanticism is suggested by the placement of "smile" and "beautiful". First of all, "realized" clarifies that this happens like an awakening for Ömer, as realized also suggests he has not seen Atif's beauty before. And putting "beautiful" and "smile" in the very same sentence gives romantic attachments to this realization, which suggests the development of romantic attractions. Thus, I argue apart from being bullied by others, Ömer now sees another thing in common with him, which intensifies solidarity already existing and evokes a romantic desire in Ömer for Atif. And towards the end of the narration, Atif seems to requite this desire, as well. It could be observed in the scene where Ömer wants to see his genital: "He did not move for a while as if he couldn't make anything of what I said, and then he threw a glance at me that I had never seen before until that moment" (Tosun 2018, 15)¹⁷. The description of Atif's reaction here draws attention. Especially "glance he threw" indicates something unexpected is about to happen. At first, it could be interpreted as if Atif were offended as "threw" might connote something negative occurs unexpectedly. However, as the narration proceeds, Ömer says "Again, he looked me right in the eye, but the meaning of his look now changed. He looked like a wounded tiger... then he woke up suddenly, he winked his wet eyes, no more being able to hold them...and he took off

¹⁶ My translation. "Gülerken ne kadar güzel göründüğünü fark ettim birden" (Tosun 2018, 14).

¹⁷ My translation: "Söylediğime bir anlam verememiş gibi bir süre hiç kııldaman durdu, sonra bana o zamana kadar hiç görmediğim bir bakışla baktı" (Tosun 2018, 15).

v his trousers with a sudden move, standing right in front of me” (Tosun 2018, 15).¹⁸ While again “wet eyes” might recall sadness and offence, as if he feels his best friend now is bullying him, we see a “change” in the gaze. And since he shows his genital in the end, I argue his being “a wounded tiger” could also mean he had actually been waiting for this moment to come for a quite a while. It is because while “wounded” could evoke the feeling of sadness, it apparently does not function to describe Atıf’s disappointment because of his best friend’s behavior. It might well function to describe his await for this moment, and consequently, he shows his genital to Ömer and the story ends there. As mentioned before, while “wounded” might recall a feeling of sadness and offence, why does Atıf show his genital if it breaks his heart? What does “the change” indicate? I claim that the answer is his behaviors in this scene is a reflection of his desire for Ömer. And then the homosexual desire emerging in solidarity becomes mutual for them, as now they are not only the best friends of one another but also the object of desire.

A similar pattern could also be observed in another short story by Tosun, which is “Muzaffer ve Muz”. Again, this story is narrated by the protagonist and the plot is about the protagonist and his best friend Ali visiting a zoo to see the chimpanzee called Muzaffer. The protagonist describes him and Ali as it follows: “Both of us were actually quite fat, but Ali’s body was much more promising than mine. He was 10 cm. taller than I was and his shoulders were quite wide (Not to mention his beard was growing)...When we go on the bus, those inside gazed us with the face they wear, full of disgust, maybe only for fat teenagers” (Tosun 2018, 11)¹⁹. This portrayal bears two important signs about their relationship. First is that the protagonist underlines “the face full of disgust” and “only for fat teenagers”. These imply that both he and Ali probably are suffering from bullying because of their body shapes. It implies that they struggle with peer pressure and body shaming in their daily and personal lives. It becomes more visible when the protagonist says “Muzaffer had died and these two teenagers frequently pray that the same thing happens to them” (Tosun 2018, 15)²⁰. And this is probably the reason why they are

¹⁸ My translation: “Yine gözlerimin tam içine baktı, ama anlamı değişmişti bakışının. Yaralı bir kaplan gibi bakıyordu şimdi...Sonra hızla ayağa kalktı, artık dayanamayarak nemli gözlerini kırptı ve tam önümde durarak ani bir hareketle pantolonunun fermuarını indirdi” (Tosun 2018, 15).

¹⁹ My translation: “İkimiz de oldukça şişmandık aslında ama Ali’nin vücudu bana göre daha fazla umut vaat ediyordu. Boyu benden on santim kadar uzundu ve oldukça geniş omuzları vardı. (Sakallarının çıkmaya başlamış olmasından bile)... Otobüse bindiğimiz anda içerdekiler, belki sadece şişman ergenlere karşı kullandıkları o iğrenme dolu yüz ifadelerini takınarak bizi baştan aşağı süzmüşlerdi” (Tosun 2018, 11).

²⁰ My translation: “Muzaffer ölmüştü ve bu iki ergen başına aynı şeyin gelmesi için sık sık dua ediyordu” (Tosun 2018, 15).

best friends as the protagonist says of Ali that “the only friend I have” (Tosun 2018, 12)²¹. The protagonist juxtaposes death of Muzaffer and their death wish, which illustrates how desperately they feel most probably due to the peer pressure and feel of loneliness. The second hint the quote bears is instrumental at this point. Obviously, their friendship is based on the solidarity emerging out of loneliness. But it also seems that their friendship is affectionate or homoemotional as we see earlier novels in previous eras. It is because the protagonist places Ali in a better position than him, he almost admires his bodily features as he acknowledges his eight, shoulders, and beard. And on top of that these lonely boys find company and shelter in one another and become their best friends. The nature of their relationship as it is portrayed here recalls the romantic friendship, which means that they become friends due to their loneliness but the solidarity between them gives way to romantic emotions. The possibility of such a relationship becomes stronger in the scene the protagonist practically forces himself to attract to the young girl in the bus: “Ali didn’t even care. The girl was not very beautiful anyway. My action was just one of those actions that are obligatory because of being a teenager, if I had not done it, I would feel something incomplete” (Tosun 2018, 12)²². While this scene might depict a hint about their heterosexuality, I would argue this scene suggests – at least – the protagonist might have non-heteronormative sexuality. “Obligatory” catches attention here. It is because he does not behave like this as a result of his attraction to the girl. On the contrary, he behaves so because he feels he has to do so. In other words, he shows a sign of “attraction” to this girl only to fill his duty as a teenage boy. “Incomplete” clearly illustrates the feel of a must. He only acts in the way a teenage boy (who is also presumed to be heterosexual de facto) is expected to behave, which is to show “attraction” to girls around them. As the narration proceeds, the boys are talking about how to kiss a girl they like for the very first time, and Ali says that “I should place the kiss on the boundary point that separates lips from the cheek, so that girl will understand how much I like her” (Tosun 2018, 13)²³. This talk between them illustrates the boys identify themselves as heterosexuals despite the hints of romantic friendship rooted in undertone. However, towards the end of the narration, this affection becomes more visible when the protagonist realizes Ali’s extreme grief over the death of Muzaffer and they put their heads together as he tries to hug Ali:

²¹ My translation: “Hayattaki tek arkadaşım” (Tosun 2018, 12).

²² My translation: “Ali oralı bile olmadı zaten kız çok güzel falan değildi. Hareketim buna benzer durumlarda ergen olmanın zorunlu kıldığı hareketlerden biriydi sadece, yapmasaydım bir şeylerin eksik kaldığını hissedecektim” (Tosun 2018,12).

