

**CONSTRUCTION OF TRANS MASCULINITIES:
EXPERIENCES OF TRANS MEN, LAWYERS AND PSYCHIATRISTS IN TURKEY**

by
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Submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Sabancı University
August 2017

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Date of Approval: 01. 08. 2017



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ABSTRACT

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M.A. Thesis

August 2017

Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Ayşe Gül Altınay

Keywords: gender identity, sexuality, masculinity, trans, identity making, queer, visibility

This thesis focuses on the experiences of trans men in Turkey by focusing on the present forms of identification, transition process, and negotiations and alliances particularly with legal and psychiatric professionals. Based on in-depth interviews and participant observation with trans men, as well as a small number of interviews with lawyers and psychiatrists, this research explores the potential contingencies of trans men's "transitions" in terms of their self-identifications, visibilities and embodiments within the social and institutional spaces in Turkey. How do trans men experience their trans masculinities? How and to what extent can they reach information on what it means to be a trans man for others, as well as for legal and medical institutions? What sorts of challenges do trans men bring to light in relation to these institutional spaces and practices? How and to what extent, do the alliance between trans men and LGBTI+ friendly doctors and lawyers perpetuate and/or challenge the state enforcements? Where do the concepts of transgenderism, masculinity, psychiatry and law overlap in relation to the construction of trans masculinities? Departing from these questions, this thesis argues that trans men, as well as their psychiatrists and lawyers, affect each other in their construction of trans man identity and trans masculinities, and thereby challenge the institutional and societal milieus' comprehension of trans subjectivities and masculinities. The thesis aims to contribute to the existing literature on transgenderism and masculinities by exploring the identity making and community building practices among trans men, and lawyers and psychiatrists in Turkey.

ÖZET

TRANS ERKEKLİKLERİN İNŞASI: TRANS ERKEKLERİN, AVUKATLARIN VE PSİKİYATRİSTLERİN TÜRKİYE’DEKİ DENEYİMLERİ

Rabia Aslı Koruyucu

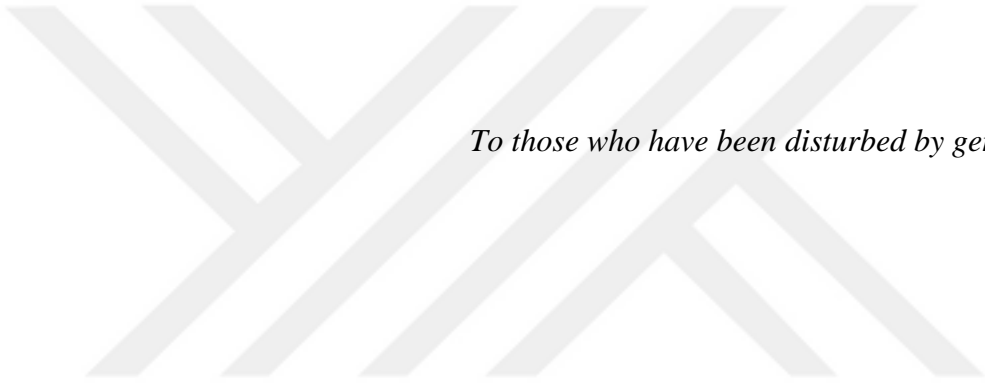
Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Ağustos 2017

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Ayşe Gül Altınay

Anahtar Sözcükler: cinsiyet kimliği, cinsellik, erkeklik, trans, kimlik inşası, kuir, görünürlük

Bu tez Türkiye’de trans erkeklerin bugünkü kimlik oluşturma biçimleri, geçiş süreçleri ve başta avukat ve psikiyatrlar olmak üzere devlet kurumlarıyla olan müzakere ve işbirliği deneyimleri bağlamında trans erkeklerin yaşam deneyimlerine odaklanmaktadır. Az sayıda hukukçu ve psikiyatrin yanı sıra, trans erkekler ile derinlemesine yapılan mülakatlar ve katılımcı gözleme dayanan bu araştırma, trans erkeklerin “geçişlerinin” kendilerini tanımlama biçimleri, görünürlükleri ve Türkiye’de sosyal ve kurumsal alanlarda buldukları yer ile mümkün temaslarını araştırmaktadır. Trans erkekler trans erkeklikleri nasıl deneyimliyor? Hukuki ve tıbbi kurumların yanı sıra, trans erkekler trans erkekliğin anlamlarına dair bilgiye nasıl ve ne ölçüde erişebilmekte? Trans erkekler, bu kurumsal alan ve yaptırımlara karşı ne tür zorluklar çıkarıyor ve dile getiriyorlar? Trans erkekler ile LGBTI+ dostu doktor ve hukukçular arasındaki iş birliği, devlet yaptırımlarına karşı nasıl ve ne ölçüde karşı koyabilmekte ve/veya bunu sürdürebilmekte? Trans erkek kimliğinin inşası ile ilgili olarak, transgenderizm, erkeklik, psikiyatri ve hukuk kavramları nerelerde örtüşüyor? Bu tez, bu sorulardan yola çıkarak trans erkekler ile psikiyatrlar ve avukatlarının, trans erkek kimliğinin ve trans erkekliklerin inşasında birbirlerini nasıl etkilediklerini tartışıyor ve dolayısıyla kurumsal ve sosyal çevrelerin trans öznellikleri ve erkeklikleri nasıl algıladığını sorguluyor. Bu tez, Türkiye’de trans erkekler ile avukat ve psikiyatrlar arasındaki kimlik inşası ve komünite oluşturma deneyimlerini araştırarak transgenderizm ve erkeklikler üzerine var olan literatüre katkıda bulunmayı da hedefliyor.



To those who have been disturbed by gender binary

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor Ayşe Gül Altınay. She was always patient, encouraging, inspirational and supportive during my research process from the very first moment that I told her what was in my mind. Her intellectual guidance and emotional encouragement have enabled this research to be continued and me to believe what I aim to do. I would also like to thank my valuable jury members Cenk Özbay and Maral Erol Jamieson for their insightful comments on the final version of this thesis and intellectual advices on my future projects.

This thesis would not have been possible without the fellowship, help, care, love and hugs of my dearest Lara. Whenever I felt desperate or lost in both the research process and my daily life she was there for drinking, crying or loudly laughing with me. Thank you, Lara, for your unfailing partnership that I had never think that it would exist. I am quite thankful to Berk who has opened the doors of my fieldwork, and has always been supportive with his friendship and recommendations from the very beginning of this research. I am also deeply grateful to Atak for his “garden speeches” and long discussion sessions; to Berkay for his motivating and pervert companionship; to Deanna for her inspiring comments, questions and feedbacks; to my “ayle” for their fruitiness wherever they were; to Cansu for her patience and sincere friendship during this process; to Çağlar who made me smile and relieved just in time; and to all of my friends who have danced with me throughout my research process and my life in general.

I would also like to express my profound gratitude to my family for their unconditional support and love which have always encouraged me to do what I believe and to be confident where I stand.

And finally, I extend thanks for all of the participants of this research who accepted to share their experiences with me and broadened my perception at every turn.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Bodies are identified as man and woman through the gender binary, according to the existence of genitals. If one cannot fit her-himself and/or her-his body into the descriptions, if one offers a different description, the relation s/he constructs not only with her/his body but also with society is interrupted because of the social reactions. Since one’s own declaration is not taken into consideration, it becomes impossible to [receive] judicial, medical, and social support on one’s request. You are expected to fit yourself into the given definitions and descriptions.”¹ (Ali Arıkan).

This quotation is from “Bedenimin Halleri,” written by Ali Arıkan, a transmasculine² activist who passed away from cancer in 2013. In his writings and talks, he had explicitly problematized not only the binary understandings within social, medical and legal institutions but also the capacity of feminist and LGBTI+ communities to make room for the multiplicity, flexibility and fluidity of self-identifications. I consider these sentences of Ali as a powerful expression of being “interrupted” throughout one’s life time as a trans person. Since this study shows the ways in which trans men have challenged the state-governed institutions, societal norms and the limited imagination on trans identities through embracing and embodying “a relatively new identity” in Turkey, I believe that a quotation from Ali serves as a productive departure point.

In this thesis, I dwell on the experiences of trans men in Turkey by focusing on the present forms of identification, their processes of transition, and their negotiations and alliances particularly with legal and psychiatric professionals. I investigate the ways in which trans men and professionals (in this case, psychiatrists and lawyers) affect each other in their construction of a “trans man” identity not only in the context of medico-legal interventions, but also in relations to one another.

¹ “Bedenler iki cinsiyet üzerinden, üreme organlarının varlığına göre, kadın ve erkek olarak tarifleniyor. Bir kişi kendini ve/veya bedenini tariflere sığdıramazsa, farklı tariflere toplumsal tepkiden dolayı, hem bedeniyle kurduğu ilişki, hem de toplumla kurduğu ilişki kesintiye uğruyor. Kişinin beyanı hiç dikkate alınmadığı için bireyin ihtiyacına, isteğine göre hukuksal, tıbbi, sosyal destek de mümkün olmuyor. Kendini var olan tanımlara ve tariflere uydurman bekleniyor.” For the full text of Ali Arıkan: <http://hikayeci.livejournal.com/28370.html>

² Since I do not know in which specific way Ali used to identify himself while he was alive, I prefer to use “transmasculine” as a relatively more inclusive term.

Based on in-depth interviews and participant observation with trans men, as well as a small number of interviews with lawyers and psychiatrists, this thesis focuses on the potential contingencies of trans men's "transitions" in terms of their self-identifications, visibilities and embodiments within the social and institutional spaces in Turkey. I explore the dynamics and spaces of struggle and resistance whereby trans men have challenged the "thinkable" identities in Turkey, and discuss of the complexities of trans masculinities within medical, legal and social mediums by exploring the interferences of trans men's "transitions." How do trans men experience their coming out processes? How and to what extent can they reach information on what it means to be a trans man for others, as well as for legal and medical institutions? What sorts of challenges do trans men bring to light in relation to these institutional spaces and practices? How and to what extent, do the alliance between trans men and LGBTI+ friendly doctors and lawyers perpetuate and/or challenge the state enforcements and discourses in Turkey? What kind of spaces are opened and subsequently regulated for trans masculinities in the context of Turkey? In what ways and to what extent can trans men build their own community? Where do the concepts of transgenderism, masculinity, psychiatry and law overlap in relation to the identity making of trans masculinities? Based on these questions, and others, this thesis aims to investigate the ways in which trans men, as well as their psychiatrists and lawyers, affect each other in their construction of trans man identity and trans masculinities and thereby challenge the institutional, societal and activist milieus' comprehension of trans subjectivities and masculinities.

1.1. Naming: Collective Identities and Pronouns

In the beginning of my research process, I was planning to analyze my interviewees' self-identifications through their answers to my "simple" question: "Do you have a preference in terms of how you would like to be called?". I planned to ask this question because I was "inspired" by a body of literature that posits the possible existence of multiple ways of naming oneself. However, I realized the awkwardness of this question from the very first pilot interview and tried to change my question in the middle of it but it did not work since my participant asked me back several times what I mean by "preference to be called." After a moment of silence, he said "I identify as trans man; did you want to ask that?". This question of my interviewee made me rethink

of my ways of asking questions and I ended up revising some of them. After this interview, I became aware of the possible difficulties my interviewees will have while answering this “simple” question.

My first question regarding naming emerged when I first started to read the body of literature on transgenderism and trans identities that is dominantly based on the experiences in the US. Whilst I was reading the texts on trans subjectivities and masculinities, I realized that there are a lot of “subgroups” and distinct “transmasculine identities” such as Transman, Woodworker, FTM, F2M, MTM, Transsexual Man, New Man, Boi, Boy-Chick, and Trans-Butch. In his “The Middle Men: An Introduction to the Transmasculine Identities,” Griffin Hansbury (2005) highlights the multiplicity of identities mostly focusing on Woodworkers, Transmen and Genderqueers as three broad categories within the transmasculine spectrum. In the article, he states “within the admittedly limiting confines of this taxonomy, it becomes possible to gain a better understanding of the people behind the labels and achieve insight into their individual therapeutic needs” (Hansbury 2005, 241). While discussing the distinctive dynamics of the trans masculine identities, he criticizes the language of “community” due to its possible tendencies to generalize men through their likeness.

In relation to these concerns, Gayle Salamon (2005) discusses the multiplicity of transmasculine identities by problematizing Hansbury’s suggestion: “Is it possible,” she asks, “that the moment ‘sameness’ is abandoned as a normative ideal governing identity, it resurfaces as a normative ideal governing relation? It seems true that the transmasculine community is something more capacious than a consolidated unity, but I wonder if this diversity of expressions of transmasculinity covers over a more subtle and fundamental form of sameness” (Salamon 2005, 267).

Inspired by Salamon’s question, I argue that there is a need for focusing on the contexts and the localities in which those who identify in different ways along the transmasculine spectrum come together, socialize with other individuals, and form collectivities, while keeping in mind Hansbury’s consideration of the multiplicity of transmasculine identities. During the process of my writing, I tried to keep Salamon and Hansbury’s discussion on the diversity of expressions in my mind. Moreover, the difficulty of the translation of some concepts to English made me feel the need of being clear on their possible connotations in Turkish language such as *erkek*, *erkeklik* and *maskülen*. In Turkish language, while *erkek* addresses to both “male” and “man,” *erkeklikler* means “masculinities” as the plural version of *erkeklik* which address to

“masculinity.” On the other hand, even though “masculine” is generally translated to Turkish language as *maskülen*, there is another colloquial word for it such as *erkeksi* which directly addresses “manly” or “mannish.” My preference to use the term “trans masculinities” rather than “trans masculinity” is shaped by this attempt to consider the multiplicity of masculinities, its relationality to self-identification and its meanings in the Turkish language.

When we look at the body of literature on trans masculinities in Turkey which is mainly non-academic and largely produced by trans men themselves, it seems that there are only two “broad” categories which are embraced by individuals: “female-to-male transsexual” (*kadından erkeğe transseksüel*) and “trans man” (*trans erkek*). In addition, online platforms such as “Transmasculine Data Bank” and “United Unicorn” have used the term “transmasculine” (*transmaskülen*) in their explanations and statements. On the other hand, some of my interviewees attached the term “transmasculine” to individuals who do not want to undergo the transitional surgeries, and they all identified themselves as a “trans man” of sorts. As another distinct example, one of my interviewees mentioned that he would prefer to identify as trans. He explained that he considers the term “trans man” as a defense mechanism against his family, and as a step of his transition process that he has been passing through. Some others mentioned that even though they generally identify as “man,” they also feel comfortable to be called “trans man” (*trans erkek*) and/or “transsexual man” (*transseksüel erkek*) while socializing with their close friends, partners and LGBTI+ activists.

As my interviewees highlighted, their way of self-naming might change depending on the milieus where they socialize and the contexts where they express their identities. In a similar way, during the interviews my participants used most of the abovementioned terms while speaking of themselves in different contexts. Depending on the context, my participants’ narrations included different ways of self-naming such as “I am a man who...”, “they did not know my condition”, “as a transsexual, I...”, “I do not prefer to say ‘hello, I am a trans man’” and “I knew nothing about female to male trans people like me.” It seemed to me that the usage of all of these expressions during my interviews blurred the borders of distinct transmasculine identities and they bring the terminological gap between academic discourse predominantly produced in English and my interviewees’ ways of self-naming in Turkish. In the research and the thesis, I preferred to use the term “trans man” due to the fact that it is the one which is predominantly embraced by the subjects of the study, as well as the emerging body of

literature in Turkey. In other words, my preference to use the term trans man as an umbrella term that is inclusive of all the mentioned ways of self-naming, has been shaped by both my interviewees' narratives and the literature in the context of Turkey.

From the starting point of my research, I have used the pronoun "he" while referring in English to my interviewees and friends who identify themselves within the transmasculine spectrum, as it has always seemed to me more "politically correct" and ethical. Yet, when I read Dilara Çalışkan's thesis (2014) on queer kinship among trans sex worker women in İstanbul, I realized that I have never asked my interviewees about their pronoun preferences. In her study, Çalışkan tells that she tried to adopt the Turkish "O" into English, "O" being the Turkish gender-neutral pronoun for the third-person. She, however, eventually gave up this idea (Çalışkan 2014). In a similar way, I was also confused in terms of pronouns while trying to transcribe the recorded interviews. Then, I found myself thinking about asking my participants which pronoun they would prefer in English. After a moment, I felt that it would be too "weird" and "insistent" for people to be asked that kind of question. Then, I again found myself re-reading the part of Çalışkan's thesis where she ponders the issue of naming and pronouns. After she explicitly shares her early anxieties regarding the usage of pronouns, she tells about how she found a "simple" solution thanks to her encounter with Jack Halberstam during a talk Çalışkan recounts: "He said: 'Just write "she" if they say they are woman'. I said 'okay' and started to think about the narratives of my informants, the atmosphere of our interviews and my participant observation" (Çalışkan 2014, 9). Taking inspiration from this dialogue, reconsidering the body of literature in Turkey and revisiting my participants' narratives, I decided to use the pronoun "he" while referring to my interviewees.

