ISLAM AND HOMOSEXUALITY DEBATES IN TURKEY: DISCURSIVE CONTESTATION AMONG MUSLIMS OVER LGBTQ RIGHTS

by

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for any award or any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. It is affirmed by the candidate that, to the best of her knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

For the last few years, the relationship between Islam and homosexuality has come to the fore of the political debate more than ever before in the recent history of Turkey. Certain Islamist actors including Islamic NGOs, Islamic-oriented political parties and many influential Islamic writers began to take oppositional positions against homosexuality and LGBTQ rights. This thesis engages with firstly the basic premises of the Islamic political opposition to LGBTQ rights in Turkey and secondly the challenges it receives from other Muslims who are able to develop Muslim defense of LGBTQ rights at the individual level. In this study, it is argued that the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights that depicts Islam and homosexuality as irreconcilable to each other utilizing critique of Western universalism, cultural essentialism, and communitarianism. On the other hand, it is asserted that this opposition to LGBTQ rights is disputed by a minority group of LGBTQ friendly Muslims. These people strive to defend LGBTQ rights by rearticulating religious norms in ways that reconcile them with LGBTQ rights. Even if for some of these Muslims the tension between homosexuality and Islam remains unsolved, these processes of rearticulation and reexamination enable them to open spaces of freedom for LGBTQ people within Islam. This study concludes that Muslim defense of LGBTQ rights achieves to move beyond neo-orientalist discourses of homonationalism, on the one hand, and culturalist communitarianism, on the other and to avoid getting caught between these two equally essentialist paradigms. It is able to build a third way depolarizing the binary opposition between universalism and cultural particularism.

Keywords: LGBTQ rights, universalism, Islam, Queer Islam, homosexuality, homonationalism, Orientalism, communitarianism, cultural difference, cultural essentialism

ÖZET

Türkiye'de son birkaç yıldır İslam ve eşcinsellik tartışmaları siyasi arenada sıkça gündeme gelmeye başladı. Aralarında sivil toplum örgütleri, siyasi partiler ve pek çok etkin yazarın bulunduğu bazı İslami aktörler son yıllarda eşcinsellik ve LGBTQ haklarına karşı açıkça pozisyon almaya başladılar. Bu tez ilk olarak, eşcinsellik ve LGBTQ haklarına yönelik İslami karşı çıkışların temel dayanaklarını, ikinci olarak ise, LGBTQ haklarını savunan Müslümanların bu argümanlara ne tür stratejilerle itiraz ettiklerini tartışıyor. Bu çalışmada, eşcinselliği İslam'la bağdaşmaz kabul eden İslami söylemin, Batı evrenselciliğinin eleştirisi, kültürel özcülük ve komünitaryanizm gibi temel özellikler taşıdığı iddia ediliyor. Diğer yandan, küçük bir azınlık dahi olsalar, diğer bazı Müslümanların gerek İslami değerleri gerekse LGBTQ haklarını yeniden yorumlayıp birbiri ile uyumlu hale getirerek LGBTQ hakları karşıtı İslami argümanlara karşı çıktıkları ve İslam'ın içinden LGBTQ haklarını savunabildikleri açıklanıyor. Bu Müslümanların bir kısmı için eşcinsellik ve İslam arasındaki gerilim çözülmemiş olsa dahi, bu yeniden yorumlara ve anlamlandırma süreçleri, onların LGBTQ bireylere İslam içinde özgürlük alanı açmalarını ve İslami değerlerle LGBTQ haklarını bağdaştırabilmelerini sağlıyor. Böylece, neo-oryantalist homomilliyetçilik söylemi ile kültürelci komünitaryanizmin ötesine geçebilen ve eşit derece özcü olan bu iki paradigmaya sıkışmayan bir söylem üretilebilmiş oluyor. LGBTQ haklarının İslam'ın içinden savunulabilmesi evrenselcilik ile kültürel tikelcilik kutuplaşmasını aşabilen üçüncü bir yol inşa ediliyor.

Anahtar sözcükler: LGBTQ hakları, evrenselcilik, İslam, Queer İslam, eşcinsellik, homomilliyetçilik, Oryantalizm, komünitaryanizm, kültürel farklılık, kültürel özcülük

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to *my mom and dad*.

Knowing that they always believe in me and stand by me at all times and under any circumstances makes me feel more confident and powerful in this cruel world.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For the last five years, the relationship between Islam and homosexuality has come to the fore of the political debate more than ever before in the recent history of Turkey. Despite the fact that there had been no significant difference among major political actors with respect to their stances on homosexuality, this began to change as certain Islamist actors have taken oppositional positions against homosexuality and LGBTQ[1] rights in the recent years. In subsequent incidents, public Islamic actors including the Islamic NGOs, the Islamic-oriented political parties and many influential Islamic writers have mobilized religiously framed cultural difference arguments as excuse for their rejection of LGBTQ rights and their requests for restrictions over public visibility and liberties of LGBTQ individuals. This thesis engages with the recent production of Islamic political opposition to LGBTQ identity and rights in Turkey and with the challenges it receives from other Muslims who are able to develop Muslim defense of LGBTQ rights at the individual level. Although they constitute a very tiny minority among overall Muslim population in Turkey, there are LGBTQ or LGBTQ friendly Muslims who involve in rearticulation of religious norms and LGBTQ rights at the same time in order to reconcile Islam and LGBTQ rights. On the one hand, they see the hermeneutic challenges that unrecoverable, insuppressible, and mostly innate character of homosexuality poses on the orthodox Islamic understandings. On the other hand, they witness the discriminatory practices and violence against LGBTQs and are aware of the immediate need for rights and remedies. Therefore, these LGBTQ friendly Muslims

[1] LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer.

attempt to construct alternative Islamic arguments in favor of LGBTQ rights and open space for LGBTQ identity within the Islam.

In the debates on Islam and homosexuality, there are two main questions: first, theological question of whether Islam and homosexuality reconcile with each other or not; and second, political question of how the regime of rights should be organized in the face of the theological question. The theological problem deals with the ways that Muslim believers understand, interpret and reinterpret the Islamic sources to produce religious meaning on homosexuality. As opposed to the general opinion which presumes that Islam condemns harshly homosexuality, there is a religious controversy on whether homosexuality is sinful, whether it is forbidden in Islam, what kind of sin it is if it is sinful or how homosexuals should be treated in religious terms. This theological sphere is an area of contestation among truth claims of various individual, institutional and societal actors who engage in shaping and reshaping religious meanings. This theological question has significant impact on political question which is concerned with how LGBTQ individuals should be treated legally and politically, what rights and liberties should be granted or restricted to them and how their status with respect to the State and other citizens should be regulated. Many believers may think that homosexuality should be outlawed and punished by the State and oppose LGBTQ rights because of their theological views. However, theological question doesn't have to be determinant of political question. In other words, even if one thinks that homosexuality is sinful, she may oppose punishment of homosexuality, reject any discrimination or violence against LGBTQ individuals and support equal rights and liberties for them. This research discusses how both the theological and the political question have been elaborated in the recent debates over homosexuality and Islam in Turkey. However, it is ultimately concerned

with the political one and examines what sort of political stances Muslim actors take with respect to homosexuality in the face of the theological problem.

This issue addresses the current dramatic clash between two major paradigms in the international debates on homosexuality and Islam. On the one hand, there is the neo-orientalist Eurocentric paradigm that instrumentalizes LGBTQ rights in its portrayal of Muslim societies as oppressively homophobic, and thus reproduces the idea of superiority of Western pluralistic modernity over Muslim societies. As part of this paradigm, homonationalism, which is the incorporation of LGBTQ rights into the rightwing nationalist political projects, is on the rise in Europe, US and Israel. This paradigm speaks in the language of Western universalism and bears the mission of promoting LGBTQ rights globally. The discourse of universality of equal rights is being incorporated to nationalist and Islamophobic accounts in order to marginalize Muslim groups. Accusing Islam as misogynist and homophobic religion has been used as a pretext for racist and nationalist policies. Negative cultural stereotypes on migrant groups have been reproduced relying on the defense of gender equality and LGBTQ rights.

On the other hand, there is homophobic Islamic communitarianism. Predominant majority of the Islamist states, political parties, religious scholars, and public intellectuals oppose homosexuality and LGBTQ rights, arguing that these are incompatible with their cultural and religious values. Relying on the Orthodox Islamic doctrine that condemns homosexuality as sinful and forbidden, they draw religious definitional boundaries in a way homosexuality is excluded from the sphere of religious legitimacy. Those conservative Islamic actors reaffirm their difference and authenticity from the West by associating homosexuality with corrupt and pervert side of Western modernity. In this paradigm, the so-called proliferation of

homosexuality and imposition of LGBTQ rights are connected to the Western cultural influence and perceived as threatening against family structure, cultural values and public morality. This paradigm has a dispute with universalist underpinnings of the abovementioned homonationalist paradigm and blames it for attempting to assimilate local cultural differences. Thus, it mobilizes the culturalist argument that the non-western communities and societies should have the right to reject LGBTQ rights and limit the public visibility of LGBTQ individuals in order to preserve their own cultures and values from the cultural hegemony of the West.

Although they seem as two opposite sides of the debate, homonationalism and homophobic Islamic communitarianism are actually similar to each other in their cultural essentialism. What is common between these two seemingly opposite dominant paradigms is that both of them take the idea of incompatibility of Islam and homosexuality for granted and attribute this incompatibility to cultural reasons. Both are essentialist in the sense that they produce a binary opposition between Western and Islamic cultures and assume these two as fixed, constant, homogenous and static entities. In that sense, these two positions are indeed novel versions of clash of civilizations thesis. How to get beyond this? How to avoid getting caught between these two dominant paradigms on the relationship between homosexuality and Islam? Is it possible to build alternatives to homonationalism and conservative Islamic culturalism? Is it possible to find a third way depolarizing the binary opposition between universalism and cultural particularism? Is it possible to envisage a third alternative other than the Islamic culturalist views or neo-Orientalist homonationalism that instrumentalize the universal rights discourse? This thesis traces the answers of these questions in the debate over homosexuality and Islam within the context of Turkey.

1.1. Research Questions and Rationale

The main research questions of this thesis are as follows: First, how is the recent Islamic opposition to LGBTQ identity and rights in Turkey is produced within a culturalist framework? Second, how is this dominant discourse contested by LGBTQ or LGBTQ friendly Muslims who are able to develop pro-LGBTQ rights stances through involving in rearticulation and reinterpretion of religious norms and LGBTQ rights at the same time? In other words, I discuss which strategies enable these Muslims to falsify two dominant paradigms of homonationalism and Islamic culturalism, and to build the Muslim defense of LGBTQ rights in the face of certain tensions between local Islamic values (cultural particularity) and LGBTQ rights (universal norms).

There are three reasons why this particular research topic is relevant to scholarship. First aspect is related to the literature on the relationship between neo-orientalism and sexual rights. There is an impressive body of scholarship on the neo-orientalist deployments of women's and LGBTQ rights for Islamophobic, racist and nationalist ends. These critical studies elaborate on how LGBTQ and women's rights are instrumentalized in the name of universalism to reaffirm Western superiority over Muslim societies. A wide variety of studies have explored the imposition of LGBTQ rights by Western actors as part of imperialist political projects in the Muslim contexts. However, it can be argued that the universal dissemination of LGBTQ rights is not a one-way process from the West to the East. Rather, these universal rights are reworked and rearticulated by local actors in their local struggles for justice against authoritarian policies and repressive regimes. This last dimension seems mostly unexplored in the literature. This thesis speaks to this literature by scrutinizing how LGBTQ Muslims and other queer-friendly Muslims rearticulate the

universal principle of equal rights and LGBTQ rights in a reconciling way with the Islamic values in the face of urgent need for legal and political remedies against severe discrimination and violence against LGBTQ individuals in Turkey.

The second aspect is related to literature on Islam and homosexuality. A variety of studies analyze the Orthodox doctrine that condemns homosexuality and the queer-friendly hermeneutics against it. Another group of studies examine literary or historical accounts on same-sex sexuality in pre-modern Islamic societies. Many studies focus on contemporary LGBTQ Muslim identities in the Western diasporic contexts and on their strategies to deal with Orthodox Islamic views, homophobic community pressures, Islamophobia and racism. However, the LGBTQ Muslim identities within today's Muslim-majority contexts have remained relatively understudied. There is a very few amount of research that explore LGBTQ Muslims' experiences and their challenges to hegemonic Islamic understandings in non-Western contexts. This thesis seeks to contribute to this last area by including the voices of the LGBTQ Muslim agencies in the Muslim-majority context of Turkey, who are extremely invisible in the scholarship. It targets to enrich the literature by analyzing their challenges to the dominant Islamic view and their reinterpretation efforts to open space for themselves within Islam.

Thirdly, this study speaks to scholarly debates over cultural difference. An extremely rich variety of political and philosophical accounts argue that the universal notion of equal rights and the principle of equal treatment are not enough to preserve -even sometimes destructive to- cultural diversity. Thus cultural distinctness and particularities should be recognized in order to avoid assimilation or discrimination. While the politics of difference is important to protect ethnic minorities and migrant groups from assimilation to the wider society, it runs the risk of falling into the trap

of essentialism, especially when it is accompanied by their cultural preservation arguments. Many feminist studies show that the excuse of cultural difference to be exempt from certain laws –mostly related to family affairs, gender issues, and sexual control over women- and to get differential treatment in these areas might endanger and restrict the rights of women and other disadvantaged segments within their cultural communities. However, these critiques have rarely been utilized to study the abuse of cultural excuse for rejecting LGBTQ rights. This thesis intends to add to this dimension in the literature. In the following section, I introduce the contextual background of the emergence of Islamic backlash against homosexuality in Turkey and explain the importance of three major sites of research that this study focuses on within this context.

1.2. Background: The emergence of Islamic opposition to homosexuality and LGBTQ rights in Turkey

Since the beginning of Turkish nation-state building, heteronormativity[2] has always been the regulating power in the gendered state policies on family, reproduction and sexuality regardless of which party or cadre was in power. This regulating and governing hegemony of heteronormativity was a silent one (Savcı,

[2] Heteronormativity can be defined as "the mutual constitution of normative heterosexuality and the rigid binary gender order, whereby there are only two genders and one can only belong to one category at a time (Varela&Dhawan, 2011: 94)." Heteronormativity creates a sexual stratification or "sex hierarchy" that gradates sexual practices from morally "good sex" to "bad sex" (Rubin, 1999). In this sexual value system, "sexuality that is 'good', 'normal' and 'natural' should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive and non-commercial (Rubin, 1999: 152)". As Butler argues, in the "heterosexual matrix", who should be considered legitimate or not is decided by this subject's conformity to normative ideals of sex and gender which are constructed through naturalizing certain bodies, desires and practices (Butler, 1999). Chambers and Carver points out that "heteronormativity is written into law, encoded in the very edifices of institutions, built into an enormous variety of common practices (Chambers and Carver, 2008: 146)". In this sense, it is important not to reduce heteronormativity to a problem or discrimination against autonomous individuals on the basis of sexual orientation. Rather, it is a system of regulatory norms and practices influencing our thinking, values and beliefs and simultaneously shaping and shaped by social, legal, political and cultural structures.

2011: 5) which works as a given assumption embodied in the laws, merged into the institutional practices and encoded in the minds of political actors. This process might be called "quiet heteronormalization" in the sense that non-normative sexualities and genders had been mostly neglected in the official state discourse, legislation or political debates (Savcı, 2011: 77). Homosexuality was never criminalized in Turkey, official discourse has refused to articulate non-normative sexualities anyway. Nonetheless, these sexualities have always been regulated; heterosexuality has silently been the norm and informed state policies as the underlying assumption.

During the Turkish nation-state formation, the first crucial historical period when debates regarding gender relations had occupied a central place in the political and ideological agenda was the Young Turk period of 1908-1918 (Bilal and Ekmekçioğlu, 2006; Çakır, 1994; Sirman, 1989; Toprak, 1991; Toska, 1998). The ideologues of the Committee of Union and Progress (the Unionists) such as Ziya Gökalp believed that the political revolution of 1908 could only succeed if followed by a social transformation that primarily depended upon restructuring and reshaping of the family as the basic unit of society (Toprak, 1991). According to this new outlook, the traditional, large, patriarchal family should have been replaced by the "national family" that was modern, nuclear, monogamous family based on egalitarian principles between the wife and the husband. This national family that was silently presumed to be heterosexual was considered as the "germ-cell of the nation-state" (Toprak, 1991: 451). Women's education was understood as a prerequisite of the progress of the Ottoman society. Women were constituted primarily as mothers and wives of the nation that should be educated in order to take better care of household

and maintain the national family (Altan-Olcay, 2009; Sirman, 1989, 2005; Toska, 1998).

Likewise, later in the Republican era, Kemalist modernizers promoted the (heteropatriarchal) family and ideal femininities and masculinities attached to it as one of the building blocks of nation-state governance (Arat, 1998; Durakbaşa, 1998; Sancar, 2004; Sirman, 2005; Şerifsoy, 2000; Toprak, 1991). Veiling, segregation of sexes, polygamy and child-marriage were disregarded and outlawed as cultural ruins of ancient Ottoman regime which was depicted as backward, religiously bigot and oppressive against women. Instead, certain reforms including women's enfranchisement and adoption of Civil Code in 1926 that granted equal rights of divorce and child custody for wife and husband were implemented. Moreover, women's emancipation, education and participation in social and economic life were promoted with the aim of elevating the Republic to the level of civilized Western nations. In the Kemalist nationalist rhetoric, the idea of women's emancipation was assimilated into an instrumentalist approach which introduces the image of "new Turkish woman" as a signifier of the so-called rupture from the backward ancient regime to the new modern Republic (Arat, 1998). In this Kemalist imagery, the ideal female citizen was portrayed as urban, educated, modern, active in professional life, secular with a Westernized/civilized appearance and a highly visible public participation (Göle, 1996). At the same time, women's role of being mother and wife responsible for educating the nation and bringing up proper citizens was kept as well (Altan-Olcay, 2009; Arat, 1994; Toska, 1998). "Women's emancipation" was not without constraints: motherhood, sexual modesty, chastity, loyalty to family and general morality values were prescribed among the basics of "new woman". Any femininity that was considered threatening to or intolerably incompatible with this

model was tried to be repressed, silenced or totally neglected by the state not only in Republican period, but also afterwards. In the multi-party era, "acceptable citizen" has been redefined in contradictory terms with "unacceptable others." Headcarved women, politically dissident women such as leftists and Kurdish activists (Keskin and Yurtsever, 2007), feminists, women who were found sexually unchaste (Parla, 2001), sex workers, transgenders (Selek, 2001) and lesbians have been among non-conforming femininities up till now.

In the Turkish modernization and state formation, the status of women, family life, male-female relations, and sexuality have always been major concerns of governing elites in their definitions of Turkish nation and acceptable citizen. State defined proper and improper attitudes and practices in these realms. After the transition to multi-party politics, heteronormativity has continued to operate consistently in state policies regardless of whether the right wing or the left wing political parties were in power. Monogamous marital heterosexuality has always had a normative status in state policies which produced heteronormalizing effects (Savcı, 2011: 76). Since legislations and official state discourse were mostly silent with respect to non-normative sexualities, the "quiet" imposition of heterosexuality can only be detected in the effects it produced. Until very recently, there has been no significant difference among major political parties[3] with regard to their stances on homosexuality. In the parliamentary political space, homosexuality was mostly out of discussion. However, in the recent years a few successive incidents ended up breaking this silence and forcing the major political actors to reexamine their positions. In these incidents, certain Islamist actors' oppositional reactions to

[3] The only exceptions were BDP which condemned discrimination based on sexual orientation in its party program in 2009 (Sulu, 2009) and its predecessor DEHAP which recognized sexual orientation already in its 2003 party program and promised to put it into the constitution (Erol, 2003).

homosexuality and LGBTQ rights marked the emergence of the recent Islamic backlash against homosexuality.

The issue of relationship between Islam and homosexuality began to be covered in the mass media in 2008 when headscarf debates were also very much heated. In the TV shows, headscarf activists or Islamist public figures got questioned more on homosexuality. On May 11, 2009, Cemil İpekçi, a famous self-defined Muslim gay fashion designer and Bülent Ersoy, a famous transgender singer confronted with Ali Bulaç, a respected Islamist writer in a popular TV show on CNN Türk (Çok Farklı, 2009). In this debate, Bulaç attested that homosexuality is a sin and argued that this sexual deviance is forbidden in Islam and that media has an encouraging impact on homosexuality. His Orthodox views were challenged by İpekçi and Ersoy on the ground that homosexuality as an innate characteristic given by God has no contradiction with Islam. This debate was so significant in the sense that it was an exceptional occasion where Muslim identity came together with the public display of gayness and transsexuality. Although there had been many examples where gayness and transsexuality appeared in the media or other public spaces, Muslim identity generally didn't accompany them. This was mostly related to the fact that being Muslim and LGBTQ at the same time were considered irreconcilable and unintelligible in the public norms. However, religious meaning emerged as a space of contestation in this debate. While Bulaç drew religious definitional boundaries in a way excluding LGBTQs from the acceptable, pure, authentic Islamic space, his attempt to impose his own boundaries was challenged by two other Muslim who voiced another religious truth claim. These exceptionalities and media reactions that it triggered made this incident a critical moment in the emergence of Islamic backlash in Turkey. The month after this TV debate hosted an

intense debate over Islam and homosexuality on Islamist media and provided me a useful site of research to examine their discourses.

On March 2010, Aliye Kavaf, Minister of Family Affairs, in an interview, stated that "I believe homosexuality is a biological disorder. I think it is a disease that needs treatment. Thus, I don't approve of same-sex marriage. In our ministry, we have no study regarding them. Besides, we have not received any demand. We don't say that there is no homosexual in Turkey, this incidence exists. (Bildirici, 2010)" After the interview was published on March 7, 2010 on Hürriyet, one of the most circulated national newspapers, it received a wide variety of reactions from LGBTQ movement, psychiatric associations, political parties in the parliament, the Islamist NGOs and the public intellectuals. Her statements were protested by more than forty organizations including the LGBTQ groups, women's organizations, feminists, socialists, anarchists and liberals. In their press release, they argued that her statements contradicted with scientific truths, violated fundamental human rights and encouraged hate crimes against homosexuals (Çakır, 2010a). Thus, they urged her to apologize immediately and resign from her office since she acted inconsistent with her responsibilities as a minister. Also, psychiatric associations declared that homosexuality was not an illness and that it was violation of human rights to denounce a segment of society as a group of ill people who need treatment (Bianet, 2010). Likewise, the representatives of CHP and BDP stated that what Kavaf said was discrimination and she must resign (Çakır, 2010b). While the reactions so far had been concentrating on discriminatory or non-scientific aspect of Kavaf's remarks, a press release issued by a platform of the Islamist NGOs shifted the focus of the debate to the Islamic views on homosexuality.

On March 22, 2010, Hayata Çağrı Platformu, which consists of twenty-one NGOs including those organized around human rights such as Mazlum-Der, İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri İnsani Yardım Vakfı (İHH) and Özgür-Der, issued a press release in support of Kavaf. In their open letter to Minister Kavaf, these Islamist NGOs declared their agreement with her and stated that "homosexuality is not a natural orientation but, as all divine religions clearly announced, it is a deviancy, sin and distortion incompatible with biological nature (Hayata Çağrı Platformu, 2010)". They invited the government to take preventive measures against the spread of homosexuality in order to protect the society, family structure, general morality and continuity of human race. This press statement, as the first common Islamic public reaction against homosexuality, was a milestone in the emergence of Islamic backlash. Before it, there had been a few sites where Islamic writers elaborated their individual opposition to LGBTQ rights and homosexuality in their writings. However, such an organized reaction by Islamist NGOs that exceeded the individual level and mobilized institutional power and organizational capacity had been first in the recent history and therefore marked a new stage in the Islamic backlash against homosexuality. In the same days, several Islamist writers also joined the debate and wrote extensively on homosexuality and LGBTQ rights in their columns. What the Islamic view was on homosexuality, what threats normalization of homosexuality could pose, what the government should have done were among the points discussed in these debates. Because the political and media debates on the relationship of Islam and homosexuality in this particular period after Kavaf's statement were intensified more than ever and, this period was selected as the second site of research in this study and provided a rich set of data to examine the discourses of the Islamic NGOs and writers.

The relationship between Islam and homosexuality came to the fore again in May 2012 when BDP had requested "sexual orientation and gender identity" to be included in the anti-discrimination clause of the constitution (soL, 2012). In the parliamentary Constitution Committee which was assigned to drafting the new constitution, BDP's request forced parties to take a clear stance on LGBT identity. While this proposal was supported by CHP for it would protect the equality of LGBT individuals, AKP and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) objected to the proposal arguing that the concepts of gender identity and sexual orientation contradicted with public morality, family structure and continuation of life (Karabağlı, 2012). When these debates were going on, two Islamic political parties out of the parliament also joined the discussion. The president of Great Union Party (BBP) criticized BDP and CHP for their "unacceptable" request and said that "To grant homosexuals under the cover of sexual orientation the same rights that men and women have would destroy Muslim Turkish nation harmer than military interventions of 12th March, 12th September, 28th February and 27th April did (Hürriyet, 2012)." Around the same days, the youth branch of Felicity (*Saadet*) Party launched a nation-wide campaign for criminalization of homosexuality and adultery (Güleç, 2012). The involvement of Islamic-oriented political parties marked another stage in the Islamic backlash against homosexuality. This last stage formed the third site of my research to analyze the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights. As the participants of all of these three sites, a group of Islamic actors including writers, NGOs and political parties produced an Islamic backlash against homosexuality through voicing clear opposition against LGBTQ identity and rights in the subsequent incidents outlined above.

1.3. Research Methodology

The methodological focus of this thesis is mainly discourse analysis. Whereas media research is used to collect data on the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights, in-depth interviews turn out to be the primary technique to reach publicly less-available discourses of LGBTQ friendly Muslims. In the media discourse analysis, I focused on the articles that were written by Islamic writers and published in newspapers or on online news portals. The research focused on two particular time periods: First was between 11 May and 11 June 2009 following the live TV debate among İpekçi, Bulaç and Ersoy on May 11, 2009. Second was between March 3 and August 11, 2010 following Kavaf's statements. Focusing on these two particular time periods, I made online search on web sites of particular newspapers and news portals by using two keywords: *islam* and *eşcinsel* [Turkish word for homosexual]. I have selected five newspapers (Taraf, Yeni Şafak, Star, Zaman, Vakit) and five Islamic-oriented online news portals (haber7.com, Haksözhaber.net, kadinnews.com, Derindusunce.org. dunyabulteni.com). I have selected these ten mediums, because my preliminary research showed me that these ten mediums host majority of those Islamic intellectuals who are involved in the debates over homosexuality and Islam. Except Taraf, four of five newspaper selected (Yeni Şafak, Star, Zaman, Vakit) are known for their Islamic tendencies and pro-AKP government stances. Although Taraf is not an Islamic-oriented newspaper and hosts a more heterogenous group of columnists, I have selected it due to Hilal Kaplan's presence among them. Because Kaplan was among the key influential figures in the media debates over homosexuality and Islam, excluding her from my research would be a significant shortcoming Therefore, I included Taraf into this research.

This media discourse analysis provided me data to analyze the Islamic writers' approaches to homosexuality and LGBTQ rights. Moreover, I benefited from the press releases of the Islamist NGOs and the Islamic political parties to understand their institutional discourses on this issue. When I was analyzing discourses of all these actors, I focused particularly on their depictions of homosexuality, their stances toward LGBTQ rights, premises behind their opposition to LGBTQ rights, and their representations of East/West division. My analysis on the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights in Chapter 2 relies upon this combination of data which includes the discourses of Islamic NGOs, writers and political parties.

The second primary technique I used to collect data was in-depth interviews[4]. Whereas the analysis of newspaper articles and other publicly available sources such as publications, press releases etc. provided a rich set of data about the discourses of the writers, civil society actors or political parties, it was not useful to get access to queer friendly Islamic discourses that are very rarely visible in the public sphere. Because it is still a social taboo to rethink Islam in a compatible way with homosexuality, and such reformist approaches are accused of distorting religion and invite hostile reactions, many people find it dangerous to talk or write openly on this issue in Turkey. The sensitive nature of the issue and related concerns constrain people from voicing pro-LGBTQ Muslim stances publicly. At the time this thesis was written, there was no LGBT Muslim organization to get in contact. The only publicly open source of knowledge was a blog page (entitled as *On Being Gay and Muslim* - gayislam.blogspot.com), on which three anonymous gay Muslims were sharing their thoughts on and experiences of being gay Muslim. Due to the lack of

[4] See Appendix A for the list of interviewees. All of names were changed to protect participant identity except Beren Azizi, Melda Onur, Özlem Albayrak and Ümit Ilgın Yiğit who preferred their original names to be used.

publicly available information concerning pro-LGBTQ Muslim stances, making interviews became an obligatory method to reach alternative views.

I made twelve in-depth interviews that lasted from one and a half hour to three hours. These interviews covered questions[5] relating to their views on the relationship between Islam and homosexuality, LGBTQ rights, Kavaf's statement and subsequent reaction. Utilizing purposive sampling, I aimed primarily to reach Muslims in favor of LGBTQ rights. Rather than making generalizations, this study purposes to demonstrate that the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights is not the only Muslim position, instead alternative Muslim approaches are possible. Since the population that I seek, that is to say LGBTQ Muslims or Muslim heterosexual supporters of LGBTQ rights, is a very small and hard-to-reach group, the interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling and using existing personal networks in LGBTQ community and Muslim circles.