²³ My translation: “...Öpücüğümü dudağının tam yanına, dudakla yanağı ayıran o sınır noktasına koymalıyım ki, kız ondan ne kadar hoşlandığını anlansın” (Tosun 2018, 13).

“ ‘Ali,’ I said, ‘You did not also kiss someone, did you?’...I raised his face, holding his chin with my hand. I put a small kiss on the boundary point between his cheek and lips...” (Tosun 2018, 15)²⁴. The position of “heads” here clearly illustrates that the solidarity between them increases as now the protagonist is also trying to share Ali’s pain. It is because the head symbolizes the support and consolation that Ali desperately needs because of his grief over the death of Muzaffer. And the protagonist is providing this consolation. And I claim that the question here simply reinforces the fact that they are lonely and excluded boys, who have no one but each other to turn to in such moments. And this underlines the need and solidarity they have for each other once more. What is more, at that very moment, he kisses Ali on “the boundary point between cheek and lips”, which is where Ali says he should kiss to show his affection. Therefore, in this moment of sadness, the homosexual desire becomes concrete thanks to the increased solidarity. For, I argue that the way the protagonist kisses him symbolizes his ongoing affection which comes to the point he can no longer hide, and I claim that the kiss makes it real at that moment. Thus, the loneliness and grief they share in their friendship give birth to the emergence of a homosexual desire between two boys in coming of age periods.

How does the desire emerging out of solidarity undermine homonormativity, then? It distorts the erotic meanings attached to the traditionally masculine body. Homonormativity celebrates the masculine body construction as the ideal body type. But here the characters do not really feel attracted to the object of desires because of their masculine body constructions. Despite Elio’s detail account of the physical features of Oliver (Aciman 2017, 5, 6), he cannot locate the emergence of desire throughout these expressions (Aciman, 2017, 8). Even more, his account on Oliver’s physical appearance – such as “the shirt, the rolled-up sleeves, the rounded balls of his heels” (Aciman 2017, 3) – does not necessarily evoke imagery of traditional masculinity. While this type of explanation could be enough to deconstruct heteronormativity, which idealizes the White masculine body as the sole object of desire, Elio might go a step further. The erotic attachments he develops might not even come from the body, at all. For, the Jewish identity common for both of them contributes to this desire, which then does not necessarily grow out of the fact that Oliver is a White, masculine man. His Jewish identity is what makes him an object of desire for Elio. Similarly, the masculine body is

²⁴ My Translation: “ ‘Ali’ dedim, ‘Sen de hiç öpüşmedin değil mi?’...Elimle çenesinden tutarak yüzünü kaldırdım. Yanağıyla dudağının buluştuğu sınır noktasına bir öpücük kondurdum...” (Tosun 2018, 15).

dysfunctional in the emergence of homosexual desire in the experiences of young boys of Tosun. It is because what brings them together in the first place the solidarity caused by peer pressure both in the relationship of Sissy Ömer and Atif and the unnamed protagonist and Ali. In the relationship between Ömer and Atif, the emergence of desire is first illustrated by Ömer's notice of Atif's smile, which does not include any praising of Atif's masculinity. And since these boys are bullied by their classmates, we can argue that masculinity is not a characteristic feature for either of them, which means they do not feel attracted to each other thanks to their masculinities. Instead, the solidarity evokes desires in them. It is the similar case for the protagonist of "Muzaffer ve Muz" and his love interest, too. Before getting into the nature of their relationship, the way the protagonist describes their body shapes is enough to undermine homonormativity. He practically defines themselves as "fat" and unpopular. Especially a "fat" does not fit in the ideal masculine body type. Because they are unpopular boys, they fail to have a strong presence as homonormativity demands of gay men. Therefore, these boys deconstruct homonormativity by finding desire in the solidarity between them. That is so to say that they are attracted to non-homonormativity to prove that there could be no singular way of gay identity or experience. On the other hand, taking account of David M. Halperin's theory on gayness, which suggests men with same-sex desires learn how to be gay, the way the desires are actualized in the works by both authors is instrumental to "queer" homonormativity. For, learning how to be gay would also mean that gays learn how to desire an ideal type of male body. However, the characters analyzed here do not display a learnt practice. On the contrary, the emergence or development of desires upon sudden realizations – Elio's realization of Oliver's necklace, Ömer's sudden awareness of Atif's beauty or narrator's hugging Ali after learning the death of Muzaffer – indicates that these desires are not a result of a learnt practice or social constructions. Instead, they emerge organically as a result of the connection developing between the characters. In other words, neither Elio nor characters of Tosun do learn what type of male body they should desire. The sexuality naturally happens without any learning. And I argue this "queers" homonormativity by adding a different way of gay male sexuality to the singular gay identity, which, Halperin argues, reduces gayness, as Elio and other characters display sexually charged emotions & desires towards other men that "go beyond the specifics of gay male existence" in Halperin's terms.

Furthermore, this same-sex desire is experienced in a gender-bending way in both authors. In their works, both Aciman and Tosun seems to undermine the erotic and sexual meanings attached to the strictly masculine coded male body. The characters feel attraction to other men in ways that would not be included the homonormative type of masculinity. The passion between the characters – either mutually or one-sided – becomes an androgynous state and liberates the characters from the norms of the gender they are located within. Such a desire is observable in “Damdaki” by Tosun. In this story, the plot is about the protagonist and his – probable – love interest spending a night at the roof in the protagonist’s village. Gender and sexuality of the protagonist’s love interest are left blurred in the narration. However, the mother’s reaction suggests a same-sex desire, while informing us about the protagonist’s gender: “...with always the same achy look. ‘Oh God, what am I going to do with this boy.’”²⁵ (Tosun 2018, 9). Apart from clarifying the protagonist’s gender, she suggests a possible homosexual desire with her looks. Constant “achy” suggests there is a constant problem between them, which might be related to the sexual orientation of her son. Additionally, the mother’s complaining, suggested by the question,” underlines the possibility of a constant problem about her son’s attraction to the boys. It is also signified by her reaction as she also “looks at him as though she were dying in a moment” (Tosun 2018, 10)²⁶ when he asks if his friend could come. “Dying” obviously suggests the feeling of discomfort and disturb. And since she reacts that way upon hearing the friend is coming, we may conclude she has been aware of her son’s attraction to his friend. Thus, considering she is unhappy with this attraction, we could presume that the object of desire is also a boy. But, when it comes to the experience of this desire by the protagonist, it goes beyond the limits of gender roles. For he says “I pretended to sleep at first until you fell asleep, and then watched you while you were sleeping...I could not look at you as much as I wanted other times, so I looked as much as I wanted. You were no longer a man, nor a woman. If I said child, I could not. You were just someone sleeping, a being like all those who sleep” (Tosun 2018, 9)²⁷. “As much as” suggests the desire has been developing in secret and for a while now, along with “other times”. And the significance of the gaze, put by “look”, indicates that the protagonist attaches strong meanings – both romantic and sexual – to the body of his love

²⁵ My translation: “...gözlerindeyse hep aynı bakış. ‘N’apıcam yarabbi ben bu oğlanla” (Tosun 2018, 9).