1.2. Research Methodology

I conducted semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews with 15 individuals consisting of 9 trans men, 3 psychiatrists and 3 lawyers. I digitally recorded all of the interviews with the permission of the participants and all were later transcribed by me. One exception is an interview with a psychiatrist: Because we had a limited time in her office, I took notes during the interview instead of recording it and visited her for a second interview. The fieldwork included interviews with people who live in 6 cities from several geographical regions of Turkey including İstanbul (7), Ankara (2), Antalya

(3), İzmir (1), Tekirdağ (1) and Karabük (1). The ages of trans men interviewees ranged from 21 to 37, and the professionals from 26 to 67, while most of them were in their 30s. I asked each interviewee to pick a pseudonym that I could use to identify them in my thesis. However, some of them were persistent on using their names. Nevertheless, I picked pseudonyms for them in order to maintain the principle of confidentiality.

From the beginning of my research, I tried to avoid limiting my field with İstanbul where I am familiar with the LGBTI+ communities and activism. For an extensive analysis of such a “relatively new identity” as trans masculinities in Turkey, I recognized that it would be easier yet unproductive to restrict my field to İstanbul. I therefore tried to enlarge the scope of my field by including interviewees who have experiences in various geographical and social environments where they live, study, work and socialize. However, in the beginning of my research, I did not have any idea about how to reach people that I could interview. I, then, asked a friend I met in a symposium of an NGO where I had a chance to watch Voltrans documentary in 2014, for his advice. He has been engaged in trans rights activism for years, and he introduced me to some of my interviewees. I also reached some of my interviewees through another personal contact from United Unicorns which is a new online platform aiming to constitute a transmasculine culture in Turkey. In addition to these contacts, I interviewed one person whom I knew from my own social circles.

Besides trans men themselves, I included psychiatric and judicial parties’ experiences in this research since they serve an essential function in building and developing trans man identity and transition processes. To conduct the interviews, I contacted 3 psychiatrists and 3 lawyers who have been working with trans men. Therefore, ethnography, in my research, traces not only trans men’s distinct experiences and life histories, but also their persistent struggle within the social and institutional milieus, negotiating their trans masculinities and allying with psychiatrists and lawyers.

While the interviews with psychiatrists and lawyers took around 1,5 to 2 hours, the ones with trans men took between 1,5 to 4 hours depending mostly on their time limits and, more strikingly, on where we met for the interviews. The interviews occurred at different places such as cafes, restaurants the residences of my interviewees and my own apartment. Since I did not know where and to whom my participants are “out” or not, I asked my interviewees where they would be more comfortable meeting. It was crucial to ask this question for me as a researcher because I did not want to create difficulties for my interviewees by compelling them to speak of their identities in places

where they may not feel comfortable. I also thought that we could not have an open dialogue if they did not feel right in a place of my choice.

Cafes and restaurants picked up by my research participants were places where they felt comfortable or socialized regularly. One interviewee, for instance, who lives in a small town in the region of Black Sea asked me if we could do the interview at home, explaining that he is out to nobody in the town except for his flat mate. Being one of my first interviews in this research process, this encounter enabled me to reconsider and think more deeply of the possible meaning of “safe zones” in the following interviews.

While trying to be able to capture the diversity, I made a special effort not to limit my research to the metropolises such as İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir. However, due to various limitations, I could not travel to all of the sites where my interviewees lived. With one of the interviewees, who lived in a distant and quite conservative town, we came in İzmir while he was visiting his friends there. It is also important to note, as an information I learned during my interviews, that some of my interviewees had grown up in the big cities, mostly İstanbul, but then moved to other cities for college education. Consequently, my efforts to make the research demographically and geographically more “inclusive” ended up with recognizing a variety of spatialities and mobilities within the field, and all of these experiences enabled me to be aware of my limitations as a researcher within the field.

Each interview began with similar open-ended questions but then proceeded through interviewees’ own narratives. Even though I renegotiated my research questions at every turn, the interviews revolved around the life histories of my interviewees as far as they chose to narrate. In the process, I had some difficulties dealing with my interviewees’ questions and comments on my life because they mostly asked me back in regard to the subjects we were talking about. During the interviews, I have been asked by my interviewees such questions as “Where did you grow up? Then, you must know this,” “You know that guy, right?” and “You probably know what living with family means.” In the course of the research, I had the feeling that these interferences enabled both my participants and me to establish a fruitful dialogue.

To conduct the interviews with lawyers and psychiatrists, I visited a courthouse, a law office, a private psychiatry office and several hospitals. These places were chosen by the professionals because they could not leave their workplaces more than a limited time. It is also significant for me to mention that I did most of my interviews with the lawyers while they were waiting for the next trial and the psychiatrists for the next

consultant. During my experience of visiting these spaces which might be considered as state-governed institutions, I knew that I was witnessing the key places where my interviewees are forced to visit for legal and bodily transitions. Accordingly, our dialogues with the professionals were also shaped by the narratives on their own experiences within the milieus where they work, which are also the places of their first encounters with the trans men they work with.

I also find it crucial to situate that the value of trans men's narratives that I interviewed are derived not only from their trans subjectivities, but also from the value of their unique life histories. Although I started my research by following this approach, it became more explicit and clear within the process of my transcribing. In a similar vein, I believe that the narratives of my lawyer and the psychiatrist interviewees on their own experiences, in this research, have been quite valuable for a critical analysis of the medico-legal regulations on trans subjectivities in Turkey. Since I present the discussions on trans masculinities and trans man identity throughout the following chapters, I would like to introduce each of my participants who self-identify as trans men in the same order that I interviewed them.

1.3. The Field

1.3.1. Meeting trans men

Yiğit, 31

I first conducted an interview with Yiğit in 2016 spring for a pilot interview just before I began working on my research proposal and we met more several times after this interview. He grew up in a district of Antalya and moved to İstanbul in 2009. He studied tourism and hotel management at university and then he had been working in hotels in Antalya. When he moved to İstanbul, he started to engage in performance projects and has worked in various theatre groups. When we met with Yiğit, he had been in the transition processes, following his psychiatric therapy and taking testosterone for nine months (to be able to obtain a blue ID in two years).

In the interview, Yiğit consistently mentioned that he has been asking himself what if he stayed in his hometown where he always felt loneliness since he did not know anyone like him. He also narrated that he was a person who had a binary conceptualization of gender and a “heterosexist approach” before he came to İstanbul to

live with his girlfriend. Meanwhile, he met a group of feminist friends in İstanbul and he started to problematize his own masculinity through a feminist perspective. However, he considers himself as a humanist person rather than a feminist or pro-feminist. As another crucial point, he told me that he does not have concerns about sterilization since he has raised his girlfriend's children with her and they already call him father. I find crucial to emphasize that Yiğit was the only interviewee who had such an experience as being a father in my fieldwork. Moreover, he compared his biological family and chosen family in terms of his ways of self-expression and kinds of socialization as a trans man. In this vein, Yiğit highlighted that his older sister and especially brother began changing their ways of communication with him, in a positive way, as soon as his appearance came to change with hormone usage.

Sarkis, 21

My second interviewee was Sarkis whom I already knew from my social circles in İstanbul. He was born in a city in Southeastern Turkey and grew up in various cities in the same region. During the interview, Sarkis related almost all of the topics we were talking about with his family, relations between family members and his families' Kurdish and Armenian background. Even though he had some troubles with his family after he came out, he was patient to make them relief about his identity and daily life in a big city.

After he moved to İstanbul to study in law school, he started to live with one of his friends from a leftist organization. As they began to read books about gender issues together, Sarkis and his flat mate came out as trans men to each other. With this coming out moment, Sarkis began searching for information on the identity and transition processes. Sarkis had been visiting a psychiatrist in a medical education and research hospital for four years but he could not get the "permission" to start taking testosterone because his psychiatrist did not perceive Sarkis as havin an issue with gender identity.

Two weeks after our interview, Sarkis got approval from another psychiatrist this time adopting a "hetero" and "hegemonic" male performance, which he normally problematizes, so that he could start taking testosterone under professional control. During our interview, Sarkis also complained that he does not feel comfortable in İstanbul anymore and is planning to find a way to go to the city where his family currently lives. Even though he is a trans rights activist and "out" in his social life, he

consistently mentioned that he does not feel safe in İstanbul. After he started to take hormones and decided to undergo mastectomy, he moved to his parents' house and transferred to another university for his law education in another city.

Can, 24

Can grew up with his parents, brother, sister and most of his close relatives, who are from the Black Sea Region, in the same building in İstanbul. When he first came out to his mother as a lesbian, he did not get a negative reaction that he expected. Since he was living with his broad family including parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and their children, Can's gender identity became a topic of conversation in the family as soon as he came out to his mother as a trans man. Can was surprised when his family underwent this process quite smoothly, although they are quite conservative and religious people. However, his father never talked about Can's transition process and he started to call him "son" when he began passing as man and got his blue ID card. The day we met with Can was the first anniversary of his blue ID card and officially carrying a new name.

When I arrived in the town where Can moved for his education in industrial design at a university one and half years ago, he took me from the bus station and told me that it would be better if we could do the interview at home since he is not out there except for his flat mate. Even though he came out as a trans man to his family and friends in İstanbul, he told nothing to his friends about his gender identity in the town he currently lives in. Can explained the reason under this preference in the way that he does not feel comfortable among people that he does not know about their transphobia and that is why he feels unsafe there. After his college education, he was planning to pursue his father's as designing furniture which was considered by him as the most proper way of saving money for his phalloplasty operation in abroad.

Kaan, 29

We met with Kaan for the interview in İstanbul where he grew up. His parents divorced when he was in elementary school and he first stayed with his mother and, then, moved to his father. Kaan currently lives with his younger brother and mother in İstanbul and works in an international company. Even though he told me that he could make "a good life for himself," he explained that his transitional process was full of negotiations about his gender identity with his relatives.

Kaan moved to another city for his college education to study engineering, which is his father's profession, after he had music education at a university in İstanbul for one year. Since he had to work for money, he could get into the engineering school only in his second year of taking the university entrance exam. After he graduated from the university, Kaan decided to come out to his family and to begin the transitional processes. In those days, his girlfriend suggested him to go to trans group therapies because she was studying medicine and heard about these therapies in the university hospitals. After a while, Kaan left home and worked in different places since he was financially dependent on his uncles who were not supportive of him. Kaan also mentioned that he would be on to better jobs earlier if he could have written about his previous professional experiences with his pink ID card and previous official name in his CV while applying for new jobs. For him, the biggest struggle for trans individuals in Turkey is unemployment and financial support for transition processes.

Kaan explained that he is used to having problems about his gender identity and, especially, the transition process with his family since they tried to make him give up planning to enter the transitional process even if they were okay with his coming out as a trans man. He still participates in group therapies to share his own experiences with people since he explained that meeting trans individuals who have a good life or proper jobs might encourage other trans persons.

Ali, 25

We initially had a contact with Ali on Facebook and he invited me to conduct the interview in the town where he had grown up and was living at the time, located in the eastern borders of Turkey. However, we ended up meeting in İzmir where he studied agriculture at the university. He grew up with his two younger sisters and parents, and was planning to go back to his hometown to be engaged in farming, benefiting from his technical, professional knowledge.

After Ali decided to enter the transitional process, his parents were not discouraging or unsupportive but he financially had to cover the expenses of his transition processes by himself. Because he desired to have his blue ID card as soon as possible, Ali was simultaneously working in different jobs and also travelling to a variety of cities to complete the medico-legal regulations, as the hospitals in İzmir had recently stopped providing support for the transition process. After he had his blue ID card in İzmir, he went back to his hometown but his parents were anxious about the

reactions of the people around them. As soon as Ali's appearance changed due to hormone treatment and the surgeries, they began explaining his "situation" as that of an intersexual, which would be more acceptable for people since it is seen as an inborn condition. As Ali explained, he did not have a negative or positive experience in the cities he has lived in but his only desire has been to make a peaceful life for himself by doing agriculture and making a family.

Tibet, 24

We met with Tibet for the interview in a small district of Tekirdağ where he moved from İstanbul for his engineering education six years ago. Tibet grew up in a city in the Black Sea Region with his family and they moved to İstanbul when he started high school. Tibet has not seen his father for about seven years, since his parents divorced. He emphasized that this separation had not been related to his "situation." He also mentioned that his father would try to communicate with Tibet if he knew anything about his process, but that his mother and older sister have already been supportive enough for him. After he came out to his mother and sister as a trans man, his mother began to have anxieties about Tibet's "sexual life." While trying to negotiate his trans masculinity with his mother and aunts, Tibet explained that his coming out triggered their feminist attitudes just like his flat mates and colleagues in Tekirdağ.

In 2012, his girlfriend came with a newspaper clipping about a trans man who underwent a transitional process and Tibet started to search for information about trans man identity. Afterward, he met a trans woman in the Pride Parade 2013 who unexpectedly invited him to a trans-only meeting, and he met a group of trans men and trans women. Tibet remembers this encounter as a moment in which he could not feel comfortable because of his transphobia at the time. However, Tibet told me that he started to feel more comfortable about his sexuality especially after he had his blue ID card, and he came out to himself as a bisexual but is still not sure about coming out to his friends.

Caner, 32

I met Caner in Antalya where he currently lives with his two brothers and mother. He grew up in a district of İzmir and is the only child who studied at university in the family. He went to a girls' boarding high school without facing any problems about his gender identity. He considers this experience as a personal gain since he had a chance to

empathize with women. In the meantime, Caner's parents divorced and he did not see his father, who had alcohol and had drug addiction, after the divorce. After high school, he studied journalism at a university in İzmir which he considers as the starting point of his life because he began "to identify himself as Caner" at the university. He explained that he realized, in his years at university, the importance of being a successful, trustful and intellectual person in the eyes of people rather than bringing his gender identity forward. Caner mentioned that he had some troubles with his friends and that is why he preferred to socialize with his professors who enabled him to be a critical person.

In his first year at the university, Caner met a woman in an online chat room who introduced him to her nephew and they had a romantic relationship. However, Caner explained that he was traumatized when his girlfriend's family made pressure on him to break up with her since they collected official information about him and learned that he has a pink ID and officially a "female name." I find it significant to give this information about Caner since he consistently highlighted that this experience had a major impact in his life. After the university, he worked in different settings such as a restaurant, a circus and a local newspaper. Even though he was planning to go to China for his transition process, he found a job at a municipal hall through a friend's contact and has been working there for two years. Unlike most of my interviewees, Caner entered his transitional process after his thirties in Ankara, and he "surprisingly" experienced this process without any problems in his workplace. When I met Caner, his gender identity was just "approved" in the official records and he was waiting for his blue ID card.

Sefa, 37

I also met Sefa in Antalya where he had moved from İstanbul two years ago. He grew up in a small district of İstanbul and also worked there in the same job for fifteen years with his pink ID. Because of his discomfort at school, especially in terms of the attitudes of school administrators and teachers, as well as other students, he stopped studying when he was in secondary school.

Sefa decided to enter the transitional process seven years ago but could not continue in İstanbul and stopped the psychiatric group therapy and legal process. Since his brother had an anxiety of living in a small neighborhood where they had grown up, socialized and worked, Sefa decided to move to another city to start the legal and the

medical processes again. As a result, he moved to Antalya from İstanbul with his brother, mother and aunt.

Sefa was the oldest trans man that I interviewed, and he, thus, narrated his former experiences through the transition processes within various medico-legal spaces and time periods. He told me that he was a “hick” person before the group therapies in İstanbul. He also did not feel comfortable within the therapy group in 2008 because of the existence of trans women who had “negative reputation” in his eyes. That is why it took a long time to participate in the therapy sessions in the beginning but he, then, met other trans men who made him rethink his own masculinity and masculinities in general in terms of performance, body comfort and relations with partners. Sefa also found his friends who also identify as trans men in Antalya via T-KULÜP, and they have had a WhatsApp group in which they communicate and organize their casual get-togethers. In fact, Sefa brought one of his friends from this group, Ümit, to our meeting since they both thought that it would be helpful for my research if we meet together.

Ümit, 21

Before we met with Sefa for the interview, I did not expect that Ümit, too, would be there. It was striking for me that they became very close friends in Antalya even though there is a significant gap in terms of their ages and experiences. Ümit was born and grew up in a city in Thrace region but he currently lives in Antalya studying journalism at university. Even though Ümit had some difficulties in high school as a “lesbian” person, in his words, he felt relieved when he “realized” that there is another possibility to love women as a man rather than as a woman. With Rüzgar Erkoçlar’s visibility on mainstream media, Ümit started to look for information on trans man identity and the transitional process through online searches.

When he moved to Antalya, he was engaged in an activist group there and he started to socialize within LGBTI+ communities. Although Ümit was out as a trans man in Antalya, he said that his father still does not speak to him when he visits his family house in his hometown. Ümit and Sefa organized a meeting with their mothers since they thought that it would be helpful for Ümit’s mother if she meets Sefa’s mother and aunt who support him. When they came together, Sefa’s mother and aunt made Ümit’s mother feel relieved sharing their own experiences on the process Sefa has pursued. Ümit also explained that his family members had to call him the name he chooses as soon as he began passing as a man since being called with his “female” name became

“awkward” on the street. Ümit started to take testosterone by himself since he thought that the doctors in Antalya do not know the process as much as himself and he could manage his own process through regular blood tests.

1.3.2. My positionality as a researcher

In the beginning of my fieldwork, I thought that reaching my interviewees through a limited number of contacts would create certain limitations in terms of my planned snowball method. This did not turn out to be the case. In time, I was able to reach quite a diverse group through the snowball method. Nevertheless, I easily became aware of my limits within the field in relation to my “insiderness.” I, as a person who does not identify as trans man, could not have access to the platforms in which trans men socialize with each other.