In addition to LGBTQ friendly Muslims, I conducted interviews with two former devout Muslim LGBTQ people who are currently self-defined as deist. These interviews told me a lot about how homosexuality is perceived and practiced within religious communities and how certain tension between religious and sexual identities might lead some believers to become alienated from their faiths. I also conducted interviews with two other people with no affiliation with Islamic politics. Melda Onur, CHP Istanbul deputy and known for her support toward LGBTQ movement and Beren Azizi, LGBTQ activist. These two interviews provided me unique background information about how the issue of Islam and LGBTQ identity is discussed in LGBTQ activist circles and CHP. In addition to these interviews, I

[5] See Appendix B for interview questions.

utilized the essays written by three gay Muslims (nicknamed as Ümitvar, Eflatoon and Gaydervişş) and published on *On Being Gay and Muslim* blog page (gayislam.blogspot.com).

1.4. Thesis structure

This thesis is designed to include five chapters. The following Chapter Two is devoted to literature review and lays out the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. It is divided into three sections. Firstly, the critical scholarship on the relationship between orientalism and sexual rights is overviewed. This literature is relevant to understand neo-orientalist and Islamophobic deployments of women's and LGBTQ rights as part of reproducing Western superiority over Muslim societies. Secondly, the theoretical debates on how cultural difference is abused as excuse for rejecting women's and LGBT rights are presented. This scholarship is useful to unpack later the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights in Turkey. The focus on recently emerging literature on queer friendly Islamic understandings and practices in the last section is helpful to analyze later how it becomes possible for some Muslims to develop pro-LGBTQ rights stances in Turkey.

In Chapter Three, I analyze how the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights is produced and framed by a group of public Islamic actors including Islamic NGOs, Islamic-oriented political parties and many influential Islamic writers. Firstly, I introduce how the idea of irreconcilability between Islam and homosexuality is reproduced by these actors. Secondly, I discuss the Islamic requests for restrictions over LGBTQ rights and visibility and its connection to the idea of proliferation of

homosexuality. Then, I examine how culturalist argument is abused by many Islamic actors as an excuse for their rejection of LGBTQ rights.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the challenges voiced against the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights by a group of LGBTQ friendly Muslims at the individual level. I elaborate how these LGBTQ friendly Muslims involve in "democratic iterations" by rearticulating and reinterpreting religious norms and universality of LGBTQ rights. In the first section these Muslims' efforts to reconcile LGBTQ identity and religion through reexamination of religious values are explained. Secondly, the production of Islamic defense of LGBTQ rights is evaluated.

As the final chapter, the Conclusion summarizes the thesis findings and suggests some further areas of research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I deal with the relationship between Islam and LGBT rights through focusing on its intersections with three areas of scholarship: 1) critiques of Orientalism, 2) critiques of cultural relativism, 3) Islamic queer studies. This will provide the theoretical groundwork for my fieldwork findings detailed in later chapters. In the first section of this chapter, I will overview the scholarship dealing with how the discourses of sexuality and universal women's and LGBT rights have shaped and been shaped by Orientalism both in the colonial times and contemporary imperialism. In the second section, the critical debates on how cultural difference is abused as excuse for women's and LGBT rights will be presented. Lastly, how LGBT Muslims deal with the tension between their religious and sexual identity will be discussed.

In the recent debates over homosexuality and Islam, there are two dominant discourses. On the one hand, there is the Orientalist paradigm that instrumentalizes LGBT rights in order to picture Islam as a backward, pre-modern, homophobic faith and reaffirm Western superiority. This depiction of Islam has worked as a pretext for racist and anti-immigration policies. On the other hand, there is the dominant orthodox Islamic discourse which sees LGBT rights as a Western imposition and use the argument of cultural difference as an excuse for rejecting LGBT rights. My aim is to show that the universalism of Orientalist discourses and the culturalism of orthodox Islamic discourses have essentialism in common, and both of them see Islam and homosexuality as two incommensurable phenomena. With the guidance of the relevant critical literatures, I will discuss the problematic sides of these two

discourses. Finally, focusing on LGBT Muslims strategies to reconcile or inhabit their sexual and religious identities, I will trace alternative views that challenge both discourses and have the potential to solve the incommensurability impasse.

2. 1. Orientalism and universality of women's and LGBT rights

Both in the colonial and postcolonial contexts of the Middle East, the issues of gender relations, sexuality, family, and women's status have been perceived as symbols of communal identity and broader visions of society. The proper roles of men and women, women's appropriate place in the society, their proper dressing and ideal model of family have been constantly redefined and regulated by hegemonic powers from colonizers, to local nationalist modernizers, and to Islamist regimes. These sites of gender, family and women's rights have always been part of mutual construction of East and West and their relation to each other. This section is devoted to critical scholarly views on how the discourses of sexuality and universal women's and LGBT rights have shaped and been shaped by Orientalism both in the colonial times and contemporary imperialism. I will introduce the literature respectively on sexual politics of orientalism in the colonial times, and homonationalism.

2.1.1. Orientalism and colonial imposition of women's rights

In his influential masterpiece *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1977) explains the ways in which the Orient has been portrayed in European imagery through literature, artistic works, historical accounts, travel books and other such mediums. As he defines, Orientalism is "a style of thought based upon ontological and

epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’ (Said, 1977: 3).” Orientalism relies on an imagined division between East and West which works in a way affirming Western superiority and enabling Western domination over the East. In that sense, Orientalism is the discourse through which the Orient, as object of knowledge, has been constructed, produced and managed politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during post-enlightenment period (Said, 1977: 4).

Orientalist paradigm constitutes itself through producing binary categories each of which stands as a “fictitious unity (Scott, 2002)”: the East against the West, the Western/Judeo-Christian civilization against the Islamic civilization. The representations of the Orient are artificially so homogenous that all "Eastern" societies are depicted as essentially similar to one another, and essentially oppositional to "Western" societies. The orientalists have deemed the Orient deserving of the attributions such as irrationality, weakness, femininity, savagery, backwardness and traditionalism as opposed to the Occident they depicted as rational, strong, masculine, civilized, progressive and modern. It is the hierarchical character of the above attributions which construct the West as the unique superior contradictory to the East as the other and inferior (Said, 1977: 43). Each of the Orient and the Occident as binary terms is created by ignoring differences it includes and assuming it timeless, natural, monolithic, and static.

Stuart Hall, extending Said’s analysis of Orientalism, traces the formation of the discourse of “the West and the Rest” in the period between the end of fifteenth and eighteenth centuries when Europe discovered “new worlds” and began to annex these new lands as possessions through conquest, settlement and colonization (Hall, 1997). He situates the relationship between the West and the Rest within his critique

of enlightenment and modernity and suggests that the West had been able to define and construct itself through its own negation, "The Other", i.e. the Rest (Hall, 1996). The West couldn't have been able to depict itself as the vanguard of civilization, modernity, enlightenment and development without representing the Rest as "the dark side –forgotton, repressed, and denied, the reverse image of enlightenment and modernity (Hall, 1996: 221)."

Orientalism, accepted and reproduced by a wide range of academics, artists and especially imperial administrators, is the underlying narrative of colonialism and indeed has enabled its formation and sustainability (Said 1977, Hall 1997). As Said describes, it is "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, 1973, p.3)." As the production of knowledge and the exercise of power are bound to each other and shape each other, Said explains that orientalism and colonialism are mutually constitutive. Orientalism couldn't have been possible without the exercise of colonial rule, and without the support of imperial institutions and bureaucracy. Interrelatedly, colonialism couldn't have been established and maintained without the production and circulation of Orientalist discourse.

Many studies show that gender and sexuality have been constitutive of orientalist discourse. The management of sexuality and the management of colonial empire had always been connected in the colonial period (Ahmed 1992, Stoler, 1991, 1992, 1995, Yeğenoğlu 1998). The stereotypes of the Oriental women, images of sexuality and Oriental clichés of harem, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys have been crucial to representations of the Eastern cultures (Alloula,

1986). These Oriental clichés and images have been placed to signify a wide range of interlinked themes, those of lascivious sensuality, unrestricted sexuality, Oriental despotic cruelty, and subjugation of women (Macmaster and Lewis, 2005: 147). Sexual fantasy was a remarkable feature of travelers' accounts. In the sexual imagery of explorers such as Amerigo Vespucci and Captain Cook, the Oriental people were sexually unrestrained, libidinous and untroubled by the burden of guilt (Hall, 1997: 210). The depictions of savage beauty, primitive nudity, open, licentious and unashamed sexuality were explicit in the writings of many European writers and travelers (Hall, 1997: 210; Macmaster and Lewis, 2005: 148; Said, 1977: 191).

Ironically, these Oriental clichés turned to objects of desire and condemnation at the same time for European colonizer male. While eroticizing and fantasizing veiling, harems, belly-dancing etc. in paintings, photographs and writings, the Western eye simultaneously reproduced these images as the indicators of Islamic backwardness (Mabro, 2005: 112; Macmaster and Lewis, 2005: 150). On the one hand, the Orient was represented in mass culture as a place where European male could look for fascinating erotic desire and unlimited sexual experience unobtainable and even condemned in Europe (Said: 1977: 191). Through the stereotype of violent and cruel sultan or sheik who had many mysteriously veiled wives and odalisques in his secret and forbidden harem, "the European male could indulge in fantasies of sexual domination and perversion while evading the restraints of repressive European puritanism and Christian monogamy (Macmaster and Lewis, 2005: 148)." On the other hand, in the colonial mind, the Oriental practices of veiling, seclusion of women in harems, polygamy, enslavement etc. were key markers of inferiority, despotism and barbaric nature of Islamic society. The ideas of unveiling women, disclosure of harem, abolishment of child marriage, and replacement of polygamy

with modern monogamous nuclear family were seen necessary to emancipate native women from traditionalism (Fanon, 1994; Lazreg, 1994).

As Yeğenoğlu argues, "representations of cultural and sexual difference are constitutive of each other (Yeğenoğlu, 1998: 1)." The colonial depictions of Middle Eastern women and of their status in the native societies served to the Western stereotypes on Eastern backwardness and traditionalism. The status of native women was taken as the symbol of the state of colonized society as a whole. For colonizers, the discourse of liberating native women was constitutive to their self-appointed "civilizing mission" and a central element in the building of control and discipline mechanisms over the population (Abu-Lughod, 2002). One location where this gendered rhetoric was so explicit was Egypt under the British Empire. British colonizers such as Lord Cromer, British governor of Egypt in the early twentieth century, developed what Leila Ahmed (1992) calls "colonial feminism" to justify the need for British rule in order to save Egyptian women from native patriarchy (Stockdale, 2005: 71). Lord Cromer, known for his obsession with unveiling native Egyptian women, was casting Islam as the primary reason behind oppression of native women. Thus, he saw British colonial rule would liberate native women through replacing the corrupt and savage Islamic leadership and culture (Stockdale, 2005: 71). In the view of colonial ethnologists, sociologists, and administrators, the native woman was portrayed as "humiliated, sequestered, cloistered (Fanon, 1994: 38)" and passively in need of protection, care and saving from this darkness by Western colonial authority (Groot, 1989). In many colonial locations, this rhetoric had the function of justifying top-down imposition of many reforms and eradication of native order. The colonial governments introduced reforms in order to enable native people to transform into the civilized society.

In all these sexual discourses of Orientalism and representations of Muslim women, the diversity of practices, lives and people in the region were neglected and assimilated into a monolithic, essentialist category of Islam. In the absolute dualism between Eastern and Western civilizations, the similarities and commonalities between the status of women in the orient and Europe were constantly ignored. Indeed, in both Eastern and Western contexts, women were facing discriminatory and oppressive practices albeit in different forms. Far from enjoying equality with their male counterparts, the European women were devoid of many rights and freedoms in education, employment and politics that were granted to male citizens (Donovan 2006, Wollstonecraft 1995). Suffragette women who were struggling for their voting rights were facing harsh opposition in the imperial metropolitans. In Britain, women were not allowed to study in many college-level educational institutions even in the 1930s (Woolf 1938). In cultural sphere, the notions of female domesticity, sexual purity and chastity continued to be imposed on women in their daily lives (Mabro, 2005). Starting from the Western superiority assumption, the sexual discourse of Orientalism concealed all these discriminatory practices in the Western societies and the commonalities in the situations of Western and Eastern women. The figure of Lord Cromer himself was a visible marker of the hypocrisy behind the "colonial feminism": While he was obsessively working for unveiling Egyptian women in the name of emancipating them, he was opposing suffragette movement back home in England at the same time (Ahmed, 1992). Cromer's hypocrisy proved that what colonizers really cared was much more the foundation and maintenance of colonial rule than women's emancipation.

The discursive regulation of the sexual practices of colonizers and colonized was foundational to the imperial rule both in colony and European metropole (Stoler,

1995). The discursive formation of Victorian prudery and sexual regulation in the 19th century Europe was highly racialized and not independent from sexual discourse of orientalism. The discourses around pedagogy, parenting, children's sexuality, hygiene and perverse pleasure not only prescribed proper behavior but also attached these proper behaviors to white European bourgeois self (Stoler, 1995: 11). The cultivation of European bourgeois identity would not have became possible without these sexual prescriptions, "without a racially erotic counterpoint, without reference to libidinal energies of the savage, the primitive, the colonized – reference point of difference, critique and desire (Stoler, 1995: 6-7)." In that respect, the sexual discourse of orientalism through producing racial and sexual distinction between colonized and colonizers enabled "the clarification of whiteness and what it meant to be truly European" (Stoler, 1995: 8).

2.1.2. Homonationalism

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, sexuality and sexual freedom have come to the fore again in the Orientalist discourses on Islam. The orientalist view which posits sexuality as an essentialized set of beliefs and practices peculiar to Islam is mobilized again to reaffirm Western superiority (Butler, 2008; Massad, 2002; Roscoe and Murray, 1997; Traub, 2008). Since the very first years of 2000s, the West is witnessing a wave of Islamophobia which can easily be tracked in multiculturalism debates in Europe and in the US-led War on Terrorism. The discomfort with Islam in the U.S. and Europe get visible in many examples including the imperialist rhetoric in military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, Palestinian-Israeli conflict, minaret debates in Switzerland, legal restrictions on veil and burqa in

Belgium and France, neo-Nazi attacks against migrants throughout Western Europe, and anti-immigration policies in numerous European countries. The issues of women's and LGBT rights are present in many of these controversies. Very similar to the way the idea of emancipating women had once served to Western colonialism, the idea of universality of women's and LGBT rights have been employed to justify the current Western domination in the world (Abu Lughod 2002, Abu Lughod 2010, Butler 2008, Mahmood 2009, Massad 2002, Mepschen et. al. 2010, Mohanty, 1988; Puar 2007, Wallerstein 2006).

In that sense, women's and LGBT rights emerge as novel manifestation of the interplay among sexuality discourses, Orientalist essentialism and imperialism. There has been a convergence between Islamophobia and most segments of gay and feminist politics in the Western context where we have been witnessing the rise of racism and anti-immigration policies. What we have observed is the sexualization of controversies over cultural/religious diversity and migration issues (Mepschen et. al., 2010). Sexual freedoms and rights are instrumentalized to reproduce the image of the West as the center of modernity, pluralism and tolerance and to construct Muslim subjects as 'the others' of the Europe. These processes operate within the discourse of homonationalism which is the dominant discourse on Islam and homosexuality today in the Western contexts.

Before elaborating on homonationalism, it is useful to define homonormativity as one of the building blocks of homonationalism. The term homonormativity has been theorized by Lisa Duggan as a "new neo-liberal sexual politics." She defines it 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 constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption (Duggan, 2003: 50).” Duggan asserts that homonormativity which means the assimilation of heteronormative ideals and practices such as nuclear family into the LGBT culture and identity construction is central pillar of the production of neoliberal gay subject. In the age of neoliberalism, it works as an assimilative strategy of transnational capital.

Furthering Duggan’s analysis of homonormativity, Jaspir Puar combines the conceptualization of homonormativity with the critique of nationalism and War on Terror. She invented the term homonationalism, short for “homonormative nationalism” to describe the convergence between homosexuality and renewed nationalism after September 11. First developed in the context of American nationalism, the term homonationalism is later employed in European and Israeli contexts as well. According to Puar, the presumed antagonism between non-normative sexualities and the nation was falsified by the intersections and convergences between homosexuality and nationalism, especially in the post-9/11 period. Whereas nationalism had always been understood “as only supportive and productive of heteronormativity and always repressive and disallowing of homosexuality”, a discursive shift occurred in US sexual exceptionalism. Homonationalism, generated both by national rhetoric of patriotic inclusion and by queer subjects themselves, produce gay and lesbians who get privilege to be accepted into the nation “insofar as these perverse bodies reiterate heterosexuality as the norm” and reinforce nationalist patriotism (Puar, 2006: 68).

So, as Puar explains, homonationalism is a dual, even contradictory process of 1) incorporation of queer subjects into the ‘us’ of the ‘us-versus-them’ nationalist rhetoric through normalizing and disciplining them and 2) discerning, othering, and

quarantining Arab/Muslim terrorist bodies which are represented as racially and sexually perverse, queer figures (Puar, 2011: 133). In this discourse, the United States is idealized "as a properly multicultural heteronormative but nevertheless gay-friendly, tolerant, and sexually-liberated society (Puar, 2006: 68)." On the one hand, the homophobic and racist portrayals of terrorists and non-national others as perversely homosexual has become part of nationalist narrative of War on Terror: "negative connotations of homosexuality were used to racialize and sexualize Osama bin Laden: feminized, stateless, dark, perverse, pedophilic, disowned by family, i.e. fag (Puar, 2006: 70-71)." Puar gives the example of a poster that appeared in Manhattan, a few days after 9/11 attacks, showing a turbaned image of bin Laden being anally penetrated by the Empire State building with the following legend (Puar, 2006: 67): "The Empire Strikes Back… So you like skyscrapers, huh, bitch?" As this example shows, US patriotism sanctioned some homosexualities in a racialized way in order to produce "monster terrorist-fags" (Puar, 2006: 71).

On the other hand, the US was depicted as feminist contrary to the Taliban regime and gay-friendly compared to Middle East. "Even patriotism during the post-9/11 crisis was inextricably tied to a reinvigoration of heterosexual norms for Americans, progressive sexuality was championed as a hallmark of US modernity. (Puar, 2006: 69-70)" Gay heroes of 9/11 events were invented, and positive attributes such as masculine, white, American, hero, gay patriot (i.e. homo-national) were attached to them (Puar, 2006: 70). Many homosexuals endorsed the 'us-versus-them' rhetoric of US patriotism. Patriotic sentiments permeated to the LGBTIQ constituencies: the American flag appeared in most of gay spaces, national performatives and symbolism (national anthem, dedications to national unity etc) became widespread in gay pride parades (Puar, 2006: 70). Moreover, many LGBTIQ

organizations supported invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan in order to liberate homosexuals in the Middle East.

The processes what Puar calls homonationalism are also in operation in the context of Western Europe. For example, in Netherlands where gay politics have moved from the margins to the center thanks to the normalizing influence of LGBT struggles since 1960s, most cases of homophobia among Muslims are usually attributed to all Muslim citizens and taken as an evidence of their inability to integrate into the superior Dutch culture which is secular and modern (Butler 2008, Hekma, 2002; Mepschen et. al. 2010, Puar 2007).

An obvious example is the controversial immigration test introduced by Dutch authorities in 2006. Each would-be immigrant has to take the compulsory 'civic integration examination' to get permission to enter into the country. In this test, they are asked to look at photos of a topless women sunbathing and a gay couple kissing each other. Their reaction is observed to examine whether they will be able to adapt to the Dutch liberal attitudes, whether they can tolerate the public nudity and gay life style. Those who defend this test consider the acceptance of homosexuality as an indicator of embracement of modernity (Butler, 2008). As Butler analyzes, in this case, "modernity is being defined as sexual freedom, and the particular sexual freedom of gay people is understood to exemplify a culturally advanced position as opposed to one that would be deemed pre-modern (Butler, 2008: 3)." This modernist Eurocentric discourse builds a link between sexual freedom and temporal progress. Behind this vision, there is the understanding of "progressive modernity" which relies on the notion of linear history and considers freedom as something emerging progressively through time (Butler, 2008: 2; Traub, 2008). In the narrative of

progressive modernity, those cultures which don't accept homosexuality would be deemed pre-modern as if they don't belong to the time of the 'now' but another, past temporality. In order to catch the time of the now, they need to move forward from their "present pastness (Traub, 2008: 9)." This account presumes a progressive evolutionary road from pre-modern stage where homosexuality was repressed, silenced, invisible and disorganized to modern stage where it get visibility and social freedom (Roscoe and Murray, 1997: 5).

Who are exempted from taking this test evinces underlying Orientalist essentialist assumptions behind the narrative of progressive modernity: Citizens of a group of (mostly Western) countries including EU nationals, citizens of USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan and Switzerland are exempted (Butler, 2008: 4). In a wholistic culturalist framing, these countries are presumed to be modern and not homophobic as if homophobia is a cultural feature essentially present in some cultures and not others, that is to say, in Islamic cultures not Western ones.

Despite the fact that heteronormative matrix had played a prominent role in the constitution of modernity and modern self in the European societies (Foucault 1990, Rubin 1984) and that homosexuals being depicted as abnormal, unnatural and perverse had been targeted as the objects of violence, the defenders of 'civic integration examination' forgot this historical past and have still persisted on representing European modernity as the champion of sexual freedom ever (Mepschen et.al 2010: 963). In reality, this Orientalist binary between sexually permissive, pluralist and tolerant West and repressive homophobic Middle East is nothing but a "politically motivated fantasy" (Traub, 2008: 18). As Traub says, "neither is entirely repressive or entirely permissive (Traub, 2008: 18)." Despite the fact that many legal rights have been granted to LGBT individuals in numerous

European countries, Canada and a few states in the U.S., there are huge variations among counties, and the full legal equality couldn't have been achieved yet even in the most "advanced" contexts such as the Netherlands (Hekma, 2002: 240). Apart from legal sphere, the public visibility of homosexuality in schools, politics etc. is still limited; queer bashing is still common. Even if the conditions of lesbians and gays are ameliorated to some extent in these Western contexts, transgenders are still facing severe discrimination and violence in their daily life.

In homonationalism, certain conceptions of sexual freedom and rights are appealed "as a rationale and instrument for certain practices of coercion (Butler, 2008: 3)." The idea of protecting sexual freedom and public visibility of LGBT individuals are employed instrumentally by anti-Islamic politics to assault Islam culturally. In the homonationalist policies in Europe such as Dutch citizenship test, the real concern is more to "keep Europe white, pure, and 'secular'" than to defend LGBT rights and freedoms (Butler, 2008: 5). The prerequisite of accepting homosexuality for admission into the European polity as an immigrant contributes to re-affirm modern, secular, white cultural grounding of Europe and its superiority over other cultures.

One significant consequence of instrumentalizing sexual freedom to justify exclusionary policies against Muslim minorities is the detachment of struggles for sexual freedom from struggles against racism and Islamophobia (Butler, 2008: 5-6). In this perspective, it is assumed that there is no way for solidarity and alliance between these two struggles. Jaspir Puar, in the US context, calls this process as "disaggregation of US national gays and queers from racial and sexual 'others' (Puar, 2006: 68)." Disassociating homophobia and Islamophobia and ignoring linkages

between power mechanisms behind these two, homonationalism generates the misleading thought that the protection of sexual freedom and LGBT rights depend upon the restriction of religious rights and expression (Butler, 2008: 6). In many contexts, it might be the same discursive framework behind discrimination against LGBTs and racism at the same time. As Butler underlines, both the opposition to gay and lesbian parenting and anti-Islamic state policies in France rely on patrilineal understanding of nationalism (Butler, 2008). The presumed absence of appropriate paternal authority in same-sex parenting and in new immigrant communities in the *banlieue* is seen as threat to "patrilineal kinship and its links to masculinist norms of nationhood (Butler, 2008: 7)." In that sense, Butler suggests rethinking the possibilities for alliance among struggles against homophobia, sexism, racism, nationalism.

Homonationalism in Israel works in similar way to the way it works in the U.S. and Western Europe. There is a growing literature focusing on the relationship of gay and lesbian rights to the Israel-Palestine conflict (Hochberg 2010, Puar 2011, Stein 2010). "The politics of homophobia" and "the politics of occupation" are connected to each other (Hochberg, 2010). The term *pinkwashing*, which was deployed firstly among activist circles and later in academia, can be defined as Israeli state's "use of ostensible support for gender and sexual equality to dress-up its occupation (Abdulhadi et al., 2012: 91)." The strategy of *pinkwashing* refers to Israel's claim to 'gay friendliness' and 'gay tolerance' as a way of "redirecting focus away from critiques of repressive actions toward Palestine (Puar, 2011: 133)." As Rebecca L. Stein (2010) explains, the recognition of gay and lesbian legal rights ["including protection against workplace discrimination, increasing institutionalisation of same-sex partner benefits, and greater inclusion in the Israeli Defence Forces (Puar, 2011:

135)"] in Israel happens in tandem with increasingly repressive policies of Israeli state toward Palestinians (Stein, 2010: 521).

In 2005, Israeli Foreign Ministry launched Brand Israel, a massively funded global PR campaign to change Israel's growing bad global reputation as a militaristic colonial power and rebrand its image as modern and tolerant. The image of Israel "as a safe haven for LGBT community" has been central to these reputation management efforts. As a part of Brand Israel, Tel Aviv has begun to be marketed as "an international gay vacation destination", and many cultural events have been organized such as in film festivals in New York, Toronto, and London (Puar, 2011). These pinkwashing activities have functioned "as a cover up to the exclusionary politics of the Israeli state" and "its violations of human rights and international law (Maikey, 2011)." Also, they contribute to the discursive "production of the 'Israeli gay tolerance/Palestinian homophobia' binary (Puar, 2011: 137)." Through its practices of pinkwashing, the Israeli state has the purpose of establish itself "as cosmopolitan, progressive, Westernized and democratic as compared with the backward, repressive, homophobic Islamic nations, which, in turn, serves to solidify Israel's aggression as a position of the 'defense' of democracy and freedom (Puar, 2011: 133)."

Homonationalism reproduces the essentialism and Orientalist premise that the Western societies have superiority in cultural, political and moral terms over Arab and Islamic cultures for being much more tolerant to and inclusive of LGBTQ identity. As a configuration of racism, nationalism and sexual politics, homonationalism particularly incorporates LGBTQ rights discourses into an Islamophobic agenda. It assigns LGBTQ rights a neo-colonial role that is similar to the role women's rights have played in colonial times and later in the War on Terror.

Homonationalist discourses represent the Western powers as the protectors of LGBTQ rights and liberators of Muslim LGBTQ individuals from their oppressing Islamic cultures. As Puar notes, "the 'Woman Question' is now being supplemented with the 'Homosexual Question'. That is, in the colonial period, the question of 'how do you treat your women?' as a determining factor of a nation's capacity for sovereignty has now been appended with the barometer of 'how well do you treat your homosexuals?' (Puar, 2011: 139)"

As numerous white Western feminists and women's rights organizations have aligned with colonialism and Western imperialism in their Orientalist missionary task of saving Middle Eastern women, many LGBT rights advocates and organizations have been doing a similar work today for liberating Muslim LGBTs in the region. Joseph Massad's central thesis in "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World" is that the promotion of gay rights in the Middle East is a brand-new Orientalist missionary task sought by white male-dominated Western gay movement what he calls "the Gay International." The Gay International consists mostly of U.S.- and European-based gay organizations, white male European or American gay scholars and journalists producing historical, literary, anthropological and journalistic accounts on so-called LGBTs in the Muslim and Arabic worlds. He argues that in the last twenty five years the Gay International has tried to universalize gay rights through self-representing itself as the defender of LGBTs all over the world, especially Muslim world (Massad, 2002: 161).

He claims that the Gay International and other global gay movements impose their own Western-originated epistemological identity categories (i.e. homosexual, heterosexual, gay and lesbian) –as if they are universal- into the non-Western contexts where these categories don't correspond to the existing homoeroticisms.

Although many Arab practitioners of same-sex relations don't identify themselves with these "global" LGBT categories, the discourse of the Gay International invites and even pushes them to conform to these categories, come out of the closet and engage in gay politics. In that sense, the Gay International "both produces homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist, and repress same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology (Massad, 2002: 163)" Through producing Arab homosexuals, gays and lesbians and repressing non-conforming same-sex practices at the same time, the Western universalist gay movement compels the Arab world to homo-hetero binary and heterosexualize it unwittingly (Massad, 2002: 383-4).

It is argued that the non-Western cultures has actually permitted sexual indeterminacy and condoned sexual diversity including unmarked, unlabeled same-sex practices which have long been performed in culturally and historically unique ways different from modern Western gay and lesbian practices (Murray, 1997). As Massad asserts, the Gay International, in an effort to liberate Middle Eastern LGBTQs from constraints and repression rooted in their non-Western cultures, has an assimilating influence on these same-sex practices for attempting to compress them into a global 'ideally open' gay identity. In doing so, the discourse of international gay lobbies replaces a variety of culturally tolerated non-normative sexualities with rigid homo-hetero binaries. Moreover, through attributing an ideal status to being out and politically organized, these discourses conflate 'doing' (participating in same-sex sex) with 'being' (having a gay identity) (Özyeğin, 2012: 203).

According to Massad, the Gay International's self-authorized mission of liberating Arab and Muslim practitioners of same-sex has actually brought about more problems for them and worsened their conditions. In the Arab world, there have

been silent permission and tacit consent toward same-sex relations which tolerate these relations as long as they are secret, invisible and only practiced in private (Murray, 1997). Same-sex contacts which have been "tolerated" previously begin to be targeted repressively in so far as they are identified with Western identity of gayness and become public (Massad, 2002: 382). As the activities of the Gay International and its upper-class supporters in the Arab diaspora (such as Al-Fatiha, a US-based LGBT Muslim organization) politicize and publicize the same-sex relations in the Arab world, they provoke more violence and reaction against these relations by Arab governments and Islamist conservatives. The gay activities and identity begins to be considered as a part of imperialist project and responded with "vilification campaigns of deviant sex as an imperialist plot (Massad, 2002: 383)" by Arab governments, press and conservatives. The Arab governments respond to the Gay International's "incitement to discourse" by framing their antihomosexual stances on an anti-imperialist, nationalist, culturalist basis. Moreover, the Gay International's activities could lead Arab governments to pass anti-homosexual legislation or begin to enforce previously unforced laws or mobilize the police persecution (Massad, 2002: 384).