²⁶ My translation: “Anca baksın öyle, az sonra ölecek gibi” (Tosun 2018,10).

²⁷ My translation: “Ben önce uyuyormuş gibi yaparak uyumanı bekledim, sonra uyurken izledim seni...Başka zaman bakamıyordum doya doya, doyana kadar baktım ben de. Bir erkek değildin artık, bir kadın değildin. Çocuk desem, diyemem. Uyuyan biriydin işte, tüm uyuyanlar gibi bir mahluktun” (Tosun 2018, 9).

interest. And at this moment, we observe the character does not experience it within the gender norms; he goes beyond them, as he does not fit in any of the categories of man, woman, and child. That he is not a “man,” “woman” or “child” implies that the protagonist enjoys his interest’s body, not within the limits of gender. He enjoys it as a being, attaches meanings. The character attaches this androgynous body a great deal of eroticism. As “look” connotes objectification and therefore makes the body as an erotic object to be looked at. Thus, the homoeroticism here is experienced in a gender binding way. He does desire him not as a boy but just as a being. Similarly, Elio has a similar experience of desire for Oliver, especially when they are making love to one another: “Something unexpected seemed to clear away between us, and, for a second, it seemed there was absolutely no difference in age between us, just two men kissing, and even this seemed to dissolve, as I began to feel we were not even two men just two beings. I loved the egalitarianism of the moment” (Aciman 2017, 131, 132). “Just two beings” clearly demonstrates how Elio experiences the moment without the borders of gender and he “loved the egalitarianism”, which indicates the feel of satisfaction. As they kiss, everything “dissolves,” which suggests that the experience of desire goes beyond the limits between Elio and Oliver, evokes a sense of equality and sameness – as the Jewish identity – in Elio, which he sexually enjoys. As they break the limits, the norms of gender are broken at this moment and Elio finds pleasure in Oliver’s body as a being, not as a man. Consequently, the act of desire, which is lovemaking, breaks the borders between them and brings Elio closer to Oliver. And this leads Elio both to perceive himself as the equal of Oliver and consequently to enjoy the desire without the attachments made to the male body.

As for how this genderless gay experience deconstructs homonormativity, I argue that it functions in a similar way to the solidarity driven desire. Both Elio and young boys of Tosun simply subvert gender norms. What I mean here is not to see femininity in their same-sex objects of desire. Their desire attaches non-normative and genderless meanings to the bodies that are supposed to be masculine according to the homonormativity. These characters do not desire their love interests because they are masculine, or their desire does hardly include masculinity. Instead, those they desire to become solely androgynous beings that they could relate to and enjoy. This genderless “same-sex desire” Elio and the unknown young boy here experience corresponds to Eve Sedgwick’s account of the erotic meanings attached to the body. Sedgwick states that sexual and/or erotic meanings

attached to the different parts of the body. In this case, it should include gay male sexuality, as well, which means different parts of a male body becomes the source of desire for gay men or men with same-sex desires and attractions. Thus, the masculine male body could not be the only ideal body for the gay male sexuality. And the disappearance of masculine bodies (their genders altogether in fact) reflects Sedgwick's explanation. Just as Elio enjoys kissing Oliver as two beings, the unknown protagonist gazes a male body who does not look like either a man or a woman. Taking Sedgwick into account, these experiences are functional to queer homonormativity because the pleasure is coming from enjoying a male body that is in a genderless state, instead of a male body demonstrating the codes of masculinity.

About how the characters react to the realization of the same-sex desire, I argue both Aciman and Tosun portray similarities in their narrations: Elio's reaction to the emergence of it and that of the unknown young man in Tosun's short story called "Homoeroticus" present themselves similarly. When they realize it, they react to it anxiously. Instead of feeling free to jump to the homosexual desire evoked in them, they are somehow disturbed by it and feels uncomfortable. The anxiety Elio feels is observable at the moment when Oliver puts his arm around his shoulders to hug-massage him (Aciman 2017, 15). At that moment Elio is discomforted by Oliver's touch on his shoulder and he explains his anxiety as: "It never occurred to me that what had totally panicked me when he touched me was exactly what startles virgins on being touched for the first time by the person they desire: he stirs nerves in them they never knew existed and that produce far, far more disturbing pleasures than they are used to on their own" (Aciman 2017, 16). His reference to "virgins on being touched" suggests that Elio has already acknowledged his desire for Oliver. I also claim that this moment also marks its first physical emergence in him as it is "the first time" and "exactly" similar to what disturbs or "startles" virgins in the same circumstances. In that sense, what the person they desire cause virgins to feel is what Oliver makes Elio feel, which is "disturbing pleasures". And this suggests the anxiety Elio feels upon the feel of Oliver's touch. Although he is aware of how he feels for Oliver, the physical aspect of his desire is not realized by him until that very moment and when he realizes it, he reacts anxiously, which is marked by his escape from Oliver's touch on his shoulders. Despite his already developing feelings, Elio has not been aware of the effect of the physicality of his desires, which evokes the feeling of anxiety in him. As a result of this, he is disturbed by it, instead

of being satisfied in the beginning. In “Homoeroticus”, the unknown young man feels similar anxiety, as well. On the surface, the story does not really indicate any sign of homosexuality as the plot is merely about young man’s journey to his aunt’s home for a few days upon the finish of his finals. In that sense, we are not given any hint of sexuality, either. But in the course of narration, the point of view alternates between this young man and an old man sitting in front of him on the ship. The man explains that moment as “I saw him in the bookstore this morning. He was so pure, so transparent...He could even catch my attention for this but this was not all..” (Tosun 2018, 25)²⁸. “Pure” and “transparent” could stand for his objectification of the young man. For, while they are enough to indicate the old man has his gaze on the boy, these words also recall a kind of romantic objectification. Moreover, he clearly states that the boy becomes an object of desire for him: “I could not wait to see him...put his book in his bag and leave the bookstore. And to follow him; until the moment I am waiting for comes” (Tosun 2018, 25)²⁹. The way the old man fantasizes about the boy, and especially “follow” suggests that the boy is an object of homosexual desire. and he repeats “wait” twice. I argue that this repetition illustrates very intense feelings of desire, which is also supported by “until the moment”. He is deeply in need of expressing his affection to this boy, clearly, which clarifies his being an object of desire for him. This is also recognized by the young man. First, he realizes the hand of the old man in the bookstore, as “this little finger carries a golden ring with a green stone on” (Tosun 201, 26). However, the young man is realizing more than the ring about the old man standing beside him at that moment:

“Yes, he looked as if he had been interested in books not me, but I felt that he actually was leaning his existence on mine, he was standing beside me at that moment, not by coincidence but as he wanted to in a way that I could not comprehend. It was as if I had turned and looked him in the eye, he would have leaned down and gently kiss my lips. Suddenly I was full of a shudder that I had not known. I wanted to leave there. At once” (Tosun 2018, 27).³⁰

He is definitely aware of the interest the old man has in him, especially “his existence” would indicate, despite the old man’s attempt not to give himself away faking to be

²⁸ My translation: “Kitapçıda gördüm onu bu sabah. O kadar duru, o kadar saydamdı ki...Sırf bu sebepten çekebilirdi dikkatimi, ama hepsi bu değildi” (Tosun 2018, 25).