Another challenge that I mulled over in the beginning of my research process was that I was not feeling comfortable with the idea of interviewing professionals who work with trans consultants and applicants. This was due to my own assumptions and prejudices about “them.” When I look back now, it seems to me that my discomfort with interviewing professionals derived from my approach to medical and legal institutions mainly as regulatory sites of power. I also knew through my pre-research encounters with trans rights activism, that there have always been tensions between trans individuals and the medico-legal regulations governed by the state. However, from the very first meeting with a psychiatrist, which was quite an eye-opening experience, I felt the need to recognize the efforts made by certain professionals to “transform” their institutions in accordance with the trans individuals’ distinct needs and demands. That is why they might be considered as significant “allies” of the trans communities and individuals.

I also find it crucial to mention that some of my interviewees made a considerable effort to “tell” me about the processes of transition in a thorough manner, even though I did not ask them generic questions about transition processes. It seems to me that this tendency to “inform me” was partially related to my being perceived not as a subject of what they talk about but as an “outsider.” On the other hand, some interviewees assumed that I should know everything about the transition processes since I am doing research on it. When I reconsider both of these tendencies now, they remind me of the tension between academia and activism. I also heard a lot of criticism on those

“outsiders” who “do research on LGBTI+ individuals”: “they send a survey link and ask us for fill the blanks,” “they do not have a face-to-face communication with us,” “researchers are coming and saying that they do research on LGBTI+. I am not the LGBTI+.” From the very first steps of framing my research and making decisions on the fieldwork, I, therefore, was anxious about this tension between academia and activism.

When I came across or met my participants after the interviews, they mostly asked how my research is going, and made jokes about our positionalities by saying “I am saying important things, you should take notes” in the middle of our conversations. In their eyes, I was ultimately a researcher. In a personal social gathering of persons who identify as trans men, it was challenging for me to hear that they perceive me as an “ally in a sense.” It was a moment that made me question my positionality in the field. This sentence also reminded me of a question almost all of my interviewees asked me: “how did you come to this topic?”. During the fieldwork, this question has triggered me to rethink my research questions and to re-evaluate my positionality.

1.4. Situating the Literature

Before presenting the body of literature on trans masculinities in Turkey, I deem it necessary to discuss the general literature and research on gender that I find related to my research. According to Butler, gender is performatively produced, and might be deconstructed and reconstructed by individual performances (Butler 1990). While this concept has introduced a groundbreaking understanding of gender, performativity-based approaches have also been criticized especially through the lens of transgenderism. For instance, Jay Prosser argues that Butler’s portrait of queer transgender “illustrates a certain collapsing of gender back into sexuality” (Prosser 2006, 264). Even though Butler (1999) subsequently explains her concerns on transgenderism in the second edition of her book *Gender Trouble*, these criticisms, in some way, happen to reveal the need of consideration on the alterity of trans subjectivities in terms of theorization. Accordingly, there has been a body of scholarship examining performativity’s role in cultural and personal production of transgender bodies and trans identities (Kondelin 2014, Schilt and Westbrook 2009, Halberstam 1998, Salamon 2010).

In this research, I argue that there is still a drawback in this theory, in that it falls short of accounting for the complexities of transgender bodies since trans subjectivities

cannot be understood through the lens of performativity per se. As taking Halberstam's configuration of "masculinities with female bodies" recalling the "female body experience" narratives, I suggest that these narratives are related not only to performativity, but also to the physical and social embodiment of trans subjectivities (Halberstam 1998). According to Halberstam, "medical descriptions of transsexuality" have been shaped through "a discourse of wrong body" since the end of 1950s and the recent visibility of trans men has "complicated the discussions around transsexuality because gender transition from female to male allows biological women to access male privilege within their reassigned genders" (1998a, 143).

In the existing literature on trans masculinities, there has been a focus on the physical transitions of trans men (Boylan 2003, Brown and Rounsley, 1996, Califia 1997, Cromwell 1999, 1997, Diamond 2004, Dozier, 2005, Edelman 2009, Hines 2006, King 1996) and technologized body narratives (Prosser 1998, Sullivan and Murray 2009). Some other scholars have emphasized legitimization and the discipline of trans bodies' public representations (Bornstein and Bergman 2010, Devor 1993, Irving 2008, Nestle et al. 2002, Sloop 2000, Sycamore 2006).

In "Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transsexual Body as Productive", Dan Irving discusses the heteronormative construction of trans bodies and their representations in mainstream North American society (Irving 2008). While discussing the mainstream understanding of "proper trans masculine social subjects" and "legitimization of this propriety," he argues that "to move toward achieving social recognition, the transsexual body must constitute a productive working body, that is, it must be capable of participating in capitalist production processes" (2008, 40). Thus far, it seems that relationality between trans masculinities, medical technologies and productivity of transgender bodies constitutes one of the central issues in trans gender studies. Scholars working on transgender and trans masculinities draw attention to the materiality of trans bodies, focusing on visual representations, clothing and naming (Bender 2012, Edelman and Zimman, 2014, Waszkiewicz 2006, Windsor 2006).

There is also a body of literature that pays extensive attention to the experience of trans masculinities, including groundbreaking researches that I would like to mention explicitly. In his book *Self Made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men*, Henry Rubin (2003) lays emphasis on the significance of investigating the progress of FTM identity. To Rubin, "the history of the emergence of an FTM subject position is the history of the 'proliferation of perversions' in the twentieth century"

(2003, 61). This statement proceeds from Rubin's approach to the genealogy of identifications on and of lesbianisms. Analyzing the "male-identified female-bodied woman" identity which had opened up crucial discussions on gender around 1970s, he presents the historical cornerstones of the consolidation of a distinct female-to-male transsexual identity from both positivist and genealogist perspectives: "The positivist approach to the rising numbers of FTMs might assume that these men were always 'out there' waiting to be discovered by better diagnostic categories. By contrast, this genealogy suggests that the numbers of FTMs rose because of the meager options for selfthematizing their gender in the new paradigm of lesbianism. Nascent FTMs became recognizable qua transsexual men once lesbianism became woman-identified in the 1970s" (Rubin 2003, 89).

In a similar vein, Aaron Devor, in *FTM: Female-to-Male Transsexuals in the Society* (1997, 3), poses a historical question: "Have there always been female-to-male transsexuals?". Investigating this question, Devor starts with an investigation into the "ancestors" of transsexual men from Ancient Greeks and Romans, to Jewish Thought to the Early Christian World and the Medieval period. He, then, presents some stories about and experiences of "females living as males" in the recent past. In addition to his analysis of the historical data, he conducted interviews with a large group of self-identified female-to-male transsexuals, and they form the basis of his book including chapters which follows the interviewees' life histories such as "Adolescence Is About Change," "Crisis at Puberty," "Looking for Love," "Finding Identities" and "Making the Changes." In all these chapters and more, Devor lays emphasis on FTM individuals' coming out processes, embracing identities and experiences on these identities with their bodies in the society.

As a very encouraging effort, Devor, after twenty years, published a new edition of his book in 2016 with a new introduction and a new foreword by Jamison Green. In the "New Introduction," Devor dwells on the blossoming of a great variety of identities that individuals have claimed throughout the last twenty years. According to Devor, internet usage has played a significant role for the diversity of individuals' and groups' self-identifications. Through building online discussion and support groups, Devor (2016) states that, trans men began to maintain connection and networks with people like themselves.

Even though the issues on trans men have not been treated much within the literature on gender and (queer) sexualities in Turkey, it seems that young scholars and

activists have brought certain dynamics of trans men into question. When I read an article published in 2000 based on group therapies with trans men by four psychiatrists, I realized that there has been a psychiatric attention on trans men, aiming to report their characteristics in Turkey (Yüksel et al. 2000). However, the existing literature on transgenderism in Turkey, has not paid as much attention to trans men's experiences in as trans women's.

There is, however, an emerging non-academic, mostly (auto)biographical literature on trans masculinities, which has informed legal and medical professionals, and enabled experience sharing among trans men (Arıkan 2013, Güngör 2012, Güngör 2013, Gürsoy 2013). Within the mentioned literature, there are only two books, which directly refer to trans men in the context of Turkey. Both of these books are edited by Aras Güngör, and include trans men's personal, social and institutional experiences. Based on short interviews, they lay emphasis on medical, judicial and social transition processes, and provide guides for trans men by discussing trans men's "otherness" in terms of positionalities within social spaces including LGBTI+ organizations and communities. There are also some other texts that focus on trans identities within the heteronormative milieu, such as public institutions, schools and workplace (Arıkan 2013, Gürsoy 2013, Hun 2012, Hun 2013). Although these texts have not been produced as academic works, they have provided a critical understanding by drawing attention to trans men's experiences in terms of their daily lives and their relations with institutions.

Since general theorizations on gender and sexualities have not emphasized trans men's distinctive position among transgender subjects, the few scholars and activist-writers who have written on trans masculinities, conducting fieldwork and theorizing trans men's autobiographies, including their own, have played an influential role in drawing an academic attention to trans men's invisibility. In this emerging literature, medical experiences and trans body narratives constitute a productive space for exchange and solidarity among trans men, besides the online platforms such as blogs, webpages, social media, and handbooks.

The aim of this research is to interrogate the current possibilities of the "thinkableness" of trans masculinities. Although trans man identity in Turkey may appear invisible and "unthinkable," through an analysis of these possibilities I intend to present how trans men's experiences bring up challenges to the state institutions and their limited imagination on trans identities, and create spaces of struggle for themselves

and trans man identity. I hope that this research serves a productive discussion on the relation between trans masculinities, identity politics and institutional (medico-legal) policies.

1.5. Thesis Outline

In the following chapter, I situate my research on trans men's embracement processes of their gender identity in Turkey in terms of the meanings attached to trans man identity, the process of "coming out," the question of visibility, and the negotiations with family and the social milieu. I first present my interviewees' narratives on their processes of coming out and self-identification. Second, the chapter discusses the limitations of information on trans men identity on the online platforms and written sources in Turkish language. Third, I lay emphasis on the visibility of trans men by discussing its impacts on the processes of coming out and self-identification. Finally, I finish this chapter with a discussion of trans men's efforts to negotiate their identity with their families throughout their coming out and transition processes.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the negotiations of trans men with juridical and medical institutions in terms of the "construction" of trans masculinities in Turkey. Throughout this chapter, I open up a discussion on the possibilities and limitations of "alliance" amongst these mediums, what it means to get blue ID card in Turkey and what the possible meanings of being "full-time trans man" might be for trans men themselves, lawyers and psychiatrist. Also, I investigate how trans men narrate and discuss their masculinities within the state sphere such as hospitals and courts, and to what extent trans men could negotiate their authentic masculinities within these spaces. Moreover, I draw attention to the ways in which lawyers and psychiatrists, who work with trans men, have made a room for visibility and embodiment of trans men and formed their own solidarity networks within their institutions. I also investigate what solidarity mechanisms are developed by and among a group of lawyers and psychiatrists against some of the medico-legal regulations and practices which are not desired and needed by trans men.

In Chapter 4, I explore the importance of trans men-only platforms in Turkey. Accordingly, I focus on trans men-only organizations and platforms which enable trans men's access to information on transitions and act with solidarity for the visibility of "trans man" identity as another layer of this research. Exploring the insights and

possibilities offered by trans lives and masculinities, I provide a particular challenge to the understanding of masculinities within the binary comprehension of sex and gender. Throughout this chapter, I introduce trans man-only online platforms and their efforts to create and to maintain a “transmasculine culture.” I discuss the community-building practices of trans men and their perception on each other not only as fellows and peers but also as competitors since they stand on different stages of transition, and have a great variety of experiences. At this point, depicting the narratives of my interviewees, I investigate how trans men perceive not only themselves but also each other in terms of their authentic masculinities and “transness.”



CHAPTER 2

EMBRACING A “NEW” IDENTITY: “DON’T BE SILENT, SHOUT, TRANS MEN EXIST!”

In this chapter, I situate my research on trans men’s embracement processes of their gender identity in Turkey in terms of the meanings attached to trans man identity, the process of “coming out,” the question of visibility, and the negotiations with family. In what follows, I first attempt to conduct a dialogic ground between the theoretical debates on self-identification and my interviewees’ narratives based on their coming out processes. Then, I go in further detail with the discussion on self-identification and lay emphasis on the multiplicity of trans men’s ways to come out to themselves.

Second, the chapter discusses the ways in which trans men access information about the identity and its limitations on the online platforms and written sources in Turkish language. I lay emphasis on the limited visibility of trans men, also drawing attention to the ways in which lawyers and psychiatrists who work with trans men, have made a room for visibility and embodiment of trans men within their workplaces. Finally, I finish this chapter with a discussion on trans men’s efforts to negotiate their identity with their family throughout their coming out and transition processes.

2.1. Coming Out

“Identification” refers to an individual’s embrace of gender or sexual categorizations as a way of expressing oneself (Devor 2016, Saltzburg 2010). As a multilayered process, identity development is experienced through different and authentic paths, however, there are certain common features in trans men’s life stories, especially when it comes to their coming out stories.

Ali (25) who does not prefer to be out as a trans man in his daily life told me that he would not like to marginalize himself by calling himself “trans” again and again since he thought that they are already marginalized by society. However, he stressed, towards the end of our interview, that being oneself would be possible neither just with the concept nor without it. I consider Ali’s raising his concern about embracing or rejecting the concept of trans man as a significant dilemma of self-identification.

Therefore, depicting the narratives of my interviewees and discussing the literature, I would like to discuss the complexities and the challenges of embracing an identity.

The anxiety for self-identification was an explicit part of the life histories during my interviews with trans men and it was depicted mostly as the hardest step of the coming out process since they could not easily reach the information on what they feel belonging to. Starting with early childhood, trans men that I interviewed had difficulties in trying to define and disclose their identity and in finding the best way to express themselves.

Coming out to oneself and others becomes a need for practical and political reasons for trans individuals, especially for those who desire physical and legal transitions. Depending on the persons' motivations, needs and desires, one might prefer to closet or disclose oneself to other people such as family, friends, partners and colleagues. While sharing his process of "becoming a man," transgender activist and writer Jamison Green (2004) states that he believes his own "-and other transpeople's-coming out (when it is safe to do so!) has the capacity to enrich everyone's experience of their own gender and the ability to accept diversity in others." (Green 2004, 44). This statement, like many others, reveals the significance of coming out in terms of, in his words, "lighting a series of candles in a dark cave" (Green 2004).

Although, in the beginning of my fieldwork, the main focus of this research was not trans men's coming out practices and strategies, this issue came up regularly in all the interviews. In this respect, coming out to oneself and to others seems to be considered as a crucial stage of identity construction for trans men.

Nevertheless, to better comprehend the personal and social development of transgender identity, Bockting and Coleman (2007) portray a five-stage identity development model which includes (1) pre-coming out, (2) coming out, (3) exploration, (4) intimacy, and (5) identity integration. They identify the coming out stage as a process of transgender individuals coming out to themselves, and then to others with the risk of abandonment and isolation through rejection or stigmatization by others.

As my fieldwork shows, coming out begins with the exploration of a certain identity and it might come up in different ways. This process might proceed with some encounters with friends, partners, mental health providers and news. For some of my interviewees, these encounters enabled them to begin querying their self-identification and going in search of the information on trans men identity for a while. Some others mentioned that they always knew who they were but that they were not "informed" of

the identity, and, hence, could not identify themselves as trans or trans man for a long while.

Unlike Bocking and Coleman (2007) states, self-identification and coming out processes were narrated by my interviewees as taking place after the exploration of the identity itself through a search. Throughout this exploration process, they thoroughly searched for reliable information on conceptual and transitional aspects of the identity. Although my interviewees could reach the limited information about trans man identity on the internet, most of them began to identify as trans man after this exploration process which generally took around one to two years. When they felt ready for the legal and medical transition, they decided to come out to their family, friends and other social milieus, and made effort to negotiate their identity with them.

In his book *Self Made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men*, Henry Rubin (2003) lays emphasis on the significance of investigating the progress of FTM identity. For Rubin, “the history of the emergence of an FTM subject position is the history of the ‘proliferation of perversions’ in the twentieth century” (Rubin 2003, 61). This statement proceeds from Rubin’s approach to the genealogy of identifications on and of lesbianisms. Analyzing the “male-identified female-bodied woman” identity which had opened up crucial discussions on gender around the 1970s, he presents the historical cornerstones of the consolidation of a distinct female-to-male transsexual identity from both positivist and genealogist perspectives:

“The positivist approach to the rising numbers of FTMs might assume that these men were always ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered by better diagnostic categories. By contrast, this genealogy suggests that the numbers of FTMs rose because of the meager options for selfthematizing their gender in the new paradigm of lesbianism. Nascent FTMs became recognizable qua transsexual men once lesbianism became woman-identified in the 1970s” (Rubin 2003, 89).

There has been a wide range of literature on the political, social and personal contexts of coming out through lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans individuals’ sexual desires (Orne 2012, Plummer 1995) but these studies do not mention possible meanings of coming out as trans. Besides these studies, some scholars investigated specifically trans men’s sexual desires and orientations (Yerke and Mitchell 2011, Devor 1993, Schilt and Windsor 2014, Vidal-Ortiz 2012). Some have worked on trans men’s negotiations of their masculinity and trans identity with their partners by dwelling on coming out stories (Meier et al. 2013). I consider these works which focus on the sexual desires of trans

men as very significant at this point since the processes of coming out are also narrated by some of my interviewees through references to their sexual orientation. During the interviews, gender identity and sexual orientation were often blurred in the depictions of their self-identification processes.