These critiques of homonationalism and the Gay International point out the tensions politics of universalism and politics of difference. The tension between cultural difference claims and universal rights has existed as one of the heated controversies within the international debate on human rights. On the one hand, the basic principles of the politics of universality are equal dignity of citizens, equalization of rights and entitlements, and principle of equal citizenship (Barry, 2001a, 2001b; Bauman, 2001; Benhabib, 2002; Calhoun, 2007; Habermas, 1998). Everyone is essentially equal and deserves, therefore, equal recognition. The politics

of universal dignity aims to guarantee non-discrimination through being difference-blind. Rights are considered universally applicable irrespective of racial, class-based, national or gender differences, since all human beings have equal human dignity. This universalistic approach considers human rights natural or historically generated, universally valid and not contingent upon laws, customs or traditions of any particular culture or society. It is defended that many basic rights allow for historical and cultural diversity in their implementation. So, the content of human rights should be the same everywhere.

On the other hand, the politics of difference relies on the idea that that everyone should be recognised for his or her particular peculiar identity (Kymlicka, 1996, 2000; Parekh, 2000; Taylor, 1994). Without acknowledging distinctness and particularities and making it the basis of differential treatment, it is not possible to avoid assimilation or discrimination. This approach suggests that the value of any different identity/culture is equal. Therefore, different identities/cultures deserve equal recognition, but not necessarily equal treatment. The thickest version of this position implies cultural relativism that perceives human rights to be culturally embedded and context dependent (Boas, 1986; Herskovits, 1958). According to them, the notions of rights and moral values/rules necessarily differ throughout the world because the cultures in which they are encoded differ. There is no cross-cultural content of right or wrong. Thus, this relativist approach attaches an important conclusion to this empirical diversity: that it is not possible to reach or agree on transcendent or transcultural ideas of rights, and thus no culture or state is justified in attempting to demand other cultures and states to comply with its own standards. It is asserted that cultural relativism is necessary since it is not possible to find cross-cultural norms without imposing a hegemonic standard. To the relativists, the

universalization of Western norms through human rights instruments may destroy cultural diversity, and thus contributes to cultural homogenization. They argue that the social and cultural differences among societies render universal human rights impossible. Instead of universal human rights, the relativist position emphasizes the values of respect for diversity and local autonomy.

This long-standing tension between politics of difference and of universalism reappears in the debate over Islam and LGBT rights, as the critiques of homonationalism show us. These critiques invite us to see the problems with the Orientalist accounts that impose LGBT rights and categories to Muslim contexts. Firstly, these Orientalist accounts that are informed by progressive modernism essentialize both so-called Muslim and Western cultures, picturing the former as backward, pre-modern and inherently homophobic, and the latter as sexually tolerant, liberal and modern. This depiction is far removed from reflecting the existing heterogeneity in both contexts.

As Massad asserts, the self-proclaimed "universal" categories of Gay International are indeed not that universal but products of a particular Western locality self-presenting its own values as if they are globally shared. The notions of LGBTQ rights and identities were emerged within the Western context and embedded in socio-cultural and historical processes in the West. Thus, they are not something which can easily be translated to the other local contexts. Although modern Western binary of homosexual and heterosexual or sexual categories of gay and lesbian don't correspond to the wide range of long existing sexual diversity in the Islamic societies, they continue to be imposed as if they are universally valid. These critiques are helpful to acknowledge that there might be differences between same-sex practices in different contexts. Thus, the agendas, needs and nature of

queer politics might differ from one context to another. These critiques warn us neglecting local differences in terms of queer practices, identities, needs and politics. However, they run the risk of reproducing cultural essentialism as far as they disregard any value that is Western-originated for being "alien" to non-Western contexts. The fact that the conceptions of human rights, women's rights, LGBTQ rights or democracy had emerged in the particular historical and political context of Western societies does not mean that they lose automatically their value, meaning or validity in non-Western contexts. This sort of assumption would reproduce cultural essentialism for assuming a radical alterity between Western and non-Western societies. To dismiss any value for having universal claim would also imply cultural relativism. Neither universality nor Western-origin makes a value or norm directly oppressive or meaningless in non-Western contexts. LGBTQ rights are surely modern products of Western liberal democracies, and they have universality claim, that is the idea that each LGBTQ individual should have the same equal rights that are granted to heterosexual citizens. Yet, none of these features is sufficient to reject LGBTQ rights altogether in non-Western contexts. Likewise, the fact that the "universal" rights and categories such as human rights, women's rights or LGBTQ rights are instrumentalized in many contexts by broader imperialist projects doesn't necessarily mean that these universal rights and categories are essentially imperialist. In that sense, hierarchy or domination between the East and the West are not absolute, fixed or unchanging. Mutual transformation and alteration is possible among interacting cultures. Non-Western people have the agency and capacity to adopt, reshape and reconstruct the Western-originated norms and values in line with their own needs, conditions and struggles. They are not merely passive or bound to be silenced. To assume otherwise would imply a combination of cultural relativism

and essentialism serving to authoritarian policies, such as those against LGBTQ individuals.

2.2. Cultural difference as excuse for opposing women's and LGBT rights

Ironically, the critiques of Orientalism and universalist imposition of women's and LGBT rights might serve to equally essentialist results. These sorts of critiques are appropriated by religious conservatives in cultural relativistic ways. In several religious contexts, the universality of women's and LGBT rights is dismissed altogether in the name of cultural difference. Culture turns to be an excuse for authoritarian practices and discrimination (Barry, 2001; Benhabib, 2002; Okin, 1997). In this section, I will introduce the critique of cultural excuse and suggest rethinking the dominant conservative objections to LGBT rights in light of this critique.

One strand of scholars (Barry, 2001a, 2001b; Bauman, 2001; Benhabib, 2002; Calhoun, 2007; Habermas, 1998; Kandiyoti 2009, 2010, Zubaida 1994, 1999) points out the risk of cultural essentialism as possible side-effect of disregarding universal rights in the name of cultural difference. Benhabib, in her discussion on "the use and abuse of culture" in multiculturalism debates in the Western contexts, points out an interesting convergence between some segments of conservatives and progressives: both groups defend the preservation of cultural difference. Conservatives argue that cultures should be preserved in order to keep groups separate and avoid instability and conflict that cultural hybridity might generate. On the other hand, progressives support multicultural policies granting collective rights to minority groups in order to

protect them from assimilation into the wider society. The idea of preserving cultures is accompanied by demands for special collective rights and autonomy from the wider national legal system. Benhabib lists (Benhabib, 2002: 4) a few faulty premises of cultural essentialism that both groups share: Firstly, they assume cultures to be delineable wholes. They reify cultures as separate entities by exaggerating their boundedness and distinctness (Turner, 1993: 412 cited in Benhabib, 2002: 4). Secondly, they take cultures as congruent with human groups and presume that noncontroversial description of the culture of a group is possible. Thirdly, "even if cultures and groups do not stand in one-to-one-correspondence, even if there is more than one culture within a human group and more than one group that may possess the same cultural traits", they don't think this creates political or policy-based problems. Benhabib rejects the demands for preservation of cultural differences because of these cultural essentialist assumptions. (Benhabib, 2002: 8)." Instead she argues that intercultural justice should be better defended in the name of justice and freedom and not of preservation of cultures.

She underlines that "human cultures are constant creations, recreations and negotiations of imaginary boundaries between 'we' and the 'others'. The proponents of cultural preservation mistakenly presume that any change in culture is a threat against cultural identity and that any change in the way of life and conditions of a cultural group destroys group identity and the very existence of the group. The critiques challenge these premises and emphasize the constantly revisable, changeable, flexible character of culture. Changes in cultures and transformation of certain cultural traits might even be required in some occasions. For example, heterosexist, misogynist or oppressive cultural practices are much better to transform and perish than to be preserved.

Multiculturalists and communitarians "celebrate out-group difference but deny in-group difference" (Calhoun, 2007: 110). Calhoun asserts that nations, cultures, peoples, genders etc. are presented "as realms of familiarity and sameness, not as categories within which heterogeneous members have rights of participation (Calhoun, 2007: 110)." In that sense, they rely on "cultural diversity rooted in a claim to integral singularity (Calhoun, 2007: 108)." This overemphasis on the internal homogeneity of cultures is dangerous for potentially justifying oppressive practices that push nonconforming members to obey communal norms, and treating cultures as symbols of group identity.

Like Benhabib and Calhoun, Brian Barry (2001a) discusses "abuses of culture" in which culture is presented as excuse for certain violent and oppressive practices which would otherwise be considered as violation of law and be punished according to system of rights. 'It's a part of my culture' approach provides defense of a particular practice, relying on the claim that it is an inherent and innate element of one's culture. He questions "the assumption that the appeal to 'culture' constitutes some sort of justification in and of itself (Barry, 2001a: 253)." He says that if you are asked to justify some action that you have performed, normally you are supposed to come up with a reason to explain what made it right to do this action within the given circumstances. However, citing tradition or culture functions as a "self-contained justificatory move (Barry, 2001a: 253)."

These theoretical accounts speak a lot to discussions about Islam and homosexuality. The Islamic governments, some clerical establishments and religious conservatives abuse the notion of cultural difference to justify their rejection of sexual freedom and women's and LGBT rights. The Islamic governments put many reservations on international documents regulating these rights, claiming that they

are incompatible with national culture, public morality or religion. The essentialist assumption that there are incommensurable differences between Western and Eastern cultures is mobilized in order to reject LGBT rights and homosexuality. In the remaining parts of this section, I will introduce the relevant literature focusing on the repercussions of cultural difference arguments in the debates over Islam and women's and LGBT rights.

In the Middle East, with the rise of Islamist movements especially after Iranian Revolution of 1979, the intertwined relationship between gender and politics manifested itself in the Islamist rhetoric of struggling against "westoxication" and return to authentic culture. The Islamist ideologies addressed the veiled Muslim women as the banner of Islamic culture and society depicted as opposite to immoral, pervert Western and Westernized cultures. An authentic Muslim womanhood was invoked as a part of broader critique of Westernization and consumerism (Kandiyoti, 1995: 23-24). In the quest for differentiation from the Westernized self, the Muslim self emerged as the symbol of morality as opposed to the immoral Western/ized other. While attributing immoral values to the West and the Westernized secular local elites, the difference of Muslim identity is rendered visible through its morality. Just as Orientalism has relied on an essentialist division between the West and the East, so does the mainstream Islamist dualism between immoral West and authentic Islam.

Morality becomes a central issue in building the "authentic" Islamic self and society and is mostly defined in relation to sexual politics. As Nilüfer Göle (1996: 16) says, the control over sexuality, normative rules defining the relations between men and women, taboos regarding chastity and homosexuality have always been part of "new consciousness of the Islamic self and the Islamic way of life." Because women are seen as the transmitters of cultural and linguistic tradition by virtue of

bringing up offspring, the control of women and family affairs has been considered central to the preservation of culture and protection of the boundaries of the symbolic identity of their group (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989). As a result, throughout the Arab region, the legal rights that were previously granted to women in the nationalist regimes were set back by *sharia*-based family codes and personal status legislation privileging men in a variety of spheres such as marriage, divorce, child custody, maintenance, and inheritance rights (Kandiyoti, 1995: 22).

When criticizing imperialist strategy of objectifying native women as "exoticized victims" and of deploying women's rights as an instrument of war, some cultural relativists demand the recognition of the radical alterity of these women and their conditions (Kandiyoti, 2009). These accounts, through elaborating that there is a radical alterity between indigenous culture and the West and that the Western concept of women's rights is incompatible with local "culture" or "tradition", unwittingly naturalize and essentialize these cultures or traditions. Ironically, this sort of reaction reproduces the Clash of Civilization thesis (Huntington, 1998) with its essentialism and reproduces the othering mechanisms. The total dismissal of women's and LGBT rights leave native women and same-sex practitioners no choice but articulating their demands only in the language of their so-called "authentic cultures." It locks local women and LGBTs into an essentialized concept of cultural indigeneity and restrains them within the very narrow boundaries of their imaginarily unified "authentic" cultures (Kandiyoti, 2010: 171).

As contradictory to their initial intention of uncovering orientalism behind the strategic imperialist exploitation of universal rights discourse, the cultural relativists ironically share the essentialism aspect of orientalism: indigenous culture is misrepresented as if it is fixed, frozen, unchanging, natural and homogenous rather

than as a construction being revised and changed over time through a multiplicity of dynamics (Bauman, 2001). In the name of respect for cultural difference or cultural sensitivity, existing gender relations are naturalized as if they are timeless, ahistorical and intrinsic to native culture, although they have actually been constructed in the interplay of historical, political, economical, religious processes (Kandiyoti, 2007, 2009, 2010). This way of understanding conceals how cultural norms and the politics of gender in local contexts have been actually influenced by a complex layering of factors over time such as colonial histories, Western interventions, and nation-state building processes. So, culturalist explanations which claim that Western concepts of women's and LGBTQ rights don't fit with the native Islamic cultures in the Middle East ignore that these cultures are constructed with the involvement of surrounding power relations.

In their denunciation of LGBT rights as alien products of morally corrupt Western modernity, these culturalist arguments essentialize Western cultures as well. Though the concepts of universal human, women's and LGBT rights have developed in the West as part of its particular history, they are not culturally specific or inherent in Western culture (Zubaida, 1994: 7). Rather, they are products of a series of struggles and revolutions such as French revolution, civil rights struggle, women's movement and LGBT movement. These rights were institutionalized after pragmatic needs felt for social peace and stability after long-lasting societal tensions and upheavals. They shouldn't be separated from history of global struggles for economic, social and political justice. Likewise, to consider LGBT rights culturally specific or inherent in Western history and culture ignores the struggles behind the emergence of LGBT rights in the West (Adam et.al, 1999). They ironically reproduce the very same essentialism in orientalism which they initially attempt to refuse.

One of the problems with these culturalist explanations is that they curtain the heterogeneity in the local contexts and assume the Islamic perspective to be the only representative of native population. The culturalist claims conceal that native populations are as diverse as their counterparts in other countries. There are ideological, political and class-based diversity among them, and they hold different political visions of their countries (Kandiyoti, 2009). However, this political and ideological diversity and multivocality is somehow ignored and reduced to an imagined Islamic cultural uniformity ironically in the name of anti-imperialism and of opposition to Western imposition. In this process, voices speaking from outside the religious field are either left out, devalued or eliminated (Zubaida, 1994: 5).

Another significant pillar of the dominant orthodox Islamic discourse propagating against LGBT rights is communitarianism which prioritizes the community over individual and common good over individual rights (McIntyre, 1984; Sandel, 1998; Taylor, 1989). In consistency with the cultural difference arguments which assert that communal perspective is ascendant over the individual in some cultures as opposed to the individual atomism in Western ethics (Dwyer, 1992), these conservative discourses defend that the rights of LGBT individuals might be restricted for the sake of public morality or future and needs of the society/*umma*. They argue that anything that might justify LGBT identity, say it LGBT rights and visibility, should be rejected in order to protect public morality and holy family. Thus, LGBT visibility in the media, politics or other public spaces needs to be limited and prevented for the sake of future of the community. For they prioritize the needs and well-being of an 'imagined' Muslim community over of LGBT individuals, the conservative Islamists fall into authoritarian communitarianism. In their discourse, the well-being of society is situated over the

rights of LGBT individuals whose visibility is found dangerous and threatening for the future of the society and public morality. Through ignoring the heterogeneity and variety of differences within the society, they treat society as if it is an organic unity.

This understanding of society as a whole and unity is part of totalistic view of community. When the society is identified "as an agency, a super-subject or a super-person" instead of "a field of social relations and institutions, which contains many agencies including governmental, institutional, associational and personal (Zubaida, 1994: 4)", the voice of authority begins to speak on behalf of the society. How the interests and needs of the society are to be defined and by whom becomes a matter of power relations. Zubaida argues that "it is usually someone from the ruling class, the state or religious authority who has the power to enforce his construction of the interests of the *umma* (Zubaida, 1994: 5)." Although there is no theological institution such as papacy in Islam, political and historical processes set up certain Shaykhs and clerical establishments as ultimate decision makers and monitors of the religious truth and give them the power of censoring (Kandiyoti, 2010b, Zubaida 1994). If the participation of some actors and agencies are obstructed through censorships and other limitations on freedom of expression and association, the process turns to authoritarianism. If decision-making process for defining common good in a community or society is not organized in a democratic way with minimum preconditions (freedom of association, expression, political campaigning etc.) secured, vulnerable and disadvantaged members and segments of society are usually excluded *de facto* from this definition process (Barry, 2001: 326). The women, youth or LGBT individuals may suffer from the intra-group inequalities and internal restrictions (Kymlicka, 1995). The authorities in power claim the right to define the needs of society and common good (Zubaida, 1994: 2-4).

Today dominant religious authorities draw the religious definitional boundaries over sexuality through condemning homosexuality as sin and incompatible with Islam. These conservatives are self-authorized to decide that homosexuality is perversion, sinful and forbidden in Islam and to constrain sexuality to heterosexual, marital, reproductive nuclear family. They keep non-normative sexualities out of religious boundaries they have drawn. While traditional family values and the Islamic conservative morality are imposed normatively in this process, the LGBT identities, choices, lifestyles and visibilities are demonized and repressed. Thus, through drawing boundaries between religiously acceptable and unacceptable sexualities and identities, they exclude LGBT individuals from their imagined 'authentic' community. As Göle says "who decides such questions as What is really Islamic? And Who is real Muslim? can lead to essentialist definitions and exclusionary standards, thereby turning the imagined community into an 'oppressive communitarianism' (Göle, 1996: 20)" The conservative Islamists try to impose their own religious definitions and meanings as if it reflects the real and authentic Islam. As though the Islamic views on sexuality, marriage or gender are not diverse and multiple, they dictate their own views on others in an authoritarian way.

In Muslim majority contexts, universal notions of women's and LGBT rights are frequently denounced by conservative political actors as culturally alien values and Western impositions. However, as the scholarly debate outlined above displays, these culturalist arguments that abuse cultural difference as excuse for women's and LGBT rights cast as a cover for authoritarian communitarianism. In light of these scholarly discussions, I argue that the fact that LGBT rights and sexual categories emerged in the context of Western liberal democracies and instrumentalized in the War on Terror doesn't necessarily mean that they have by no means relevancy in the

non-Western contexts. It doesn't mean that it is incommensurable, non-translatable to Muslim-majority contexts. It would be reductive to assume that globalization of LGBT rights and of sexual categories is a one-way process. As Amar says, universal rights have "no 'ideal form' or singular direction of dissemination, nor one meaning or legacy that would maintain them as exclusive property of the West (Amar, 2011: 304)." Rather, they are reworked and rearticulated by local actors in their local struggles for justice. The local movements and individuals have agency to rework on LGBT rights and sexual categories and attribute new strategic meanings to them in line with their own local needs

2.3 Queering Islam, Reconciling or Inhabiting Islam and LGBT identity

Religious definitional boundaries and meanings are social constructions and resultfrom political and sociohistorical struggles (Asad, 1993; Bayat, 2007; McGuire, 2008). The definitions of what is properly 'religion' and 'religious', who is really 'one of us', what practices and beliefs are true as opposed to what is wrong, mistaken and alien have undergone transformations overtime due to several political and sociohistorical proccesses (McGuire, 2008: 21). Although particular ways of being religious were once normative and prevalent, they might come to be considered unacceptable and condemned as sinful, or vice versa after certain contestations. In that sense, each religion is an area of contestation and struggle.

As Asef Bayat argues "sacred injunctions are matters of struggle, of competing readings. They are, in other words, matters of history, humans define their truth. The individuals and groups who hold social power can assert and hegemonize their truths. (Bayat, 2007: 4)" Likewise, McGuire asserts that power setting is

determinant to the process of drawing boundaries (McGuire, 2008: 43). The terms of discourse about religion is mostly decided by powerful groups who have economic, political, cultural or military power. The power setting privileges these groups' religious practices, whereas marginalizing others.

So, the debates over homosexuality and Islam need to be understood in the light of this approach to religion. The dominant Islamic orthodox doctrine that sees homosexuality as sinful and condemns it is an actually historical product of discursive processes and power relations. The dominant religious distinctions and boundaries are not inherent and essential properties of the sacred injuction. There is neither "one and only" Islam nor "real" Islam. Religion is not a unitary, monolithic phenomenon, but it is multicentered and multivocal. The definitions and judgments of the dominant heteronormative orthodox view should not be taken as inherent and essential aspects of Islam but as social, political cultural constructions.

This way of thinking prevents us from representing Islam as a monolithic and static entity and homogenizing its believers and allow us to see the diversity and multiplicity of actors from individuals to institutions, from small groups to social movements all engaging in the construction of religious meanings. The religious truth claims of those in power are resisted and challenged by other groups they attempt to subjugate. Social movements cast an influential role in redefining and shaping religious truth. A variety of theological genres including liberation theology, feminist theologies, queer theology emerged from the involvement of different social movements into the contestation over religious meaning. If the present hegemony of conservative heteronormative discourses in Islam doesn't stem from Islam's intrinsic or essential characteristics but the current configuration of religious power, this means that this hegemony might be disrupted when more queer-friendly visions of

Islam gain more social acceptance. In the following parts, I will introduce relevant literature focusing on how LGBT Muslim agencies deal with the tension between their religious and sexual identity, and how their Muslim identity interact with Western-originated LGBT sexual categories.

The orthodox Islamic doctrines are influential on Muslims' beliefs and practices but are not absolutely determinant. It "penetrates but does not encompass the lives of its practitioners (Barth 1993: 177 cited in Boelstorff, 2005: 577)." As Eickelman observes, huge numbers of Muslims are examining and debating the fundamentals of Muslim belief and practice. In that sense, an Islamic Reformation is going on continuously through this highly deliberate examination of the faith (Eickelman, 1998). Sexuality, gender equality and homosexuality are among the issues that the faithful engage in rethinking and reinterpreting.

Muslim feminists have begun this project and questioned the patriarchal and misogynist assumptions behind so many practices and beliefs that are presumed to be integral part of Islamic religion (Ali, 2006; Barlas, 2002; Stowasser, 1994; Wadud 1999, 2006). They have suggested that the Qur'an does not portray women as devoid of reason, naturally inferior, or intrinsically subject to men's control, in contrast to the Orthodox and traditionalist interpretations that claim this to be the case.

Following these feminist critiques, an increasing number of LGBT Muslims return to the Islamic sources in order to argue for a queer-friendly Islam through reinterpretation of the religious texts and sources (Jamal 2001; Nahas 1998, 2001; Kugle 2003, 2007; Malik 2003; Schannahan 2009, Yip, 2005). Similar to their Christian counterparts (Stuart 2003; Guest 2005; Guest et al. 2006), non-heterosexual Muslims have begun to challenge hegemonic Islamic discourses disregarding

homosexuality and produce alternative knowledge through a creative process of re-interpretation and re-contextualization (Yip, 2008: 108).

Drawing upon his research on British non-heterosexual Christians and Muslims, Yip argues that these believers employ different strategies of constructing sexuality-affirming hermeneutics: highlighting the inaccuracy and socio-cultural specificity of traditional hermeneutics, arguing for contextualized and culturally-relevant interpretation, criticizing the credibility of institutional interpretive authority by highlighting its inadequacy and ideology, or relocating authentic interpretive authority to personal experience (Yip, 2008: 108). Asserting that relevant Qur'an and *hadith* have been misinterpreted, the non-heterosexual Muslims offer alternative views which open a space for the recognition of non-heteronormative sexual identities and relationships within an Islamic framework. Among them, Jamal (1997) suggests that in the Koran, same-sex practices are viewed no different from certain opposite-sex and non-sexual activities. As a result of her semantic analysis, she found that there are no terms in the Quran that exclusively denote to same-sex sexuality, but certain terms are frequently associated with same-sex practice. According to her, "same-sex indiscretions are put on the same ethical plane as all sorts of inappropriate opposite-sex and non-sexual activities (Jamal, 1997: 95)" such as desiring opposite sex outside the bounds of marriage, committing adultery, approaching sexually one's mahrams such as mother, sister, daughter, aunt, niece etc. or not purifying oneself prior to prayer after sex. Concerning Lot story, she concludes that the punishment of Lot's people was not due to homosexuality but other morally inappropriate acts such as inhospitality, sexual violence and rape. It was *hadith* literature not the Quran which built a connection between the Lot story and same-sex sexuality, thus influenced later Islamic attitudes toward same-sex practice.

Another strand of queer-friendly Islamic stances emphasizes "historical and socio-cultural specificity of certain religious texts, which limits their applicability to today's socio-cultural realities (Yip, 2008: 109)" As religion is not a 'trans-historical essence' (Assad, 1993: 29) and doesn't exist as timeless and unitary phenomenon, we know that both religions and what people perceive to be religion change over time (McGuire, 2008: 5). In line with this view, Kugle (2003) points out that the Quran doesn't address homosexuality as the term is understood today; instead it speaks of particular acts and moral attitudes. Thus, he questions that how one can infer that the Quran condemns homosexuality when it has no reference to sexual identity or orientation. According to him, Muslims needs to reevaluate dominant Muslim interpretations of Islam instead of rejecting Islam entirely. It is argued that Shari'ah which was first developed in Medina in seventh century has not only historical but also ideological bias for it reflects heteronormative, androcentric and patriarchal ideology of its time (Barlas, 2002). In the reinterpretation process, it is necessary to take into consideration possible heteronormative and patriarchal biases that might have influenced previous ways of reading the texts. Kugle suggests that gay and lesbian Muslims should involve in a "sexually-sensitive interpretation" that is attentive to multiplicity of sexualities and to the fact that non-normative sexualities are marginalized and disempowered due to hierarchical power relations (2003: 203). He proposes semantic and thematic analysis of the text instead of classical literal, ahistorical, decontextualized interpretations.

Another approach, despite accepting that Islamic law forbids homosexuality, still looks for spaces of freedom within the traditional boundaries. Nahas (1998, 2001) says that homosexuality can only be punished if there are four witnesses who had observed the same-sex sexual act. This loophole in the Islamic law might offer a

possibility for non-heterosexual acts to be practiced as long as it is in private. This sort of approach might be beneficial to understand huge number of LGBTQ Muslims who maintain practicing same-sex relations even though believing that they commit sin by doing so (Bereket and Adam, 2008; Boellstorff 2005; Khan, 2010). To understand this seemingly self-contradictory ways of being, it is important not to forget that religion is not only a belief system but also an individual practice. There might be tensions even contradictions between religious discourses and practices at the individual level (Yip, 2009: 2). "Lived religion" in everyday practices "appears to be multifaceted, often messy or even contradictory amalgam of beliefs and practices (McGuire, 2008: 208)." This view of "lived religion" is very helpful to understand how it becomes possible for a religious person to continue practicing homosexuality though s/he believes homosexuality is sinful at the same time.

Boellstorff discusses this "incommensurability" between being Muslim and being gay in the Indonesian context where being a gay Muslim is considered ungrammatical and unintelligible by public norms (Boellstorff, 2005). There is an extensive public Islamic discourse addressing proper and improper heterosexual practices. In contrast, gay Muslims encounter with "the silence of incommensurability" regarding their sexuality. Even if Islamic figures speak of male homosexuality in rare public occasions, it is always in terms of condemnation and rejection. Many scholars argue that in many Muslim contexts, there is a widespread "will not to know" in which the community "tolerates" sex between men or other non-normative sexualities as soon as they are unspoken, invisible and performed only in private (Boellstorff 2005, Massad 2007, Murray 1997). Those people who don't comply with normative sexualities are permitted and condoned to some extent subject to the condition that their sexual activities are never visible in public.

Although gayness appears sometimes in the media or other public spaces, Muslim identity never comes together with this public display of gayness. In that sense, in Indonesia, Muslim homosexuality is totally invisible, there are no gay Muslim publics, and there is currently no example of being an out gay and seen as a pious Muslim at the same time. As Boellstorff points out, the incommensurability of being gay and Muslim lies here. This doesn't mean that there are not gay Muslims. Indeed, most Indonesian *gay* men believe in Islam.

Boellstorf, focusing on the Indonesian gay men's responses to dominant public norms and religious doctrine, underlines that his interlocutors have not been able to resolve incommensurability between the language of Islam and gay subjectivity, but they inhabit it (Boelstroff, 2005: 582). Some of them see same-sex sexual acts as sinful and try to suppress or constrain their desire; some of them see it as not sinful or as a minor sin forgivable by merciful God. Majority of them are married or plan to marry with a woman and see marriage as a duty or requirement for being proper man and citizen of nation (Boelstorff, 2005). This habitation of incommensurability constitutes not a translation of global gay identity into local language, but a process of "dubbing culture" (Boelstorff, 2003). The metaphor of dubbing implies that as the moving lips of person speaking never perfectly match the dubbed voiced, being *lesbi* or *gay* and being an Indonesian Muslim never perfectly match. In that sense, the languages of Islam and gayness are "placed together like rails on a train track that unify only at some ever-receding horizon (Boelstorff, 2005: 583)." Thus, *gay* Muslims inhabit *gayness* and Islam simultaneously without a perfect match and resolution of incommensurability.