²⁹ “Onu...kitabını çantasına koyup kitapçıdan çıkarken görmek için sabırsızlanıyordum. Bir de onu takip etmek için; ta ki beklediğim o an gelene kadar” (Tosun 2018, 25).

³⁰ My translation: “Benimle değil kitaplarla ilgilenir gibi görünüyordu evet, ama anlayamadığım bir şekilde aslında varlığını benimkine yasladığını, o an yanımda tesadüfen değil, benim için durduğunu hissediyordum. Sanki dönsem ve gözlerine baksam o da eğiliverecek ve beni dudaklarımdan nazikçe öpecekti. İçim tanımadığım bir ürpertiyle doldu. Oradan uzaklaşmak istedim. Bir an önce” (Tosun 2018, 27).

“interested in books”. Moreover, this feeling is new for this boy as he could not “comprehend” how he knows the man’s motives. His unfamiliarity with the feeling is also repeated here as “shudder that I had not known” illustrates. And on top of that, the boy becomes fully aware of the eroticism in the man’s motives. That he likens it “gently kiss” makes it clear the interest has in him an interest, which is romantic and erotic. For, “kiss” would connate eroticism and romanticism if not a sexual encounter altogether, i.e.; the boy realizes that he is an object of desire for this man. Moreover, kiss on the lips would make the desire more concrete and real. Apparently, I think this also indicates that the boy almost imagines how it would be if the old man kissed him and realizes something he has not felt before. And his realization simply disturbs him and create in him anxiety as “shudder” indicates and he wants to leave the place immediately. Although it could be argued that his anxiety might not be directly related to a homosexual desire evoked in him and it could contrarily be related to his lack of interest in men. But I argue what he feels is an emergence of homosexual desire, as it becomes clear towards the end of the narration:

“...A hand touched my shoulder. He was standing right on top of me and hindering the sunshine. I would see his face if I opened my eyes. But I didn’t. Even surprising to myself, I also put my hand on his. I waited for a while...my hand was still on the hand on my shoulder. On the hand, which seemed to both so far and so familiar to me. I was still not happy yes, but my sorrows joined seagulls, flew away” (Tosun 2018, 29).³¹

In that scene, the hand belongs to the old man as the boy puts his finger on the green stone at the very end (Tosun 2018, 29). And his putting his hand on boy’s shoulder means he is now demonstrating his attraction to this boy as he has been waiting for a while to do so, and the boy requites his feeling as “he put his hand on the man’s hand” symbolizes. It is because now the desire is taking place on a physical level and the boy actually accepts and two hands become a concrete demonstration of desires. “Surprising” still shows that it is a new feeling for the boy as well but he keeps his hand on old man’s hand, which relaxes him a little as his disturb, suggested by “sorrow”, “flew away.” The juxtaposition of “far” and “familiar” indicates the anxiety remains in him but the boy responds to erotic desire the old man had for him. Accordingly, I suggest that what troubles the young man

³¹ My translation: “...Bir el dokundu omzuma. Tam tepemde duruyor ve güneşimi kesiyordu. Gözlerimi açsam yüzünü görebilecektim. Ama açmadım. Kendimi bile şaşırtarak, elimi elinin üstüne koydum ben de. Bir süre bekledim...Elim hala omzumdaki o elin üstündeydi. Bana hem çok uzak, hem de çok tanıdık gelen o elin. Mutlu değildim hala evet, ama sıkıntım martılara karışmış, uçup gitmişti” (Tosun 2018, 29).

in the bookstore is the emergence of homosexual desire in him and due to his lack of familiarity with this feeling. his reaction is that he gets anxious by its presence felt both by himself and the old man. Consequently, he feels anxious and uncomfortable just as Elio does so when Oliver's touch on his shoulder triggers his desire that already started developing. As both this young boy and Elio are not familiar with the impact of desire at the moment they physically feel or realize it, as Elio is physically exposed to it while the young boy simply feels the attraction he creates in the man, who touches him in the end.

Thanks to the anxiety Elio and the young man displays in the emergence of such desire, the sexually adventurous homonormative gay is dismantled. Apparently, "sexually adventurous" means that ideal gay is sexually active, while it could also mean that he would not give it much thought to have sexual encounters when the chance appears. However, neither Elio nor the young man shows such willingness in the emergence of the desires, which could lead to sexual encounters. They do not easily take the chance when they see it. They feel discomfort and anxiety and therefore they distance themselves from this desire. Accordingly, their reaction works to dismantle homonormativity because they hesitate and are shy to requite the affection that develops in the emergence of the homosexual desire, unlike the sexually active gay who would attempt to enjoy the desire as homonormativity expects him so. Henceforth, I argue that their anxiety and hesitant behaviors prove to us that homonormativity could not cover the whole identity as a singular concept. For, not all gay experiences include sexually adventurous practices

However, both Elio and the characters of Yalçın Tosun do never display any kind of self-hatred or regret due to their homosexual desires despite the anxiety they feel at first. They show concerns or problems, including issues of regret or hate but it is never an issue about the desire itself. In *Call Me by Your Name*, Elio shows signs of regret or similar feelings multiple times during the development of his feelings for Oliver. Yet, those are never caused by the fact that both Elio and Oliver are men. Instead, he worries or feels regret or hate about his position in his relationship with Oliver:

"By noon, the agony of waiting to hear him say anything to me was more than I could bear. I knew that the sofa awaited me in an hour or so. It made me hate myself for feeling so hapless, so thoroughly invisible, so smitten, so callow. Just say something, just touch me, Oliver. Look at me long enough and watch the tears well in my eyes. Knock at my door at night and see if I

haven't already left it ajar for you. Walk inside. There's always room in my bed" (Aciman 2017, 59)".