Even though the self-identification processes were narrated through the exploration of sexual orientations, it was overt, throughout our interviews, that coming out to themselves as trans man was the crucial moment for trans men. Sarkis (21), for instance, told me that he was a “stone butch” before he came out to himself as trans. After many years that he identified himself as lesbian, it was very hard, as he mentioned, to embrace his trans identity because of his own transphobia:

“Before that, I was strictly lesbian for a while, I mean woman and lesbian. To be able to accept myself, I had to deal with my transphobia first. Frankly, I faced the fact that I was transphobic, in the first place. After that, I was able to make peace with myself. “Are you sure? You were always uncomfortable with this. Plus, this concept of being a trans man does not really fit you. You accept it as a more serious thing.” My that transition process was tough.”³

Like Sarkis, Can (24) had identified himself as a lesbian and socialized with this identity in various spaces such as family, friends and partners. Even though he said that he was happy and feeling comfortable with his lesbian identity, he explained a similar anxiety with Sarkis on being trans:

“I am searching for... You know, there was only one name comes to my mind when someone said trans. And this is the only name which comes to everybody’s mind: Bülent Ersoy. You look at like ‘For God’s sake!’ and I looked aside. I looked to myself and said, ‘Don’t be ridiculous! Is it even possible?’”⁴

Can, later, narrated that he did not know his own identity until he had a conversation with a friend’s sister, who studied psychology and had trans man neighbors in Holland, told him that he is a trans man rather than a lesbian:

³ Ya ben ondan önce çok böyle bi ara bi şeydim katı lezbiyendim hani, kadın ve lezbiyen. Hmm benim kendimi kabul edebilmem için önce transfobimi yenmem gerekti. Ben ilk önce onunla yüzleştım açıkçası, ağır bi transfobikmişim. Zaten onu yendikten sonra böyle kendimle barışma sürecim... bak emin misin bak bunlardan sen hep rahatsızdın, bi yandan trans erkeklik kavramı da sana pek uygun gelmiyo felan daha ciddi bir şey kabul ediyosun yani. O benim geçiş dönemim çok sıkıntılıydı.

⁴ Ya şey arıyorum, ya trans diyince benim aklımda tek bir isim var, o da herkeste olan isim Bülent Ersoy. Ya bakıyosun... Tövbe estağfurullah diye (laughs) kafamı çevirdim. Ya hani bu ilk dedim, böyle bi kendime bakıyorum böyle ‘Saçmalama öyle bi şey mi olur?’ falan.

“She said ‘You are not a lesbian, not a butch either.’ (laughs) I was like ‘What are you saying? Are you kidding me?’ She said, ‘You are a trans man.’ I asked ‘How?’ and she said, ‘You are a trans man.’ I asked “And?” She explained that I am not a woman actually. I said, ‘For the sake of God!’ Anyway, I searched it and so on. I learned about my identity in that way.”⁵

This encounter enabled Can to start his search for information and to explore the identity in which he felt belonging to. These kinds of dialogues that help trans men “learn” their identity might vary depending on their positionality and access to relevant sources or to people who are familiar with the concepts and processes.

When Kaan (29) was four years old, he started to ask some questions to his parents like “why didn’t you give birth to me as a boy?” and then he recognized that he only likes women. Afterwards, he told me that he did not hear a word like trans man for quite a while and the only thing he was aware of was that he likes women. Since his girlfriend was studying in medical school, she heard about trans group therapies and directed Kaan to these therapies:

“I was graduated from high school and I was in college. I went to X [an hospital] and that was the time I met the concept of trans man. I had a girlfriend who is a doctor and she mentioned about this thing happening in X. I had no idea about it. I mean, I was feeling like I am a man but I did not know what it is and what kind of sanctions there is. Could I take an [blue] ID card? I had no idea. She mentioned about that thing and I went there. It was 2005. After I went there [trans group psychotherapy], I learned what it is and what it is not.”⁶

Apart from these personal dialogues, some of my interviewees encountered trans man identity as a word or embodiment on the news for the first time. Tibet (24), for instance, explained his first encounter with this identity as follows:

“I came to the college and I had a girlfriend. One day, I guess the year was 2012, I mean 2012... Which century is this? Even Mars will be colonized soon but she brought me a piece of newspaper. For God’s sake! What is

⁵ ‘Sen’ dedi hani ‘lezbiyen değilsin, baç da değilsin.’ ‘Ne diyon ya sen, nasıl yani abla’ falan oldum. ‘Sen’ dedi ‘trans erkeksin.’ ‘hını nasıl yani abla’ dedim, anlamıyorum ya cidden dediği şeyi anlamıyorum. ‘Nasıl yani abla’ dedim, ‘İşte sen’ dedi ‘trans erkeksin.’ ‘Ee abla’ dedim. ‘Ya aslında işte kadın değilsin’ falan filan böyle anlattı. ‘Allah allah ya’ falan dedim. Neyse araştırmalar şunlardır bunlardır [...] O şekilde öğrendim, kimliğimi öğrendim.

⁶ Trans erkek kavramını X’ya gittiğim zaman yani üniversitede, lise bitti liseden sonra X’ya gittiğim zaman sadece bir kız arkadaşım vardı o zaman doktordu. ‘X’da böyle böyle bi şey var gitmek ister misin?’ dedi. Onunla ilgili hiçbir şey bilmiyordum. Hani tamam ben kendimi erkek olarak hissediyorum ama bu nedir hangi yaptırımını var, kimlik mi alınıyo hiçbir fikrim yoktu. Bak böyle bi şey var dedi, gittim ve orda 2005’te ona gittikten sonra neyin ne olduğunu aslında öğrendim.

this? I mean, it was just a news about a trans man who had transition. After that, I was like, ‘There is a such thing happening huh?’⁷

On the other hand, Sefa (37) who has a generational gap with most of my other interviewees heard some news on a trans man who gave birth, and he, then, started to search on this identity:

“Do you remember the news about the first man who gave birth? I saw that. There was this trans man who got pregnant and gave birth. I read it and I asked, ‘Is it even possible?’ Because you know, there is no example like that in Turkey. Then, I started to search about it.”⁸

For the interviewees, encounters with the concept of trans men came much later, and was not regarded as being too significant. For instance, Caner (32) talked about always knowing who he was and not needing a concept for it:

“No one comes to you and says that you are transsexual. I mean, you don’t know its name. For example, you eat that hibeş [a local food in Antalya] without knowing its name and you think ‘what a sweet thing it is.’ [...] You don’t know about transsexuality but you know that: ‘I am a man. I might have this body but that is who I am.’ I mean you can’t suppress it. It is not something you can suppress, transform or change.”⁹

Yiğit (31) has a similar narrative:

“It was always like that. Everybody was always aware of it. It was like, you know... You have an identity of woman but you are something different. The way you dress, the hair cut... From their perspective, you are either marginal or a lesbian. They put you in a place anyway. But, I have known what I am, since I was a little child. I have known what I really want. So, in this respect, there is nothing changed about me.”¹⁰

During the fieldwork, I was confused when some interviewees, like Caner and Yiğit, stated that they never needed a concept to express and identify themselves as

⁷ Üniversiteye geldim, bi tane kız arkadaşım oldu. Bi gün bana ya, yıl 2012 mi ne, 2012 yani artık hani kaçınıcı yüzyıl... Millet Mars’ta koloni kuracak, bana bi gazete küpuru getirdi, ya gazete küpuru ne allah aşkına! Yani gazete kupüründe cinsiyet değiştiren bi tane trans erkek haberi aslına baktığımda. Ondan sonra ‘Aa’ dedim ‘Böyle bi şey oluyo muymuş?’ falan.

⁸ İlk doğuran erkek diye bi haber vardı hatırlıyo musun o haberi? Onu gördüm işte trans bi erkek işte hamile kalıyo falan doğum yapıyo. Ya dedim hani okudum ya dedim ‘Böyle bi şey mümkün mü?’ falan dedim çünkü hani Türkiye’de bunun bi örneği yok hani sen de biliyosun. Ondan sonra ben bunu araştırmaya başladım.

⁹ Kimse gelip sana ‘Sen transseksüelsin’ demiyo tamam mı? Bunun adını bilmiyosun yani şu hibeşin adını bilmeden de yiyebiliyosun hani aa ne tatlı şeymiş vesaire [...] Transseksüeliteyi bilmiyosun ama şunu biliyosun, ‘aa ben erkeğim.’ Yani evet bu bedene sahip olabilirim ama ben böyleyim yani onu bastıramazsın yani o bastırılabilircek dönüştürülebilircek değiştirilebilircek bir şey değil.

¹⁰ Hep böyleydi ya ben evet bir şekilde farkındaydı [herkes]. Şey gibiydi aslında... şimdi kadın kimliğinde olup farklı bi şey olduğu için... Giyim tarzı saç kesimi vesaire, genelde ya marjinal oluyosun ya lezbiyen oluyosun onların gözünde. Bi yere koyuyorlar illa ki. Ama yani ben küçüklüğümden beri ne olduğumu çok iyi biliyodum. Ne istediğimi çok iyi biliyodum. Yani o açıdan bende hiçbi şey değişmedi.

man. However, I realized that most of my interviewees' narratives were revolved around the dilemma that Ali brought into question which emphasizes the difficulty of both embracing and rejecting "the concept." It seems to me that this is not only because of their trans being, but also by the reason of the diversity of trans men that I interviewed in terms of age, living environment, cultural background and education. However, all of the narratives above show that invisibility of trans men in Turkey creates an essential challenge for self-identification and coming out.

It is also crucial to mention that since trans men need to take testosterone therapy throughout their life in order to keep their hormone balance and physical embodiment, my interviewees mentioned that they have to come out to new people that they possibly will encounter. Even though my interviewees do not feel compelled to be out to everyone in their daily life, they considered being out as part of their socialization. In our interview with Sefa and Ümit, the issue of coming out was discussed as a permanent process:

Sefa: "I think, it doesn't come to an end. The process continues until the end of your life. It is not a thing that ends.

Ümit: I think, the process is made up of two parts. One is the medical part which continues until you take your id card. The other part continues throughout your life. With every person you met, you go through it all over again. I mean, until you die, you will be coming out to everybody who doesn't know. Besides, of course you can't have children. I will have to come out to my child. Maybe my child's friends will learn about it and I will have to come out to them, too. It will always start all over again. I guess, it never ends.

Sefa: At the begining, everybody thinks "I will take my ID card and so it will end." But it continues after you take your ID card. Nothing changes. For example, everytime you go to a hospital, you have to tell about it.

Ümit: Apart from anything else, you need to use that hormone until you die. You need to see an endocrinologist very often. You explain to the doctor the reason why you use it and you need a prescription to be written again and again. It always turns back to the start. But maybe, medicine will improve (laughs) and then we can find a solution."¹¹

¹¹ **Sefa:** Yok yani bence bitmeyen bi şey ömrünün sonuna kadar o süreç devam ediyö yani bence. Hani biten bi şey değil.

Ümit: Bence de süreç aslında iki bölüm, biri o tıp yani kimliğini alana kadar devam ediyö diğeri bütün hayatın boyunca, her yeni tanıştığın insanla tekrar yaşıyosun onu. yani ölene kadar bunu bilmeyen her insana açılcaksın. Mesela hepsini geçtim çocuğum olmuyo tabii ki. Çocuğuma açılmam gerekicek ını çocuğumun arkadaşı belki öğrenecek ona açılmamam gerekicek. Bu hani sürekli başa dönücek. Bitmez yani herhalde.

Sefa: Herkes şey diye başlıyo kimliğimi alınca biticek falan diye düşünüyö ama kimliği aldıktan sonra da devam ediyö değışen bi şey olmuyo. Yani her hastaneye gittiğinde mesela onu söylemek zorunda kalıyosun.

At this point, it is also significant to mention that most of my research participants consider the whole “path of being a trans man” as an endless process from the first moment of coming out to oneself to transition processes (see also Chapter 3).

In the following section, I will discuss the relationality between and the interactions of the coming out process, the visibility of the identity, and the accessible information on trans masculinities.

2.2. (In)visibility and Reaching the Information

Trans women’s visibility increased in the 1990s, especially after Bülent Ersoy was legally recognized, enabling both trans women and trans men to get gender reassignment surgeries and to be recognized legally. The public visibility of trans men came later, mainly through a nascent activist group, Voltrans. This platform opened up a ground-breaking discussion on transgenderism in Turkey among feminist and LGBTI+ organizations.

While talking about his high school years in the early 2000s, Caner (32) highlighted that it was unthinkable to “be a trans man” in those times since there were only trans women as visible. Then, he narrated his experience in a girls’ dormitory by ambiguating the differentiation between gender identity and sexual orientation:

“The year was 1998 or 1999. There was only Bülent Ersoy but nobody knew her identity, nobody defined her as transsexual. Maybe, people didn’t think there can be woman-to-man transsexuals either. But, I didn’t put a sexual identity, that I can’t live, in the center of my life. I was living it anyway. My lover was sleeping on the top of my bunk bed.”¹²

Accordingly, I suggest paying sufficient attention to the historical consolidation of trans men identity in the context of Turkey since this identity has quite a new history in Turkey. Given that Caner also narrated that he never self-identified as woman or lesbian, it seems that lack of information on and invisibility of trans men might blur the borders of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Ümit: Zaten hiçbir şey olmasa ölene kadar o hormonu kullanmak zorundasın, sürekli endokrine gidiyorsun. Neden bunu kullandığını açıklıyorsun, tekrar yazdırıyorsun falan dönüyo yani başa. Ama belki tıp gelişir, çözüm bulabiliriz.

¹² Yıl 1998 99, bir Bülent Ersoy da onun da nolduğunu kimse bilmiyordu hani onu da transseksüel olarak tanımlamıyolardı. Kadından erkeğe bi transseksüel olabileceğini düşünmüyolardı belki de, ben de bilmiyodum yani. Ama benim hayatımın merkezinde yaşayamadığım cinsiyet kimliğim yoktu. Çünkü ben onu bi şekilde yaşıyodum zaten, sevgilim üst ranzamda yatıyordu.

In 2014, Voltrans directed a documentary film that treats the history of this platform based on oral history interviews. Even though they had strongly made an effort to screen it in film festivals, its visibility remained relatively limited and could not reach people out of the activist milieu. Most of my interviewees told me that they did not watch this documentary. Given that most of trans men that I interviewed do not see themselves activist in a broad sense, it seems that Voltrans' existence and visibility could not have a direct effect on their self-identification and coming out processes.

In terms of the visibility of trans men, the public transition process of Rüzgar Erkoçlar¹³ played a key role. For Rüzgar, being exposed by mainstream media may have been traumatic, but his visibility enabled trans men in Turkey to identify with someone "like them." Ümit (21), for instance, was in high school when his gender anxiety came into focus and Rüzgar's visibility was helpful for him to question his way of self-expression:

"I remember the interview Rüzgar Erkoçlar gave to Ayşe Arman, from the newspaper Hürriyet. There was this sentence, even though I cannot remember the exact words: 'I like women not as a woman but I like them as a man.' Then I wondered if I was the same. I thought, 'Is there a such thing? Is there a difference between the two?'" Later, I found myself while searching what transsexuality is."¹⁴

As Ümit pointed out, the visibility of trans men facilitates self-identification, enabling a smoother coming out process both to themselves and to others such as family, friends, partners and psychiatrists. Like Ümit, Tibet (24) who told me that he did not "know" that he was a trans even though he was aware of his sexual orientation, speaks of the distress caused by having no information on his way of self-expression:

"I searched as 'woman who likes woman' [on Google]. And there was this definition on Wikipedia, which, later I found out, was not exactly true. I thought this is not exactly what it is. Then, I kind of wrote a paragraph on Google and searched by using the words 'who feels like a man'. It brought me to Wikipedia's page with the title of 'transsexuality'. I was like 'Oh, I think I found it!' It made me feel so relaxed, at that moment. Because when there is something new and you don't know exactly what it is, you feel

¹³ Rüzgar Erkoçlar is an actor who is the first publically visible trans man in the Turkish media.

¹⁴ Hürriyet'e röportaj vermişti [Rüzgar Erkoçlar] işte Ayşe Arman'a, o zaman okudum, tam şey demişti tam cümleyi hatırlamıyorum da annesine açıklarken 'ben kadınlardan kadın gibi değil, erkek gibi hoşlanıyorum' demişti. 'Aa' dedim 'ben de mi öyleyim, öyle bi şey mi varmış o ayırım' diye. Ondan sonra ordan işte transseksüelizm nedir diye falan araştırırken buldum.

worried. You think like there is a problem. After I learned that, there was something, okay, but I had never seen, heard or known like that.”¹⁵

As another example, during a course on media that Ali was taking at the university, one student made a presentation on the struggles of gay and lesbians in Turkey, and it triggered Ali’s curiosity on LGBTI+ issues:

“I said to myself then, ‘Yes, I am something. But what am I?’ After that, I searched on internet, which I broke one of my taboos by doing that, ‘What is lesbian?’ or ‘What is gay?’ and so on. Till then, I just had knowledge by hearsay. I had been closeted till then, I mean there was something on me but what was that? You just afraid to go forward. Later, I met somebody on internet [Lezce: lesbian dating and socialization application]. I wrote to that guy, thinking ‘Yeah buddy, he is a man.’ He was huge and he had a beard etc. Then I talked to him about ‘what is it and what it is not’. We talked throughout the nights.”¹⁶

In Ali’s example, the first encounter in the class was followed by an online search. Then, he found some other online platforms with his new friend’s suggestions, and encountered trans man identity through a complex path by reaching the information on it step by step, including a lesbian dating application before any source on trans men. This example reveals the limitations of the sources on trans men and the difficulties of accessing them.