In addition to Boellstorff, there are many other scholars focusing on translation of global gay and lesbian identities into local culture in Muslim-majority contexts (Bereket and Adam, 2008; Mahdavi, 2012; Özyeğin, 2012). Their findings challenge not only cultural relativist arguments that homosexuality contradicts with local culture but also some critical scholars such as Massad who see gay and lesbian identities as Western impositions. In the non-Western contexts, there are many people identified with the LGBT categories as well as those who don't prefer to do so. For example, in Turkey, there is a powerful LGBT movement and considerable LGBT population who adopt these sexual identity categories consciously or strategically (Çakırlar&Delice, 2012: 24). Gül Özyeğin's study (2012) on the emergence of *gey* as a category of identification by men who practice same-sex relations in Turkey shows that this global category is given substance and localized rather than imposed from outside in a one-way process. *Gey* subjectivities in Turkey neither fit well with the "global" demands of an open gay identity nor reject global gay identity in its totality. Instead, *gey* identity gains meaning through "local inflection to this imported global category (Özyeğin, 2012: 202)."

Similarly, Bereket and Adam (2006), relying on interviews with 20 MSM[6] (men who have sex with men) in Ankara, have demonstrated that there are increasing numbers of MSM who are identifying themselves as *gey*, and stepping away from the longstanding characterization as either *pasif* (recipient) or *aktif* (inserter). Although *gey*-identified men in Turkey represent a minority among men practicing same-sex relations, their number is increasing. As Bereket and Adam argue, "there is no one-way determinism in the adoption of sexual identity from the global to the local and that the meaning of *gey* is variable, entailing diverse ways of imagining, portraying,

[6] I borrowed the authors' description.

and seeing oneself. (Bereket and Adam, 2006: 133)" So these two studies in the Turkish context give us evidence that there is heterogeneity in the self-identification of men practicing same-sex relations. Whilst the majority of male same-sex practitioners don't prefer to identify with global sexual categories such as gay, others describe themselves as gay through redefining gayness in the Turkish context.

These studies show us that to assume LGBTQ sexual categories and rights purely as Western impositions by the Gay International would disregard the agency of self-defined local Muslim LGBTQs. Their agency should not be dismissed as if they adopt the Western identities submissively without any reshaping intervention. Actually, these people have the capacity to adopt, reshape and reconstruct the Western-originated sexual categories in line with their own needs and conditions. Ironically, both dominant Islamic view and some of the scholars criticizing homonationalism or the Gay International such as Massad fall into a common mistake. Both see self-defined LGBTQs as Westernized, upper class, privileged collaborators of Western imperialists. It is a current fact that they are mostly urban, westernized, upper or middle class, educated segments among all same-sex practitioners, but it doesn't mean that they can be excluded from 'authentic' local community for being assimilated into the "corrupt" Western culture. To leave them out as collaborators would imply that those identities, life styles and values that don't conform to norms of majority can be labeled as 'foreign' and neglected. Such understanding is nothing but a repercussion of authoritarian communitarianism. Rather, those LGBTQ identities in Muslim-majority contexts need to be understood as part of plurality of the polity and recognized as equal members.

In the current debates over the relationship between Islam and LGBT rights, there are two dominant discourses. On the one hand, there is the Orientalist

combination of universalism and Islamophobia that exploit LGBT rights with the aim of reasserting Western superiority. Within the framework of progressive modernity, this account pictures Islam as backward, pre-modern, homophobic as opposed to the Western sexual tolerance, liberalism and pluralism. On the other hand, there is the entanglement of culturalism and orthodox Islamic heteronormative understanding that abuses cultural difference as excuse for rejecting LGBT rights. In this account, LGBT rights and sexual categories are considered as Western products that are incompatible with local culture. It is argued that the non-western communities and societies should have the right to reject LGBT rights and to limit the public visibility of LGBT individuals, if these measures are necessary to preserve their own cultures and values from the cultural hegemony of the West. The universalism of Orientalist discourses and the culturalism of orthodox Islamic discourses have essentialism in common, and both of them see Islam and homosexuality as two incommensurable phenomena. However, the existence of LGBT Muslims and their strategies to reconcile or inhabit their sexual and religious identities save us from being locked into the polarization between Orientalist discourses and culturalism of orthodox Islamic discourses. The experiences of LGBTQ Muslims challenge both of these two discourses and generate possibilities for the solution of the incommensurability claim.

CHAPTER 3

THE ISLAMIC OPPOSITION TO LGBTQ RIGHTS

This chapter analyzes how the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights is produced and framed by a group of public Islamic actors including Islamic NGOs, Islamic-oriented political parties and many influential Islamic writers in Turkey. Firstly, I introduce how the idea of irreconcilability between Islam and homosexuality is reproduced by these actors. Secondly, I discuss the Islamic requests for restrictions over LGBTQ rights and visibility and its connection to the idea of proliferation of homosexuality. Then, I examine how culturalist argument is abused by many Islamic actors as an excuse for their rejection of LGBTQ rights. This chapter builds primarily upon the data collected in three particular sites of research: First site is the intense debate in the Islamic media following the live TV debate among İpekçi, Bulaç and Ersoy on May 11, 2009. Second site is Kavaf's remarks in March 2010 and successive reactions by the Islamist NGOs and writers. Third site is the political debates in May 2012 over the wording of sexual orientation in the new constitution. The reason behind the selection of these three sites of research is that the political and media debates over Islam and homosexuality had been concentrated more than ever around them and that these three sites mark the emergence of Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights in Turkey. Whereas the first two sites are examined through media research, the third site is analyzed relying upon press statements by relevant political parties. Because the preliminary research showed that majority of those Islamic writers who involved in the debates over homosexuality and Islam are mostly hosted in five newspapers and five online news portals, these ten mediums were selected to conduct media research: Taraf, Yeni Şafak, Star, Zaman, Vakit, haber7.com, Haksözhaber.net, kadinnews.com, Derindusunce.org and

dunyabulteni.com. Media research was conducted through online search on web sites of particular newspapers and news portals by using two keywords: *islam* and *eşcinsel* [Turkish word for homosexual]. Using only these two keywords in the online search expanded the search results and enabled me to have access to a wide range of writings. In addition to media search, I benefited from the press releases of the Islamist NGOs and the Islamic political parties to understand their institutional discourses on this issue. When I was analyzing discourses of all these actors, I focused particularly on their depictions of homosexuality, their stances toward LGBTQ rights, premises behind their opposition to LGBTQ rights, and their representations of East/West division. The analysis on the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights in this chapter relies upon this combination of data which includes the discourses of Islamic NGOs, writers and political parties.

3.1 Depictions of homosexuality: Incompatibility of Islam and homosexuality

On March 2010, Aliye Kavaf, Minister of Family Affairs, in an interview, stated that "I believe homosexuality is a biological disorder. I think it is a disease that needs treatment. Thus, I don't approve same-sex marriage. In our ministry, we have no work regarding them. Besides, we have not received any demand. We don't say that there is no homosexual in Turkey, this case exists. (Bildirici, 2010)" The first reaction came from a group of organizations including LGBTQ associations, feminists, women's groups etc. In their press release protesting Kavaf, they argued that her statements contradicted with scientific truths, violated fundamental human rights and encouraged hate crimes against homosexuals (Çakır, 2010a). Thus, they urged her to apologize immediately and resign from her office since she acted

inconsistent with her responsibilities as a minister. Also, psychiatric associations declared that homosexuality was not illness and that it was violation of human rights to denounce a segment of society as a group of ill people who need treatment (Bianet, 2010). Likewise, the representatives of CHP and BDP stated that what Kavaf said was discrimination and she must resign (Çakır, 2010b). While these first reactions had been critical of discriminatory or non-scientific aspect of Kavaf's remarks, another press release issued by a platform of Islamist NGOs in favor of Kavaf shifted the focus of the debate to the Islamic views on homosexuality. In its press release, Hayata Çağrı Platformu, which consist of twenty-one NGOs including established human rights associations such as Mazlum-Der and Özgür-Der, portrayed homosexuality as an anomaly and perversion:

> All divine religions regard homosexuality as a deformation, a deviation, an immoral attitude, a digression from what is natural and a sin. In many Islamic countries homosexuality is legally banned and the reason behing this ban is to protect human generation and to prevent this anomaly from becoming widespread. According to the holy/divine books, throughout the history the communities which experienced such perversions were tormented and destroyed for "their ugliness and evilness and for they were deviated". (Hayata Çağrı Platformu, 2010)[7]

According to them, homosexuality is not an innate, natural orientation, but, as all divine religions clearly announced, it is a deviancy, sin and corruption incompatible with biological nature. They reminded that all of the past communities which practiced homosexuality had been deemed to be destroyed by God, as holy books told us. Although they did not directly demand its criminalization in Turkey, they stated that its criminalization in Islamic countries is useful to protect the society

[7] Bütün ilahi dinler eşcinselliği bir bozulma, sapma, gayri ahlaki bir tutum, tabii olanın dışına çıkma ve günah olarak görür. Birçok İslam ülkesinde de "eşcinsellik" yasal olarak yasaktır ve bu yasaktan amaç toplumun ve insan neslinin korunması ile bu anomalinin yaygınlaşmasının önüne geçilmesidir. Tarihte bu tür sapkınlıklar yaşayan topluluklar, ilahi kitaplara göre "çirkinlik ve kötülük üzere oldukları, saptıkları" için azap görmüş ve helak edilmişlerdir.

from the proliferation of this anomaly. In their press release later on, they invited the government to take preventive measures against the spread of homosexuality in order to protect the society, family structure, general morality and continuity of human race. This press statement, as the first common Islamic public reaction against homosexuality, was a turning point in the emergence of Islamic backlash. Before it, there had been a few sites where Islamic writers elaborated their individual opposition to LGBTQ rights and homosexuality in their writings. However, such an organized reaction by Islamist NGOs that exceeded the individual level and mobilized institutional power and organizational capacity had been first in the recent history and therefore marked a new stage in the Islamic backlash against homosexuality.

After Islamist NGOs, several Islamist writers also joined the debate and wrote extensively on homosexuality and LGBTQ rights in their columns. What the Islamic view was on homosexuality, what threats that normalization of homosexuality could pose, what the government should have done against it were among the points discussed in these debates. My research demonstrates that almost all of the Islamic writers[8] I have examined agreed with the Islamist NGOs that homosexuality is forbidden and sinful in Islam, despite certain variations in their depictions of homosexuality. So similar to the Islamist NGOs, some of the writers depicted homosexuality as illness or mental disorder that is acquired because of environmental or social influences such as negative familial socialization, inadequate father-child relationship, dominant or aggressive mother figure, or traumatic experiences such as sexual abuse, harassment, or domestic violence during childhood or adolescence

[8] Aktaş, 2010; Albayrak, 2010, 2011; Atav, 2010; Bayraktar, 2010; Bulaç, 2005, 2009; Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2009; Emre, 2010; Eraslan, 2010; Erdeğer, 2008; Güleç, 2012; Gülşen, 2010; Gültekin, 2010; Güneş, 2010; Hayata Çağrı Platformu, 2010; Kaplan, 2010; Karaman, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; Öğüt, 2008, 2010; 2010; Seyhan, 2010, 2011, 2012; Tarhan, 2009.

(Gülşen, 2010; Güneş, 2010; Hayata Çağrı Platformu, 2010; Seyhan, 2010, 2011, 2012; Tarhan, 2009). Prof. Dr. Nevzat Tarhan, a psychiatrist famous and respected in Islamic circles and columnist on Haber7.com that is an Islamic online news portal, wrote that homosexuality is a pervert sexual preference mostly connected to social learning:

> Homosexuals direct their sexual desire and sexual preference not toward opposite-sex which is natural or prescribed by genes; but toward members of their own sex which is a deviancy. (...) Any genes relevant for homosexuality could have not been defined. However, when their conditions of upbringing are examined, the role of social learning stands out. In these cases, we frequently come across a mother model that is over protective and hates men and a father figure that is indifferent to the household and does not provide sufficient love. Homosexuality is a perverted choice. It does not have a gene just as pedophilia, which means sexual interest in children. Homosexuals who say "I am raised in this way" make more sense than the ones who say "I am created in this way". (Tarhan 2009)[9]

In this account, whereas heterosexuality is naturalized on the basis of genetic factors, homosexuality is pathologized as abnormal and unnatural social deviance that is acquired through social learning. It is argued that homosexuality stems from not nature but nurture, from improper upbringing conditions which inhibit innate heterosexuality. Within this biological deterministic framework, heterosexuality is taken as normative standard, whereas homosexuality is considered as socially constructed deviance from this norm. Because homosexuality was pathologized and medicalized as a socially acquired disorder in this hardliner account, it was assumed to be something curable, recoverable, reversible either through medical treatment or

[9] Homoseksüeller cinsel yönelimini ve cinsel tercihini doğal yani genlerin öngördüğü heteroseksüel yönelime değil bir sapma olan kendi cinsine yöneltmişlerdir. (…) Homoseksüellik ile ilgili bir gen tanımlanamamıştır. Ancak eşcinsel tercihi olan kişilerin yetiştirilme tarzı araştırıldığında sosyal öğrenmenin rolü göze çarpar. Aşırı koruyucu ve erkeklere düşman bir anne modeli ile zayıf, evle az ilgilenen veya sevgi vermeyen bir baba rollerini sık görürüz. Eşcinsellik sapmış bir cinsel tercihtir, çocuklara Pedofili yani cinsel ilginin nasıl geni yoksa eşcinselliğin de geni yoktur. Ben böyle yaratılmışım demek yerine ben böyle yetiştirilmişim diyen eşcinseller daha doğruyu söylerler. (Tarhan 2009)

personal repentance and purification. Therefore, these hardliner actors advised LGBTQ individuals to undergo psychiatric treatment in order to convert to heterosexuality and suggested the government to provide easy access to these therapies. This hardliner approach rejects that homosexuality is sexual orientation, fearing that the connotation of innateness in "orientation" might justify homosexuality.

Among the Islamic writers who joined the discussion after Islamic NGOs, there was another group who argued that it is mistaken to represent homosexuality as illness or disorder in medical terms; instead they preferred to call it sin (Aktaş, 2010; Albayrak, 2010; Eraslan, 2010; Öğüt, 2008, 2010; Kaplan, 2010). As part of this moderate group, Süheyb Öğüt and Hilal Kaplan argue that homosexuality is forbidden in Islam as a form of adultery (Öğüt, 2008; Kaplan, 2010; Özkan, 2010). They assume that each of us has innate homosexual inclination as well as inclination toward opposite-sex. That is why; God puts the rules on modesty which apply even in the same-sex spaces. It is not coincidence that it is inappropriate in Islam for two adolescent brothers to sleep in the same bed. Because God is aware of our inner drive and potential toward committing sin, he warns us against putting these drives into action and forbids adultery and homosexuality. Here they draw a line between inclination and action, feeling and practice. As soon as one doesn't practice his same-sex feelings, it is not a sin. Their approach has close similarities with that of Fethullah Gülen, the leader of the Gülen Community that is the largest and strongest Islamic community in Turkey. According to Gülen, God creates some people with inner homosexual feelings as a way of examining their faith and to see whether they will be able to rule out these feelings and obey God's order (Gülen, 2001). In this view, the naturalness and innateness of homosexuality increases its tolerability,

though not justifies it. Those people who have tendency (*temayül*) toward same-sex relations should struggle with and control their lower self (*nefs)*, suppress their homosexual feelings and carnal desires, and restrict their actions to permitted boundary that is marital reproductive heterosexual sexuality.

Öğüt and Kaplan, relying on a Foucauldian critique of medicalization of homosexuality, argue that the discourse of homosexuality as a treatable illness is the invention of modern biopolitical state. Thus, they criticize the Islamist NGOs and Kavaf for adopting Western modern term of illness and "reproducing modernity". Reminding their fellow Muslims that both homosexuals and headscarved women were both considered as sick in insulting and exclusionary ways within the biopolitics of the modern secular Turkish state, they invite Muslims to replace the modern secularist language of illness with the Islamic conception of sin that is, as they assert, sufficiently powerful to condemn homosexuality. This group of moderate writers (mostly Islamist female writers who are known for their gender egalitarian stances and critiques against sexist interpretations of Islamist male elite) stated, in their articles, that they opposed any cruelty against homosexuals and any attack to their "life, property, honor" including murders, physical violence, beating. They approved neither homosexuality nor cruelty against homosexuals (This point is elaborated in detail later on in this chapter.) Their distance from medical discourse of illness and their denunciation of cruelty against LGBTQ individuals put them in the moderate side of the Islamic actors.

Despite these variations in Islamic actors' depictions of homosexuality, there is a clear consensus among the Islamist NGOs and Islamic writers on that Islam forbids homosexuality as sin and deviance. Repeating the Orthodox Islamic doctrine, the predominant majority of them cited the story of Lot in the Qur'an as the evidence

of Islamic condemnation of homosexuality. According to this story, the city of Lut was destroyed because of the male residents' same-sex sexual activities. All these Islamic actors drew their religious definitional boundaries in a way that homosexuality was left out from the sphere of religious legitimacy. Homosexuality was perceived as something wrong, mistaken, alien and unacceptable to Islam. Therefore, homosexuality and Islam were considered irreconcilable and incompatible by all the Islamic participants of debate after Kavaf's remarks of March 2010. This assumption of incompatibility of Islam and homosexuality was also shared by Islamic-oriented political parties (Felicity Party and BBP) which got mobilized against homosexuality after parliamentary debates over the wording of sexual orientation in the new constitution.

3.2. Restrictions over LGBTQ rights and visibility: Proliferation of sin

In the previous section, it was demonstrated that despite certain variations in Islamic actors' depictions of homosexuality, all of them defended that homosexuality as a sin was clearly forbidden in and irreconcilable with Islam. Another commonality among them was that all of them represented homosexuality as a proliferating and spreading sin, therefore threatening against the social order, family structure, general morality or continuity of the human race. Homosexuality is not understood as an ordinary sin but attributed certain social and religious meanings different from many other sins. Regardless of whether they depict homosexuality as either illness, mental disorder or merely sinful, all of them think that in today's modern world, certain processes such as public visibility of homosexuality, display of LGBTQ figures in the media, artistic or cultural areas, defense of LGBTQ rights as part of sexual

identity politics, emergence of LGBTQ movement and associations have proliferating impact on homosexuality. Moreover, it is asserted that the increasing social acceptance of homosexuality in Western countries and the promotion of LGBTQ rights via some Western governments, international organizations such as U.N. or E.U, or gay lobbies in the West have accelerated the normalization of homosexuality and increased its legitimacy. All of them expressed to a more or less extent their concerns about normalization and justification of homosexuality, therefore thought of certain preventive measures against it. However, the content and voice of tone of their policy proposals varied in a wide range. The suggestions of the hardliner actors such as the Islamist NGOs, Felicity Party, BBP and some of male writers included criminalization of homosexuality, restrictions on public visibility in the media, artistic or cultural spaces, closure of LGBTQ associations, censorship on their publications and reparative therapies for recovering homosexuals (Erdeğer, 2008; Emre, 2010; Güleç, 2012; Gültekin, 2010; Güneş, 2010; Hayata Çağrı Platformu, 2010; Karaman, 2009c; Seyhan, 2010, 2011, 2012; Tarhan, 2009). In line with these suggestions, they called the government to take preventive and restrictive measures against homosexuality. The following quote from the Islamist NGOs' open letter to Kavaf is an example of this view:

> It is very normal and a matter of responsibility for Muslims – even Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance, both norms have borders- and other faithful people to act against indecorousness and sin according to their beliefs. This responsibility is not only for the sake of Muslim societies but for all humanity. For this reason, setting immorality and sin as law should never be supported. Given that homosexuality contradicts with the nature, its acceptance and justification through portraying it as natural sexual orientation would be equal to desire indirectly the extinction of human generation. If one thing that is normal and right for one subject is normal and right for everybody, let's assume everybody opts for this normal(!) choice; in that case is it possible for life to exist on earth? This normal(!) choice is as legitimate as destroying all life is. It is understandable that your statement [*addressing Kavaf*] that "homosexuality is illness" would annoy a particular group which conducts serious lobbying activities in order to spread this deviancy/anomaly,

> goes all out for infecting other people with it, works to influence a wide range of spaces including TV series, competition shows, video clips, news, and TV discussions, and tries to justify homosexuality as a natural choice in the subconscious of society. (Hayata Çağrı Platformu, 2010)[10]

In this account, homosexuality is portrayed as transmissible virus spreading from one another with the assumption that it is a socially learned and acquired deviance/anomaly rather than natural and inborn characteristic. These NGOs invite the audience to imagine possible destructive results of a hypothetical situation in which all of the world's population becomes homosexual: the prevalence of homosexuality in the world would imply the end of reproduction, life and humanity. Through propagating this illusory fear, it is asserted that the normalization and justification of homosexuality would spread it, and therefore would lead the extinction of human generation eventually. In the mainstream Islamic understanding, very similar to conservative approaches in Christianity or Judaism, procreation is a must for continuity of human race and is only allowed within the legitimate boundaries of marriage that is defined as the union of a man and a woman. Because same-sex couples cannot procreate in natural ways, homosexuality is perceived as a threat that might exterminate human race. Homosexuality also challenges the heteronormative understandings of marriage as a male-female union and

[10] Müslümanların -İslam barış ve müsamaha dini olmakla beraber her iki normun da sınırları vardır- ve diğer ilahi inanışlara sahip insanların, inanışlarına göre ayıp ve günah olana karşı durmaları çok normal ve sorumlulukları gereği olup bu sorumluluk sadece Müslüman toplumlar için değil tüm insanlık içindir. Bu nedenle ahlaki olmayanın ve günahın hukuki kural olmasına ve meşruiyet kazanmasına asla destek verilemez. Fıtrata aykırılık teşkil eden "eşcinsellik" in, doğal tercihlerden bir tercih gibi gösterilerek "cinsel yönelim" olarak kabul görmesi ve yaygınlaşmasının meşru görülmesi, zımnen insan neslinin yok olmasını istemekle aynı şeydir. Bir kimse için normal ve doğru olan bir şey herkes için normal ve doğru ise, bir an için herkesin bu normal(!) tercihte bulunduğunu varsayalım; o takdirde yeryüzünde hayat mümkün olabilir mi? Hayatı toptan imha etmek ne kadar meşru ise, bu normal(!) tercih de o kadar meşrudur o halde. Yapmış olduğunuz "hastalık" açıklaması, bu sapma/anomali durumunu topluma yaymak için ciddi lobi faaliyetleri yürüten, diğer insanlara da sirayet ettirmek için akla gelmeyen yolları deneyen, dizilerden yarışma programlarına, kliplerden haber bültenlerine, tartışma programlarına kadar her alanı zorlayan, toplumun bilinçaltında eşcinselliği doğal bir seçim olarak kabul ettirmeye çalışan bir kesimi elbette rahatsız edecektir.

complementarity of opposite sexes, thus its proliferation is seen as the dissolution of family structure and morality that are foundational to the Islamic society and self.

According to the Islamist NGOs, today a lobbying group (referring to LGBTQ community) tries to justify homosexuality as a natural choice and increase its social acceptance through media visibility in TV series, competition shows, video clips, news, and TV discussions. As stated in the beginning of the quote, Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance, but not without limits. Homosexuality as sin and immorality is kept out of the boundaries of tolerance. Therefore, later on in the same letter, the government and many ministries are called for implementing certain restrictions to counter these efforts and prevent the prevalence of this sin. Any legal recognition of LGBTQ identity or any legal or political remedies for LGBTQ individuals including anti-discrimination laws, grant of equal civil rights such as same-sex marriage etc. are seen as unacceptable and intolerable. Certain rights and liberties of LGBTQ individuals are refused for their contradiction with particular religious values of these NGOs. Although many of these NGOs are human rights associations actively working on religious freedoms, headscarf ban, educational rights etc., they don't deem LGBTQ individuals worthy of equal rights due to their sexual identity. They deny to acknowledge them as "equal but different" citizens, rather positions them as "dangerous others", "less than human" or "sub-human" and thus not deserving of equal treatment or rights. Through this dehumanization and defining homosexuality as a dangerous spreadable sin, they justify preventive measures against or restrictions over homosexuality. Thus, intimate relations, sexuality and private matters of LGBTQ individuals become open to intervention, harassment, state regulation, and surveillance for the sake of religious moralism and public sensibilities. These might include limitations on freedom of expression and of

association that are mostly connected with LGBTQ politics and movement, and restrictions over the public visibility of LGBTQ individuals such as censorships in the media. Very similar arguments were voiced by huge majority of hardliner Islamic writers in the aftermath of Kavaf's remarks, as it is introduced later on in this chapter.

On the other hand, moderate actors, mostly gender egalitarian female writers, tried to keep distance from both hardliner actors and LGBTQ politics (Aktaş, 2010; Albayrak, 2010; Eraslan, 2010; Öğüt, 2008, 2010; Kaplan, 2010). They criticized Kavaf and Islamic NGOs for calling homosexuality illness and expressed their opposition to any cruelty against homosexuals and any attack to their "life, property, honor". For example, Kaplan (2010) gave the examples of the murder of Ahmet Yıldız, who was killed by his father for being gay and police brutality against Esmeray, an activist transsexual. She blamed the Islamist NGOs for ignoring these cases of cruelty and not being consistent in their justice demands. All of the other moderate actors stated their opposition to cruelty. However, their conception of cruelty is mostly limited to murders, physical violence, or beating and far away from covering many other forms of social, legal, political or economic discrimination constantly experienced by the majority of LGBTQ population on a daily basis. Morevoer, moderate writers are worried concerning "the proliferation of sin" as much as hardliners are. Their condemnation of cruelty against LGBTQ individuals is usually accompanied by expressions of worry about justification and spread of homosexuality. Hilal Kaplan's following statement shows that she doesn't support LGBTQ rights, being afraid of its justificatory influence: "I, as a Muslim who worries about any evil that rises either from my lower self (*nefs*) or from the society, refuse any requests for recognition of citizenship rights for homosexuals and any

other attempts that might justify homosexuality (Kaplan, 2010)." Likewise, Cihan Aktaş (2010) emphasizes that she feels pain of homosexuals, but she is also worried about the defense of homosexuality as part of identity politics that moves "pleasure" to the center of politics. She argues that public morality is getting overwhelmed by "politics of pleasure" as homosexuality becomes normalized and justified. According to Süheyb Öğüt (2008, 2010), sexuality is a private matter that needs to stay within the boundaries of the private sphere. Neither the state should violate right to privacy nor should LGBTQs publicize their privacy (*mahrem*). He criticizes the modern secular state for intervening in people's privacy and also LGBTQ movement for making sexuality a matter of politics. In that sense, he doesn't approve right claims by LGBTQs' and their public visibility. Similarly, Özlem Albayrak says that it is not possible for her to accept any legal recognition of civil rights for homosexuals due to the proliferating or encouraging effect that these sorts of regulations might create. She also adds that:

> I think they should not have so much public visibility. Because this type of sexual orientation sets a bad example, I believe that it would break up the family. The disintegration of family would mean disintegration of the society. The disintegration of the society would mean that we shouldn't expect good days ahead. Of course, it cannot reach this level, especially in Turkey. I do not see such a danger. However, I find horrible the possibility that even if a person or a youngster reverses his sexual preference for being affected by this role model. I think it is horrible a possibility that he might change by seeing it from or being influenced by another person. (Özlem Albayrak, interview with the author)[11]

Very similar to hardliner point of view, Albayrak notes that there should not be much public visibility of homosexuals, because it might dissolve family structure

[11] Kamusal görünürlüklerinin çok fazla olmaması gerektiğini düşünüyorum. Çünkü örnek teşkil etmesi bakımından aileyi parçalayacak bir cinsel yönelim biçimi olduğunu düşünüyorum bunun. Ailenin parçalanması toplumun parçalanması demektir. Toplumun parçalanması da iyi günlerin bizi beklemediği anlamına gelir. Elbette bu raddeye gelecek bir şey değil, özellikle Türkiye'de. Böyle bir tehlike görmüyorum. Ama bir insanın bile, bir gencin bile bu gördüğü rol modelden etkilenerek cinsel tercihi değiştirmesi ihtimalini çok korkunç buluyorum. Başkasından görerek etkilenerek değişmesi ihtimalini de çok korkunç buluyorum.

and in turn the overall society. Their public visibility might set a bad example for people and youth and cause them to reverse their sexual preference toward same-sex relations. Although Kaplan, Aktaş and Albayrak, as three headscarved women, had previously suffered from and harshly criticized the public/private distinction created by the headscarf ban, they reproduce the very same division for LGBT individuals. Their opposition to pathologization of and cruelty against homosexuality puts them on the moderate side of the hegemonic Islamic view. However, the content of cruelty is as narrow as it only focuses on physical violence, murder, beating, and forced prostitution. The space of freedom that these moderate actors allow is so limited that it constraints LGBTQ individuals to live in their private spaces and closets, nothing more. What they suggest is the privatization of homosexuality: according to them, sexuality is a private matter, thus neither homosexuality nor opposite-sex sexuality should be made a public issue and a matter of political struggle. In that sense, they desire indirectly the confinement of homosexuality to the private sphere and therefore reproduce a sort of exclusion of and discrimination against LGBTQ individuals. Their opposition to cruelty doesn't necessarily mean they support equal citizenship rights for LGBTQ individuals. What they defend is a restricted tolerance but not equal rights or equal dignity or lack of dicrimination. In the absence of equality, the idea of tolerance might turn to a repressive mechanism for involving two unequal parties among which the powerful one would ultimately determine the extent of space of freedom to be granted to the other disadvantaged party totally arbitrarily. Given the absence of equal citizenship rights for LGBTQ individuals, the Islamic female columnists who speak from the privileged position of being members of heterosexual Muslim majority in Turkey set the limits of their tolerance toward homosexuality in a way the LGBTQ existence can only be allowed within private

spheres. This implies another form of discrimination in which a group of citizens are treated different from others because of their sexual identity and restrained from being in the public space as they feel to be.