Here, Elio makes sure that there is not something he is not happy about himself and his feelings for Oliver as "hate" shows. "Bear" does totally indicate that there is something going on in his relationship Oliver that he is not happy with. "Awaited" could figuratively express the problem that he has. I claim while he is "awaiting" on the sofa, he is waiting for Oliver to recognize him, his feelings, his desire, which becomes clearer as the quote proceeds. Nonetheless, his self-hate does not come from same-sex nature. It comes from how he feels he is unable to express his feelings for Oliver. "Always" shows that he is in a constant craving for Oliver. But he only stands there for Oliver to realize him as "waiting" suggests. And this what makes Elio unhappy, as he describes his situation as "hapless", "invisible", "smitten" and "callow" and it is an "agony" he could not "bear". If these words do not remind the feel of hate in the first place, I argue they at least suggest Elio's regret for not being able to express himself. It seems to me that he wishes he could be more open about how he feels to Oliver, but he just can't, which he regrets. "Just say something", "look at me", "knock at my door", and "walk inside" all indicate that Elio passively tries to catch the attention of Oliver and "tears" suggests that longer does he fail to do so, he regrets or hates the situation. In other words, Elio leaves all the hints and clues for Oliver to recognize and go after Elio, except for saying it directly. Thus, this shows that Elio's lack of ability to express his passion for Oliver leads him to feel regret or hate in his desire for Oliver, instead of the gender of his object of desire. Elsewhere, we witness Elio is having concerns or a self-dislike about his desire and relationship with Oliver. Yet, again, this is not triggered by the emergence of homosexual desire. It is observable in the scenes where he fantasies that he asks Oliver to have sex with him after being rejected by Oliver openly and clearly as he says "We can't do this – I know myself" (Aciman 2017, 82)": "Oliver, I want you to take me. Someone has to, and it might as well be you. Correction: I want it to be you. I'll try not to be the worst lay of your life. Just do with me as you would with anyone you hope never to run into again" (Aciman 2017, 86). Here, "someone" directly indicates Elio's negative feelings about his relationship with Oliver: He believes Oliver will definitely not enjoy having sex with him but he at least wishes he is not as bad as the worst case. Practically, he struggles to bring himself to state it is Oliver that he wants as he needs "correction". These suggest Elio looks down him with low self-esteem since he does not see himself worthy of Oliver. This is demonstrated

more clearly by “try not to be the worst lay of your life”. “Lay” obviously stands for having sex with someone. “Worst” indicates how Elio perceives himself in relation to Oliver and his promise to “try” shows his anxiety and discomfort despite his extreme desire for Oliver. Hence, whereas he despises himself as unworthy of Oliver’, he feels he still has to try to be with him, which shows his concern and low self-esteem. Instead of having concerns about same-sex desire, he has concerns about his worth for this desire itself. In stories by Yalçın Tosun, the characters do not show sign of regret or hate about their homosexual desire, as well. We see a character like this in “Kibriçti Kız”. The story narrates an unknown protagonist, selling lottery tickets, and his recall of how he came to work in streets as sex worker after he was kicked out of by his father upon finding out his being gay, who “kicked his faggot son out of the country by threatening to kill” (Tosun 2018, 85)³². Although the narrator-protagonist now seems to be an adult man, the past he recalls includes his coming-of-age period, which is hinted by the fact he could not resist to his father when he advanced on him (Tosun 2018, 85).³³ And the protagonist starts working as a sex worker and dressing like a woman, against her will (Tosun 2018, 84).). But, despite the hardships he faces (Tosun 2018, 85), he never defines his homosexuality as something he hates or regrets. We observe this in two incidents. One is his encounter with his cousin Mülayim in the past: “Ah, she doesn’t know, of course, I was there before her. We met innocent pleasures of first enthusiasms with Mülayim...Let me explain: I made the opening with Mülayim during a summer holiday when we were their guests. I do not regret, at all. I didn’t do it with a stranger, at least” (Tosun 2018, 86)³⁴. Here, the protagonist embraces his gayness as “opening” suggests he had sex for the first time with his cousin. While the nostalgia, suggested by “summer”, might be a sign of his cherishing of this experience, he goes on saying he does not “regret at all”. He does not feel guilty about being gay or see it as something to regret, even though he lost his home and now has to act like transvestite unwillingly. While he is not happy with “looking like a woman” (Tosun 2018, 86), he never states he hates to be gay. In contrast, he cherishes it. The other takes place at the moment he is crying in front of the mirror: “I wanted to sleep just with the men I want. Fur just once, just because I wanted to, I wanted to have sex. But most of

³² My translation: “...’Öldürürm gitmezsen’ diyerek ülkeden kovduğu ibne oğlundan” (Tosun 2018, 85).

³⁴ My translation: “Ah, bilmiyor tabii, ondan önce ben vardım. Biz Mülayim’le tanıştık, ilk heveslerin masum zevklerini...Şöyle diyeyim daha anlaşılır olsun: Açılışı Mülayim’le yaptım ben, bir yaz tatili sırasında, evlerine misafir olduğumuzda. Hiç de pişman değilim, yabancıya gitmemiş oldum...”(Tosun 2018, 86).

all, to be able to see myself in the mirror, and to love him again, to be able to love...” (Tosun 2018, 88).³⁵ Here, we observe he has a self-hatred for himself. It is because “him” refers to his reflection in the mirror, which he desires to “to be able to love”. He clearly hates himself for some reason. But it is definitely not because of his gayness or homosexual desires. For, he still accepts it without regret as “the men I wanted” indicate. If he wants to have sex with the men he desires, then I argue he does not feel regret or guilt about his homosexuality. Therefore, since it is his reflection that he wants to love “again”, I suggest it refers to his female-like look that he has to perform to be able to find customers, which he states earlier in the narration (Tosun 2018, 87). Therefore, in the protagonist’s experience, it is how he looks that makes him hate himself, not the desire he feels for other men as a gay, which he still “wants”. Another experience of a character that has this gay experience without the feel of guilt or hate happens in “Kıpırtılı Bir Yorgan”. This story narrates the affection of the protagonist to a boy, who is his classmate, called Cemil and his struggle with the homophobia of his classmates. “Remember when you were seventeen... I was just doing what I had to do. I do not know if I ever felt that free later. I placed Cemil in this life masterfully. I was ready to do all his homework to feel the smell of his freshly-washed shirt rather closely, to get a little bit closer to his brunette skin. I was not able to do anything else, anyway” (Tosun 2018, 23).³⁶ The protagonist, whom we know is a boy as his classmates call him “faggot” (Tosun 2018, 25), seems to have very strong romantic feelings for Cemil both bodily and romantically as whereas feeling “free” demonstrates the romantic attachments he feels, his references to the smell of Cemil’s shirt and his skin portrays an erotic desire along with the fact that “place in my life masterfully”: “masterfully” along with other things suggests importance. As for the references, “feel,” “smell,” and “closer” portray a physical desire while “brunette skin” and “freshly-washed” illustrates the erotic attachments put in Cemil by the protagonist. Thus, the protagonist’s desire for Cemil is so strong that he somehow manages to include Cemil in his life. But it is an unrequited love as the very last sentence shows. Despite this, the protagonist does not show any negative feeling about his desire as “else” indicates that his feelings are never returned either sensually or sexually. Yet, he practically accepts the situation as it is, suggested by “ready”. And “placed” and

³⁵ My translation: “Bir kez olsun, canım istediği için sevişmek istedim. Biri beni sevsin istedim. Ama en çok da, aynada kendimi görebilmek, belki onu yeniden sevmek, sevebilmek...” (Tosun 2018, 88).