In his groundbreaking book *FTM: Female-to-Male Transsexuals in the Society*, Devor (2016) analyzes trans masculine individuals’ coming out processes, exploration of the identity and bodily experiences by associating them with their social statuses within the society. About twenty years, its first publication in 1997, Devor published a new edition of this book in 2016 with a new introduction. In his “New Introduction,” Devor dwells on the blossoming of self-identifications in the last twenty years. According to Devor, internet usage has played a significant role in the increasing diversity of individuals’ and groups’ self-identifications:

¹⁵ Şey diye aratmıştım yani ‘kadından hoşlanan kadın’ diye aratmıştım. Vikipedi’de bi tanım çıktı şimdi okuyorum ya tamam bi kısmı doğru da bi kısmı değil. Yani ‘bu tam olarak bu değil’ falan oldum. Sonra baya böyle alenen yazdım, ‘kendini erkek gibi hissedem...’ hani paragraf kurdum yani Google’a. Sonra Vikipedi’nin transseksüellik sayfasına yönlendirdi. ‘Aa’ dedim ‘vallahı bu, buldum.’ O an çok rahatlamıştım çünkü yani bi şey var ama ne olduğunu bilmeyince insan daha bi tedirgin oluyo yani bir sıkıntı var gibi geliyo. Benim onu öğrendikten sonra hani böyle bi şey var ama böyle kimseyi görmedim duymadım bilmiyorum.

¹⁶ O gün dedim kendi kendime, dedim ‘ben de bişeyim ama neyim?’. Sonra internete girdim tamam mı bi tabumu yıkiyorum internete bişeyler yazıyorum araştırmak için işte bu nedir lezbiyen nedir gey nedir falan. E kulaktan dolma bilgilerle biliyosun şey değil. O zamana kadar kapalıydım hani bişey var ama ne? Korkuyosun üstüne gitmeye. Sonra işte bi arkadaşla tanıştım bu işte internet vasıtasıyla [Lezce: lesbian dating and socialization application], bu işte çocuğa yazdım bakıyorum işte ulan diyom hani erkek yani. İşte iri miri falan sakalı falan var işte sordum bu nedir ne değil, baya çocukla konuştuk bak gecelere kadar konuştuk.

“Around the time that the first edition of this book was published, public use of the internet began to burgeon and trans people were eager early adopters. They were hungry for connection and communication with others like themselves. [...] They told their stories, and learned those of other people. They gathered and disseminated life-saving information in text, sound, and video exchanges. They built web pages, wrote blogs, published online newsletters, posted videos, and were active in social media. Research began to be conducted and published online. Service providers realized that their market was increasingly online and they, too, became part of the trans internet world” (Devor 2016, xxiv).

As my research has uncovered, online platforms and publications have played a supportive role for trans men’s self-identification and transition processes in Turkey as well. Including personal, collective and/or interactive blogs and Facebook groups, internet usage has been an integral part of trans men’s experiences. In my interviews with psychiatrists, they said that they refer trans men who consult with them to “Transmasculine Data Bank” (*Trans Maskülen Bilgi Bankası*) and “T-KULÜP”¹⁷ (*Transerkek Kültür Üretim Platformu*) Furthermore, some trans men might also get suggestions from T-KULÜP members to meet the psychiatrists that I have interviewed (see Chapter 4).

At this point, I would like to give a brief account of the Transmasculine Data Bank which was frequently mentioned throughout my fieldwork. This blog substantially aims to give information in regard to trans men and transmasculine identity such as hormone usage, surgeries, juridical procedures and current news from Turkey and abroad. At the same time, the blog enables its followers to ask specific questions and to comment on the posts, and also provides a platform for discussions. In general, the posts are geared towards providing information for anyone who is curious about or experiencing the transition process, as well as those who are questioning their gender identity. The blogger, who writes mostly on behalf of T-KULÜP, assumes an audience that is completely lacking in any knowledge of trans men and LGBTI+ issues.

This data bank and others aim at becoming useful sources of information while encouraging and empowering trans men with regard to coming out as well as negotiations with family and state institutions. Tibet (24) told me that some young trans

¹⁷ T-KULÜP (Transmasculine Culture Production Platform) is a Facebook-based platform in which only trans men have an access. It was founded in 2013 (as “transmen” (*transerkekler*) and took its current name in 2014) with an aim of trans men’s cultural production in terms of acting as a network in which trans men can support, and help each other about the transition processes and any other issue on trans masculinities as well as text publications, shooting movies and so on.

men came to him asking some questions on the identity and transition, and he, then, explained his feelings on the potentiality of experience sharing among trans men:

“I wish I had people who I could take advice from. I mean, I would like to touch somebody’s life. Because we are all organic creatures. No one is made up of carbon fiber. We are all going to die. Anyone who we can do good to, should be able to take benefit. I even share my [blood] test results or what the doctor said, on the blog. Why? Because I stil remember how great I felt, when I was reading Akay’s blog. [Transmasculine Data Bank] I remember that idea of freedom, that hope... I mean, hope is the only emotion which is stronger than fear, and it has always been like that.”¹⁸

Besides the data bank, there have been some other personal blogs which were created with its inspiration and Tibet conducts one of them:

“We are living in the age of information but there was not much information about trans men. I would give Akay’s due on this matter. Later, I also decided to start a blog, his blog was Blogspot anyway. I thought, since there is one information source in Blogspot, I could use Tumblr. My aim was to tell about the process, create a source in Turkish and so on.”¹⁹

Bariş, as a psychiatrist who works with trans groups, told me that he suggests his clients to check these online platforms since he believes that experience sharing among trans men might be more helpful than his suggestions:

“Even if someone had not come out to his family yet, I try to provide him not to limit himself with the information that I could give him since our first encounter. There are things I reccomend for that. I mean, I suggest books, websites, etc. There are two basic things I suggest: One is transsicko [Transmasculine Data Bank] that is Akay’s blog and I usually recommend it. Other one is a book called “Öteki Erkekler” (Other Men) that I definitely suggest.”²⁰

Another psychiatrist Zeynep considers the same blog as a significant source of knowledge:

¹⁸ Keşke zamanında benim de böyle danışabileceğim birileri olsaydı yani ben birilerinin hayatına dokunabiliyo olsaydım yani çünkü hepimiz organik varlıklarız, kimse karbonfiber değil ölücez gidicez. Kime yararımız varsa o yararını görsün yani. Ben blogda test sonuçlarımı bile paylaşıyorum yani doktorun ne dediğine kadar paylaşıyorum yani. Niye? Çünkü zamanında akay’ın blogunu [Transmasculine Data Bank] okurken gözümde olan o parıltıyı hala hatırlıyorum. O özgürlük fikrini o umudu... Hani çünkü her zaman öyledir yani umut korkudan güçlü tek duygudur.

¹⁹ Bilgi çağındaydık ama trans erkeklik üzerine çok fazla şey yoktu. O konuda akay’ın hakkını yiyemem yani hakaten. Sonra bu süreçten sonra dedim ki ben de bi blog açayım zaten onunki Blogspot’tu, ben de dedim ki hani Blogspot’ta bi tane var zaten bunun hakkında bilgi veren, ben de dedim Tumblr’da açayım. Yani süreci anlatayım falan filan Türkçe olsun, kaynak olsun bilmem ne.

²⁰ Bir kişi daha ailesine açılmadıysa dahi ilk görüşmeden itibaren ben, benim verdiğim bilgiyle sınırlı kalmamasını sağlamaya çalışıyorum. Bunun için önerdiğim şeyler var. yani kitap önerdiğim, internet sitesi önerdiğim oluyo, iki temel şey bir tanesi transsicko [Transmasculine Data Bank] işte akay’ın blogu o çok önerdiğim bi şey oluyo; ikincisi kitap öteki erkekler kitabı mutlaka öneriyorum.

“There is need for those kinds of things. For example, Akay’s website has been a life-saver for trans men. I was suggesting, to people who came to me without any knowledge, to read and to work on that website. Because, if somebody does not know much about it, they can check it out and had an opinion in mind. If they would have questions at the end and bring them to me, we could save some time. That was such a good source of information because it contained true information. I guess, we need to focus on increasing the number of this kind of sources.”²¹

As these narratives suggest, there is an effort to increase the number of online source on trans man identity. Moreover, all psychiatrists and lawyers that I interviewed mentioned that they had difficulty reaching the relevant sources which would benefit their own research and consulting. They, therefore, emphasized the importance of experience sharing also within their own workplaces where they were marginalized by their colleagues, and I will lay emphasis on these dynamics of institutional spaces in Chapter 3.

2.3. Negotiations on Trans Masculinities with the Family

As a crucial part of socialization, trans men feel compelled to negotiate their masculinities with their families, friends, teachers and partners. All my interviewees, including professionals as well, urged upon especially the importance of family support, and considered it as a significant part of trans men’s resistance against institutions such as school, court, hospital, and social environment. Even before I asked my interviewees about their families’ reactions to their coming out, they all constituted a narrative by associating each issue to their families. Besides trans men themselves, all the psychiatrists and lawyers that I interviewed overemphasized the significance of family support for trans men’s life individually and socially.

Caner (32) told me about living a life that they always have to take up all the challenges [dügüm çözmek] by challenging norms, relations and institutions. Moreover, he takes this challenge as his own responsibility:

“We have no such a luxury; we have to understand everybody and untie every knot. I was so little, when I noticed that. I mean, I was going to college and did the biggest mistake of my life. After that, I decided not to

²¹ Bu tür şeylere çok ihtiyaç var. Misal şey çok Akay’ın sitesi o baya hayat kurtardı yani trans erkekler için. Ben de bana gelenlere hiçbir şey bilmiyorsa yazıyodum ‘Bunu çalış gel’ diyodum. Çünkü hani bi hakkaten farkında değil bilmiyo bir sürü şeyi ve ordan bakıp kafasında bi fikir oluşabilir ve onun üzerinden sorularını da getirsen daha çok zaman kazanırız diye... O muazzam bi bilgi kaynağıydı yani bir de doğru bilgi içerdği için. Gibi hani bunları biraz arttırmaya yoğunlaşmamız lazım galiba.

tell anyone something which is not true as if it is. I knew this would not always go like this and it would change some day. And, I prepared myself for that.”²²

To receive these people’s support might have a positive influence on trans men’s self-confidence for self-expression and encourage them to begin following the transitional process as a legal and medical path. As my fieldwork recovered, family issue matters for trans men in Turkey as a space of resistance in terms of social acceptance, embracement of identity, visibility and financial burden.

Besides all my interviewees identify themselves as “trans man” and/or “man,” only one interviewee, Sarkis told me that he generally prefers to identify “trans” and said: “trans masculinity is something like a defense mechanism against my family. It is also a step of my transition process that I have been passing through. I would prefer to be called trans.”²³ This explanation of Sarkis can make us reconsider the possible meanings of family for trans men.

Most of my interviewees, especially Sarkis, Kaan, Tibet and Caner, mention that their need to be recognized and accepted in the society could not be provided without their family support. Moreover, trans men might develop various strategies to get family support such as taking family members to their psychiatrists, suggesting them to attend to family groups like LİSTAG²⁴ or psychiatric group therapies and introducing them to other trans men’s families.

On the other hand, psychiatrists that I interviewed try to be in alliance with trans men’s family throughout their transition process. Accordingly, they make an effort to pursue follow-ups not only with trans men but also with their families within client-centered therapy and group therapy. As the psychiatrists that I interviewed mentioned, if a person says that he is ready to face with the risk of losing everything by referring to family, it seems that family matters for him rather than something he does not care about.

²² Bizim öyle bi lüksümüz yok, biz herkesi anlamak ve her düğümü çözmek zorundayız. Ben bunun farkına vardığımda el kadar bebektim işte. Üniversiteye gidiyodum yani hayatımın en büyük hatasını yaptım. Ondan sonra kimseye olmamış bi şeyi varmış gibi anlatmamaya karar verdim. Bu sürecin böyle gitmeyeceğini ve bi gün değişeceğini bilerek yaşadım ve bunun için hazırlık yaptım.

²³ Trans erkeklik benim aileme karşı aldığım bi savunma mekanizması gibi bi şey. Bi de geçirdiğim sürecin parçası. Transı tercih ederim

²⁴ LİSTAG (Families of LGBTs in İstanbul) is a solidarity and support group for families and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans individuals in İstanbul. For the further information here is their website: <https://listag.org/english/> and their documentary movie: <https://vimeo.com/203084859>

In this context, it seems that trans men desire not only to be accepted as man and/or trans man but also to be socially supported and encouraged by their families. When I asked Barış about family issues to get an information on general psychiatric approach in Turkey, he replied me:

“This is not my personal and political view about the society and family but it becomes something important if family is an important institution for my interlocutor, or if he includes family by saying ‘I run the risk of everything.’ If he includes family in each matter, it means that it is very important anyway since he doesn’t say ‘I don’t care about the family.’ If family is considered as one of the things that he runs the risk of, it is meaningful for me to provide him to stand with his family. Thereby, I personally make an effort to meet families here. I support them to be able to be with their children throughout the transitional process. Also, we hold the sessions for family groups [bringing different families together] besides the one-to-one meetings with each family.”²⁵

In this vein, it seems that families, especially parents, also might need a support to deal with the process of their trans children. Ümit, for example, took his mother to his psychiatrist since he could not “convince” her about his identity:

“My mom is affected by her environment in this matter. In the beginning, I took her to that psychologist to talk with and that woman [psychologist] said her, “Your child is not a thief or a murderer, I mean you must stand with him because this is not his choice.’ Also, when my aunt didn’t accept me, my mother defended me, using the psychologist’s words. I was shocked, like ‘What?’. I mean, it had minor effects and she even came out to all of our relatives on my behalf. I haven’t spoken to them about this at all but my mother called everyone that I didn’t meet and told them ‘Such and such happened.’ It is very surprising that some relatives, that I have never known, know about me now. Well, the processes of coming out first to oneself and then to others around you worked out the same for my mother as it does for us.”²⁶

In her unpublished medical speciality thesis, Seven Kaptan (2010) underlines the significance and influences of familial and social support on trans individuals to

²⁵ Benim politik görüşüm benim toplumla, aileyle ilgili görüşüm değil bu ama karşımdaki insan için aile önemli bir kurumsa herşeyi göze aldım diyecek kadar önemliyse çünkü bu da bir şey. Her şeyin içerisinde aile giriyorsa zaten demek ki önemli, ‘Bana ne aileden?’ demiyo. Göze alınacak bir şey aileyi kaybetmek gibi görünüyorsa ailenin desteğini yanında tutmasını sağlamak benim için anlamlı. Dolayısıyla burada hem bireysel olarak aileyle görüşmeye çaba sarf ediyorum. Onların tepkilerine onların müttefik olarak kişiyle geçiş sürecinde yer alabilmesi için destekliyorum. İşte bu aile grupları vesaireler de yapıyoruz bireysel olanın dışında onlar da yapıyo.

²⁶ Annem çevresinden çok etkilenir bu konuda. İlk başta ben onu o psikoloğa götürdüm konuşmaya, kadın şey demişti hani ‘Senin çocuğun hırsız değil, katil değil hani senin yanında olman gerekiyo çünkü bu onun elinde değil’ diye. Sonra teyzem falan da kabul etmediği zaman beni annem psikoloğun sözlerini kullanarak beni savunuyodu. Baya şaşırımtım noluyo dedim. Yani ufak ufak etkileri oldu, şimdi zaten akrabalarımın hepsine annem açıldı. Ben hiçbir şey söylemedim ama hani benim görüşmediğim herkesi bir de aramış hani herkesi arayıp tek tek telefonda bakın şöyle oldu falan diye söylemiş. Şu an hiç bilmediğim akrabalarım beni biliyo, çok şaşırıyo. Zaten yani bizdeki gibi kendine açılma süreci sonra çevreye açılma süreci annemde de aynı şekilde görüldü.

overcome discrimination and other stressors. Based on the follow-ups with her clients, Kaptan analyses the impacts of family support on obtaining self-regard and mental health of trans individuals. According to her analysis, even though there was no significant differentiation on family support between trans women and trans men, she mentions that this situation might change from a set of social norms to another.

On the other hand, if we pay regard to the years Kaptan did her research, it seems that the results could become different in a certain extent. In this manner, one psychiatrist that I interviewed, Barış, considers a commonly-held comprehension that it is easier to get family support for trans men as a misinterpretation, and suggests laying emphasis on the authenticity of individual experiences:

“I sometimes hear from some trans women, families or doctors something like ‘It is easier to be a trans man.’ However, you can understand that it is not like that if you listen to people a bit. As a person who has worked on this issues and discrimination since really long time ago, it is quite easy to say that there is no hierarchy of pains. I mean, I clearly see that the challenges and the problems people face with couldn’t be classified as bigger or smaller. Well, there is a considerable gap also between trans men who came here.”²⁷

In the light of these expressions and experiences, it seems that there is need for alliance between trans men, psychiatrists and families to enable trans men to get their transition as required by themselves.