Some of hardliner writers (Alpay, 2010; Emre, 2010; Gülşen, 2010) blame "a group of Muslim conservative intellectuals", implicitly addressing the Islamic female columnists including Hilal Kaplan, Hidayet Tuksal, Cihan Aktaş, and Özlem Albayrak, for their compliance to the Western liberalism and for seeming relatively tolerant to homosexuality. They remind these intellectuals that, their seemingly tolerant attitude in the name of opposing discrimination and promoting peaceful coexistence, does contradict with their missions and responsibilities as Muslims. They, as Muslims, are expected to struggle against the proliferation of homosexuality instead of standing neutral or tolerant to it. Refuting Öğüt's and Kaplan's arguments that "it is wrong to distinguish homosexuality as major sin from other sins such as smoking, alcohol consumption, raping, nationalism, or racism[12]"; these hardliner writers suggest that homosexuality is more dangerous and major than other sins. These hardliner writers distinguish between "individual act of sinning" and "proliferation of sin" and warn that these two should not be confused:

> The arguments of some Muslim writers who criticize Aliye Kavaf and her supporters for saying that "homosexuality is illness" and instead suggest that "homosexuality is not illness, but sinful" can be seen more Islamic because of their refusal to norm-making processes in psychology and psychiatry. However, for me, the main problem in this view is that it runs the risk of legitimizing Muslim tolerance toward homosexuality through depicting it as a sin like all other sins. This view might also pave the way to an enormous danger of taking a neutral stance in the face of individuality of sin and threat of proliferation of sin. Because homosexual intercourse is "not a minor sin among other minor sins", instead a very dangerous case enough to jeopardize human descent; even in democratic societies, Muslims must express counter arguments against the factors and regulations which might render this sin

[12] Öğüt and Kaplan see nationalism and racism sinful for oppression and cruelty that they produce.

> spread. (Gülşen, 2010)[13] (Enver Gülşen is a film critic and writer. He was writing on Derin Düşünce, an online platform for political discussion.)

Enver Gülşen distinguishes homosexuality from other sins and argues that it cannot be considered as "one among other minor sins". Instead, he assumes homosexuality as a sin that has a very dangerous potential to spread within the society. Emre (2010) and Alpay (2010) make similar arguments. According to them, the idea of "individuality of sin" –the idea that the guilt of sin binds the sinner- is not valid when it comes to homosexuality. Because "the danger of proliferation of sin" prevails over "the individuality of sin" in the case of homosexuality, Muslims should not see homosexuality as an ordinary sin the cost of which is born by the sinner himself. The potential spread of homosexuality is more dangerous as it threatens the human race. Therefore, Muslims, instead of tolerating homosexuality as an individual sin, should contest anything that might contribute to its proliferation. Appealing to the religiously framed notion of "the believer's liability to struggle against the proliferation of the sin", the Islamist NGOs and majority of hardliner writers assign Muslims the missionary task of conveying the religious truth about unlawfulness and sinfulness of homosexuality. In that sense, these hardliner writers criticize "some Muslim writers", implying Süheyb Öğüt, Hilal Kaplan and other female columnists, for justifying tolerance toward homosexuality. They emphasize that Muslims should not tolerate or stay neutral to homosexuality in the face of its

[13] Kimi "Müslüman" yazarların eşcinsellik hastalıktır diyen Aliye Kavaf ve ona destek olanları eleştirerek "hastalık değil, günahtır" tezleri, psikiyatri ya da psikolojinin norm belirleyen duruşlarına bir itiraz olarak daha "İslamî" görünebilir. Ancak bu bakıştaki ana sorun, eşcinselliğin, diğer bütün "günahlar" gibi sadece bir günah olarak Müslümanlar açısından tolere edilebilirliğine meşruiyet kazandırma tehlikesidir bence. Bu bakış, günahın ferdiliği ile o günahın yaygınlaşma tehlikesi karşısında Müslümanların belirlemesi gereken tavır konusunda "tarafsız" bir noktada durarak, büyük bir tehlikeye gebe bir bakış aynı zamanda. Zira eşcinsel ilişki "bütün küçük günahlar gibi bir küçük günah" değil, insan neslini tehlikeye sokacak kadar tehlikeli bir durum olarak, demokratik bir toplumda dahi Müslümanların, bu durumu yaygınlaştıracak faktörler ve düzenlemeler hakkında karşı-söz söylemelerini gerektiren bir günahtır.

possible outcome of extinction of the human race. Their classification of homosexuality as a social threat against the human race instead of an individual act, practice or preference lays LGBTQ identity and individuals open to outside interference.

I argue that the moderate and the hardliner writers don't vary from each other concerning "tolerability of homosexuality" as much as the hardliners suppose. The refusal by moderate actors to call homosexuality an illness and their classification of homosexuality as "one among other sins" do not change the fact that they agree with the hardliners on their opposition to LGBTQ rights and their confinement of homosexuality to the private sphere. In their case, to consider homosexuality as "one among other sins" doesn't lead the moderate actors to respect for "individual will" of LGBTQ individuals, as queer friendly Muslims stances do. As I discuss in detail in the following chapter, some queer friendly Muslims, even though they call homosexuality sinful, are able to defend equal rights for LGBTQs, because they think that it is beyond the humanly authority to judge or punish another person's act of sinning, rather it is between God and this person. Although, as I suggest, the hardliner and moderate positions are so close to each other in many respects, the harsh reaction by hardliners against moderate actors is striking to display their high level of intolerance against alternative views in the issue of homosexuality.

Despite differences among their policy proposals and tones of voice, both moderate and hardliner actors state that they don't approve anything that might contribute to the normalization, justification or spread of homosexuality. Therefore, all of them agree to more or less extent on the necessity of certain restrictions over rights and liberties of LGBTQ individuals and their public visibility for the sake of community interests. For all of them, any citizenship rights such as same-sex

marriage, adoption, inheritance rights etc. are unacceptable, since these rights involve the legal recognition of LGBTQ identity. Because the visibility and representations of LGBTQ figures in the media, or kissing couples in TV programs etc. set bad examples for children and youth, LGBTQ visibility needs to be limited to protect young generations from being influenced by these bad role models. The Islamist NGOs and almost all of the writers underline that they don't approve of LGBTQ identity to become a matter of identity politics, of political struggle and an issue of rights and liberties. In that sense, freedom of expression and freedom of association of LGBTQ individuals becomes controversial as well.

3.3. Cultural difference as excuse for restricting LGBTQ rights

Similar to the processes what a group of critical scholars call as "cultural excuse", "cultural relativism" or "abuse of culture" (Barry, 2001a, 2001b; Bauman, 2001; Benhabib, 2002; Calhoun, 2007; Habermas, 1998; Kandiyoti 2009, 2010, Zubaida 1994, 1999), majority of Islamic actors that I have examined refute equal citizenship rights of LGBTQ individuals in the name of cultural difference. They voice cultural difference argument as excuse for their rejection of LGBTQ rights and their requests for restrictions over LGBTQ visibility and liberties in Turkey.

3.3.1. Western imposition of LGBTQ rights

It is widely argued among the Islamic actors that I have examined, the acceptance of homosexuality and LGBTQ rights has been imposed on the Muslim contexts by the West under the name of universal rights (Bulaç, 2005, 2009; Emre,

2008; Emre, 2010; Güleç, 2012; Gülşen 2010; Gültekin, 2010; Karaman, 2009c; Tarhan, 2009). These Islamic public actors assert that LGBTQ rights and identities emerged in the particular context of modern Western societies and reflect the Western values of morality. However, they are promoted worldwide as if they are universal through activities of LGBTQ lobbies that are supported financially, politically and legally by certain Western governments, many international organizations and big multinational corporations. In this Islamic discourse, LGBT rights are frequently denounced as culturally alien and religiously unacceptable values that are imposed from the West.

It is ironic that these arguments echo the scholarly critiques of Western universalism and of homonationalism. There are close similarities between the arguments of these Islamists and Joseph Massad who claims that LGBT rights and sexual categories that are imposed by the Gay International into the Arab World don't correspond to the cultural and religious values and practices in the Muslim contexts (Massad, 2002). Likewise, in line with the critical scholarship that focuses on the Western colonial and imperialist imperatives and Eurocentric biases behind the global dissemination of universal rights (Abu Lughod 2002, Abu Lughod 2010, Butler 2008, Mahmood 2009, Massad 2002, Mepschen et. al. 2010, Mohanty, 1988; Puar 2007, Wallerstein 2006), the Islamic opponents of LGBTQ rights assert that the LGBTQ rights and identities are indeed not universal but products of a particular Western locality. These scholarly accounts are created mostly by the Western-educated professors who address mostly the Western audience and research and write with the intellectual responsibility to unveil the mechanisms of power, oppression and discrimination produced in the Western contexts that they inhabit. In contrast to their initial intention, their works might ironically be appropriated by the

authoritarian actors in the non-Western contexts, as it has been by the Islamist opponents of LGBTQ rights.

For example, Akif Emre, an Islamist columnist in *Yeni Şafak*, relates the emergence of universal rights to the particular Western context of secularization: the seculars in Europe invented the universal rights as substitution for the sacred values that they excluded from the political space, and attached these rights transcendental meaning by calling them universal (Emre, 2008). As he claims, the European Union, ignoring that the moral, cultural and religious values in Turkey might be in contradiction with its own Western secular values, imposes its own morality to Turkey in the accession process, as if this morality is universally valid and neutral. Likewise, Enver Gülşen, a film critic and writer on *Derin Düşünce* news portal, writes that same-sex marriage gained legitimacy in the West and is now introduced as a right that should be accepted worldwide (Gülşen, 2010). Although LGBTQ rights are originated from the West and shaped within the particular European morality, they are imposed to the world as if these were universalizable. The following quote from Mücahit Gültekin, psychologist and writer, reflects a similar view:

> The gay movement has gained support from many international organizations including the U.N. (It is interesting that gay organizations still uses a "dramatic language", even though they are backed by the whole world.) Wolfowitz, the head of the World Bank, had granted funding two times to a gay organization in Turkey in order help it to inform youngesters and parent about homosexuality. The European Council monitors the compatibility of national legislations of the candidate countries with the European Convention of Human Rights. The punishments targetting sexual preferences contradict with this convention. Therefore, this convention obliges a candidate country to legislate in line with the desires of gay lobbies in order to get membership to the European Union. (…) Homosexuality is constantly defended through using the political instruments such as "human rights", "discrimination", "freedom". Whenever one attempts to voice alternative views, he is accused of making discrimination and silenced through being pushed to feel guilty. (Gültekin, 2010)[14]

[14] Eşcinsellik yanlısı hareket BM de dahil olmak üzere pek çok uluslararası organizasyonun desteğini almıştır (İlginçtir, neredeyse bütün dünyayı arkasına alan eşcinsel yanlısı örgütler hala bir "dram dili"

Mücahit Gültekin, explains in his essay that LGBTQ movement and lobbies first developed in the US and EU countries, gained legal, political, and scientific power there and then expanded to other countries. As he argues, the activities of LGBTQ lobbies are now widely supported financially, politically and legally by many international organizations such as the World Bank, UN, UNICEF and the EU. With these supports, LGBTQ lobbies are actively promoting their values in many countries including Turkey. He, referring to the anti-discrimination laws concerning sexual orientation, emphasizes that the EU makes it compulsory for the candidate countries to legislate in accordance with the demands of the LGBTQ lobby. As he complains, the political instruments of human rights, discrimination and liberty are employed in defense of homosexuality. In this process, alternative views which don't approve of homosexuality are marginalized and silenced by being denounced as discriminatory. By saying this, he dismisses the conceptions of human rights and liberties as something might be useful and necessary for people and reduces these notions to merely political instruments in the hands of Western powers and LGBTQ lobbies.

Youth Branch of Felicity (Saadet) Party has a similar way of reasoning with respect to homosexuality. Just after BDP had requested "sexual orientation and gender identity" to be worded in the anti-discrimination clause of new constitution (soL, 2012), Youth Branch launched nation-wide petition campaign for the

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kullanmaya devam eder). Dünya Bankası başkanı Wolfowitz Türkiye'deki eşcinsellik yanlısı bir örgüte eşcinselliğe ilişkin gençleri ve anne-babaları bilgilendirmesi için iki kez ekonomik hibe yapmıştı. (…) Avrupa Konseyi AB'ye adaylık sürecinde aday ülkelerin yasalarının Avrupa İnsan Hakları Sözleşmesi'ne uyumlu olup olmadığını denetlemektedir. Eşcinsel tercihlere getirilen cezalar bu sözleşmeyle çelişmektedir. Özetle bu belge, eğer bir ülke Avrupa Birliği'ne üye olmak istiyorsa "eşcinsellik yanlısı lobilerin" arzularıyla uyumlu yasaları çıkarmasını zorunlu kılmaktadır. (…) Eşcinsellik sürekli olarak "insan hakları", "ayrımcılık", "özgürlük" vb. gibi politik enstrümanlar kullanılarak, "çığırtkan" bir uslupla savunulmaya çalışılmaktadır. Birileri çıkıp, farklı bir şeyler söyleyecek olsa "ayrımcılık" yapmakla itham edilerek "suçluluk psikolojisine" itilmeye, bu yolla susturulmaya çalışılmaktadır.

criminalization of adultery and homosexuality in May 2012. In their press release issued to announce their campaign, Youth Branch of Felicity Party criticized the European Union for its works against criminalization of homosexuality:

> The European Union's efforts and insistence on the decriminalization of adultery and abolishment of restrictions over homosexuality are not compatible with our national sensibilities. Any step taken in line with the European Union's imposition but out of the nation's wishes would be one step closer to the abyss. The spread of homosexuality together with that of adultery are contrary to the human nature. Homosexuality is one of the outstanding reasons behind the degeneration of societies. However, the background of warnings and pressures by the European Union on the TRNC for the removal of the penal code that criminalizes homosexual intercourse should be properly examined. Adultery and homosexuality are high explosive bombs dropped on the societies. Each nation and its representatives should have the duty to take measures and legislate against them. (Güleç, 2012)[15]

In the press release, the Youth Branch depicted adultery and homosexuality as unnatural, "as the major threats that shake the society to its foundations" and "among the major sins and crimes in the Islamic law" (Güleç, 2012). It called the government to criminalize adultery (homosexuality as a form of adultery would automatically be criminalized) in order to protect the family structure and the human race from destruction. According to them, homosexuality and adultery were not compatible with "the nation's values and sensitivities". In its legal efforts in favor of homosexuality, the European Union had neglected these national sensitivities and imposed its own values as part of its political projects.

[15] Avrupa Birliği'nin gerek zinayı suç sayan yasa maddelerini engelleme gerekse eşcinselliğin önündeki engelleri kaldırma konusunda gösterdiği gayret ve dayatma milletimizin hassasiyetleriyle örtüşmeyen bir durumdur. Milletin arzusunun dışında, Avrupa Birliği'nin dayatmasıyla atılan her adım, uçuruma doğru atılan bir adım olacaktır. Zinanın yaygınlaşmasına paralel olarak eşcinselliğin yaygınlaşması da insan fıtratına aykırı durumlardandır. Eşcinsellik toplumların yozlaşmasında önde gelen sebeplerdendir. Bununla beraber, Avrupa Birliği'nin KKTC'ye eşcinsel ilişkiyi suç sayan yasanın kaldırılması için yaptığı uyarı ve baskıların arka planını iyi irdelemek gerekmektedir. Zina ve eşcinsellik toplumların ortasına atılmış tahrip gücü yüksek bombalardır. Buna karşı her milletin ve o milletin temsilcisi olanların tedbir alması ve bunu yasayla düzenlemesi boynunun borcudur.

Yet, while blaming the EU for its efforts to proliferate homosexuality at the expense of the national or cultural differences, the Youth Branch itself ignored the internal differences within the nation they imagined. In a communitarian understanding (I elaborate on this in the following sections), it celebrated out-group difference but denied in-group difference (Calhoun, 2007: 110). It depicted the nation as a homogenous and monolithic unity as if all members agreed on the same values and sensitivities, and as if they were all against adultery and homosexuality. As other culturalist and communitarian perspectives do, the Youth Branch presented nation as a site of familiarity and sameness, not as spaces within which heterogeneous members with different political visions, life-styles, beliefs, ideologies, and cultures have rights of participation (Calhoun, 2007: 110). This overemphasis on the internal homogeneity of cultures is dangerous for potentially justifying oppressive practices that push nonconforming members to obey communal norms, and treating cultures as symbols of group identity. Similar opinions are voiced by many other Islamic writers I have examined in my research. In their refusal of LGBT rights as alien products of morally corrupt Western modernity, these culturalist actors essentialize both the so-called Western *and* Islamic cultures. In the following section, I discuss the cultural essentialism intrinsic to the Islamist arguments for opposition to LGBTQ rights.

3.3.2. Cultural essentialism

Many Islamic actors dismiss the universal rights with the argument that these rights are culturally specific to the Western culture, thus irreconcilable with the Islamic cultures. In the dominant Islamic discourse on homosexuality, the essentialist assumption that there are incommensurable differences between the Western and the

Eastern cultures is mobilized in order to reject the LGBT rights and homosexuality. Morality becomes a central issue in the production of the binary opposition between the West and the Muslim society. The president of BBP, in his statement against the wording of sexual orientation and gender identity in the anti-discrimination clause of the constitution describes homosexuality "as product of the corruption of Western family structure (Hürriyet, 2012)." Likewise, Akif Emre writes that:

> The Western culture and thought have nothing new to say to humanity except from body politics and sexuality. There is nothing new to say beyond sexuality in the Western philoshopical circles in which grand narratives are dead and which could not have nurtured global thinkers for centuries. Today, the destination of the West is the politics of body, individualism and sexuality (BIS). In this respect, "there is no human being but individual" in the West. Once the human being is degraded to individual, the body comes into prominence. It has been long time since the human being, who was once alive with his spirit, transformed from the most honorable of all creatures (*eşrefi mahlukat*) into the pleasure-seeking individual. What we are facing with today is the imposition of unnatural sexual preferences as if they are universal values by a civilization that depends on the exaggeration of human mind and body. We are facing with a social and cultural project [*He means homosexuality*.] that is tried to be encouraged and justified in media and artistic circles, and made attractive on TV series. The Muslim reminds the humanity its nature (*fitrat*). He stands as a model for protection of the nature. He promotes and protects the social harmony of the environment, social relations and moral norms. (Emre, 2010)[16]

As this quote demonstrates, Akif Emre, in a culturally essentialist way, attributes to the West the notions of immorality, individualism, excessiveness, corruptness, sensual indulgence and pleasure-seeking. As if there are two separate

[16] Batı kültürü ve düşüncesinin insanlığa beden siyaseti ve cinsellik dışında söyleyeceği yeni bir şey kalmamıştır. Büyük sözlerin tükendiği, yüzyıldır dünya çapında düşünür yetiştiremeyen Batı düşünce ortamının cinsellikten başka söyleyecek yeni bir şeyi yok. Batının geldiği nokta beden, birey ve cinsellik (BBC) siyasetidir. Bu anlamda Batı'da 'İnsan yoktur birey vardır', insan bireye indirgenince beden öne çıkıyor. Beden felsefesi üzerinden ruhuyla diri olan insan eşrefi mahlukat olmaktan çıkıp cinsel tatminlerin, bedensel hazların peşindeki bireye dönüştü çoktandır. İnsan aklının ve bedeninin alabildiğine abartısına yaslanan bir uygarlığın insan fıtratını zorlayan tercihleri evrensel değer olarak dayatması ile karşı karşıyayız. Medya ve sanat çevrelerinde özendirilerek meşrulaştırılmaya, televizyon dizilerinde masum rollerle sempatik hale getirilmeye çalışılan bir toplumsal, kültürel proje ile karşı karşıyayız. Müslüman insanlığa fıtratını hatırlatır. Fıtratını korumaya örneklik eder. Çevrenin tahrip edilmesinden tüketim alışkanlıklarına, beşeri münasebetlerden ahlaki normlara kadar bu bütünlüğün uyumunu tebliğ eder, korumaya çalışır.

and holistic entities of the Islamic and the Western culture, the Islam is represented as the primary promoter of the morality, whereas the West becomes its negation. According to him, Muslims have a wide range of missions including reminding humanity its nature, promoting and protecting the harmony in social relations and moral norms. As the post-1979 Islamist rhetoric of struggling against "westoxication" and return to authentic culture had addressed the unveiled Western women's skimpy attire as the indicator of Western corruption (Ahmed, 1998; Göle, 1996), the current dominant Islamic discourse labels homosexuality as the banner of Western corruptness, sensual indulgence and pleasure-seeking. It is claimed that the Western self has lost its spiritual-human quality and depreciated to body-obsessed hedonistic individualism. In the quest for differentiation from the Western self-centric individual, the Muslim authentic self is reproduced as the symbol of morality. In addition to Emre, very similar opinions are voiced by many other Islamic writers as well. In their Islamic discourse, homosexuality becomes a boundary marker between the Islamic society and its negation and reconstructs the symbolic identity of the Islamic community. Just as Orientalism has relied on an essentialist division between the West and the East, so does the Islamic dualism or Occidentalism between the immoral West and the pure and authentic Islam. Exaggerating internal sameness and neglecting internal heterogeneity of these two so-called cultures, the discourse of Islamic opposition to homosexuality builds a radical alterity between them and therefore reproduces the Clash of Civilization thesis (Huntington, 1998). The fact that these concepts of universal human, women's and LGBT rights have developed in the West as part of its particular history doesn't imply that they are culturally specific to or inherent in the Western culture (Zubaida, 1994: 7). The institutionalization process of these rights shouldn't be separated from history of

struggles for economic, social and political justice and for civil rights. To consider LGBT rights culturally specific to or inherent in the Western history and culture ignores the struggles behind the emergence of LGBT rights in the West (Adam et.al, 1999).

Many critical scholars have pointed out the severe risks of cultural essentialism that these claims of cultural difference might create (Barry, 2001a, 2001b; Bauman, 2001; Benhabib, 2002; Calhoun, 2007; Habermas, 1998; Kandiyoti 2009, 2010, Zubaida 1994, 1999). This critical scholarship invites us to question as to who decides the principles and boundaries of the culture at stake, whether this culture is really holistic and distinct from the others as it is claimed, and whether the cultural traits at stake should really be preserved or would it be much better if they change and transform. These questions should be asked for Karaman's cultural preservation argument as well. Is it really possible to talk about "a "religious, national and local culture" in Turkey? Who decides that homosexuality is immoral according to this imagined culture? Whose values are taken for granted? Who are excluded from this decision process?

When asking these questions, we should also keep in mind the contextual difference between multiculturalism demands in the Europe and the Islamic cultural different arguments in Turkey. Deniz Kandiyoti (1995) and Sami Zubaida (1999) warn us about the possible authoritarian implications of transposing multiculturalism and cultural relativism to non-democratic non-Western contexts where Islam is the hegemonic power. It would be deceptive to transfer multiculturalism and identity politics which originally aimed at inclusion of Muslim minorities in the Western liberal democracies to the Middle Eastern and North African contexts, where they

might paradoxically contribute to "the movements which seek to impose homogeneity and uniformity on their adherents, particularly on women who are invited to comply with the structures of their communities (Kandiyoti, 1995, p.28)." In our case, cultural preservation argument is voiced by members of Muslim majority in Turkey where the hearth of democracy problem is not the preservation of hegemonic Islamic culture but constitutional protection of rights of minority groups, identities, and life styles including LGBTQ rights.

Professor Hayrettin Karaman, who is one of the most prominent and respected Islamic scholars specialized in Islamic law (*fiqh*) and frequently consulted on religious matters in Turkey, points out the danger of "extinction of religious, national and local cultures" as a possible side-effect of this globalization of Western values including homosexuality:

> In the human rights documents, the 'violation public morality' is considered as an acceptable reason for restricting freedoms. In our country, there has been controversy among jurists over the categorization of homosexuality as "immorality, violation of public morality". Whereas some of them have stated that "it is not immoral", others have argued that "it is immoral". Globalization should not be allowed to wipe out the religious, national and local cultures. Those who are loyal to their civilization and culture should take preventive measures in order to preserve their cultural values. Therefore, those attitudes that our people deem contradictory to moral values in our religion and culture should be considered as violation of public morality. This principle should be utilized in restricting freedoms. (Karaman, 2009c)[17]

Here, Karaman relies upon the culturalist critique of globalization which underlines that the globalization of Western norms through universal rights

[17] İnsan hakları belgelerinde "genel ahlaka aykırılık" bir hürriyeti kısıtlama sebebi olarak kabul edilmektedir. Ülkemizde eşcinselliğin "ahlaksızlık, genel ahlaka aykırılık" bakımından değerlendirilmesi hukuk adamları arasında ihtilafa sebep olmuş, bazıları "Bu ahlaksızlık değildir" demişler, bazıları ise "Ahlaksızlıktır" hükmünü benimsemişlerdir. Küreselleşmenin, "dini, milli, yerel kültürleri" silip süpürmesine imkan verilmemeli, medeniyetine ve kültürüne bağlı olanlar, kendi kültür değerlerini korumak için tedbir almalı, bu meyanda "Bizim dinimizde ve kültürümüzde ahlaka aykırı olanı, halkımızın genellikle böyle kabul ettiği davranışları" genel ahlaka aykırı olarak değerlendirmeli ve hürriyetlerin kısıtlanmasında bu ilkenin kullanılmasına destek verilmelidir.

instruments may destroy cultural diversity, and thus contributes to cultural homogenization (Massad, 2002). He mobilizes "cultural preservation" argument in order to justify his Islamic call for the prevention of and restrictions over homosexuality. What is ironic in Karaman's account is that the culture that he urges to be preserved has already majority and hegemonic power in Turkey. As Karaman's quote epitomizes, the dominant Islamic discourse prioritizes the preservation of cultural and religious values over the individual rights of LGBTQ individuals. For the sake of preserving culture and protecting public morality, the rights and freedoms of LGBTQ individuals should be limited. The definition of public morality is decided in majoritarian way: even if Karaman is aware of the fact that there are LGBTQ citizens living in this country, he suggests that their rights and freedoms must be restricted because the cultural and religious values of the remaining majority finds them immoral.

3.3.3. Communitarianism

I suggest that all of these Islamic figures share a communitarian perspective for prioritizing their own religiously framed notion of "common good" over "individual rights and liberties" of LGBTQ individuals. In the political philosophy, there is a tension between communitarianism and political liberalism, primarily rooted in the conflicts between common good and individual rights. Communitarianism, which emerged as a reaction to the moral individualism of political liberalism, argues that liberalism fails to capture the importance of communal bonds which are claimed to be constitutive of our identity. Communitarian scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1984), Michael Sandel (1998)

and Charles Taylor (1989) elaborate the close connection between the individual and the community and defend that liberalism mistakenly assumes individual to be atomistic and "unencumbered" as if it exists outside the community. In contrast, they assert that each individual has membership to a particular community and that individual identity is constructed by and embedded within the cultural and social relations. Our ethical values and conceptions of good life differ from each other and are shaped within the communities we are members of. Thus, it is not possible to define universal "individual rights" without taking the "common good" into consideration. According to communitarians, the conception of the good has to be defined on the common ground. This socially formulated common good will provide the normative foundation upon which possible conflicts among individuals and groups can be solved. This shared vision of "common good" becomes the standard for different actors with varying political visions and backgrounds. In that manner, communitarians criticize liberals for overemphasizing individual rights and autonomy at the expense of the common good. The vision of solidarity in communitarianism reflects the understanding of "ascriptive group solidarity" in which the basis of social cohesion, belonging, coexistence and togetherness in the society is sameness and familiarity informed by common ascriptive identities such as ethnicity, race, nationality, or religious affiliations (Candaş and Buğra, 2010). This type of solidarity neglects the fact that there are divergent ways of life, interests, life styles, and choices in a society and leaves out of membership those who don't share certain ascriptive identities that are defined as the common denominator. Therefore, communitarianism, with its vision of ascriptive group solidarity, is essentialist, exclusionary and hostile to diversity in character.

Politically liberal scholars suggest that communitarians overlook the fact that the common good can sometimes be oppressive, especially when its formulations don't involve democratic deliberation processes and when it creates obligations which individuals must conform to. Communitarianism can easily turn to authoritarianism when individual rights are curtailed for the sake of so-called common goods such as national security, public morality, public order and national interest. In contexts where common good is defined according to the values of the ruling majority without sufficient commitment to the rights of minorities and disadvantaged groups, communitarianism might result in subjugation of vulnerable segments of the society. According to the politically liberal perspective, moral autonomy and individual rights become vital to protect non-conforming individuals from oppressive imposition of majority rule, because they enable the self "to challenge religion, tradition, social dogma (Benhabib, 1992: 73)."

This study asserts that the Islamic opposition to homosexuality represents a communitarian understanding. In line with the cultural difference arguments which emphasize that community is ascendant over the individual in some cultures as opposed to the individual atomism in Western ethics, this discourse appreciates the communal values of the Muslim society and criticizes the Western individualism. It is argued that the "individual rights" of LGBTs and public visibility of homosexuality must be restricted for the sake of "common good". Their call for restrictions over LGBTQ rights and liberties means that they demand the legislators to predicate regime of rights on this particular definition of common good and allocate the rights accordingly. Likewise, their request for the moral regulation of public sphere and restrictions over LGBTQ visibility for the sake of protecting human generation, family structure, and religious values is repercussions of their

communitarian understanding. These Islamic discourses prioritize the needs and well-being of an 'imagined' Muslim community over the rights of LGBTQ individuals. In this communitarian perspective, the "good life" is defined as the life guided by Islamic rules and values, and "common good" is defined as Islamic public morality, protection of Islamic family values and structure, and continuity of human race. Since homosexuality contradicts with these conceptions of "good life" and "common good", it deserves to be restricted even if at the expense of "rights" of LGBTQ individuals. The well-being of society as prescribed by these Islamic actors is ascendant over the rights of a particular group of members of the society.