³⁶ My translation: “On yedi yaşınızı hatırlayın...Ne yapmam gerekiyorsa onu yapıyordum işte. Bir daha hiç o kadar özgür öldüm mu bilmiyorum. Cemil’i de bu hayatın içine ustalıkla yerleştirmiştim. Yeni yıkanmış gömleğinin kokusunu şöyle yakından duymak, esmer tenine biraz daha yaklaşabilmek için bütün ödevlerini yapmaya razıydim. Başka da bir şey gelmiyordu zaten elimden” (Tosun 2018, 23).

“masterfully” show that instead of grieving or regretting about his desire, he tried to find ways to enjoy his attraction to Cemil as much as possible within his own universe of feeling. That he accepts this situation willingly is shown by his account on he did “what he had to do”. Thus, this character, similar to both the protagonist of other story and Elio, does not really hate his homosexual desire. He just tries to find ways to manage it. The final instance from the stories about showing no regret or hatred about their same-sex desire is from “Damdaki”. The protagonist’s perception of his desire is visible in his reaction to his mother’s disapproval, which was discussed above: “Soon my parents will return. My mom won’t be able to resist and move up to the roof to...She won’t say anything. She will just wait on top of us...I will feel her disturbing presence and wake up, startling. I will hug you much more strongly as if sleeping. Purposely” (Tosun 2018, 11).³⁷ “Disturbing presence” indicates that the mom does not approve her son’s attraction to his friend. And “resist” suggests that she has been aware of the protagonist’s same-sex desires for quite a while now, which is obviously uncomfortable for the protagonist. But the character does not really hate or regret it. In contrast, he openly and almost proudly presents it to his mother. “Hug more strongly” and “purposely” demonstrates that he does not feel any negative feeling such as guilt, hatred, shame, etc. because of desires that his mother does not approve. He challenges her by “purposely” “hugging” his love interest, to make her uncomfortable and to show it in her face. In other words, despite the struggles he has with his mother because of his homosexual desires, he embraces them and demonstrates.

Thereupon, although the characters do not display hate or regret about their gay experiences or even, they do embrace it sometimes as the protagonist of “Damdaki”, this comparison is still instrumental to challenge homonormativity. It is because the in-your-face attitude of homonormativity portrays a gay identity or expression that is self-confident and open about his sexuality. Yet, if we take each character’s expression of their desires, we see homonormativity deconstructed. For instance, Elio is not sure of his sexual charm for Oliver, let alone being open and ready for it, which he is not. All he could do is to wait until he can put it together to express his desire. Additionally, the protagonist of “Kıpırtılı Bir Yorgan” cannot be freely open about his sexuality, as well.

³⁷ My translation: “Biraz sonra annemler dönecek. Annem dayanamayıp çıkacak dama...Hiçbir şey demeyecek. Dineliş duracak başımızda...Rahatsız edici varlığını hissedip irkilerek uyanacağım. Daha sıkı sarılacağım sana uyuyormuş gibi yaparak. İnadına” (Tosun 2018, 11).

He tries to manage it in some hidden ways, which again deconstructs the open and sexual gay image. Finally, the protagonists of “Damdaki” and “Kibritçi Kız” are somehow open as we see in the stories, but their lives are a constant struggle: one has to put up with his mother, the other is disowned and has to do sex work to survive. Therefore, being open and proud in term of sexually does not come in handy for them. They have to pay a price for it.

As for the differences of the gay experiences in the works by both authors, Elio of Aciman experiences his desires in an atmosphere that is much different from in the environment the young boys of Yalçın Tosun do. Although he lives in a small town in Italy, Elio was born into an upper-class family that is cultured, considering the fact that his father is an academician. Thus Aciman’s narration portrays experiences of a young gay man, whose family are intellectuals, but we observe much different atmospheres in Tosun’s stories. Tosun portrays young men who are from a small town in Turkey with a family consisting of villagers. Or, he creates characters that have to put up with peer pressure owing to their differences, including their sexualities. he also creates characters who are disowned by their parents or characters that have to hide their desires due to lower class status. And this inevitably causes differences in the ways the characters experience their same-sex desires. Considering the environment in which Elio has been raised and now live, I argue that it is quite welcoming for a young man to experiment and express his own sexuality with other men, which is obviously related to his parents’ socio-cultural status. Among their many guests, there is a gay couple, for whom Elio’s father says, he “was too old not to accept people as they were” (Aciman 2017, 125). Whereas this line clearly shows the open-minded nature them, it becomes more obvious when Elio thought if his father finds out the thing between Elio and Oliver: “My father would never object. He might make a face first , then take it back” (Aciman 2017, 125). While Elio’s own thoughts lead us to consider father as understanding and supportive, his own account makes sure of it: “And I envy you. In my place, most parents would hope the whole thing goes away, or pray that their sons land on their feet soon enough. But I am not such a parent...” (Aciman 2017, 224). “Envy” and “not such a parent” clearly shows his open-mindedness and how he supports his son to explore himself through sexuality. Further, we observe him showing empathy towards Elio, as he also implies that he had similar encounters with someone (Aciman 2017, 225). Tosun, on the other hand, does not allow his characters to experience their sexualities in a welcoming environment. As we already

observed in stories previously discussed, the characters struggle with their family or their environment due to their sexualities. Mother's facial expression, which says "what am I going to do with this boy" suggests the character does not have a family that will support him in his experiences, Ömer's nickname, which is "sissy", in the other story, clearly demonstrates that he is suffering from peer pressure due to his sexuality. We also observe a clear demonstration of this peer pressure in "Kıpırtılı Bir Yorgan". The protagonist narrates an incident that he has in a sports hall: "As a matter of fact he, too, cried and made fun of me like other boys before me while my pants were moving from hand to hand... 'Look, friends, that is how pants of a faggot look like'" (Tosun 2018, 25).³⁸ The character clearly suffers from peer pressure in a homophobic way, as "faggot" indicates the reason why they are making fun of him is his sexuality. Furthermore, he can't even express his desire to the boy (Cemil) he desires, as he clearly states all he could do is to do his homework so that he can be close to the boy he loves. The friendship between them, without necessarily sexual meanings, has to be kept hidden from others. We observe this at the moment where the protagonist and Cemil are alone in a corner during a small school trip where Cemil is kind of apologizing for his homophobic bullying: "Suddenly, I put my hand on his as if it were the most natural thing on earth. He just stands still, without moving. I look at his face directly this time. How I want to die, I feel it is the only way to express my joy... we both are startled by a whistle...He rushes out without finishing his words as if escaping..." (Tosun 2018, 26).³⁹ The action of "hand" here, along with "standing still" shows that Cemil is responding to the protagonist's affection, which is in a friendly manner. Although the touch of the hand might suggest eroticism, the way the protagonist narrates the incident clearly includes no erotic meanings. But even this friendly affection between them has to be kept secret. Both the protagonist and Cemil could only express it in a corner where they are alone. And when their moment is disturbed by a presence of others, suggested by "whistle", it has to be dissolved as he is "escaping" not to be seen with a "faggot". The protagonist, therefore, has to experience his desire by hiding it both from his object of desire, Cemil, and the others due to the unwelcoming setting. Similarly, the protagonist of "Kıbrıçlı Kız" has to deal with such homophobia, as well. It was already mentioned that his father committed

³⁸ My translation: "Aslına bakarsanız o da öteki oğlanlar gibi bağırıp eğlenmişti karşımda, donum elden ele gezerken. 'Bakın arkadaşlar ibne donu böyle oluyormuş demek ki!'" (Tosun 2018, 25).