In our interview with Tibet, he mentioned that his mother was not convinced that he is a trans man, and he, thus, took her to his psychiatrist, as in Ümit’s experience:

“We went to the doctor [with my mother], and there was actually no difference between the things which were told by the doctor and what I told her, but he just has a diploma. I said, ‘Doctor, I tell her but she doesn’t believe in me. If you answer her questions’ I said, ‘it would be better.’ He said, ‘Sure, what are your questions?’. She said, ‘I think that this is because she is fat.’ I guess, the doctor had never heard of such a question before because he gave an error for a while and then said, ‘If it is so, then all the fat people in the world would like to change their gender.’ Well, my mother waited for a second and said, ‘You are right.’ I mean, it is impossible that

²⁷ Bazen trans kadınlardan da duyuyorum bazen ailelerden de bazen doktorlardan da hani trans erkek olmak daha kolay gibi bi şey söyleniyo. Onun da öyle olmadığını biraz insan dinlerseniz anlayabiliyorsunuz yani. Bi kere çok taa eski zamanlardan beri ya da ayrımcılıkla ilgili çalışan birisi olunca şeyi söylemek çok kolay böyle acıların hiyerarşisi diye bi şey yok. Yani insanların yaşadığı sıkıntıların, zorlukların büyüktür küçüktür şeklinde birbirinden ayrılmayacaklarını net bi şekilde görüyorum. Yani buraya gelen trans erkekler arasında da ciddi bi uçurum var.

she couldn't find the same answer by herself but she needed only to be told that by an expert. Well, this was what she needed, I mean support.²⁸”

In Tibet's case, he supported his mother by taking her to his psychiatrist in order to relieve her about his gender identity and transition that he desired. Unlike most of my interviewees, Sarkis emphasized the importance of family support in his life from a political consideration:

“You need to remind them occasionally and they need to go beyond it because parents reset their mind. I sometimes open that topic and say ‘Mom, look! I do such and such things at school. If I were doing these for another thing like Kurdish Movement or animal rights, you would be proud of me because I would follow the route that you expect from me. However, I am proud of myself and would like you to know about it’.”²⁹

At this point, Sarkis explained the personal reasons of his efforts to be with family during his transition process as: “It [family] is another space of struggle of yours. To make family be organized or your efforts to change some things within family, being able to transform yourself with family etc. are ultimately another space of struggle. It is not independent from this resistance.”³⁰

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced how and in what ways the processes of coming out are narrated, how visibility works during these processes, and how they are associated with the family members through negotiating their identity by trans men. My interviewees consider coming out as a process rather than as a moment and “coming out to oneself” constitutes the major part of this process as they narrated. During this process, the contradiction between gender identity and sexual orientation consistently

²⁸ Doktora gittik işte yani aslına bakarsan hani doktorun söyledikleriyle benim söylediklerim arasında hiçbir fark yok sadece onun diploması var yani. Dedim ki hani ‘X bey ben anlatıyorum, annem inanmıyo.’ Dedim ‘Siz’ dedim ‘sorularını cevaplıyorsanız daha iyi olur.’ ‘Tabii’ dedi ‘nedir sorularınız?’. Dedi ki ‘Bence’ dedi ‘şişman olduğu için böyle oluyo’ dedi. Ya X bey de hiç demek ki böyle bi soru duymamış ki adam mavi ekran verdi bi an ve sonra dedi ki ‘Ya o zaman dünyadaki bütün şişmanlar cinsiyet değiştirmek ister’ dedi. Yani annem böyle bi durdu, ‘Doğru söylüyorsunuz’ dedi. Yani bu cevabı kendi kendine bulamamış olması mümkün değil yani sadece hani bilen birinin ona destek olması gerekiyordu. Aslında annemin tek ihtiyacı buydu yani destek.

²⁹ Arada hatırlatmak gerekiyo, aşmak gerekiyo çünkü sıfırlıyo ebeveyn kafasında. Şey diyorum hani arada ‘Anne bak ben böyle böyle şeyler yapıyorum okulda. Eğer onu başka bi şey yapmak için yapsaydım, Kürt özgürlük hareketi için yapıyo olsaydım ya da hayvan hakları için yapıyo olsaydım benimle şu an gurur duyuyo olurdu, senin istediğin yoldan gittiğim için. Ama ben şu an kendimle gurur duyuyorum bunu bilmeni istiyorum’ falan diye sürekli böyle konusunu açıyorum.

³⁰ O [aile] da senin başka bi mücadele alanın. Aileyi örgütlemek ya da aile içinde işte bi şeyleri değiştirme çaban, aileyle beraber dönüşebilmek falan... Yani başka bi mücadele alanı sonuçta. Bu mücadeleden bağımsız değil.

becomes blurred, and trans men find a variety of ways to self-identify through this “blurriness” and rising visibility of transmasculine identities.

In the course of the process of reaching information, rising the numbers of the sources on the internet play a significant role. Including blogs, Facebook groups and other informative sources such as guidelines and handbooks, internet usage has been one of the fundamental parts of trans men’s experiences. It is also crucial to situate that my interviewees’ narratives on the processes of coming out, the embracement of the identity and the negotiations with family might change depending on how much time has passed after they came out to themselves first. During my fieldwork, some narratives were conducted through coming out stories that they have actually been experiencing while some of my interviewees gave weight to legal and medical transition processes since they got their blue ID card several years ago in their own explanation. However, all of my interviewees agreed with the idea of coming out as an “endless process.”

In the following chapter, I will discuss the legal and medical regulations on trans men by associating them with the transitional processes of trans men and medico-legal spaces.

CHAPTER 3

THE MEDICO-LEGAL REGULATIONS: “COMPULSORY” STATE INTERVENTIONS ON TRANS MEN’S SUBJECTIVITIES

The existing literature on trans masculinities focuses predominantly on the physical transitions of trans men (Bender 2012, Boylan 2003, Califia 1997, Cromwell 1999, Dozier 2005, Edelman and Zimman 2014, Green 2004, Hines 2006, Kondelin 2014) and technologized body narratives (Prosser 1998, Sullivan and Murray 2009). Some other scholars have paid attention to the legitimization and disciplining of trans bodies’ public representations (Bornstein and Bergman 2010, Irving 2008, Nestle et al. 2002, Sloop 2000, Sycamore 2006). Based on my interviews with trans men, as well as, their lawyers and psychiatrists, I too find the focus on physical, legal and social transitions to be crucial.

3.1 Medico-Legal Regulations on Trans Subjectivities/Subjects

Article 40 of the Turkish Civil Code which is related to “sex change” was reformulated in 2001 foreseeing “new conditions for transgender people desiring to ‘change their sex’” (Hun 2013). In Article 40, it is stated that:

“Any person who wants to alter his or her sex, he or she may request to be given permission for alteration of gender by applying to court in person. But the applicant must have completed the age of eighteen years, be unmarried, besides being transsexual nature and must document indispensability of gender alteration in respect to his or her mental health and his or her permanently infertility through a report of a board of health provided from a medical education and research hospital. In case of confirmation through an official board of health report that a gender alteration surgery has been materialized conveniently to the medical purpose and procedure in parallel with given permission, it may be decided to be done as a required correction in civil status registers by the court.”³¹

³¹ Article 40 of 4721 numbered Turkish Civil Code reads in Turkish:

“Cinsiyetini değiştirmek isteyen kimse, şahsen başvuruda bulunarak mahkemece cinsiyet değişikliğine izin verilmesini isteyebilir. Ancak, iznin verilebilmesi için, istem sahibinin onsekiz yaşını doldurmuş bulunması ve evli olmaması; ayrıca transseksüel yapıda olup, cinsiyet değişikliğinin ruh sağlığı açısından zorunluluğunu ve üreme yeteneğinden sürekli biçimde yoksun bulunduğunu bir eğitim ve araştırma hastanesinden alınacak resmi sağlık kurulu raporuyla belgelemesi şarttır. Verilen izne bağlı olarak amaç ve tıbbi yöntemlere uygun bir cinsiyet değiştirme ameliyatı gerçekleştirildiğinin resmi sağlık kurulu raporuyla doğrulanması halinde, mahkemece nüfus sicilinde gerekli düzeltmenin yapılmasına karar verilir.” (<http://www.turkhukuksitesi.com/mevzuat.php?mid=1073>)

Given that the title of Article 40 is chosen as “changing sex,” I argue that first there is a need for problematization of the discursive aspects of the law.

The term “changing sex” reveals the logic under the law-making policies of the state as referring to “free will” and “liberal choice” of trans applicants (Hun 2013) since the text subjects trans individuals who “wants to alter” their gender with the validation of the judiciary. In her unpublished thesis on the architecture of Turkish judicial system’s symbolic violence against transgender people, Sinem Hun (2013), who is a trans rights activist and lawyer, mentions that this discourse which disambiguates the distinction between obligation and choice is fundamental for the vocabulary of the LGBTI+ political discourse.

As my fieldwork and encounters with LGBTI+ activists also revealed, trans individuals who are involved in activism prefer to use “transition process(es)” rather than “sex-change” or “SRS” (Sex Reassignment Surgery) in order to account for the variety of processes that are involved. However, the text of Article 40 reduces transition processes to only one operation, solely emphasizing “a gender alteration surgery” and not mentioning the expected “procedural” steps up to this specific operation. Moreover, the surgery being talked about in the law is not specified in a way that is can be clearly understood by the individual judges. In other words, transitional process does not seem to be explicitly articulated in the text of Article 40.

In his *Female Masculinity* (1998), Halberstam investigates how masculinity is constructed as masculinity while discussing masculinities among ciswomen, dykes and transsexual men. His discussion on “FTMs” and “masculinities without men” is reminiscent of determined bodies and performances within gender binaries: “medical descriptions of transsexuality throughout the last forty years have been preoccupied with a discourse of ‘the wrong body’ that describes transsexual embodiment in terms of an error of nature whereby gender identity and biological sex are not only discontinuous but catastrophically at odds” (Halberstam 1998, 143).

These kind of “wrong body” narratives include some clues for the existing binary and normative approaches on transgenderism, and they are reproduced not only by medical and judicial authorities but, at times, by trans men themselves. In a similar vein, there is an effort to provide the consistence and harmony of body and the sense of self on an individual and institutional level by considering a trans body as material which needs and requires “modification.”

According to Article 40, individuals who desire gender reassignment are required to “be over 18 years of age and unmarried; also, he or she is required have a transsexual disposition, and has to document, with a formal health form the health board of an education and research hospital, that sex reassignment is essential for his or her mental wellbeing.” In comparison with the former article, it seems that the Turkish State consider that the implementation of new additional conditions as necessary for the “identification” and “recognition” of trans subjects (Hun 2013).

In her dissertation, Sinem Hun (2013, 15) states that the state obstructed “the legal process to ‘change sex’ by implementing new additional conditions” and “by prioritizing the role of the court as the primary decision-making organ.” She also mentions that sterilization of trans bodies became “compulsory” as a new concept in the eyes of the state (Hun 2013). Agreeing with Hun, I argue that all of these requirements and procedures must be considered as a product of the logic that trans persons should be devoid of reproductive faculties. It seems to me crucial to include Ümit’s comment on these “compulsory” regulations including sterilization:

“Its [sterilization’s] compulsion... I feel like, if you don’t want the reproduction of all the street dogs, you sterilize them not to take care of them. It makes me feel like that. Its goal probably is same anyway, I mean that they would be worried about the transmitting of our genes to the future generation and the increasing number of people like us in that way. That is why they don’t want it. It is like fascism, I mean body fascism. I would remove my ovaries in any case but it is probably a human rights violation if someone says, ‘you have to remove them, otherwise I wouldn’t accept you’.”³²

3.2 “Certification” of Masculinity: Having a Blue ID Card

Throughout my fieldwork and engagement in LBGTI+ activism, I encountered many trans men who politically reject to apply for a blue ID card by getting top surgery and taking hormones (which are legal in Turkey). However, most of my interviewees already had their blue ID and the rest of them had entered the transitional processes including surgeries as hormone therapy. As my fieldwork revealed, many trans men would like to have blue ID due to the bureaucratic difficulties of “discrepancy” between their desired body and the color of their ID card in daily life.

³² [Kısırlaştırmanın] zorunlu oluyo oluşu... Şey gibi hissediyorum hani bütün bu sokak köpeklerinin fazla üremesini istemezsin fazla uğraşmamak için ya, kısırlaştırırız onun gibi hissettiriyor. Zaten muhtemelen amaç odur yani bizim genimizin başkasına geçip böyle insanların artacak olmasını falan düşünüyolardır ama o yüzden istemiyolar. Şey gibi yani faşizm yani, beden faşizmi. Ya gerçi zorunlu olmasa ben yine aldırırdım [yumurtalıklarımı] ama birinin ille aldıracağını yoksa ben seni almıyordum demesi insan hakları falan ihlali olabilir sanırım.

3.2.1 Looking for a proper masculinity

Due to the fact that there are a great variety of expressions of trans subjectivities that have adopted a variety of culturally constructed physical “masculine” characteristics or behaviors, taking hormones or not, it is essential to consider how trans men with transitioning bodies and identities experience and feel their masculinities. According to Halberstam (1998), while many “FTMs” live “their masculinity in deliberately ambiguous bodies, many others desire complete transitions from female to male (...) Some of those transgender people who retain the label “FTM” (rather than becoming “men”) have mastectomies and hysterectomies and take testosterone on a regular basis and are quite satisfied with the male secondary characteristics that such treatments produce” (Halberstam 1998, 154).

Even though it seems that there is no legal differentiation between trans women and trans men in Turkey, the processes and procedures are substantially different from one another. Legally speaking, trans men do not need a penis as “proof of masculinity” for them to acquire a blue ID card, yet a mastectomy, hysterectomy and bilateral salpingectomy are obligatory (Güngör 2013). As my research has uncovered, trans men largely do not prefer to undergo phalloplasty, as the most preferred technique in the penile reconstruction surgeries, since there are very few known surgeons who provide this surgery in Turkey. In addition, it requires a long, exhausting, and expensive process, especially considering that there are several other surgeries necessary.

In his well-rounded work, Irving (2008) discusses the heteronormative construction of trans bodies and their representations in mainstream North American society. According to Irving, trans persons are disciplined due to that their gender variance “violated social codes” which are “contributed to the growth, development, and global expansion of the domestic economy” and professionals who work with trans clients “often internalized the social expectations of the upper and middle classes that undergirded hegemonic discourses of productivity” (Irving 2008, 43). At this point, revisiting Irving’s understanding of “proper transmasculine social subjects” and legitimization of this propriety, I argue that hegemonic discourses on transgenderism might also determine the medical professionals’ approach to masculinity as a fixed, stable category.

In the course of my field work, it was striking to come across a number of narratives on the psychiatrists' questioning trans men's desires for having "penis" and judges' query on the topic. Below I extract some quotes from my informants about the expectations of the psychiatrists and judges.

Sarkis:

"He [a psychiatrist], for instance, asks 'Do you want to have a penis?'. I tell that this is not a requisite thing for me, I mean it is not necessary. I know what I want and it is to take hormones and so I need a sentence from your mouth which is 'you are a man' to take hormones. But I already gave him everything no to say it. And I left there by crying each time because he says, 'I can't assign a gender identity to you.' Who the fuck is you assigning my gender! He says, 'I can't call you a woman or a man.' It is okay, I already don't care about that. I don't have a purpose in which people call me as a woman or a man. The matter is that I want to remove my boots, to have a beard and a loud voice. I don't want to be a classical man or a classical woman. But it must be like that. I didn't know these because of my lack of experience. Also, I didn't ask anyone like 'what should I do dude?'. Then, he said 'huh he wants to have a penis!' At the end, I couldn't stand and ask him 'doctor, could I have the same one?' by addressing to his own penis. He said, 'I don't know.' I told him 'let me tell you then.' I showed him some surgery photos and said 'Look, if I want to have this penis, the processes and methods are this, this and this.' I was trying to needle like 'You could guess my psychological process more or less'."³³

Ali emphasized the judges' variable interpretation:

"I proceeded my case and had a fear like you can't have your blue ID without having a penis. Some judges do that although it is not mentioned in the article 40. We had it [blue ID card] by means of [legal] gap."³⁴

Kaan mentioned that he had to convince his doctor to write an "open-ended" report for himself:

³³ Şeye takılıyo mesela 'penis istiyomu musun?' diyo. Diyorum ki 'Yani bu benim için elzem bi şey değil olmasa da olur. Ben ne istediğimi biliyorum ben hormon almak istiyorum ben hormon almak için de senin ağzından çıkıcak 'sen erkeksin' cümlesine ihtiyacım var benim. Ama ben sen bunu demeyesin diye resmen sana her şeyi vermişim yani böyle.' Ve her görüşmenin sonunda ağlayarak çıkıyorum ben ordan çünkü her seferinde şey diyo işte 'Ben sana cinsiyet atayamıyorum.' Sen kimsin bana cinsiyet atayacaksın? 'Bi işte kadın ya da erkek diyemiyorum ben sana' diyo. Tamam, benim zaten böyle bi derdim yok. Birileri bana kadın ya da erkek desin diye bi derdim yok. Benim derdim mememin olmaması ve sakalımın olması, sesimin kalınlaşması. Klasik bi erkek ya da klasik bi kadın olmak istemiyorum. Ama meğer öyle olmak gerekiyomuş, ben bunları bilmiyodum sadece deneyimsizliğimden dolayı. Bi de kimseye sormadım yani 'Ne yapmam gerekiyo hacı' diye. Öyle ondan sonra hah şey diyo işte 'Penis istiyomu.' En son dayanamadım şey dedim hani 'Hocam bundan olucak mı bende' dedim yani hani kendi penisini göstererek. 'Bilmiyorum' dedi. 'O zaman ben sana söyleyeyim' dedim. Ameliyat fotoğraflarını açtım, dedim ki 'Bak eğer bu penis istiyosam' dedim 'geçireceğim süreçler iki tane ayrı yöntem var bunlar bunlar bunlar. Bu sırada yaşayacağım psikolojik süreç hani az çok tahmin edebiliyosundur herhalde' diye böyle birazcık laf sokmaya çalışıyorum.