This definition of "common good" and "good life" is a product of an authoritarian decision making process in which the heterogeneity within the society and political, ideological, sexual and religious differences among the members are neglected. These Islamic opponents of LGBTQ rights share a vision of ascriptive group solidarity in which they take Muslim identity as the common denominator that unites people in Turkey and assume religious values to be the basis of living together in the society. By doing so, they overlook faith-based or sexual diversity within the society and impose their own definition of common good as if it is standard and shared by all. LGBTQ individuals are automatically excluded from membership to the society, because their sexual identity is considered intrinsically irreconcilable with Islam that is the common ascriptive tie. In that sense, these actors exploit religious norms that they interpret in heterosexist, exclusionary and authoritarian ways in their opposition to equal citizenship rights for LGBTQ individuals.

CHAPTER 4

QUEER-FRIENDLY ISLAMIC APPROACHES:

CHALLENGES TO THE ISLAMIC OPPOSITION TO LGBTQ RIGHTS

As the previous chapter examined the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights, this chapter discusses how LGBTQ friendly Muslim stances challenge this dominant Islamic discourse and are able to develop Islamic defense of LGBTQ rights. I explain how LGBTQ friendly Muslims are able to reconcile universality of LGBTQ rights with their local Islamic values and tradition by rearticulating and reworking both simultaneously. I argue that following strategies of rearticulating LGBTQ rights and religious norms enable these Muslims to open space for the defense of LGBTQ rights in the Islamic tradition: these are reinterpreting religious norms in LGBTQ-friendly ways, reminding the past queer friendly examples from the Ottoman and religious history, emphasizing that act of sinning is an individual matter, and lastly highlighting universal principle of equal rights for all. In this chapter, I discuss these strategies respectively.

Before starting, I would like to note methodological issues that I encountered during the process of data collection. Currently, queer Muslim identity and queer friendly Islamic discourses are very rarely visible in the Turkish public sphere. Since LGBTQ Muslim identity is considered unacceptable by public norms, Muslim identity never comes together with the public display of LGBTQ identity except a very few cases such as Cemil İpekçi and Bülent Ersoy. Because it is unintelligible to rethink Islam in a compatible way with homosexuality, and this sort of reformist approaches are accused of distorting religion and invite hostile reactions, many people find it dangerous to talk or write on this issue in Turkey. The sensitive nature

of the issue and related concerns constrain people from voicing pro-LGBTQ Muslim stances publicly. At the time this thesis was written, there were almost no publicly available sources such as publications, news, articles, media coverage etc. about LGBT Muslim identity in Turkey. Different from the European and U.S contexts where there are many LGBTQ Muslim organizations and groups, there was no LGBT Muslim organization to get in contact in Turkey. The only publicly open source of knowledge was a blog page entitled as *On Being Gay and Muslim* (gayislam.blogspot.com), on which three anonymous gay Muslims share their thoughts on and experiences of being gay Muslim. In order to overcome these limitations to access information, I appealed to a combination of sources including this blog page, in-depth interviews and media research. Conducting interviews became an obligatory method to reach alternative views, and turned out to be my primary source of information in this chapter.

I made twelve in-depth interviews that lasted from one and a half hour to three hours. Interviewees[18] were recruited using existing personal networks in LGBTQ community and Islamist circles and through snowball sampling. Since the interviews were conducted in 2011 and 2012, I could have the chance to ask interviewees directly about their opinions on Aliye Kavaf's remarks in March 2010, the Islamist NGOs support to her and the Islamist writers' subsequent reactions in the media. These interviews covered questions relating to their views on the relationship between Islam and homosexuality, Aliye Kavaf's statement and subsequent reactions from the Islamist NGOs and media, and LGBTQ rights. This gave me opportunity to hear the challenges and critiques that my interlocutors pose against the dominant Islamic discourse. In addition to these interviews, I utilized the essays written by

[18] All of names were changed to protect participant identity except Beren Azizi, Melda Onur, Özlem Albayrak and Ümit Ilgın Yiğit who preferred their original names to be used.

three gay Muslims (nicknamed as Ümitvar, Eflatoon and Gaydervişş) and published on *On Being Gay and Muslim* blog page (gayislam.blogspot.com). As part of the data I collected in my media research that focused on the period after Kavaf's remarks, I incorporated into this chapter the comments voiced by Hidayet Tuksal and Ayhan Bilgen, two Islamic public intellectuals in favor of LGBTQ rights.

As the previous chapter examined, the dominant Islamic discourse in the Turkish political sphere reproduces the Orthodox doctrine that forbids homosexuality as sinful and sees LGBTQ identity and rights incompatible with Islamic religion. In culturally essentialist ways, the Islamist NGOs, writers, and political parties abuse the cultural difference argument as an excuse for their opposition to Western-imposed universality of LGBTQ rights. Relying on cultural particularism, they dismiss the idea that LGBTQ rights are universal human rights; rather argue that these rights are not acceptable in their local religious tradition. They defend the restrictions on public visibility and rights and liberties of LGBTQ individuals for the sake of "common good" that is authoritatively defined in conservative religious terms.

However, this dominant Islamic discourse does not reflect the view of all Muslims and challenged at the individual level by queer friendly Muslim stances. The dominant religious distinctions and boundaries are not inherent and essential properties of religions, but they are particular readings of sacred injunctions. Religious definitional boundaries and meanings are social constructions and are constantly redrawn and transform in line with changes in the political and sociohistorical processes (Asad, 1993; Bayat, 2007; McGuire, 2008). Each claim for religious authenticity is just one among other religious truth claims. Therefore,

religion is not a unitary, monolithic phenomenon, but it is multicentered and multivocal. The definitions of what is properly 'religion' and 'religious', who is really 'one of us', who are 'we'?, what practices and beliefs are true as opposed to what is wrong, mistaken and alien have undergone transformations overtime as a result of several political and sociohistorical struggles (McGuire, 2008: 21). Particular practices, beliefs, or ways of being that were once condemned, considered sinful or alien might come to be perceived acceptable over time after certain contestations. As Bayat argues, societal forces, namely social movements, cast a significant role in this contestation over religious meaning (Bayat, 2007: 4). What we call queer theology, feminist theology, or liberation theology emerged from different social groups' attempts to redefine the religious truth so that it would allow spaces for their social existence within religion (Bayat, 2007: 4).

I suggest analyzing the debates over homosexuality and Islam in the light of this approach to religion. The dominant Islamic orthodox doctrine that sees homosexuality as sinful is actually a historical product of discursive processes and power relations. Its definitions and judgments should not be taken as inherent and essential aspects of Islam but as social, political cultural constructions. If the present hegemony of heteronormative discourses in Islam doesn't stem from Islam's intrinsic or essential characteristics but the current configuration of religious power, this means that this hegemony might be disrupted when more queer-friendly visions of Islam gain more social acceptance.

The LGBTQ friendly Muslim stances challenge this dominant Islamic discourse and achieve to open space for LGBTQ rights and identity from an Islamic perspective. My Muslim interviewees and other five Muslim actors I have examined (Hidayet Tuksal, Ayhan Bilgen, and three gay Muslim blog writers) are in favor of

equal rights of LGBTQ individuals, regardless of whether they think homosexuality is sinful and of whether they could solve the tension between Islam and homosexuality. All of them refute the restrictive arguments voiced by the proponents of dominant heteronormative understanding of Islam. In contrast to the dominant Islamic arguments which see LGBTQ rights as Western imposition incompatible with local culture and religion, these LGBTQ friendly Muslims are able to reconcile universality of LGBTQ rights with their local Islamic values and tradition by rearticulating and reworking both simultaneously. As Amar says, universal rights have "no 'ideal form' or singular direction of dissemination, nor one meaning or legacy that would maintain them as exclusive property of the West (Amar, 2011: 304)." Rather, they are reshaped by local actors in their local struggles for justice and civil rights. The local movements and individuals have agency to rework on LGBTQ rights and attribute new strategic meanings to them in line with their own local needs.

Seyla Benhabib's term of democratic iterations is very useful to understand this process of rearticulation of universal values in local contexts. According to Benhabib, in the process of repeating a norm, concept or value, what is produced is never a simple copy of the original usage. Rather, every iteration involves variation and transformation of the original meaning (Benhabib, 2006: 47). Every iteration is a creative appropriation of the authoritative antecedent, through which the original meaning is enhanced and resignified (Benhabib, 2006: 48). As Benhabib says, the reconciliation of cosmopolitan norms with the unique legal, historical, and cultural traditions in the local contexts is possible through these processes of democratic iterations:

> Democratic people, which considers itself bound by certain guiding norms and principles, engages in iterative acts by reappropriating and reinterpreting these, thereby showing itself to be not only the *subject* but also the *author of the laws* (Benhabib, 2006: 49)

As Benhabib notes, cosmopolitanism might be reconciled with the unique legal, historical, and cultural traditions through multiple processes of democratic iteration (Benhabib, 2006: 70). On the one hand, LGBTQ friendly Muslims see the hermeneutic challenges that unrecoverable and nonpreventable character of homosexuality poses on the orthodox Islamic understandings. On the other hand, they witness the discriminatory practices and violence against LGBTQs and are aware of the immediate need for rights and remedies. Since they consider themselves bound by both Islamic norms and universal equal rights, they initiate iterative acts by rearticulating and reinterpreting both the religious truth and the notion of LGBTQ rights. In that sense, the Islamic defense of LGBTQ rights operate at local religious level and universal rights level simultaneously and constantly maneuver between these two levels. As every iteration is a creative appropriation of the authoritative antecedent (Benhabib, 2006: 48), both religious meaning and universal notion of equal rights are enhanced and resignified in the construction of Islamic defense of LGBTQ rights.

In the Muslim-majority context of Turkey where the dominant Islamic discourse dismisses homosexuality and LGBTQ rights as Western impositions incompatible with local cultural and religious values, the pro-LGBTQ Muslim stances try to reclaim the religion back from Orthodoxy instead of speaking solely in universalist terms of LGBTQ rights. They adopt the strategy of redeploying very religious arguments that have been used against them rather than abandoning the

religious sphere they are excluded. Since they consider themselves bound by the Islamic rules and take Islam as the major guidance in shaping their lives, they engage in iterative acts by reappropriating and reinterpreting the authoritative original that is Islamic norms. By doing so, they redraw the boundaries of religion and expand them to include previously excluded group of LGBTQ Muslims. On the other hand, they attempt to localize universal norms of LGBTQ rights by rethinking them in compatible ways to local religious values. Below, I argue that following strategies of rearticulating LGBTQ rights and religious norms enable these Muslims to open space for defense of LGBTQ rights in the Islamic tradition: reinterpreting religious norms in LGBTQ-friendly ways, reminding the past queer friendly examples from the Ottoman and religious history, emphasizing individually binding aspect of sinning, and lastly highlighting universal principle of equal rights for all.

4.1. Rearticulating religious norms and values

4.1.1 Reinterpreting the religious norms

The orthodox Islamic doctrine condemns homosexuality as sinful and deems it in no way incompatible with Islam. This dominant discourse is influential on Muslim individuals' beliefs and practices but not absolutely determinant and encompassing. As religious injunctions are subject to constant reexamination and deliberation in societal, institutional and individual levels (Eickelman, 1998; McGuire, 2008), so are those religious meanings over homosexuality. Following the footsteps of Muslim feminists who have initiated questioning and reforming the patriarchal and misogynist assumptions behind many mainstream Islamic practices and beliefs (Ali, 2006; Barlas, 2002; Stowasser, 1994; Wadud 1999, 2006), an

increasing number of LGBTQ Muslims engage in rethinking and reinterpreting the Orthodox doctrines over homosexuality (Jamal 2001; Nahas 1998, 2001; Kugle 2003, 2007; Malik 2003; Schannahan 2009, Yip, 2005). Instead of accepting the incompatibility argument and presuming the Orthodox heterosexist views as fixed religious truths integral to Islam, they attempt to remake and rework the religious truth in a queer-friendly way. They neither give up their religious belief, nor assimilate into heterosexuality, as the Orthodox view recommends as a solution to settle the tension between their sexual and religious identities. Rather they try to find space for their LGBTQ identity within the Islam and reconcile the two.

One of their most important strategies is to return to the Islamic sources in order to argue for a queer-friendly Islam through reinterpretation of the religious texts and sources. These believers employ different approaches for constructing sexuality-affirming hermeneutics. Although the LGBTQ Muslims and other Muslim supporters of LGBTQ equality constitute a very small minority within the entire Muslim world, their challenge against the Orthodox heterosexist doctrine gets more visible and heard more in parallel with the foundation of many LGBTQ Muslim organizations such as Imaan LGBTQI Muslim Support Group[19] and Safra Project for Muslim LBT Women[20] in the UK, Salaam Queer Muslim Community[21] in Canada, Al-Fatiha in the U.S, and Homosexuels Musulmans[22] in France.

In the face of tension between their religious and sexual identity, the LGBTQ Muslim interlocutors I interviewed appeal to reinterpretation in order to open up space for themselves within religion. Indeed, they are not alone in this struggle of

[19] http://www.imaan.org.uk/
[20] http://www.safraproject.org/index.html
[21] http://salaamcanada.org/
[22] http://www.homosexuels-musulmans.org/index.html

reexamination and remaking the religious meaning. Even if they are not self-defined as LGBTQ, many other Muslims with sensitivity to discrimination and violence against LGBTQ individuals feel the need to find ground in Islam for their pro-LGBTQ rights stances. Feeling themselves bound by both God's commands and universal principle of equal rights, these Muslims join their LGBTQ fellows in producing alternative religious knowledge through creative process of re-interpretation and re-contextualization. One of the ways to construct queer-friendly hermeneutics is to highlight ideological biases in the Orthodox views:

> Actually, I believe in the Quran being inalterable, and fundamentally Quran can provide answers to anything. Islam is a legal system, an economic system and a social system altogether. It provides answers to all and it has canonical answers about all. However, many different things come into account regarding the practical meaning. There is a sentence about an issue, to translate that sentence or to interpret that sentence… All interpreters, all expounders are male. There is no woman around to interpret the verses of Quran regarding women. And I believe men are overpowered by their indulgence. I mean, they give false verdicts just for their own interests and they act upon these. (Duygu, 23 years old, university student, headscarved Muslim feminist, heterosexual)[23]

> When I look at the Quran, the language appeals to men saying things like "if you do this, you will be given virgins". Muslim feminist women criticize this and I agree with them. If Islam is a religion for everybody, then Quran is not a scripture just appealing to men. I believe interpreters interpreted this as such, they wrote the meaning like this and this goes on as tradition of centuries. Therefore, why people, who wrote these on the fundamental subject of men and women, would look out for homosexuality? For example, when referring to something like marriage, scripture says "man should do this to his woman; woman should do that for the man". I mean, I don't think they would make an interpretation like "one spouse would do this, other would do that". That's because, as I said before, there is a serious problem even at the issue male-female relations. (Oğuz, 24 years old, bisexual male, Muslim, psychologist)[24]

[23] Aslında Kuran'ın değişemez olması, Kuran'ın her şeye cevap oluşturabileceğine inanıyorum ben temelde. İslam hem bir hukuk sistemi, hem bir ekonomik sistem, hem bir sosyal yapı. Bütün bunlara cevap oluşturuyor aslında temelde, bunların hepsine dair bir ilkesel cevabı var. Ama pratikteki karşılığına dair birçok farklı şey giriyor devreye. Bir cümle geçiyor bir mesele ile alakalı, o cümleyi çevirmek ya da o cümleyi yorumlamak… Bütün tefsir alimleri, bütün müfessirler erkek. Bir tane Kuran ayetini, kadınlara dair bir ayeti yorumlayan bir kadın yok ortalıkta. Ve ben erkeklerin birçok konuda nefislerine yenildiğini düşünüyorum. Yani yanlış hükümleri sırf kendi çıkarları için verdiklerini ve onun üzerinden hareket ettiklerini falan düşünüyorum.

[24] Kuran-ı Kerim'e baktığım zaman, "şunu yaparsanız size huri verilecek" gibi direkt erkeklere hitap eden bir dili vardır. Müslüman feminist kadınlar bunu eleştirir ve ben onlara katılırım. İslamiyet

For Duygu and Oğuz, there are heteronormative, androcentric and patriarchal biases in the translation and interpretation of Quran. Starting from Muslim feminist critiques, they both question the credibility of interpretive authorities by highlighting their male biases. According to Duygu and Oğuz, although Islam is authentically impartial and is speaking to all equally, the religious scholars and commentators who are mostly males understand, translate and explain the verses in line with their own heteronormative and sexist perspectives. As Duygu says, they are all human beings, thus they might sometimes listen to their lower selfs and make mistakes. Even sometimes they misuse their authoritative power and intentionally misrepresent the religious meanings in order to protect their own interests and their patriarchal power. According to Oğuz, the Quran's direct addressing to the men is an example of these processes of misinterpretation and distortion. The current orthodox Islamic doctrine that forbids homosexuality as sinful might also be a product of biased judgments of religious authorities. As Oğuz argues, if we know that the religious meanings over male-female relations and gender issues are constructed through authorities' reasoning based upon heteronormative and patriarchal assumptions, why not to infer that the same filtering process is also working for homosexuality? In the construction of queer-friendly Islamic vision, one of the strategies employed by pro-LGBTQ Muslims is to elaborate possible heteronormative and patriarchal biases that might have influenced previous Orthodox readings of the texts.

herkesin dini ise muhtemelen direkt erkeklere hitap eden bir kitap değildir Kuran-ı Kerim. Bunu çeviren insanlar böyle çevirmiştir, mealini böyle yazmıştır ve bu yüzyıllardır artık bir gelenek olduğu için böyle devam ediyordur diye düşünüyorum. Dolayısıyla kadınla erkek, en temel meselede bunu bu şekilde yazan insanlar neden eşcinselliği gözetsin ki? Örneğin, evlilik diye bir şeyden bahsederken kitap, onlar şey diyor: kadına erkeği şöyle yapacak, kadın erkeğe böyle yapacak. Yani eşlerden biri böyle yapacak, eşlerden diğeri böyle yapacak diye bir meal yazacaklarını sanmıyorum. Çünkü dediğim gibi daha kadın-erkek meselesinde bile çok ciddi bir sıkıntı var.

Since the Orthodox doctrine's primary evidence for the sinfulness of homosexuality is the story of destruction of Prophet Lut's tribe, the pro-LGBTQ Muslims focus on its reinterpretation. In the academic scholarship, Jamal's study (1997) is one of the most extensive and cited works with respect to the story of Lut. Jamal (1997) suggests that the punishment of Lot's people was not due to homosexuality but other morally inappropriate acts such as inhospitality, sexual violence and rape. It was *hadith* literature not the Quran which built a connection between the Lot story and same-sex sexuality, thus influenced later Islamic attitudes toward same-sex practice. Likewise, some of my interviwees (Baybars and Ümit Ilgın Yiğit), Ayhan Bilgen, and three gay Muslim blog writers argue for this line of reasoning. According to them, what is of concern in the destruction of Lut's tribe was not sexual orientation but rape, thus the story of Lut doesn't match with homosexuality and cannot be presented as the evidence of its sinfulness. Duygu and Ferda as well point out that they are confused because of these sorts of reinterpretations, even though they are not certain about their reliability. In addition to rereading of the story of Lut, relevant *hadith*s are also questioned. Ümit Ilgın Yiğit told me that he investigated the reliability of relevant *hadith*s that are claimed to recommend severe punishment for homosexuality and found nothing about the source of these *hadith*s*:*

> I could not find the sources of other, very harsh hadiths saying things like "kill them", despite all my efforts. And after all, I believe he is a totally made-up character and these hadiths are fabrication. There is a hadith saying, if two men fornicate in bed, scourge the one on top and kill the other. It is unknown who gave this command when and where. It is unknown if it exists or not, and where it stands. (Ümit Ilgın Yiğit, 34 years old, gay Muslim, artist, former LGBTQ activist)[25]

[25] Geri kalan çok sert olan, "öldürün onları" gibi hadisi şeriflerin kaynağını benim bütün çabalarıma rağmen bulamadım. Ve artık bu adamın tamamen uydurma bir karakter olduğunu, bu hadisi şerif diye ortaya atılan şeylerin artık uydurma olduğuna inanıyorum. Diyor ki, kim ki iki erkek bir yatakta zinada bulunursa üstü olanı kırbaçlayın, altta olanı öldürün, gibi bir hadisi şerif var. Bu nerede, nasıl, kim bu emri vermiş belli değil. Var mı, yok mu, neresinde duruyor bu şeyin, belli değil.

Since he couldn't find the source of these hadiths and any information about who, where, when, why the punishment was ordered, he concluded that these hadiths are fabricated and not authentic. The relative lack of clear information concerning homosexuality in the primary religious sources and the uncertainty, ambiguity and openness to diverse readings in the existing ones create discursive loopholes to be benefited from by queer-friendly interpretations. In this reinterpretation process, queer-friendly Muslims rebut and negate the orthodox evidences against homosexuality either by attaching new meanings to the original source as in the story of Lut or by dismissing some sources for being fabricated and inauthentic as in the case of relevant hadiths.

The reinterpretation of religious meanings does matter for the lives of LGBTQ Muslims not only for its contribution to gain religious legitimacy and social acceptance in the future but also to get rid of feeling of personal guilt and to have a clear conscience. The following dialogue from my interview with Oğuz reveals that the potential religious approval that a reasonable and convincing rereading of a religious source might bring about relieving and comforting influence on his. In our interview, I realized that he never mentioned about the queer friendly rereading of the story of Lut, even if he told me about many other reinterpretations concerning other verses. That is why, I asked him whether he ever heard about this particular rereading which argues that the destruction of Lut's tribe was not because of their homosexuality but because of their sexual assault:

> *Do you know, some say the reason the people of Lot being exterminated is not anal intercourse, but their forceful attacks.*
>
> You know, I'm relieved! I just felt like that… Are there groups who really think like that?
>
> *Yes, there are. They interpret the verse in this way.*

> I'm delighted. Even that little nuance in that little interpretation relieved me. I became really happy.[26]

In this dialogue, what was so striking for me that after I told him the alternative explanation; he got really happy and was visibly relieved after a moment of silent amazement. After this short moment of silence when he tried to conceive and judge the plausibility of this rereading, he got excited and expressed his relief, then asked me again whether there were really some Muslim groups that defend this argument. Upon my confirmation, it was remarkable to observe how this "tiny nuance" might create a huge difference for him especially in terms of self-affirmation and calming down the inner tensions between sexual and religious identity.

So far, I have discussed how LGBTQ Muslims or their queer-friendly Muslim fellows involve in reinterpretation of religious sources and rearticulation of religious truth through "iterative acts". In their iterative acts, they employ certain methods such as highlighting heteronormative, patriarchal biases in the Orthodox views, or considering the possibility that Orthodox sources and evidences are fabricated and inauthentic. Queer-friendly interpretations are important for opening space for LGBTQ identity within the legitimate sphere of religion. Therefore, all of the LGBTQ Muslims and their Muslim supporters involve themselves with reinterpretation of the religious texts in varying degrees. According to the findings of my research, the LGBTQ identity and Islam might be reconciled by some of Muslims (Baybars, Ümit Ilgın Yiğit and Gayderviş) with the help of the

[26] The author: "Şunu biliyor musun: Lut kavminin helak edilmesinin nedeni anal ilişki değil, onların zorla saldırmaları, diyenler var." Oğuz: "İçim rahatladı, biliyor musun! Bir an öyle bir his geldi… Gerçekten böyle düşünen gruplar var mı?" The author: "Evet, var. Ayeti bu şekilde yorumluyorlar." Oğuz: "Çok sevindim. Çünkü gerçekten o ufacık yorumdaki, ufacık nüans bile beni çok rahatlattı. Çok mutlu oldum."

abovementioned strategies of reinterpretation, whereas the incommensurability between the two still remain unsolved for some others. Even though Duygu, Oğuz, Ferda, Ümitvar, Eflatoon, and Ayhan Bilgen involve in reinterpretation, the Islamic view on homosexuality still remains controversial and uncertain for them due to relative lack of clear Islamic discourse concerning this issue. Lastly, for Hidayet Tuksal, Berat and Canan, homosexuality is clearly sinful and forbidden in Islam. Even the irreconcilability remains unsolved; this doesn't inhibit LGBTQ Muslims from practicing their sexuality and other queer-friendly Muslims from supporting LGBTQ rights. In the following sections, I discuss what other strategies enable these Muslims to support LGBTQ rights even if they can't certainly reconcile the tension between Islam and homosexuality.

4.1.2. Reminding the past queer friendly examples from the local history

Another strategy employed by queer-friendly Muslims is to turn to religious history and local cultural past to find justification for homosexuality. Particular instances from the Ottoman past and Islamic history are cited to question the presumed incommensurability between Islam and LGBTQ identity and to challenge the idea that LGBTQ identity and rights are alien Western impositions:

> There is a single thing that you say over and over: you legitimize homosexuality… Sirs! We are not illegitimate children of this land! And yes, there have been sects in Islam saying that our actions are legitimate! Like the Sunni sect of Zahiriyah! There also have been some saying our actions would require a punishment less than for male-female adultery. Like Imam Abu Hanifa! You expect us to say this: This is a sin and I am sinful, I exert myself to "straighten". No, we are not going to say that! (Gayderviş)[27]

[27] Dönüp durup söyleyegeldiğiniz tek bir söz var: Eşcinselliği meşrulaştırıyorsunuz… Efendiler! Biz bu toprakların gayrimeşru çocukları değiliz! Ve evet, İslam Dininde bizim yaptığımız fiilin meşru olduğunu söyleyen mezheplerde olmuştur! Sünni Zahiriye mezhebi gibi! Yaptığımız fiilin kadın erkek zinasından daha düşük bir ceza gerektirdiğini de söyleyenler çıkmıştır. İmam-ı Azam gibi! Bizden

Gayderviş, one of the three writers of *On Being Gay and Muslim* blog page, is among those LGBTQ Muslims who are able to resolve the incommensurability. In his above quote, he addresses the Muslim opponents of homosexuality and gives examples of Zahiriye Sect and Imam-ı Azam, the founder of Hanafe sect, from Islamic history to argue for legitimacy of homosexuality. He asserts that Sunni Zahiriye Sect was accepting homosexuality and that Imam-ı Azam saw homosexuality less punishable than opposite-sex adultery. Through invoking this multivocality and diversity of approaches concerning homosexuality in the history of Islamic scholarship, Gayderviş challenges the hegemony of heterosexist understandings of Islam. These religious accounts help him to refute the sinfulness arguments and make another truth claim that is alternative to the Orthodox one. These examples from the past strengthen his hand to argue that Islam allows space for LGBTQ identity. Likewise, Baybars and Ferda turn to same-sex sexual history in the Ottoman era to challenge the idea that LGBTQ identities and rights are western impositions that are inappropriate to the local culture:

> Homosexuality did not arise as a political movement in the course of history. *Gulampara* has always existed, *mahmup* has always existed. These are Ottoman translations of those terms. *Gulampara* means "young boy lover". *Mahmup* has a male lover. *Zenandost* means lesbian. Saying "politicizing these is Western imposition" is like saying "democracy is a Western innovation, we should not be democrats". What if the West made the definitions? These are defined due to oppressions in its history. In fact, oppression is required for something to be politicized. If we could have shown the tolerance that we showed 100-200 years ago, maybe homosexuality would have not been politicized. In the Ottoman times, gay boys would participate in weddings and festivities. Imagine now, Abdullah Gül's son marries and transvestites present gifts to him! (Baybars, 31 years old, PhD candidate, bisexual male, former Muslim and member of Gülen Community)[28]

şunu dememizi bekliyorsunuz: Bu günahtır ve ben suçluyum, "düzelmek" için gayret sarf ediyorum. Hayır bu sözü söylemeyeceğiz! İslam dini içinde bize bir yer vardır.

[28] Gaylik, lezbiyenlik tarih içinde politik bir hareket olarak ortaya çıkmadı. Gulamparalık her zaman vardı, mahmupluk her zaman vardı. Bunlar o terimlerin Osmanlıcası. Gulampara genç oğlancıları seven. Mahmup erkek sevgili olan kişi. Zenandost lezbiyen demek. "Bunları politikleştirmek batının empozesi" söylemi "demokrasi batının icadı demokrat olmayalım" demek gibi bir şey. Ne yapacağız

Upon my question on what he thinks about some Islamists' arguments that LGBTQ identities and rights are western impositions, Baybars responds that same-sex sexualities have always been part of local culture in local terms even in the Ottoman period and had been more tolerated there compared to today. Through giving examples of Ottoman equivalent terms for what we call gay, lesbian, homosexual and transvestite today, he tries to prove that sexual practices similar to contemporary sexual identities had been existing in a wide range of variety in Ottoman times as well. His narrative clashes with the essentialist Islamic perspective that sees these identities as pure Western products that has no correspondence in Islamic societies. Likewise, Ferda points out to the prevalence of same-sex relations in the Ottoman palace and adds that their practitioners had had more freedom than they have today:

> Back then, in the Ottoman era, even sultans were sodomites. Homosexuals lived without any problems. And possibly, they were living much more comfortable than today. The limitations over homosexuality are actually products of modernity and its definition of individual. (Ferda, 25 years old, heterosexual, headscarf activist)[29]

She emphasizes that the restrictions over homosexuality is a product of modernity. Like Baybars, she points out that there was more tolerance toward homosexuality in the Ottoman times. Because the Ottoman emperors and Ottoman state as the most powerful Islamic empire are highly glorified in the collective memory of many Islamists today, the strategy of reminding the homoerotic aspect of this respected Ottoman past might be useful to challenge the Islamic opposition to

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batı tanımlamışsa? Bunu kendi tarihinde bu baskıdan dolayı tanımlamıştır. Bir şeyin politikleşmesi için aslında onun biraz da baskı altında kalması lazım. Biz 100-200 sene önceki hoşgörüyü gösterebilseydik eşcinsellik hiç de politikleşmezdi belki. Osmanlı'da hamam oğlanları düğünlerde derneklerde yürüyorlar. Şimdi düşünsene Abdullah Gül'ün oğlu evlenecek travestiler gelip hediye sunacak!