³⁹ My translation: "Birden dünyanın en doğal şeyiymiş gibi, elimi elinin üstüne koyuyorum. Hiç kıpırdamadan öyleye duruyor. Yüzüne bakıyorum bu kez doğrudan. Nasıl ölmek istiyorum, sevincimi ancak böyle aktarırım gibi geliyor...bir düdük sesiyle ikimiz de irkiliyoruz...O sözünü bitiremeden hemen kaçır gibi fırlıyor..."(Tosun 2018, 26).

violence on him and disowned him, which is enough to show the unwelcoming environment. But he goes on facing it when he comes to his cousin's house: "His wife was cunning as a serpent, she saw through who I was at the very first glance. She didn't allow me to stay at that home. She probably assumed I would seduce her husband" (Tosun 2018, 86)⁴⁰. "Who I was" means that she understood he is gay and because of this, she does not allow him as the possibility of his "seducing" her husband simply fears her, which the narrator does euphemism by saying "assume". Consequently, he cannot make this place his home due to his sexual orientation. In other words, he cannot express and experiences his gayness openly in this house as he is not even allowed to stay because of it.

The atmosphere then becomes quite unfriendly for characters (protagonists from all texts by Tosun) to express or experience their sexuality. If they "out" it somehow, and they are exposed to discriminations such as mocking, homophobia, family & peer pressure as we see in the case of this character. All in all, as opposed to the environment of Elio, where Aciman presents a father who's not only totally understanding but he also empathizes with his son, indicating he has similar experiences before, Tosun portrays environments where the characters with same-sex desires have to put up with discriminations, either from their pressures or their family, which allows us to observe how the experiences are related to the context and could change, accordingly.

Furthermore, the characters of Tosun and Aciman's Elio display differences while putting their desire into practice change, as well. Aciman's Elio can decide to explore it further with the guy he is attracted to, despite struggling with it for a while, whereas the characters of Tosun are not able to experience it with their objects of desires, explicitly. His openness for experimenting becomes concrete when he says "...I'd still go through with it, go with it all the way, because better to find out once and for all than to spend the rest of the summer, or my life perhaps, arguing with my body" (Aciman 2017, 124). Should we pay attention to the diction, "arguing" especially catches attention, which indicates he has been thinking of whether to do it with Oliver or not. And I argue that it is related to the welcoming environment he lives in. Even if he struggles with it or keeps it to himself, he finally decides to experiment his desire with Oliver, which he describes

⁴⁰ My translation: "Anasının gözüymüş karısı, bir bakışta anladı ne mal olduğumu. Barındırmadı beni o evde. Kocasını ayarırım sandı zahir" (Tosun 2018, 86).

as “not a secret left in the world, because wanting to be in bed with him was my only secret and here I was sharing it with him” (Aciman 2017, 132). “Secret” shows it is something he has struggled to come to terms with, yet in the end, he shares his ultimate secret with the one he wants to share it most. Unlike Elio, Tosun’s characters do not have the same opportunity. Mentioned previously, Sissy Ömer describes his feelings for his object of desire as Atif is not aware of his craziness about Sarı Yusuf” (Tosun 2018, 13)⁴¹. Accordingly, that he couldn’t tell it even his best friend means no one knows; he hides his desires from everyone and lives them in secret. Besides, the protagonist nicknamed “faggot” in “Kıpırtılı Bir Yorgan” provides us with another incident. I argue that the quote I previously used to analyze his way of managing his desire illustrates the situation for him. He lives in such an environment that even the boy he loves makes fun of him (Tosun 2018, 25). So, this prevents him from expressing his feelings and experimenting them with his love interest. Instead, he tries other things -like doing his homework- to be with him. Thus, Tosun’s characters, in contrast to Elio, experience the same-sex desire in hidden ways, in shame and guilt, which are not coming from themselves but forced upon them. As a result of this, they do not have the chance to express and experience their gay desires as Elio could do.

Yet, despite the fact that Elio could express his same-sex desire openly to Oliver and he can even talk about it with his father, he is still not as unapologetic and assertive as homonormativity would praise. As mentioned above, “arguing” and “secret” shows Elio’s interior conflicts before acting on his desires. Instead of being freely and carelessly sexual and trying to experiment it right away, he has had to resolve his inner conflicts and only after that he could put his desire into practice. Thus, regardless of how free the environment is, Elio’s desires are not that free. In contrast, the protagonist of “Kıpırtılı Bir Yorgan” can’t even practice his desire with the boy he is attracted to. While his desire for Cemil is imprinted in all his words, all he could do is to be close to him as much as he can, so that he may smell him, or be close to his skin. All in all, these two characters demonstrate that not all gay experiences could be open and free in the way the homonormative gay identity promotes, regardless whether the environment is free or not, in which they emerge and develop, is for them to explore their sexualities.

Accordingly, the comparison analyzed between Elio, who is raised in small village in Italy by a upper class & intellectual family familiar with non-straight people, and Tosun's characters portrayed in mostly unwelcoming and homophobic environments, helps queering homonormativity through Butler's idea of performativity. Previously I stated that if gender is a performative as a social construction (in Butler's terms), so is sexuality. Homonormativity idealizes a singular and limited performance of gay male sexuality, excluding others. While the disappearance of genders of bodies challenges this performance of gay male sexuality, the way the characters practice, i.e.; perform it conflicts with homonormativity, as well. Initially, Elio's conditions might seem to be proper for homonormative performance, as he belongs to a socially upward family where he openly express his same-sex desire. However, he does not perform his sexuality with Oliver in sexually adventurous and careless manners. Instead, he goes through a self inner-conflict and romantic and emotional phase up until he comes to terms with it and declares it to Oliver. Thus, the performativity of Elio's sexuality is not totally homonormative, except for his family surrounding, which eventually allows him to explore it with Oliver after he is resolved to express his desire to Oliver. When it comes to the characters of Tosun, their sexualities are not even something they could be out about. In the context of Turkey and conditions of characters, the same-sex desire is not something to be proud of. Instead, it is dangerous and problematic if it is visible to others. Therefore, unlike Elio who has the chance to freely explore it, their performativity of sexuality must be hidden and momentary. For, it poses a threat to the characters as we see especially in "Yaralı Bir Kaplan" and "Damdaki" or in "Kibritçi Kız", where the protagonist has to do compulsory sex work upon his being outed to his father and banished from home. Consequently, the homonormative performativity of gay male sexuality is disfunctional because it refers to a limited experience. And different performativities observed in Aciman and Tosun might function to queer it as they expose experiences not fitting in homonormativity.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis has tried to queer homonormativity through a comparative analysis of the representations of homosexual desire in two contemporary authors', André Aciman and Yalçın Tosun, works written in English and Turkish. It argues that homonormativity could not cover the gay identity as a whole owing to the fact that it is established as an idealized identity that refers only to a selected type of body & sexuality construction. This identity construction is predominantly white and authoritative in terms of either wealth or strength, and outspoken both sexually and unapologetically. And one of the ways to queer this identity is to detect and bring into visibility the alternative expressions of gay identity and/or same-sex desire. Having a queer lens to analyze and think critically of homonormativity as a socially constructed norm allows us to recognize the non-normative expressions of gay male desire or identities. Because the queer theory aims to challenge all the structural norms that exclude those who do not fit in, it is instrumental to challenge homonormativity by recognizing non-normative expressions of gay male sexuality and promoting their existence and visibility.