³⁴ Davamı açtım bi şey korkusu vardı işte hani penis olmadan kimliği alamıyosun. Bazı hakimler bunu şey yapıyo hani Madde 40'ta belirtilmiyo. Açıklıktan aldık yani biz.

“I brought my paper then [...] it stressed me out a lot. Also, the judge did not understand. He said that the paper doesn’t say anything to him. I mean, it was saying that I underwent a surgery but it was not clearly written in its content what that surgery exactly was. Aslı, they began to change the paper after me. That paper from the maternity hospital began to be changed because the judges were thinking that it is a penis [construction] surgery and you have a penis. Whereas, nobody... there is no such thing here in Turkey. There must be around five people who underwent the penis [construction] surgery. I went to the doctor and talked to him. I asked, “What can we do?” and he wrote just that my female gender was ended. It is too open-ended, I mean it is not clear what you have or don’t have. I brought that paper and they, then, gave it [a blue ID card]. After this, everyone began to take their papers from the hospital in the same way. They didn’t have any problem either.”³⁵

Tibet also problematized the judges’ interpretations:

“The judges say something liket... There is another subparagraph there explaining the required surgeries and some of the judges can interpret that as a penis [construction] surgery. I mean, there is a trouble to come when it is so. In fact, let’s imagine a person with a penis and it is, then, broken. Then, would you give him a pink ID card? Or, would you call him lady?”³⁶

As a lawyer, Gizem stated that the limits of judges’ flexibility might change depending on their “conscience”:

“There have been decisions without penis [surgery] requirement in accordance with the personal convictions of the judges. In smaller regions, I realize, the judges might be influenced more with some more pressure. For the next time, you can direct the judge who has such a case for the first time and doesn’t understand what is the Article 40 in the civil code. I mean, this, of course, might be a dangerous thing though. If s/he has strict prejudices, you can’t go beyond her/his walls. But s/he might listen to what the client says and try to make the process easier since s/he is not sure professionally. S/he might try to dispose of the case. That is why the less experienced judges in smaller regions might make this kind of decisions relatively easier.”³⁷

³⁵ Kağıdı götürdüm ondan sonra (...) baya o strese soktu. Hakim de anlamıyo, dedi ki hani burda bana bi şey yazmıyodu. Yani şurda şu şu ameliyatı oldu yazıyo. Ama ne olduğu yazmıyo hakkaten içeriğinde yazmıyo. Aslı benden sonra orda şey kağıtları değiştirmeye başladılar. Kadın doğum hastanesindeki kağıt değiştirmeye başladı çünkü hakimler bunu bir penis ameliyatı, penis yaptırdı diye düşünüyorlar. Halbuki kimse burda zaten Türkiye’de yok yani o. Belki beş tane falan var herhalde penis ameliyatı olan insan vardır. Ben de gittim doktorla konuştum. Dedim ne yapabiliriz, sadece şey yazdı ‘Kadınlık cinsiyeti sonlandırılmıştır.’ Çok ucu açık. Ne var ne yok yani... onu götürdüm onun üzerine zaten verdiler. Bunun üzerine zaten herkes artık öyle kağıt almaya başladı hastaneden. Onlarda da sıkıntı olmadı.

³⁶ Hakimler o hani şey diyo ya orda... Bir alt madde daha var orda diyo ya hani gerekli olan cinsiyetin ameliyatlarını... Onu penis olarak yorumlayabiliyo bazı hakimler. Yani böyle olduğu zaman da işte orda bi sıkıntı çıkıyo. Halbuki yani atıyorum penisi vardı ve koştı, ona pembe kimlik mi vereceksin? Ona hanımefendi mi diyeceksin ya da?

³⁷ Hakimlerin vicdani kanaatleriyle işte penis şartı olmaksızın verilen kimlik değişim kararları var. Bu iyi bi şey, devam ediyö. Daha küçük yerlerde onu fark ediyorum, biraz daha baskıyla hakimler daha fazla etkilenebiliyorlar. Bir dahakine ilk gelen ilk dosyalar oluyo, anlamıyo yani Medeni Kanun 40 ne ki. Yani orda çok yönlendirebiliyosun

Another lawyer Gül narrated that “judges cottoned on to the ‘necessity’ of penis,” especially with Rüzgar Erkoçlar’s visibility. In Chapter 2, I discussed the positive influences of Rüzgar’s visibility in terms of encouraging other trans men to come out and embrace trans identity. However, while Rüzgar’s visibility enabled other trans men to make a room for self-expression, it also seems that this visibility has simultaneously brought some new difficulties regarding the practices of law. As my lawyer informants frequently emphasized, judicial decisions on the legal recognition of trans men have begun to substantially change, with the introduction of strict conditions for the acquisition of blue ID, since his surgeon “exposed” Rüzgar and publicly mentioned that he did not have a “bottom surgery.”

This observation of the lawyers was corroborated by the trans men that I interviewed. Especially in our interview with Sefa and Ümit, they discussed the negative influences of Rüzgar’s exposal, comparing the approaches of the judiciary before and after his visibility:

Sefa: “We, maybe most of us, think that our judicial processes were easier before Rüzgar [Erkoçlar]. After Rüzgar’s visibility, the judicial processes for trans men...”

Ümit: It is because someone exposed that he [Rüzgar] did undergo such a surgery. Afterwards, the judges started to think like ‘Was there such a thing?’.

Sefa: Exactly! They started to enforce that. I mean, I have never heard that the judges enforced anyone to undergo the penis [construction] surgery when I was in the hospital where I met many people who already had their blue IDs. When Rüzgar was exposed, trans men started to be dragged up and to be queried. After that, the judges began demanding penis [construction] surgery. There was no such a thing before that. I mean, the man [a judge] could provide you a blue ID through gazing your appearance. They thought like ‘Okay, this guy’s appearance is fitted, let me give him his [blue] ID and let him go’.”³⁸

hakimi ilk dosyası olabiliyo, hiçbi fikri yok. Ya tabii bu hem tehlikeli bi şey de olabilir. Çok katı önyargıları varsa o duvarı aşamıyosun. Ama biraz hani mesleki olarak da çok emin olmadığı için orda müvekkilin dediği şeyi dinleyebiliyo da, kolaylaştırmaya da çalışabiliyo. Elinden dosyayı çıkarmaya da çalışabiliyo. O yüzden küçük yerlerde daha deneyimsiz olan hakimler daha böyle rahat bu kararları verebiliyorlar.

³⁸ Sefa: Biz belki de bi çoğumuz şey diye düşünüyoruz, Rüzgar’dan önce bizim mahkeme süreçlerimiz daha kolaydı. Rüzgardan sonra mahkeme süreçleri trans erkeklere...

Ümit: Şeyden dolayı oldu bu birisi işte ameliyat olmadı diye ifşa edince ondan sonra hakimler böyle bi şey mi varmış diye...

Sefa: Aynen! Onu dayatmaya başladılar. Yani yoksa hani ben X’da çok insan tanıdım kimliğini almış hatta şöyle bu hiçkimseden hakimlerin şey istediğini duymadım hani penis ameliyatı istediklerini duymadım. Ne zaman Rüzgar ifşa oldu, trans erkekler hani böyle artık karıştırılmaya başladı kurcalanmaya başladı. Ondan sonra penis ameliyatlarını hakimler talep etmeye başladılar yoksa öyle bi şey yoktu hiç. Hani adam senin dış görünüşüne bakarak hakim senin

In one of his lectures on sexuality, Michel Foucault (1984) lays emphasis on “the culture of the self” as requiring the correction of the body and the soul. While criticizing the idea claiming the necessity of the balance between the body and the soul, Foucault (1984) notes that there is an extensive disquiet, arising from the imbalance between them, which prompts subjectivities to “correct” or “recalibrate” their body and soul. This argument might be considered also in relation to the Foucauldian concept of “governmentality” which refers to the ways of subjects’ understanding and then governing themselves by grabbing power just like a state or an institution. As my fieldwork revealed, even though the regulations on trans subjectivities seem extensively strict and unflexible, there are still some legal loopholes which enable individuals to maintain or conduct their distinct subjectivities within the medico-legal mediums through benefiting from flexibility of ways to self-governance and to recalibrate their subjectivity.

3.3. Are Societal Norms Determinant of Thinkable Identities?

When I first began to think about doing a research on trans masculinities, I was planning to focus only on trans men’s self-identifications and experiences as men. I was also thinking that the ethnographic structure of this research might be limited with interviews and participant observation with trans men. However, as soon as I started to have closer relations with trans men as a “researcher,” I recognized my tendency to interrupt the conversations’ flow when someone started to talk about judicial or medical conditions of their own experiences during their effort to get the blue ID card, and to try to transform the trajectory of narratives into how and which kind of masculinities they feel belonging to. Then, I realized that I was missing some important dimensions of their performances of masculinity: trans men generally feel the need of legal (and medical) transition in order to express themselves as men and to live their daily lives without any bureaucratic or legal problems.

Reflecting on my earlier reluctance to engage this aspect of trans masculinities, I have become to associate this tendency with my initial search for “queerness.” A friend who identifies as trans man made me deeply rethink trans men’s daily realities and “queer” as a category or concept, when he said: “When I go to toilet in a few minutes,

dış görünüşüne bakarak sana kimlik veriyodu. Ha bu adamın dış görünüşü oturmuş, veriyim kimliğini gitsin falan diye düşünüyolardı.

everything will be queer there; if you search for something queer, you can see that everywhere.” After our conversation with this friend, which puts a smile on my face whenever I remember now, I comprehended the difficulties of tracking the boundaries of heteronormativity and queerness. In this research, I do not extensively discuss queer and queer-based performativity since my fieldwork was not shaped around these issues. However, I still argue that there are “queer possibilities” in trans men’s experiences especially in terms of their “failures” in the way of Halberstam (2011) employs the term since I think that fluidity is not always about queerness but there are also fluid dynamics between heteronormative and queer performances.

The compulsory interventions to get a blue ID given to “male” citizens and/or to benefit from health care and legal services limit and restrict trans men’s ways of self-expression in terms of the expectations and desires for their own body. In this light, as gender theorist Jay Prosser (1998) emphasizes, trans individuals may risk becoming “transsexualized/transsexed” subjects. Prosser mentions that transsexed people’s written autobiographical expressions show that their experiences in their bodies cannot be approached regardless of the intense social and cultural pressures which compel them to live as “members of their natal sex” (Prosser 1998).

Taking up the framework of Prosser in his conceptualization of “transsexualization,” I discuss its possible relationality with Halberstam’s rendering of “success” and “failure” in the transgender experience. According to Halberstam (2011, 2), “success” might be seen as a heteronormative intervention that “capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation.” In that sense, “failure” seems as referring to a situation where a certain form of reproductivity cannot be obtained.

3.3.1 Policing of trans borders: Who is trans?

In our first interview with Ayşe, a well-known psychiatrist in this field, she used the concept of “full-time trans man” which made me rethink the difference between medical discourse and politically correct terms preferred by trans men themselves. At first, I took a distance from this discourse that I found too medical but then, began to ask my friends who identify trans if this term “full-time” is commonly used by them, and they told me that there are many trans persons who adopt this discourse. Also, when I first looked back to my field notes from this specific interview, I realized that she uses

this term since she believes that individuals need to be aware of their limits before the law, medicine and cultural norms in the context of Turkey. For instance, she told me that some trans men come to her to asking about the possibilities of military service because they would like to go to the army for “compulsory military service” after they get their blue ID card. This early interview constituted one of the most influential turning points in my research which enabled me to reconceptualize the “politically correct” discourses that I was trying to adopt as a young researcher.

In her book *Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Sara Ahmed (2004) challenges the notion of “feeling queer,” probing instead the inverse and asking what it might mean to have “queer feelings.” Ahmed suggests that we instead focus on the question “How does it feel to inhabit a body that fails to reproduce an ideal?” (2004, 146). I consider this question particularly significant for making sense of the self-identification and self-imaginings of trans individuals. Each individual might “fail” to be and become ideal within the borders of heteronormativity. Indeed, the concept of heteronormativity may not be enough to understand the different ways in which the ‘normative’ definitions of sex, gender and sexuality operate.

Sarkis, who could not get medical permission for hormone therapy for four years, narrated that his psychiatrist was not “convinced” about his trans identity since the doctor cannot identify his gender identity through his “way of self-expression”:

“I entered the process four years ago. Normally you would be send to the hormone [therapy] in six months and you must have your [testosterone] shot in one year at the latest. I wasn’t sent there throughout four years. When the last time I went there was already one and half years ago. Last month I went there again. At that time, the process was like... I mean, I talked to them without thinking like ‘you are only a means rather than an end for us; we just take advantage of you to take hormones and to let the process start.’ And he said, ‘Then, you lie to yourself.’ I said, ‘We only lie to you!’ Well, they [psychiatrists] are trying to guarantee themselves following the transition procedure in case this person would repent of his transition later and proceed against them. But I also know, for example, he says something about the ID card... I say ‘look, the ID card is not important for me. Pink ID is the most wonderful thing in the world... I have insurance and passport through my father for years. What else... there are so many advantage of it. What can I do with a blue ID card?’. I wish we were in such an ideal world and I could live my [gender] identity with a pink ID card. But there is no such a world! Also, if I want to be a lawyer, it is a necessity to have a blue ID card since, otherwise, I will have beard etc. but I will not have breast.”³⁹

³⁹ Ben sürece bundan dört sene önce başladım. Normalde altı ay sonrasında hormona yollanıyosun, en geç bir yıl sonunda vurulmak zorunda. Ben dört sene boyunca yollanmadım. En son zaten bi buçuk yıl önce gitmişim. Bi geçen

The concept of performativity has particularly expanded the theoretical grounds of critical engagement in the ways in which one thinks of gender construction and expression, and has in turn contributed to the greater body of literature on queer and gender dynamics. As Butler mentions in the Preface of the second edition of *Gender Trouble* (1999), when one looks at the clothes or other objects that cover and articulate a body, it becomes impossible to pass judgement on an idea of stable anatomy since that body might be “preoperative,” “transitional,” or “postoperative” (xxiv). Just as heteronormative and non-normative bodies exist in a variety of sexual and gender expressions, transgenderism also necessitates being considered in relation to various forms of self-identification that express a diversity of wishes and desires. In that sense, “realization of the self” cannot be separated from modification and alteration of the body in the case of trans femininities and masculinities. However, medicine, as distinct from the law, also allows these bodies to physically exist in a “mutant/ambiguous” state, so it both inhibits and enables individuals to alter their bodies. In other words, medicine allows the body to invert the ideals of gender binary, starting with psychiatric approval.

During my fieldwork, the diversity of the life histories, coming-out processes and transitions of trans men came as a surprise. At this point, law and medicine have a strong coprocessing for trans persons “to be recognized” and “to be able to realize themselves” in the binary discourse that is extensively produced and reproduced by the state. As two essential apparatuses of the heteronormative system, these spaces might influence individuals’ self-imaginings and self-makings, and, they, in so doing, might re-stabilize trans subjectivities by interfering in them with common strict rules. On the other hand, transitional processes do not seem to be experienced as strict as stated in the body of the law. As my interviews, especially with lawyers and psychiatrists, also revealed, judiciary have an authority to interpret Article 40 in accordance with their personal convictions based on the set of gender norms they adopted.