[29] Eskiden Osmanlı zamanında falan gayet padişahlar oğlancıymış. Eşcinseller rahat rahat yaşıyormuş. Ve muhtemelen şu ankinden çok daha rahat yaşıyorlardı. Bir yandan o eşcinselliğe getirilen kısıtlamalar modernite ile birlikte gelen, o birey tanımının getirdiği bir baskı.

LGBTQ rights with their own terms. By reminding this history, both Baybars and Ferda negate the culturalist essentialist arguments that homosexuality is not compatible with the local culture and show that compulsory heterosexuality is not a natural, intrinsic character of the "local culture" but a construction mostly related to modern processes. Their discursive intervention inhibits the naturalization of heteronormativity in today's local culture as if it is timeless, ahistorical and intrinsic to native culture. This strategy of retelling the local history and of making its same-sex sexuality aspect visible confutes cultural difference arguments that represent local culture as authentically heterosexual and under threat of spread of Western-imposed homosexuality.

4.1.3. Authority to judge belongs to God alone

There are studies showing that huge number of LGBTQ Muslims who maintain practicing same-sex relations even though believing that it is sinful (Bereket and Adam, 2008; Boellstorff 2005; Khan, 2010). To understand this seemingly inconsistent ways of being, it is important not to forget that religion is not only a belief system but also an individual practice. There might be tensions even contradictions between one's religious discourse and practices at the individual level (Yip, 2009: 2). "Lived religion" in everyday practices "appears to be multifaceted, often messy or even contradictory amalgam of beliefs and practices (McGuire, 2008: 208)." This view of "lived religion" is very helpful to understand how it becomes possible for a religious person to continue practicing homosexuality though s/he believes homosexuality is sinful at the same time.

Boellstorf, focusing on the Indonesian gay men's responses to dominant public norms and religious doctrine, underlines that his interlocutors have not been able to resolve incommensurability between the language of Islam and gay subjectivity, but they inhabit it (Boelstroff, 2005: 582). Some of them see same-sex sexual acts as sinful and try to suppress or constrain their desire; some of them see it as not sinful or as a minor sin forgivable by merciful God. Majority of them are married or plan to marry with a woman and see marriage as a duty or requirement for being proper man and citizen of nation (Boelstorff, 2005). This habitation of incommensurability constitutes not a translation of global gay identity into local language, but a process of "dubbing culture" (Boelstorff, 2003). The metaphor of dubbing implies that as the moving lips of person speaking never perfectly match the dubbed voiced, being lesbi or gay and being an Indonesian Muslim never perfectly match. In that sense, the languages of Islam and gayness are "placed together like rails on a train track that unify only at some ever-receding horizon (Boelstorff, 2005: 583)." Thus, gay Muslims inhabit gayness and Islam simultaneously without a perfect match and resolution of incommensurability.

One strategy of rearticulating religious norms is to emphasize that the authority to judge people's acts belongs to God alone. The act of sinning is an individual matter: people are given by God "individual will" to decide how to act as soon as they bear its responsibility. Even if homosexual practice is sinful, it is an issue between God and the homosexual person himself. Its punishment is beyond humanly authority and will be given by God. This idea that only God has authority to judge people's sins is employed by some of the interlocutors to challenge those Islamist requests for the restrictions over public visibility of homosexuality and

LGBTQ rights. It is asserted that the proponents of restrictions attempt to substitute God by trying to judge homosexuality in this world.

Among my interviewees, Canan is a headscarved Muslim lesbian and maintains her lesbian practice even though she admits that homosexuality is certainly unacceptable and forbidden in Islam as the story of Lut clearly shows. She states that "homosexual feelings must be suppressed and should not be experienced" in her religious view. Upon my question about her opinion on queer-friendly interpretation, she responded that she doesn't find these reinterpretations credible and thinks that they are stretching the literal meaning in the Qur'an. She doesn't want to "meddle in" reinterpreting Quran, because she thinks that "religion doesn't have to approve me". Indeed, so similar to Fethullah Gülen's approach that I have mentioned in Chapter 3, she emphasizes that to be Muslim requires being in constant struggle with one's lower self (*nefs*). Against our lower self which always mobilizes our desires and encourages us toward illicit (*haram*) behaviors, we are supposed to struggle and defeat it through directing our will toward legitimate and permissible (*helal*) sphere. Therefore, she arrives to the same conclusion with Gülen that homosexuality must be suppressed. Despite acknowledging this at the discursive level, she practices lesbianism in her daily life in the opposite way to her beliefs. From a rationalist point of view, this ambivalent way of being is unintelligible, and it becomes difficult to comprehend how a believer can knowingly maintain committing a sinful act given that it possibly brings conscientious burden for her. In our interview, it was probably this rationalist way of reasoning led me to ask her how she can handle hardships of this inconsistency between her belief and her practice. She responded that "it is not a big deal, it is not that troubling as you suppose" and that it is no more distressful than trying to suppress her feelings. She told me that she tried to overcome her feelings

before and it was so difficult and painful as well. When she realized that she couldn't change herself, she decided to release her feelings and allowed herself to practice her sexuality. As she describes, she doesn't feel guilty and is not in the mood that "I am committing sin, oh my God, what a bad person I am!" Rather, she feels that "This is how I am, and this is my life":

> I am what I am and I live without expecting any kind of consent from anybody. Yes, in regards to religion, this is a thing that I shouldn't do, shouldn't experience. However, if I am going to be brought to account according to the system that I believe in, it's me who will be brought to account. And most of the time, I think as "this is my form, my life" and I don't feel like I have to explain myself. It's like I live like this because I want this. This is the year that I have been the most comfortable. Though I experienced many. Like, how would it be, how wouldn't it be, how am I going to live, how is it going to be. But now, I'm comfortable like this. (Canan, 22 years old, lesbian, headscarved Muslim, university student, LGBTQ activist)[30]

Her response shows that she is at peace with "inhabiting (Boellstorff, 2005)" her lesbian Muslim identity even though she cannot reconcile both. With respect to her lesbian feelings, she decides that throwing them out is beyond her compliance capacity. She knows that her lesbian practice contradicts with her religious belief and bears its consequences. What enables her to handle the irreconcilability of her lesbian and Muslim identities is her belief that the failure to comply with some of Islamic rules doesn't take a believer out of religion. Given that the perfect conformity to religious rules is impossible, each of us can only partially obey these rules. God expects believers to do their best to shape their lives in accordance with his commands. According to her, "Islam is not a holistic religion that enforces its rules in

[30] Ben nasılsam öyleyim ve bir yerden onay beklemeden yaşıyorum. Evet, dinin içerisinde bu yapmamam gereken, yaşamamam gereken bir şey. Ama inandığım sisteme göre bir hesap vereceksem onu ben vereceğim. Ve "bu benim şeklim, benim hayatım" gibi bakıp, kimseye hesap vermek ve nedenini açıklamak zorunda da hissetmiyorum çoğu zaman. Böyle istediğim için böyle yaşıyorum gibi. En rahat olduğum sene, bu sene. Tabii çok bunun şeylerini yaşadım. Hani nasıl olur, nasıl olmaz, nasıl yaşayacağım, nasıl olacak gibi. Ama şuan böyle rahatım.

an all-or-none basis." Instead, it allows its believers space for partial non-conformity as soon as they bear its responsibility in the other world. When Islam is asking believers to fulfill God's expectations as much as they can, it recognizes individual will to decide and to choose what to do and how much to do. This flexibility and openness to individual decision give her opportunity for determining how much she can do and how much she can comply with the religious norms. As she points out, she doesn't expect any approval from others or not feel herself to have to give an account to other people for her actions or life, but only to God. Since she is given "individual will" by God to decide how to act as soon as she bears its responsibility, her sinful lesbian practice is an issue between herself and God. By rearticulating the religious idea of sinning as an individual act and reminding that the judging authority is God, Canan tries to open herself a space of freedom within religion and an independent status free from intervention from other believers.

Likewise, Oğuz, 24 year old bisexual Muslim and currently has a male partner, maintains his same-sex relationship, even though he believes that this is sinful as a form of adultery. He says that he couldn't deduce a clear answer regarding homosexuality from the Islamic sources. According to him, the Islamic view on homosexuality is uncertain and controversial. Neither the Orthodox Islamic doctrine comes with reliable arguments that prove the sinfulness of homosexuality, nor do alternative interpreters such as gay imam Muhsin Hendricks convince him that it is not sinful. Given this relative lack of clear Islamic discourse on religious legitimacy of homosexuality, he inhabits being bisexual and Muslim at the same time without a perfect reconcilability. Although he doesn't have a certain religious answer, he has an inner feeling that homosexuality is not sinful in itself, but sinful as a form of adultery. For Oğuz, he will never be regretful for homosexuality, but certainly for

committing adultery. Because he believes that Islam recognizes marriage as the only legitimate and acceptable way for sexual relationship and defines marriage as a contract between a man and a woman, his same-sex relationship stays inevitably out of this legitimate sphere and becomes a form of adultery. Thus, he admits that he is committing sin not directly due to his homosexual relationship but due to adultery. He relies on the idea of impossibility of perfect compliance to the religious rules in order to continue his "inhabitation" of Muslim and bisexual identity at the same time.

> But there is always the sin of the prayers I have missed, sins of the sins I committed. I will not be a totally sinful, I would not. Or I don't think I would be a total Muslim if I have done all the things wanted from me. (…) However, there are expectations of Allah from me in the perception of world of trial. And these are trade-offs of some sort. And every time, how I feel when I do a bad thing or I do a thing that I shouldn't have done, is this: Allah will forgive me, and I will foreswear someday. Allah knows me; I didn't do it with foul intent. I have the belief that I somehow compensate this. I really don't believe that neither this world nor the other world would end just because I kissed a man, or even I had an anal intercourse. As I said, it would all end, life would end for me. Then, nothing would matter. (Oğuz, 24 years old, bisexual male, Muslim, psychologist)[31]

According to him, homosexual practice as a form of adultery doesn't make him "a total sinner" who is unforgivable and will directly be sent to the hell. Each act of us is evaluated separately. Same-sex relationship doesn't take one out of the fold of Islam. If this was the case, he says, everything would lose its meaning. Islam, which is a humanistic religion, as he describes, doesn't exclude a believer totally because of his same-sex practice. Otherwise would be the end of the life and

[31] Ama benim için her zaman kılmadığım namazın günahı vardır, işlediğim günahın günahı vardır. Total bir günahkar asla olmam, olmuyorumdur. Ya da hiçbir zaman bütün istenenleri yerine getirdiğim zaman da full bir Müslüman olduğumu ya da olabileceğimi de hiç düşünmüyorum. (…) Ama imtihan dünyası algısı içinde Allah'ın benden beklentileri var. Ve ben bunları yerine getiriyorum, getireceğim bir şekilde, getiriyorum, getiremiyorum. Ve bunlar bir şekilde trade-off. Ve her seferinde, ben kötü bir şey yaptığımda ya da yapmam gereken bir şeyi yaptığımda hissettiğim şey: Allah beni affeder, ben zaten bunun tövbesini bir gün ederim. Allah beni biliyor, kötü niyetle yapmadım bunu. Hani bir şekilde ben bunu başka şekilde kompanse ediyorumdur, düşüncesi hakim bana. Gerçekten ben bir kere bir erkekle öpüştüm diye ya da öpüşmeyi geçtim anal ilişkiye geçtim diye benim bu dünyamın da öbür dünyamın da biteceğine inanamıyorum. Dediğim gibi, o zaman biter yani, hayat biter benim için. O zaman hiçbir anlamı kalmaz hiçbir şeyin.

everything for him. The fact that he is committing sin doesn't prevent him from maintaining his homosexual relationship, because, for him, adultery is no major than many other sins he commits. He describes this world "as a world of examination" where God expects his believers to act in accordance with his commands. In this world of examination where perfect compliance is not possible, there is "a trade-off", as Oğuz calls, in which each believer carries out some of God's expectations, whereas others stay unfulfilled. In that sense, there is nobody without sin. When he cannot fulfill some of God's commandments and commits sin, he tries to "compensate" this wrongdoing with some other good deeds and believes that God will accept his repentance and forgive him. As he describes, the ultimate authority to judge his behaviors and actions is God. God to whom he is accountable knows him and his good intentions and will decide his fate accordingly.

Moreover, Baybars and Ayhan Bilgen underline that the Islamist proponents of restrictions over public visibility of homosexuality and LGBTQ rights attempt to substitute God by trying to judge homosexuality in this world or they play God:

> However, limits of the lawful freedoms are our negative freedoms. (…) Humans have the right to hurt themselves. Humans have the right reject treatment even when they are terminally ill. How would you forcibly moralize these people, fit them into a mold? Who are you? Even God that you believe in does not do that. God you believe in has given us our own will, you believe in that. What are you? Are you smarter than God? Did God give you power to be his shadow on this world? What are you? Arrogance of men, nothing else! (Baybars, 31 years old, PhD candidate, bisexual male, former Muslim and member of Gülen Community)[32]

[32] Ama işte kamunun özgürlüğünün sınırları olumsuz özgürlüklerimizdir zaten. (…) İnsanın kendine zarar verme hakkı bile var. İnsanların ölüme giderken tedaviyi reddetme hakkı bile var. Sen nasıl bu insanları zorla ahlakileştirebilirsin, nasıl zorla belli bir kalıba koyabilirsin? Sen kimsin? İnandığın tanrı bile bunu yapmıyor. İnandığın tanrı dahi bize bir irade vermiş, sen buna inanıyorsun. Sen nesin? Tanrıdan daha mı akıllısın? Tanrı sana gölgesi olma iradesi mi verdi bu dünyada? Nesin? İnsanın kibri, başka bir şey değil!

For Baybars, each person has a right to sin. Each person has a right even to harm himself as long as he doesn't interfere with others' rights. God gives people "individual will" to decide what to do and allow them to commit sin if they bear its responsibility. Its punishment is beyond humanly authority and will be given by God. Given that God himself acknowledges the individual will, anti-LGBTQ Islamists' dare to restrict public visibility of LGBTQs is an attempt to imitate God's authority and even go beyond it. According to him, "moralizing" LGBTQ individuals or reversing them forcibly into heterosexual patterns are out of the boundaries of humanly authority. The restrictionist actors act as if they represent God in this world, when they force others to abandon certain practices and adopt their own moral standards. He calls this attempt as humanly arrogance. Ayhan Bilgen makes a similar argument:

> If humans deserve freedom only by passing your judgment, then you are in heresy according to Islam. If you impose an absolute oppression on homosexuals, then you place yourself as God. Even Ottomans showed more tolerance to homosexuals than today, I accept homosexuals with my Muslim identity but this does not mean defending homosexuality. Furthermore, "acceptance" exceeds the power of men. Who am I not accept identities of others? Humility should increase piety. (…) Piety is also a choice, homosexuality as well. The person will get the reward or punishment for both. Nobody can reward or punish that person. What do you punish, with the name of whom? (Bilgen, 2010)[33]

In Ayhan Bilgen's account, each of us has individual will to decide how to act and will be awarded or punished according to our decisions. The ultimate right to judge people's actions belongs only to God. Nobody has authority to interfere in

[33] İnsanlar sizin süzgecinizden geçmek kaydıyla özgürlüğü hak ediyorsa, İslam açısından sapkınlığa girmiş oluyorsunuz. Eğer eşcinseller konusunda mutlak bir zorlama dayatıyorsanız, kendinizi tanrının yerine koyuyorsunuz. Osmanlı bile eşcinsellere şimdikinden daha tahammülkar davranmıştı, ben Müslüman kimliğimle eşcinselleri kabülleniyorum ama bu eşcinselliği savunmak anlamına gelmez. Üstelik" kabul' konusu, insanın yetkilerini aşar. Ben kim oluyorum ki, başkalarının kimliğini kabullenmeyeyim? İnsan dindarlaştıkça tevazusu da artmalı. (…) Dindarlık da bir tercih, eşcinsellik de. İkisinin de mükâfatını ve cefasını kişinin kendisi alır. Kimse ona ne mükâfat ne de ceza kesebilir. Neyi, kimin adına cezalandırıyorsunuz?

others' choices and to impose its own values to others. Therefore, to judge others' identities, to impose compulsory heterosexuality on homosexuals, or to stipulate heterosexuality as the condition for certain rights and liberties are equal to substituting God and contradictory to Islam. He adds that he accepts homosexuality even if he doesn't defend it. Then he corrects himself by emphasizing that the idea of "accepting" the other's identity actually exceeds one's authority and would imply acting as God.

As these narratives show, the religiously framed idea that the authority to judge people's sins belongs to God alone enable LGBTQ friendly Muslims to argue against restrictionist authoritarian positions. It is asserted that even if homosexual practice is sinful, it is an issue between God and homosexual person himself. Its punishment is beyond humanly authority and will be given by God. This idea is employed to open a space of freedom for LGBTQ identity within religion and functions as a protective shield from outside interferences against homosexuality. If only God has authority to judge people's sins, then it is underlined that that the proponents of restrictions attempt to replace God by trying to punish homosexuality in this world.

4.2. Islamic defense of equal rights for LGBTQ individuals

The communitarian perspectives assert that the individualistically constructed system of rights that political liberalism promotes fails to capture the cultural differences and communal bonds that are constitutive of our identities (MacIntyre, 1984; Sandel, 1998; Taylor, 1989). Thus, it is not possible to define universal "individual rights" without taking into consideration the cultural particularities and

varying visions of common good. According to communitarians, the conception of the good has to be defined on the communal ground. This shared vision of "common good" becomes the normative standard for different actors with varying political visions and backgrounds. On the other hand, politically liberal scholars dispute the opposition between the politics of recognition of cultural differences on the one hand and the politics of universalization of individual rights on the other (Barry, 2001a, 2001b; Bauman, 2001; Benhabib, 2002; Calhoun, 2007; Habermas, 1998). As Habermas points out, the individually constructed systems of equal universal rights -if they are truly applied- are not blind to cultural differences and are able to reconcile equality and cultural diversity (Habermas, 1998). The principle of equal individual rights might accommodate differences in the cultural forms of life and guarantee the communities equal rights to coexist without laying down its insistence on equal treatment before the law. Moral autonomy and individual rights are vital to protect non-conforming individuals from oppressive imposition of majority rule, because they enable the self "to challenge religion, tradition, social dogma (Benhabib: 1992: 73)."

As the Chapter 3 discussed, the Islamist NGOs, political parties and predominant majority of Islamist writers -with a communitarian understanding that prioritizes "common good" over individual rights and liberties- defend the moral control over public sphere and restrictions over public visibility of homosexuality and rights and liberties of LGBTQ individuals. They have suggested the confinement of homosexuality to the private sphere for the sake of preventing its proliferation and normalization. Therefore, this restrictionist Islamist stance imposes its own values and conceptions of "common good" as the standard to shape the public and legal status of LGBTQ individuals and intends to homogenize the public sphere through

isolating homosexuality and confining it to private sphere. LGBTQ individuals are not considered as equal citizens that should have the same rights with others. Instead, both the principle of equality and respect for diversity are short-circuited in this communitarian account. In contrast, the LGBTQ friendly Muslims, which I have examined in this research, refuse this communitarian perspective and instead have a more liberal position: they suggest that individual rights and liberties of LGBTQ people should always be protected even if their practices might contradict with the predominant religious beliefs, moral standards and values shared by the majority of the society. This LGBTQ friendly Muslim stance makes an equal emphasis on diversity within the society and equality among individuals with diverse values, identities and ways of life. Equality and difference is considered inseparable in this account.

Another difference between the proponents of the Orthodox heteronormative discourse and the pro-LGBTQ rights Muslims is their visions of coexistence and solidarity in a diverse society. Solidarity refers to a kind of tie that bind people to one another in a society and that is the basis of social cohesion, belonging, coexistence and togetherness. Candaş and Buğra (2010) distinguish between two kinds of solidarity: Firstly, the sense of solidarity is informed by shared ascriptive identities, group interests or myths of common descent as in nationalism, racism or communitarianism. This ascriptive group solidarity is based on sameness or familiarity. Ascriptive ties such as ethnicity, race, nationality, religious affiliations are mobilized to unify population on the basis of their sameness. Secondly, "solidarity among strangers" implies the social bond among strangers with divergent interests, life styles, and choices in a complex, diverse society. It is a triangulated concept of solidarity that involves both individual liberties and equality. That is to say, these

strangers are considered as free and equal members "despite their unfamiliar traits, mostly non-identical descent, plurality of preferences, and variety of their choices. (Candaş&Buğra, 2010: 296)" Solidarity among strangers is built and sustained within a common institutional context that arranges "the basic indivisible, individual, civil, political, socioeconomic, and cultural rights of each member of the political community in conjunction with equality before the law, the rule of law, and democratic participation (Candaş&Buğra, 2010: 294-295)." Because the former type of solidarity claims to unite people on the basis of their sameness and leaves out of membership those who don't share certain ascriptive identities that are defined as the common denominator, s is essentialist, exclusionary and hostile to diversity in character. In contrast, solidarity among strangers envisages an inclusive citizenship regime in which equal membership and rights in a polity is prioritized over ascriptive ties or common descent.

I argue that this division between ascriptive group solidarity and solidarity among strangers echoes between pro- and anti-LGBTQ rights stances among Muslims. As opposed to the Muslim opponents of LGBTQ rights, who rely on the former, pro-LGBTQ Muslim stances seem to adopt the latter. The former group takes Muslim identity as the common denominator that unites people and leaves out of membership those who don't share the same religious values and sexual identities. What enables many Muslims to support LGBTQ rights despite their uncertainty as to the religious legitimacy of homosexuality is that their visions of coexistence are in line with the "solidarity among strangers". For them, the prerequisites of the peaceful coexistence in a diverse society are that the plurality and diversity within the society should be acknowledged by all and that all citizens should be granted equal rights.

> This information [*referring to the story of Lot*] is not ignorable for many Muslims, including me. I may believe to this information as a Muslim, but others do not have to believe in the same way with me. And nobody has to live in compliance to the norms which I believe. If For Turkey to be a genuine democratic state, -everyone is a citizen here- any right owned by a single citizen should also be owned by other citizens. (…) The issue of homosexuality is an extremely sensitive issue for Muslims and especially for some Muslim groups. It is not an issue that I'm very comfortable with, either. However, I believe everyone in this country need to make sacrifices for peace and cooperation. For each of us, in this country, there can't be only who we deem good Those who we deem 'bad' also have the right to live and live with the same rights. (Tarafsız Bölge, 2010) (Hidayet Tuksal, headscarved Muslim feminist, former *Star* columnist)[34]

According to Hidayet Tuksal, given that the story of Lut tells the destruction of Lut's tribe due to the prevalence of homosexuality within their culture, neither she nor other Muslims could be comfortable with regard to homosexuality. As she says, she might believe in sinfulness of homosexuality, but she cannot expect others to conform to her own norms. Religious condemnation of homosexuality doesn't necessarily impede her from supporting equal rights of LGBTQ individuals including right to marry and adoption. What makes this possible is her awareness that there are multiple conceptions of good within the society and that Muslims should not impose their own "good" on others. In line with "solidarity among strangers", her vision of coexistence involves the notion of equal rights for all despite divergences among strangers: Each of us should accept that others don't have to share our traits, life

[34] Şimdi bu bilgi ben de dahil bir çok Müslüman için yok sayamayacağımız bir bilgi. Ben bir Müslüman olarak bu bilgiye inanabilirim, ama herkes benim gibi inanmak mecburiyetinde değil. Ve herkes benim inandığım ölçülere uyarak yaşamak mecburiyetinde de değil. Türkiye eğer gerçekten özgür bir ülke olacaksa burada herkes vatandaş ve her vatandaş hangi hakka sahipse herkesin o haklara sahip olması gerekiyor. (…) Bu eşcinsellik meselesi Müslümanların –özellikle bazı Müslüman grupların- çok aşırı hassas olduğu bir konu. Bu benim açımdan da "çok normal, çok relaxım" diyebileceğim bir konu değil. Fakat ben bu ülkede toplumsal barış ve uzlaşma adına herkesin fedakarlık etmesi gerektiğini düşünüyorum. Herkes için, sadece onlar için iyi olanlar olamaz bu ülkede. Onun için kötü olanların da yaşama hakkı var. Ve aynı haklara sahip olarak yaşamak durumunda.

styles, choices, visions or beliefs and that everyone, even those who we deem wrong, bad or sinful, has right to live and should be granted the same rights that we have.

Likewise, Ayhan Bilgen, a Muslim columnist, chief-editor of Günlük Newspaper until it was closed down and former president of Mazlum-Der (Organization of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People) that is one of the most established Islamic human rights associations in Turkey, argues that Muslims should defend the equal rights of LGBTQ individuals, even if they don't approve of homosexuality:

> While taking position and developing approach as to an issue based on which people are exposed to discrimination, especially hate speech and hate crimes, I think one should focus on what right-based approach requires doing, instead of focusing on his own beliefs, moral approaches or value judgments. (…) For instance, a person may have a very conservative, religious worldview and may find certain approaches related to homosexuality, sexual identity or sexual orientation wrong or bad in his own view. (…) After this issue was discussed in Mazlum-Der, it was institutionally agreed that "we should not remain silent to the violence they are frequently exposed to." (…) Yet, when it comes to freedom of expression and association, some of our friends there find it unacceptable. According to them, to consider this issue within the framework of freedom of expression is dangerous and harmful to public morality or some other religious reasons. What I want to underline at least in terms of human rights ethics is that your rights advocacy becomes coherent as far as you can consider an idea, way of life, orientation, or identity that is opposite to yours within the framework of rights. If you defend freedom of expression and association only when they are in line with the thoughts you accredit, approve and appreciate, then it means you are involved in an ambivalent rights advocacy. (Bilgen, 2010)[35]

[35] İnsanların ayrımcılığa hele hele nefret söylemine, nefret suçlarına maruz kaldığı bir alanda bir yaklaşım, bir tutum geliştirirken kendi inançları, ahlaki yaklaşımları, değer yargıları üzerinden bir tanımlama yapmayı ve orası üzerinden bir tartışma yapmayı değil, hak temelli bakış açısının neyi gerektirdiği üzerinden bir tartışmayı ben doğru bulurum. (…) Yani bir insan çok muhafazakar, çok dindar bir dünya görüşüne sahip olabilir ve eşcinselliği, cinsel kimlik ya da yönelim ile ilgili yaklaşımları kendi inançları açısından yanlış bulabilir, sağlıksız bulabilir. (…) Mazlum-der bu konuyu tartıştığında kurumsal olarak ortaklaşabildiği nokta şudur: Şiddete uğradıklarında –ki çok sık uğradıkları da hepimizin bildiği bir şey- ayrım yapılmaksızın o şiddete maruz kalmalarına sessiz kalmamalıyız, tepkisiz kalmamalıyız. (…) Ama iş ifade ve örgütlenme özgürlüğüne geldiğinde "o asla kabul edebileceğimiz bir şey değil" diyor bazı arkadaşlarımız. Bu alanın ifade özgürlüğü kapsamında ele alınmasını toplumsal ahlak açısından ya da başka sayabileceğimiz dini gerekçelerle, tehlikeli-zararlı gördüklerini ifade ediyorlar. Benim en azından insan hakları ahlakı açısından en altını çizme ihtiyacı hissettiğim nokta şudur: karşı olduğunuz bir düşünce, yaşama biçimi, yönelim, kimlik, eğer hak boyutunda, bağlamında ele alabildiğiniz bir alana dönüşüyorsa siz gerçekten tutarlı bir hak savunuculuğu yapıyorsunuz demektir. Ama akredite ettiğiniz, onayladığınız, beğendiğiniz,

He criticizes some Muslim NGOs and groups which refuse LGBTQ rights for being inconsistent in their rights advocacy. He, relying on his own personal observations within Mazlum-Der that was one of the Islamist NGOs that supported Kavaf, tells that Mazlum-Der's institutional policy over LGBTQ rights is restricted to opposition to any violence and torture against LGBTQs and their unlawful detention. However, when it comes to their freedom of expression and of association, Mazlum-Der certainly opts out of rights advocacy. Although Mazlum-Der and other Islamist NGOs carry out advocacy activities against human rights violations in a wide range of issues including headscarf ban, Kurdish issue, torture, and ill-treatment etc., they don't deem LGBTQ individuals deserving of some human rights, especially freedom of expression and of association. By this conscious choice, they construct LGBTQ individuals as *less than human* and exclude them from equal membership to the polity. Bilgen criticizes these Muslim groups for prioritizing their own definitions of "common good" (i.e. public morality or religious values) over "individual rights" in case of conflict between these two. These Islamist NGOs and groups, in a communitarian understanding, suggest certain restrictions over individual rights and liberties of LGBTQ people because the LGBTQ identity and practices are corruptive according to their religiously framed vision of "common good". In contrast to this communitarian approach, Bilgen argues that individual rights and liberties of LGBTQ people should always be given priority even when their practices contradict with our beliefs, moral standards and values. In that sense, Bilgen suggests that "solidarity among strangers" should be the basis of coexistence: Each of us as well as Islamists should respect the equal rights for all even for those whose values, ways of life and choices seem wrong, bad or sinful to us. Likewise, Canan questions the

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savunduğunuz düşüncelerin ifade ve örgütlenme özgürlüğünü savunuyorsanız o zaman zaten ikircili bir hak savunuculuğuna boyun eğmişsiniz demektir.

culturalist opposition to LGBTQ rights and points out that if the legal system is shaped according to the cultural values of the majority rather than the principle of equal rights for all, this might lead to the homogenization of the society:

> If two people do not have equal rights before the law, there is a problem. I believe that laws should be completely independent. In other countries, for instance in some states in the U.S., same-sex marriage is legal. Then, should all homosexuals go there? Or other people there [*referring heterosexuals*] should come to here? And then the outcome is a completely homogeneous society, all thinking in the same way, having the same culture. In that case the laws applied to them have to be same. This would be the picture, and it is funny. It is also funny. Because Turkey contains a lot of different cultures in itself, it is possible to do this. Which culture are you going to take as the standard to legislate accordingly? (Canan, 22 years old, lesbian, headscarved Muslim, university student, LGBTQ activist)[36]

According to her, everybody should have equal rights before the law and the LGBTQ individuals should be granted the same citizenship rights that other citizens enjoy including right to marriage. She asks if equal rights for LGBTQs are not granted, are they supposed to go and live in other countries where these rights are recognized. Or are the opponents of same-sex marriage in those countries supposed to come to Turkey? With these questions, she points out that the opposition to LGBTQ rights in the name of cultural difference is related to the visions of homogenous society. She criticizes these culturalist arguments that demand the local cultural/religious values to be taken into consideration in the allocation of rights and thus that oppose the recognition of LGBTQ rights because of its presumed incompatibility with local moral values. She challenges the culturalist perspective by asking which culture is going to be taken as the standard norm, given that there are

[36] Ama iki farklı insan yasa önünde eğer bir şeye başvurduklarında ikisinin de eşit hakkı yoksa o zaman bir sorun var, bir sıkıntı var demektir. Yani o yasa tamamen bağımsız bir şey olmalı bence. Mesela başka ülkelerde onların toplumlarına göre, mesela Amerika'nın bazı eyaletlerinde eşcinsel evliliği var. O zaman bütün eşcinseller oraya mı gitsin? Oradakiler de buraya gelsin? O zaman tamamen homojen bir toplum, hep aynı düşünen, aynı kültüre sahip, o zaman bunların yasalarının aynı olması gerekiyor. Öyle bir şey çıkıyor ortaya, o da komik yani. Türkiye zaten kendisi çok farklı kültürleri içinde barındırıyor, bunu yapamazsın yani. Hangi kültüre göre acaba yasayı düzenleyeceksin?

not one but many diverse cultures in Turkey. She reminds that if the legal system of rights was arranged according to certain cultural values instead of the principle of equal rights for all, this would necessarily involve hegemonizing the values and norms of certain cultural groups and subjugating others. In her account, equality and diversity go hand in hand. In her reply to my question about her opinion on some Islamists' demands for restricting visibility of homosexuality, Canan emphasizes that LGBTQ public visibility is important, because violence and hate speech are mostly directed to those unfamiliar others. Her answer is significant for it unveils the problems that the vision of ascriptive group solidarity might create:

> To be homogeneous is not right. We should live in mixed communities to be able to acknowledge each other. Instead of otherization or complete destruction, we should be aware of each other. For this reason, the emancipation and visibility of homosexuals are significant. Otherwise violence occurs, Hate speech occurs against those whom you do not recognize. That is why, because of this homogeneity, when a person different than others shows up, she draws attention. Then violence and harassment follow directly. All of these are outcomes of isolation. Therefore, laws and state policies should also avoid isolation. (Canan, 22 years old, lesbian, headscarved Muslim, university student, LGBTQ activist)[37]

As Canan argues, the confinement of LGBTQ identity to private sites would result in a more homogenized public sphere where the interaction among "strangers", among people with diverse values, identities and life-styles gets more difficult. In turn, this would trigger more violence and hatred against LGBTQ individuals, because they will become more vulnerable to stigmatization as unfamiliar others. Therefore, restrictions over LGBTQ public visibility might possibly pave the way for more violence and hatred due to its isolation of LGBTQs and thus homogenizing

[37] Tamamen homojen olmak yanlış zaten. Birbirine karışık olmak gerekiyor ki birbirine algın olabilsin yani. Tamamen ötekileştirme, tamamen yok etme şeklinde değil de varlığından haberdar olma. O yüzden de eşcinsellerin özgürleşmesi ve görünürlükleri de bu yüzden önemli. Çünkü şiddet bu yüzden oluyor. Tanımadığına karşı bir nefret söylemi oluyor. O şekilde olduğu için, yani homojen olduğu için zaten farklı biri geldiğinde direkt dikkat çekiyor, direkt şiddet, taciz oluyor. O tamamen ayrılaştırmaktan kaynaklı. O yüzden yasanın ya da devlet politikasının da ayrılaştırmaktan uzak olması gerekiyor yani.

influence in the society. Other people's acknowledgement of and familiarity with LGBTQ identity cannot be possible without LGBTQ visibility. For this reason, Canan opposes any legislation or state regulation that might isolate diverse people from each other and LGBTQs from heterosexuals. Her answer draws attention to the homogenizing effect that ascriptive group solidarity which is based on sameness and familiarity instead of equality might create.