Call Me by Your Name by André Aciman, and “Damdaki,” “Yaralı Bir Kaplan,” “Homoeritocus,” “Kibritçi Kız,” “Yorganda Bir Kıpırtı” and “Muzaffer ve Muz” by Yalçın Tosun are the works analyzed in this thesis. When these two authors are compared, they portray characters and events that make Aciman and Tosun diverge a lot. Aciman’s Elio lives in a very socially upward family without any threats of being marginalized or any other possible dangers caused his sexual encounter with Oliver. Henceforth, his experience of same-sex desire is quite different from the characters of Tosun, who are forced to experience their sexualities in hidden ways as a result of possibilities of threats coming from their environments. Thus, in a way Tosun’s works include more elements

that subject homonormativity to queering as Elio's social status is almost totally homonormative. Yet, their comparison still functions to queer this homonormative identity construction. It is because these texts, portrayals of which include non-Western particular expressions, do not simply construct the gay experience or same-sex desire in (homo)normative ways. While Tosun's stories are set in context of Turkey where the Western-ideal gay identities do not possibly cover all types of gay identities, Aciman's Elio is a Jewish boy living in Italy, which helps these characters create non-Western experiences. On the other hand, while the homonormativity idealizes strictly traditionally coded masculinity, Aciman does not tell something related to masculinity of Oliver's body construction as the object of desire, while Tosun creates characters who are "fat", "sissy" or subject to mobbing due to their sexualities. Thus, his characters are assertively non-normative as they challenge the ideal norms of masculinity, while the absence of masculinity in Elio's desiring Oliver might contribute to this, although it is not as assertive or strong as Tosun's narration. Furthermore, with some exceptions in Tosun's stories, the characters do never call themselves "gay" or "homosexual" necessarily, and this ambiguity rooted in the texts allow the young male characters to explore their sexualities and same-sex desires through experience and experimentation rather than embracing a constructed identity. These works also stand out among the other works that portray young gay male sexuality. It is because other works, again with some rare exceptions such as *Boy Meets Boy* by David Levithan, tend to portray young gay men as troubled boys because of their sexualities or homosexuality or homosexual desire as something to be guilty of or regret, which leads the characters to either their death or some undesirable consequences in the end. However, neither Aciman nor Tosun portray their characters as victims who are doomed.

Having these gay experiences during their coming-of-age periods, these young men, Elio and Tosun's young boys, do try to experience and manage their same-sex desires both within themselves and in relation to the environment they live in. Thus, comparison of the texts by these two authors provide us with the experiences that will add to the homonormative construction of a gay identity or desire, if not to challenge it.

How do these authors challenge the homonormative codes of gay male desire then in their works? Initially, it is significant to notice that both authors see the impact of bodily

pleasures in the emergence and development of this desire. However, their representations do go beyond the bodily pleasures and show what other elements contribute or create such a desire in a boy for another male figure. For instance, in *Call Me by Your Name*, one of the very major factors that trigger Elio to desire Oliver is the fact that they come from the same ethnic identity. Apparently, their being Jews creates a sense of sameness in Elio. He feels they share a solidarity, out of which emerges his desire for Oliver, rendering solidarity highly influential in the emergence of such desires. Solidarity presents itself in a different form other than ethnic identity, which is peer pressure. And only when the solidarity is intensified, do they show their attractions to the objects of desire. Further, this masculinity celebration is even more dissolved because in some moments the object of desire gains an androgynous status and the desire is experienced in a way that goes beyond norms of gender. The homonormativity fashions a gay identity as sexually driven and the characters in both texts simply deconstruct this feature, as well. It is because they do not easily give in to the desire and put it into practice upon its realization. On the contrary, the unfamiliarity of desire startles them, and they attempt to distance themselves away at first. It takes a while for the character to absorb the desire before exploring it, which portrays their gay experience as not sexually driven unlike what the homonormativity promotes.

Additionally, how the characters perceive their own same-sex desires deconstructs homonormativity from a different aspect. The characters do never show regret, hatred or any similar negative feeling. Instead, their worries, if they have any, are related to their own position in the same-sex desire/relationship, which is mostly related to Elio. Apart from that, we observe how the characters (especially those of Tosun) handle or manage their homosexuality or homosexual desire. These experiences tell us that “in-your-face” attitude against norms, which suggests a careless, unapologetic and even relaxed expression of homosexuality, is not always valid. For, the characters face struggle, whether it is an interior one or an exterior one related to the environment, even in the cases where they are almost proud of their homosexual desire and are open about it as we see in “Damdaki”. Thus, they are not always careless and unapologetic in terms of their experiences and expressions of same-sex desire, unlike the homonormative expectations of an ideal gay identity. In other words, that they have to manage their homosexual desires – or identities in the cases where they openly declare it – clarifies that we cannot expect all gay identities or expressions to be as relaxed as the homonormativity presumes. It

means that homonormativity could not be a singular identity that refers to all. Regarding this, the environment in which they are portrayed affects the characters' gay experiences: whereas Elio experiences his desires in a welcoming environment and eventually speaks to his object of desire, Tosun's boys have to experience their desires in hidden ways due to the reasons such as class status or peer pressure by either keeping it from their object of desire or from their social zones. Elio, also, goes through a process where he hides it to deal with his interior conflicts. Thus, combining this with Tosun's portrayals, I argue that these non-sexual practices of gay experience, even if it is temporary for Elio, deconstruct the image of sexual, adventurous and "powerful" homonormative gay identity. For, Elio, who could be argued to be the "powerful" one, does experience it in a welcoming environment and even he goes through a process to experience it really, unlike an image who would probably go for his desire at the moment he realized it. When it comes to the characters of Tosun, he does not even create a welcoming environment for them and disallows his characters to experience their desires openly with whom they desire. Consequently, they have to experience it in non-sexual ways. Therefore, the homonormative identity is deconstructed because of fragments, one of them having the qualifications of homonormativity, present alternatives, which proves that it does not represent all types of gay identities or expressions of desire.

Consequently, then, these comparative outcomes add to the global identity of gayness by deconstructing the Westernized homonormative perception. The deconstruction is carried out by pointing out the alternative expressions of same-sex desire (gay experiences). And this challenges the singular nature of homonormativity. Instead, it uncovers a set of expressions of gayness consisting of particularities from non-Western settings.

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