Another interviewee, Duygu contests the Islamic writers who are in favor of restrictions on public visibility by drawing parallelism between headscarf issue and LGBTQ identity. She criticizes them for reproducing the very same public/private division that Kemalists employ in arguing for headscarf ban. She rearticulates LGBTQ rights through associating it with headscarf activism and extending the meaning of cruelty to the scope that it includes restrictions on visibility and liberties as well:

> Just saying 'they should not be murdered' is not enough. This woman lives such a life and you have to respond to this. I know Ayşe, she is a trans. (…) It is not sufficient to say that she should not be murdered. I know that visibility is essential to her existence. Therefore when you limit her visibility, you actually kill her. This is cruelty as well. I know this, because I know her psychology. Wearing skirt on the street is an important representation for her. Wearing skirt on the street is part of her identity, as it is the case with wearing headscarf. Kemalists say that we should not be visible. They say 'Everyone may live their life in accordance with Islam unless it becomes visible in the public sphere.' They say they are uncomfortable. Namely, they believe greater public visibility of covered women would pose danger to Kemalist structure. It is similar to say that if homosexuals gain more public visibility, the family structure would be destroyed. All of these are 'fear'. (…) "Gay bars could exist only far from the eyes. Outside the bars they should continue to live as heterosexuals"; is it what we want from these people?! (Duygu, 23 years old, university student, headscarved Muslim feminist, heterosexual)[38]

[38] Sırf öldürülmesin demek yeterli değil. Bu kadının böyle bir hayatı var, bu insanın böyle bir hayatı var. Buraya cevap oluşturman gerekiyor. İşte Ayşe'i tanıyorum. Trans bir birey. (…) Ve sen o insan öldürülmesin demekle sınırlı kalamazsın. Biliyorum, görünür olmak onun için aslında asıl var olmak demek. Sen onu görünür kılmadığında öldürüyorsun aslında. Bu da bir zulüm. Onun kendi psikolojik durumu içinden biliyorum. Etekle gezmek onun için çok önemli bir temsiliyet. O etekli gezdiği zaman zaten o kimliğine dair bir şey yapmış oluyor. Sen de başörtülü gezdiğinde… Görünür olmasın, diyorlar Kemalistler de bize. "Görünür olmasın. Müslümanlığını herkes yaşayabilir ama görünür olmasın kamusal ortamda" diyorlar; "rahatsız oluyoruz", diyorlar. Şey var ya: Eşcinsellik çok görünür

> The absence of same-sex marriages sounds very strange to me. If homosexuals continue to exist, there should have legal reflections. This is also related to: "Homosexuals want to live. And to live is not merely equal to 'not to be dead', but living the life. (Duygu, 23 years old, university student, headscarved Muslim feminist, heterosexual)[39]

For Duygu, anti-LGBTQ concern that the public visibility of homosexuality might destroy family structure is so similar to the Kemalist arguments in favor of headscarf ban in universities and public offices. The Kemalists who see headscarf as a threat against their own secular values defend that the religious expression should be privatized and that the students, teachers, lawyers and other public officials should not be allowed to wear headscarf in schools and public offices. As Duygu points out, those Islamists who demand restrictions over visibility of homosexuality in the media and public spaces reproduce the same discriminatory and exclusionary division between public and private that Kemalists mobilize against headscarved women. According to her, isolationist and restrictionist policy suggestions would imply the concealment and confinement of LGBTQ identity to private, isolated and hidden sites such as gay bars. She asks whether the Islamist proponents of restriction really want LGBTQ people to act as if they are heterosexual in public other than their isolated spaces. If public visibility of homosexuality is constrained to these isolated ghettos, the only option remaining for LGBTQ individuals is to conceal their identities and to live in their collective "closets". Neglecting the diversity within the society, both Kemalists and communitarian Islamists impose their own values and norms as the standard to shape the public sphere accordingly and demand others to

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olursa aile yapısı bozulur. Yani başörtülüler çok görünür olursa, Kemalist yapı bozulur. Bütün bunların hepsi birer korku. (…) "Gay barlar olsun ama gizli kapaklı bir yerlerde olsun, oradan çıktıkları gibi hayatlarına heteroseksüel olarak devam etsinler." Bunu mu istiyoruz bu insanlardan?!

[39] Toplumsal düzeyde eşcinsel bir çift varsa onların evlenmemesi çok garibime gidiyor. Bunun hukuki bir karşılığı olmalı, eğer eşcinseller var olacaksa… Ta şeye gidiyor: eşcinseller var olmak istiyor, bu var olmak sadece ölmemek değil yani, bir yandan da onu yaşıyor olmak.

conform to this standard. Indeed, Duygu's intervention reveals the close similarity between solidarity visions of these two groups: They share the vision of ascriptive group solidarity and try to regulate the regime of rights and public sphere according to their own projections of uniform society. On the other hand, what Duygu desires is peaceful coexistence of equal strangers instead of homogenization of society through the elimination and isolation of vulnerable "others" such as LGBTQs.

She, directly referring to the Islamic female writers, argues that these writers' condemnation of murder of LGBTQ individuals is "not enough" and "doesn't touch the real daily problems" of LGBTQ people. The issue isn't merely not to be killed; instead what is at stake is to live the life, to have equal means to be happy, to be able to marry, and to be able to go out as you are. Not granting equal rights to LGBTQ individuals including same-sex marriage means for them being "neither killed nor allowed to live". Duygu underlines that the restrictions over public visibility of LGBTQ identity would mean another form of cruelty against LGBTQ individuals given that visibility is part of identity formation. She conveys her own witnessing of a transsexual acquaintance's life and emphasizes that cross-dressing[40], wearing skirt on the street and being visible as a cross-dresser do certainly matter for this transsexual friend's self-formation as a subject. Being visible, performing, and being recognized as a transsexual might have existential meanings for transsexuals. Not to allow transsexual visibility in the public means to prevent their existence, therefore a sort of killing them. For this reason, the Islamist request for restricting LGBTQ visibility in public implies to confine them in their private and isolated spaces and is itself a form of cruelty for not giving them chance to exist as they feel to be. Through drawing parallels between headscarf activism and LGBTQ rights and also extending

[40] Cross-dressing is the act of wearing clothing and other accessories commonly associated with the opposite sex.

the scope of cruelty enough to cover restrictions on visibility and liberties as well, she rearticulates LGBTQ rights and attempts to reconcile it with local context. Her redefinition of cruelty in a way it includes depriving LGBTQs of same rights that other citizens are granted such as right to marry provides a ground for Islamic defense of LGBTQ rights. Among my interviewees, Oğuz involves in rearticulation of LGBTQ rights as well. Through reformulating LGBTQ rights as *kul hakkı* (an Islamic term referring to rightful share), he tries to reconcile universality of LGBTQ rights with local religious values:

> There is one precept that I've known very well since my childhood: rightful share. It is unwarrantable and even unacceptable to harm someone arbitrarily. People remember this only when they are suffering as victims. It is forgotten when it comes to other victims. If one person knows about this, he wouldn't need to refer to the concept of human rights that he stigmatizes as Western. It is hypocrisy; he ignores to see this when it does not serve to him. I agree that LGBTQ rights discussion in Turkey is derived from Western sources, yet there is no other way! Everything comes from the West, like woman rights. Which movement that is not Western originated is supported in Turkey? If the Islamists, even only Muslims, succeeded to approach the issue in terms of 'rightful share', there would be no necessity for human rights of Western origin. Hypocrisy! (Oğuz, 24 years old, bisexual male, Muslim, psychologist)[41]

Oğuz equates human rights with the Islamic notion of *kul hakkı* (human right or rightful share). *Kul hakkı* is an Islamic term that refers to the rights that people have with respect to each other. As Oğuz describes, *kul hakkı* forbids one person's arbitrary power over another. According to him, if Islamists or other Muslims could be able to consider LGBTQ issues within the framework of *kul hakkı*, we wouldn't

[41] Çocukluğumdan kalma öğretilerden çok iyi bildiğim bir şey var: kul hakkı. Bir insanın başka birine arbitrary bir şekilde zarar vermesi hoş görülmez, hatta kabul edilmez bir şey. Bunu insanlar sadece kendileri mağdur olduğu zaman hatırlıyor. Başka mağduriyetler olduğunda bu unutuluyor. Bunu bilen insanın Batılı diye yaftaladığı insan hakları konseptine ihtiyacı kalmaz ki... Ama işte iki yüzlülük; bunu istediği zaman görmüyor. Evet, bence de eşcinsel hakları meselesinin Türkiye'ye girişi ve tartışılması Batılı kaynaklardan gerçekleşiyor; ama bunun alternatifi yok ki! Her şey oradan geliyor. Kadın hakları da oradan geldi. Batı temelli olmayan hangi hareket destekleniyor ki Türkiye'de? İslamcılar hatta sadece müslüman olanlar bile kendi dinleri/dinimizin emrettiği gibi kul hakkı üzerinden buna bakabilmeyi başarabilseydi, Batılı insan haklarına gerek kalmazdı. İki yüzlülük!

have need of Western conceptions of human rights or LGBTQ rights. He criticizes that people remember and employ selectively this notion of *kul hakkı* only when they need it and that they don't grant it when others are suffering. He confirms that human rights, women's rights and LGBTQ rights are all originated from the West. However, he finds the dominant Islamic view hypocritical; because these Islamists neither recognize Western-originated LGBTQ rights, nor do they respect the Islamic notion of *kul hakkı* for LGBTQs in place of LGBTQ rights. As this quote shows, Oğuz rearticulates the Islamic notion of *kul hakkı* as an equivalent of human right; he reworks it in a responsive way to LGBTQ problems and invites his fellow Muslims to consider LGBTQ claims as part of *kul hakkı*.

As the narratives of my interviewees, Ayhan Bilgen and Hidayet Tuksal demonstrate, LGBTQ friendly Muslims refuse the Islamist communitarian perspective which prioritizes its own religiously framed conception of "common good" over individual rights and liberties of LGBTQ individuals. In contrast, they – in a more allied way with the liberal stance- suggest that individual rights and liberties of LGBTQ people should always be protected even if their practices might contradict with the predominant religious beliefs, moral standards, values or "common good" shared by the majority of the society. This LGBTQ friendly Muslim stance makes an equal emphasis on diversity within the society and equality among individuals with diverse values, identities and ways of life. Equality and difference are considered as inseparable in this account.

LGBTQ friendly Muslims attempt to remake and rework the religious truth in a queer-friendly way instead of accepting the incompatibility argument and the Orthodox heterosexist view as fixed religious truths integral to Islam. In their iterative acts, they employ certain methods such as highlighting heteronormative,

patriarchal biases in the Orthodox views, or accusing the Orthodox evidences of being fabricated and inauthentic. These interpretations are significant for them to open space for LGBTQ identity within the legitimate sphere of religion. Instead of seeing LGBTQ identity and rights as Western imports, they remind the homosexual aspects of the Ottoman past and religious history. These strategies of help them to challenge cultural essentialist Western imposition claims. They criticize the communitarian Islamic actors for their restrictionist approach and their depiction of homosexuality as a proliferating sin. Rather these LGBTQ friendly Muslims emphasize that act of sinning is an individual matter and that the authority to judge belongs to God only. The idea of "individuality of sin" enables them to counter the prioritization of "common good" over individual right and liberties of LGBTQ people. As opposed to this communitarian view, they suggest that individual rights and liberties of LGBTQ people should always be protected even if their practices are in conflict with the dominant beliefs, moral standards and values shared by the majority of the society. This LGBTQ friendly Muslim stance makes an equal emphasis on diversity within the society and equality among individuals with diverse values, identities and ways of life. In their vision of "solidarity among strangers", equality and difference is considered inseparable.

As the finding of this chapter demonstrates, the building of Islamic defense of LGBTQ rights is not merely product of LGBTQ Muslims but involves heterosexual Muslims as well. In the existing body of literature, the research subjects of studies on queer Islam or queer friendly reinterpretations are predominantly LGBTQ Muslims. However, the finding of this study affirms that it is not merely one's sexual identity that leads him to develop pro-LGBTQ rights stance. Rather, what enables these LGBTQ friendly actors to be able to defend LGBTQ rights regardless of their sexual

identity are their embracement of certain principles such as equal citizenship rights for all, priority of individual liberties over community interests, and inseparability of equality and diversity and their strategies of reexamining religious norms and LGBTQ rights.

The fact that LGBTQ rights and sexual categories emerged in the context of Western liberal democracies and instrumentalized by homonationalist and neo-orientalist discourses does not necessarily mean that they have by no means relevancy in the non-Western contexts. The building of Islamic defense of LGBTQ rights demonstrates that the promotion of LGBTQ rights in non-Western does not have to be one-way process or imposition from the West to the East. Rather, these rights are reworked and rearticulated by local Muslim actors in their local struggles for justice and equality against authoritarian, exclusionary and communitarian policies. In the face of recent Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights in Turkey, certain principles such as the universal equal rights and priority of individual rights over community interests are reconsidered and circulated by Muslim proponents of LGBTQ rights in order to counter culturally essentialist, communitarian and restrictionist arguments against LGBTQ rights. These Muslims rearticulate the universal principle of equal rights and LGBTQ rights in a reconciling way with the Islamic values in the face of urgent need for legal and political remedies against severe discrimination and violence against LGBTQ individuals in Turkey. Therefore, this study argue that LGBTQ friendly Muslim stance destabilize the dualism between universalism and particularism through inventing strategies to defend universal norms in local terms in local contexts.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the basic premises of the recent Islamic political opposition to LGBTQ identity and rights in Turkey and the challenges it receives from other Muslims who are able to develop Muslim defense of LGBTQ rights at the individual level. I argue that the Islamic opposition to LGBTQ rights which relies upon the Orthodox Islamic doctrine that depicts Islam and homosexuality as incommensurable to each other has the following basic aspects: critique of Western universalism, cultural essentialism, communitarianism and vision of ascriptive group solidarity. I have explained that certain democratic iterative acts and strategies of rearticulating religious norms and LGBTQ rights at the same time enable the LGBTQ friendly Muslims to open spaces of freedom for LGBTQ people within Islam and reconcile Islamic values and LGBTQ rights. The major strategies they employ are reinterpreting religious norms in LGBTQ-friendly ways, reminding the past queer friendly examples from the Ottoman and religious history, emphasizing that act of sinning is an individual matter and that the authority to judge belongs to God only, and lastly highlighting universal principle of equal rights for all in line with "solidarity among strangers" vision.

In the discourse of Islamic opponents of LGBTQ rights, these rights are frequently denounced as culturally alien and religiously unacceptable values that are imposed from the West to the non-western contexts under the cover of universality, although they emerged in the context of modern Western societies and reflect the particular Western values of (im)morality. In a cultural essentialist way, this account produces a binary opposition between the Western values of immorality,

individualism, excessiveness, corruptness, sensual indulgence and pleasure-seeking and the Islamic values of morality, family and social harmony. Through exaggerating internal sameness and neglecting internal heterogeneity of each, this Islamist discourse builds a radical alterity between the West and the East, thus reproduces a sort of Orientalism. Homosexuality and LGBTQ rights become a boundary marker between the Islamic society and its Western negation.

What makes homosexuality more dangerous than other sins in the mind of these Islamist actors is its perceived threat against general morality and Islamic heteronormative family structure that are foundational to their self-definitions of Islamic self and society. Another reason is its perceived threat against the continuity of human race due to the reproductive inability in same-sex relations. In order to prevent these possible problems that the proliferation of homosexuality might create, they suggest restrictions over rights and liberties of LGBTQ individuals and their public visibility. I have argued that this Islamist discourse reflects communitarianism with its prioritization of its own conceptions of "common good" over of rights and liberties of LGBTQ individuals. In this communitarian perspective, the "good life" is defined as the life guided by a particular heteronormative understanding of Islam, and "common good" is defined as public morality, protection of family values and structure, and continuity of human race. Since homosexuality contradicts with these conceptions of "good life" and "common good", it deserves to be restricted even if at the expense of rights of LGBTQ individuals. I have suggested that this communitarianism aspect of the Islamist opposition to LGBTQ rights is connected to their vision of ascriptive group solidarity that takes Muslim identity as the common denominator uniting the society. This essentialist and exclusionary conception of

solidarity ignores the diversity of ways of life, beliefs, and identities within the society and deprives LGBTQ people of equal membership as non-conforming others.

Different from the Islamic opponents of LGBTQ rights, LGBTQ friendly Muslims attempt to remake and rework the religious truth in a queer-friendly way instead of accepting the incompatibility argument and presuming the Orthodox heterosexist view as fixed religious truth integral to Islam. In their iterative acts, they employ certain methods such as highlighting heteronormative, patriarchal biases in the Orthodox views, or accusing the Orthodox evidences of being fabricated and inauthentic. Queer-friendly interpretations are important for opening space for LGBTQ identity within the legitimate sphere of religion. Even if the incompatibility between Islam and homosexuality remains unsolved –that is to say, homosexuality continues to be considered as sinful-, this doesn't inhibit LGBTQ Muslims from practicing their sexuality or other queer-friendly Muslims from supporting LGBTQ rights. Instead of seeing LGBTQ identity and rights as Western imports, they remind the past queer friendly examples from the Ottoman and religious history. These strategies of queer-friendly interpretation and retelling the queer friendly past examples help these Muslims to challenge cultural essentialist Western imposition claims. They criticize the communitarian Islamic actors for their restrictionist approach and their depiction of homosexuality as a proliferating sin. Rather these LGBTQ friendly Muslims emphasize that act of sinning is an individual matter and that the authority to judge belongs to God only. It is asserted that even if homosexual practice is sinful, it is an issue between God and homosexual person himself. This idea is employed to open a space of freedom for LGBTQ identity within religion and functions as a protective shield from outside interferences against homosexuality. The idea of "individuality of sin" enables these actors to counter the communitarian

prioritization of "common good" over individual right and liberties of LGBTQ people. If only God has authority to judge people's sins, then it is underlined that that the proponents of restrictions attempt to replace God by trying to punish homosexuality in this world. Another difference between Islamist communitarians and queer friendly Muslims is their visions of coexistence and solidarity in a diverse society. I argue that what enables many queer friendly Muslims, despite their uncertainty as to the religious legitimacy of homosexuality, is that their visions of coexistence are in line with the "solidarity among strangers". For them, the prerequisites of the peaceful coexistence in a diverse society are that the plurality and diversity within the society should be acknowledged by all and that all citizens should be granted equal rights and liberties.

There are two main questions in the debates on Islam and homosexuality in Turkey: theological and political questions. Theological question deals with Muslims' views on homosexuality; it is concerned with whether homosexuality is sinful, whether it is forbidden in Islam, what kind of sin it is if it is sinful or how homosexuals should be treated in religious terms. As this study has displayed, on the other hand, the political problem lies in Muslim believers' attitudes toward legislation and state regulation over homosexuality. The political question is related to how the regime of rights should be organized in the face of theological question, how LGBTQ individuals should be treated legally and politically, what rights and liberties should be granted or restricted to them and how their status with respect to the state and other citizens should be regulated. The research findings have shown that the Islamist NGOs, political parties and majority of Islamic writers allow their theological views to be determinant of their political stances on LGBTQ rights. They think that homosexuality is sinful, thus LGBTQ individuals deserve to be treated

unfairly, to be subject to certain restrictions and to be devoid of certain rights and liberties that other citizens are privilegly granted. However, there are other Muslims who are politically in favour of LGBTQ rights regardless of their theological views on homosexuality. Despite the fact that they think homosexuality is sinful or they are uncertain about its compatibility with Islam, these queer-friendly Muslims oppose punishment of homosexuality, reject any discrimination or violence against LGBTQ individuals and support their equal rights and liberties. They do this, because they see protection of equal rights and liberties for all –even for those ones that they think wrong or unapprovable- as a prerequisite of peaceful coexistence of "strangers."

This study argues that LGBTQ friendly Muslim stance achieves to get beyond the homonationalism, on the one hand, and culturalist communitarianism, on the other and to avoid getting caught between these two equally essentialist paradigms. The fact that LGBTQ rights and sexual categories emerged in the context of Western liberal democracies and exploited by homonationalist and neo-orientalist discourses in the War on Terror doesn't necessarily mean that they have by no means relevancy in the non-Western contexts. It doesn't mean that it is irreconcilable, non-translatable to Muslim-majority contexts. The Muslim defense of LGBTQ rights is able to build a third way depolarizing the binary opposition between universalism and cultural particularism. Since they consider themselves bound by both Islamic norms and universal equal rights, they initiate iterative acts by rearticulating and reinterpreting both the religious truth and the notion of LGBTQ rights. As every iteration is a creative appropriation of the authoritative antecedent (Benhabib, 2006: 48), both religious meaning and universal notion of equal rights are enhanced and resignified in the construction of Muslim defense of LGBTQ rights. By doing so, an alternative universalism other than Western universalism is constructed.

Limitations of time and research scope definitely affected the research undertaken in this thesis. First, I could have evaluated only two time periods with a total of six months during which there were intense media debates over Islam and homosexuality. It would be possible to strengthen this research by examining these debates in more and longer periods of time even especially during times media remained more silent. By doing so, it could be possible to analyze which writers, why and when, preferred to stay silent while others were writing their opinions on the relationship between Islam and homosexuality. Secondly, looking at more number of newspapers or online news portals would enrich this study. This would enable me to have access to more writers with a wider range of political stance. Because this thesis is concerned primarily with discursive contestation among Muslims on homosexuality and LGBTQ rights, it has not analyzed secular views in Turkey. For further research, a comparative study can be made focusing on similarities and differences between secular and Islamist political actors' views on homosexuality and Islam. Such a research might also reveal whether there is any manifestation of homonationalism in Turkey. I suggest that a study that analyzes discourses and practices of political actors or writers, who define themselves as secular, on homosexuality and LGBTQ rights would be interesting to research further.

In the future, it would be useful to examine the political, cultural and religious impacts of Muslim defense of LGBTQ rights. If the Muslim defense of LGBTQ rights gains more power and visibility in the future in Turkey, certain sites of research would emerge to trace these possible influences on the media, party politics, LGBTQ politics, civil society, or religious communities. LGBTQ Muslims and other LGBTQ friendly Muslim individuals deserve further research, not merely for the

theoretical implications and scholarly contributions, but also because of the political significance of making this highly invisible and marginalized group of people visible in today's political landscape.

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

	Name/ Assigned name	Age	Gender identity	Sexual orientation	Faith	Profession	Political activism
1	Beren Azizi	22	Queer	Queer	N/A	Student	LGBTQ activist
2	Melda Onur	48	Female	Heterosexual	N/A	Member of parliament	CHP
3	Mahir	24	Male	Heterosexual	Muslim	Student	Islamist
4	Özlem Albayrak	38	Female	Heterosexual	Headscarved Muslim	Columnist	Headscarf activist
5	Can	23	Male	Gay	Deist (former-Muslim)	Student	Leftist party member
6	Ferda	25	Female	Heterosexual	Headscarved Muslim	Student	Headscarf activist
7	Duygu	23	Female	Heterosexual	Headscarved Muslim	Student	Feminist and headscarf activist
8	Ümit Ilgın Yiğit	34	Male	Gay	Muslim	Artist	Former-LGBTQ activist
9	Berat	32	Transsexual (Female-to-male)	Heterosexual	Muslim	Doctor	No activism
10	Canan	22	Female	Lesbian	Headscarved Muslim	Student	LGBTQ activist
11	Baybars	31	Male	Bisexual	Deist (former-Muslim)	Academician	No activism
12	Oğuz	24	Male	Bisexual	Muslim	Psychologist	No activism

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introductory: (write assigned name, profession, age, educational background)

How do you describe your gender identity and sexual orientation now?

Do you believe in religion or God?

What role does Islam play in your life? What does it mean for you?

Coming out process

How did you discover your gender identity? To whom you are out? When and how did you come out? What kinds of reactions did you get?

What kinds of hardships did you face in that period? How could you handle these difficulties?

Islam and homosexuality

What do you think about homosexuality in terms of your own understanding of Islam? Do you think Islam and homosexuality can reconcile with each other? Do you think that homosexuality is sinful?

Do you think Islam and Qur'an are open to different interpretations?

What do you think about the different interpretations of Islam and Qur'an concerned with homosexuality?

What do you think about the view that homosexuality and Islam are irreconciable?

Recent debates over homosexuality and Islam in Turkey

What do you think about Aliye Kavaf's statement that "homosexuality is an illness"?

What do you think about Islamic organizations' press statement supportive of Kavaf?

What do you think about some Islamic actors' concerns over the prevalence and justification of homosexuality?

What do you think about some Islamic actors' argument that homosexuality is threatening human generation and can cause its extinction?

What do you think about Felicity Party's petition campaign for the criminalization of homosexuality and adultery?

What do think about the political debates over the wording of sexual orientation in the new constitution? What do you think about varying stances of political parties (CHP, BDP, AKP, MHP, BBP)

LGBTQ rights

What are the primary problems of LGBTQ individuals in Turkey?

What comes to your mind when I say LGBTQ rights? What do you include in these rights?

What do you think about the recognition of LGBTQ rights?

What do you think about the argument that LGBTQ rights are imposed by the West?

What do you think about the view that LGBTQ rights are irreconcilable with the cultural and religious values of Turkey?

Islamophobia in the LGBTQ community

Do you think there is any Islamophobia within LGBTQ community? Have you ever encountered with any discrimination against LGBTQ Muslims in LGBTQ community?

Have you ever encountered with any occasion where LGBTQ Muslims might feel uncomfortable and feed excluded from LGBTQ spaces?