While discussing the positionality of trans people before the medical authorities in Iran, Najmabadi (2014) mentions that “sex change is framed explicitly as the cure for a

ay tekrar gittim, bi buçuk sene önce gitmişim en son. O zaman şöyle geliştii süreç... Yani ben ağzıma gelen her şeyi saydım işte ‘Siz bir amaç değilsiniz bizim için sadece araçsınız; biz sizden işte hormon alabilmek için süreci başlatabilmek için sadece sizi kullanıyoruz’ diye. O da işte ‘Siz o zaman kendinizi kandırıyorsunuz’ falan diyo. Dedim hani, biz sizi kandırıyoruz sadece. Ya onlar şeyi garantilemeye çalışıyorlar ‘Bu insan daha sonra pişman olup bize dava açar mı?’yı... Ama ben de şeyi biliyorum yani benim için mesela kimliğe şey yapıyo... Diyorum ki ‘Bak benim için kimlik önemli değil pembe kimlik dünyanın en güzel şeyi yaa... Babam üzerinden sigortam var işte pasaportum var bilmem kaç sene. İşte ne bileyim getirisi bir sürü. Mavi kimlik alıp ne yapıcım ya?’ diyorum. Keşke öyle ideal bi dünyada yaşasak da pembe kimlikle beraber bu kimliğimi yaşayabilsem. Ama öyle bi dünya yok. E hukukçu olmak istiyosan birazcık mavi kimlik zorunlu. Çünkü sakalım olacak falan, memem olmayacak.”

diseased abnormality (gender identity disorder), and on occasion it is proposed as a religio-legally sanctioned option for heteronormalizing people with same-sex desires and practices” (2014, 1). At this point, I find it crucial to share a narrative which brings together cultural codes and medico-legal practices into question. Sefa narrated an encounter in a hospital where he was trying to get official “approval” from the endocrinology department for taking hormones. When he asked an endocrinologist for documentation of his condition:

“S/he said, ‘We don’t look after you, I wouldn’t give you such a document.’ ‘We,’ s/he said, ‘disapprove you to do this, I’m not giving that document to you.’ At that moment, it was like... you begin to understand how marginalized you are, how unrecognized you are not in the society. I mean, even if a well-educated doctor does this to you, what wouldn’t a person on the street do against you? I turned back and said, ‘Okay, well go on give me no fuck! I would go to a private hospital then.’ When you go to private hospitals, they too avoid giving you that document even though you give them money. I also don’t understand what they abstain from but their answer was that: ‘we don’t want to take on that kind of responsibility.’ What a responsibility! I guess they think that they will burn in hell because of that.”⁴⁰

As a lawyer, Gül also interpreted these processes of “convincing” medical professionals to do their job as a form of state violence against people whose identities are seen as “valuable” by society:

“In this country, it is already a huge problem that you develop a discourse in order to bring into your existence. Can it possible such a nonsensical thing? I mean, you develop that discourse, then you need to get a document, then you wait for submitting it or rather being approved... I mean, the confirmation of an identity, to wait for the approval of an identity is too violent if you know what I mean.”⁴¹

In both of our interviews, Ayşe stated that we need to take our distinct culture seriously by referring to the societal codes in Turkey since all the sets of norms are constructed through local cultures; and the legal limitations we face are determined by this set of

⁴⁰ ‘Biz’ dedi ‘sizinle ilgilenmiyoruz’ dedi, ‘o yazıyı sana vermem’ dedi. ‘Biz’ dedi ‘bunu yapmanızı uygun görmüyoruz’ dedi, ‘o yazıyı vermiyorum size’ dedi. Şimdi hani şey gibi oldu hani ne kadar böyle dışlandığını hani ne kadar kabul edilmediğini böyle toplumun içinde o zaman anlamaya başlıyorsun. Hani sonuçta karşında bi okumuş etmiş doktor sana bunu yapıyo hani dışardaki insan sana ne yapmaz ki. Döndüm ‘tamam’ dedim, ‘vermiyosanız vermiyosunuz’ dedim, ‘giderim özelden falan alırım.’ Özellere gidiyosun hani parayı verdiğin halde onlar bile sana o yazıyı vermeden çekiniyorlar. Artık neden çekiniyorsa ben de anlayamıyorum bize verdikleri cevap şu: “Biz bu vebalin altına girmek istemiyoruz.” Nası bi vebalse bu... herhalde cehennemde falan yanacaklarını düşünüyolar.

⁴¹ Şu ülkede kendini zaten çok büyük bi şey kendini var etmek için söz üretiyosun. Ya böyle saçma sapan bi şey olabilir mi? Yani söz üretiyosun, bir evrak alman gerekiyo, onu işte hani vermek için daha doğrusu kabul edilsin diye bekliyorsun. Yani bir kimliğin kabulü, kimliğin kabul edilmesini beklemek çok vahşice, anlatabiliyo muyum?

norms in Turkey. Therefore, she consistently explained the reasons behind her “relatively strict” and unflexible approach as being aware of our expectations’ and desires’ practicability dealing with “the limits of our culture.” However, she also mentioned that they, as professionals and trans individuals, “can only make these limits more flexible.”

In a similar approach with Ayşe, psychiatrist Barış emphasized the influential role of social codes and norms as determining the limits of trans persons’ self-identification and self-expression. However, he also highlighted another layer of cultural norms with a transnational approach by mentioning that gender identities should not be taken for granted as strict and stable categories since they might be in transformation:

“If I think about how they [trans men] construct their gender identity, I can say something like I have encountered with some applications which are more out of categories as I have seen in the recent years. Accordingly, how we medically construct gender is related with how the individuals in the society construct it and this is a mutual interactional thing. I mean, two-three consultant have come here [a hospital in Ankara] by self-identifying as ‘genderqueer’ in the recent year. Wasn’t there such a thing before? Quite likely there was or they began to self-identify in this way with the proliferation of these concepts. And as I hear and know from my friends in İstanbul, there are a lot more this kind of applications in İstanbul than here [Ankara]. So, it seems like a mutual interaction. I mean, I think that the things like categories, class, classification, non-classification, flexibility etc. are affected by the society even though the constructed characteristics of their gender when they say, ‘I am a man’ have been diverse since the first human who said, ‘I am a man’.”⁴²

To get back to the dichotomy of success vs. failure one could argue that failures might contain some creative and cooperative possibilities within themselves by expanding the ways of being in the world. Hence Halberstam asks: “what kinds of reward can failure offer us?” (Halberstam 2011, 3). Revisiting Halberstam’s question, I would like to employ the concept of “legal loophole” addressing the possibilities in which we can infiltrate through the very “changing limitations” Barış emphasized as a psychiatrist.

⁴² Cinsiyetlerini nasıl kurduklarını düşünecek olursam ben şöyle bi şey söyleyebilirim, son yıllarda benim gördüğüm şey biraz daha kategori dışı başvurularla daha çok karşılaşıyorum. Dolayısıyla [...] medikal olarak bizim cinsiyeti nasıl kurguladığımız toplumun, toplumdaki bireylerin nasıl kurguladığıyla ilgili ve bu karşılıklı etkileşen bi şey. Yani ben şimdi mesela son bir yılda iki üç başvuran genderqueer diye geldi. Yok muydu daha önce? Vardı büyük olasılıkla ya da o şekilde kendilerini tanımlamaları bu kavramların yaygınlaşmasıyla oldu. Ve belki İstanbul’daki arkadaşlarımdan duyduğum, bildiğim İstanbul’da böyle başvuru buradan çok fazla. Yani dolayısıyla hani bu karşılıklı etkileşen bi şey gibi görünüyo. Yani ‘ben erkeğim’ derken insanların kendilerine oluşturdukları kurdukları kimlik özellikleri belki ‘erkeğim’ diyen ilk insandan beri çeşitli olsa da bunu böyle kategori, sınıf, sınıflandırmama, esnetme vs gibi bi şeylerin tabii ki toplumdan etkilendiğini düşünüyorum.

3.4 Legal Loopholes: The Rewards of “Failure”

In 2012, there was groundbreaking news on mainstream media, entitled “One Woman, One Man and A Gay Marriage,” narrating the legal marriage demand of a gay couple⁴³, Aras Güngör and Barış Sulu. In the case of Aras and Barış, although gay marriage is not legally allowed in Turkey, it seems that there was nothing posing an obstacle for their marriage before the law since Barış had a blue ID card and Aras had pink one. However, their marriage demand became a scandal since Aras was a trans man who did not have a blue ID card but passing as “male” due to the fact that he was taking testosterone and had undergone top surgery. I would argue that Aras and Barış’s resistance was not only against marriage inequality promoting only heterosexual relationships, but also, I suggest, against the heteronormative and binary legal system in Turkey.

As an activist-lawyer, Demet commented on the rejection of Aras and Barış’s marriage demand, underlining the contradiction between the theory and practice of the law due to its efforts to maintain the neutral family as a “productive” and normalized unit of the society:

“I don’t know if he [Aras] had his blue ID card later but he had a pink ID within the application process and the activist dimension of it was starting just from that point. They said, ‘Okay then, one of us has a pink ID, other one has blue ID, then we are getting married.’ It was not accepted, I mean they said ‘No, there is a pink ID here okay but you can’t do that.’ At that point, you discuss with the judges like ‘Okay you don’t give a blue ID to my client because you think he does not have a penis etc... Well then, I will let these two people who have beard get married!’ At that point, you try to make a breach in there with some paradoxes and some pressures which are actually unsuitable with our queer politics, you try to overcome that normativity. How much do we success or how much do we fail? We do that as best as we can. I forgot to tell you something about the law enforcement... it protects the family and the society a lot rather than the claimant. I mean, our laws generally protect its interlocutor, demandant. But there is no such a thing here [in the case of trans demandants]. Here, the trans demandant is always the other. For them, there are some things which need to be protected from the demandant because they think that our world would get in trouble if the demandant would be sent to our world as they are.”⁴⁴

⁴³ “Bir kadın, bir erkek ve bir gay evliliği”: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bir-kadin-bir-erkek-ve-bir-gay-evliliği-19899814>

⁴⁴ Sonradan aldı mı bilmiyorum ama o başvuru sürecinde [Aras’ın] pembe kimliği vardı zaten işin aktivist boyutu burdan başlıyordu. ‘Tamam o zaman birimizde pembe kimlik var birimizde mavi kimlik var, hadi biz evleniyoruz o zaman.’ ‘hayır’ dediler yani ‘hayır bu burda pembe var ama 1 ih’ dediler. E işte hakimlere de bunu şey yapıyosun yani ‘tamam sen şu anda müvekkilime bu sebepten mavi kimlik vermiyosun işte evlenince penisi olmadığı için bilmem ne

In her book on transgenderism and “same-sex” desire in contemporary Iran, Afsaneh Najmabadi (2014) problematizes the role of constituting a harmony between trans persons’ body and sense of the self for the state ideology of Iran. While discussing the binaristic logic under the regulations on trans subjectivities, she argues that there is not a possibility for acceptance of “same-sex” relations in the eyes of the state in accordance with its heteronormative insights. On the hand, Najmabadi (2014) investigates how the techniques of domination, in which Foucault particularly emphasizes, become “productive of” and transform into “the art of existence.” (2014, 2). Taking up the framework of Najmabadi in her conceptualization of “the art of existence” I will discuss the ways in which lawyers and psychiatrists form their solidarity against their institutions in the following sections.

3.4.1 Being in alliance with whom?

“I think that the first step of the transitional process is to say, ‘I am trans’ or individuals sometimes can’t give a name to the situation and then it is then to ask, ‘What I am?’. I mean, it is to be able to say, ‘there is a different thing on me and I don’t feel good’. It is too hard for a person to find a way of self-identification and to try to be able to give a name for him/herself. Also, they generally come and ask us, ‘Am I a homosexual or a trans? Tell me what I am.’ At that point, I don’t know... It is something only he can completely know about. But, for example... Whether he is confused or set measures to himself or has a resistancy because of his transphobia or something else... The process we provide is to enable them to find the way or ways self-identification, or to prefer not to identify himself by expanding their awareness. Also, his demands are the things we should work on after he identifies his identity and/or self-identified. That is why the process doesn’t start when he entered through this door. My process starts at that moment but not his. His process probably starts at the point that he faces himself.”⁴⁵

bilmem ne diye düşünyösün. E iki tane sakallıyı evlendircem ben o zaman yani!’ falan diye... Ya orada işte birtakım paradokslarla aslında bizim kuir siyasetimize çok da uygun olmayan bitakım paradokslarla bitakım zorlamalarla bi gedik açmaya çalışıyosun yani, delmeye çalışıyosun o normatifliği. Ne kadar başarıyoruz ne kadar başaramıyoruz? Elimizden geldiğince... Yani işte kanun hükmüne dair az önce söylemeyi unuttum, bu aileyi bu kadar koruması, toplumsal olanın... Yani davacıyı değil mesela genel olarak bizim kanunlarımız muhatabı korur, talep edeni korur. Burada hiç öyle bi şey yok. Burada hep talep eden öteki. Talep edenden sakınılması gereken bazı şeyler var çünkü talep eden bu haliyle dünyaya salınırsa dünyamızın başına çok kötü şeyler gelebilir falan diye yani.

⁴⁵ Sanırım sürecin ilk adımı ‘Ben transım’ demek ya da bazen adımı koyamayabiliyorlar, ‘Ben neyim?’ demek. Yani ‘Bende bi farklılık var ve iyi hissetmiyorum’ diyebilmek. Şey çok zor o adını koyma yani bir insanın kendinin adını koyabilme mücadelesi vermesi çok zor. Ve bize soruyolar tabi çoğunlukla gelip ‘Ben eşcinsel miyim, trans mıyım neyim ben? Siz söyleyin’ diye. O noktada bilmiyorum hani o tamamen kendisinin bilebileceği bi şey. Ama o atıyorum transfobisinden dolayı mı kafası karışıyor ya da bloklar koyuyo dirençleri var, homofobisinden dolayı mı başka bi yerden bi şey yaşıyo. Bunların dahi farkındalığını arttırarak onların kendisine uygun ismi ya da isimleri koymasına ya da isimsizliği tercih etmesi neyse bizim yaptığımız süreç o. Ve o kendini, kimliğini tanımladıktan sonraki talepleri gene bizim muhattabımız olan şey. O yüzden kapıdan girdiği an başlamıyo süreç. Benim sürecim böyle başlıyo ama onunki değil. O herhalde kendiyile yüzleştiği yerde başlıyo.

The quote above belongs to Zeynep who has professionally and voluntarily worked with trans men for around ten years. During my fieldwork in 2016-2017, we came across each other many times in events such as gender and sexuality panels and solidarity parties. As my encounters within LGBTI+ activism shows and most of my trans interviewees have mentioned, Zeynep is seen as not only one of the most preferred psychiatrists by trans men but also an “ally,” as well as Barış and Ayşe, throughout transition processes and within the medico-legal institutions and practices that they have trying to transform. As she stated, Zeynep does not consider the moment when a client enters to the hospital or her room as the starting point of transition; she, rather, thinks that her own process starts as a psychiatrist at that moment.

Another psychiatrist that I interviewed, Barış mentioned that he studied medicine and started to work with trans clients at the time when queer conceptualization of gender and sexualities had become prevalent. He, thereby, finds the term “transsexual” mostly too medical and considers his own personal and professional approach to sexualities rather differentiate from other psychiatrists:

“Let me say that I have been educated at such times we were talking about transgenderism rather than transsexuality. Thereby, I have never had an expectation from persons who have come here with a certain identity to have the characteristics of a certain category.”⁴⁶

I also find it crucial to situate that all of my lawyer informants identified themselves as “activist-lawyers” by referring to their inter-positionality amongst social and legal mediums. In the course of my fieldwork, it was striking to come across similar narratives defending the idea that medico-legal regulations on trans subjectivities should not be obligatory, but optional for each individual depending on their preferences, needs and desires. Below I extracted some quotes from my lawyer informants in terms of how they position themselves.

Gül:

“Actually, I identify myself both as a lawyer and as an activist. I see the life too in this way, I mean that the absolute legal order is not enough for me, justice is a more important concept. The equality is important too in conjunction with the justice. but when I consider them in total, there is a point which is in a progress and that must be conducted through an independent activism. That is why I have preferred to work as a lawyer

⁴⁶ Ben transseksüel değil de transgender döneminde yetiştim diyeyim. Dolayısıyla hani böyle hani belli bir kimlikle başvuran kişi, belli bir kategorinin özelliklerini sağlıyor olmaları gibi bi beklentim hiç olmadı.

throughout my life (...) When I was back here [from the abroad] and wanted to open a personal law office, I tended to the LGBTI issues. Since 2012, I have tried not only to provide a legal service or support to trans men during their transitional process but also to be an activist against their unjust treatments, discriminations within their workplace, social environments or school, and all the violence or discrimination of their families in terms of both its legal dimensions, and social and sociological aspects.”⁴⁷

As a young activist lawyer, Demet narrated that she sees herself as “a subject of the transitional process of trans men” since she began hearing the cases of trans men after her partner came out as a trans man and decided to proceed to the transitional process. After a while she was trying to learn the procedures, Demet has proceeded the cases of trans men in alliance with Gül and Gizem. Even though Demet mentioned that she could not interpret or judge the medico-legal regulations on trans subjectivities as a lawyer, she stated:

“The letter of the law, I mean, what we understand when we read the law itself, is actually enough clear. To comment on it is none of my profession’s business. I mean, how can I know as a lawyer whether the transitional process psychologically needs to be taken six months or how it should be? I can comment on it as an activist rather than a legal expert; I think that we don’t need any of them [the law enforcements], self-declaration is already enough.”⁴⁸

In the next section, I will discuss the solidarity mechanisms and the “lobbying strategy” of lawyers and psychiatrists within their institutions.

3.4.2. Corridors of courthouses and hospitals as spaces of struggle: Lobbying as a form of solidarity

During my interviews with the lawyers and the psychiatrists, there has been a consistent emphasis on the solidarity mechanisms among the professionals who work with trans men. In my second interview with Ayşe, she told me how they first organized

⁴⁷ Ben aslında yani hem hukukçu hem aktivist olarak tanımlıyorum kendimi. Ya yaşama da böyle bakıyorum yani salt işte ne biliyim hukuk düzeni benim için yeterli değil adalet çok daha önemli bi kavram. Yani hatta ve hatta işte eşitlik de çok önemli adaletle birlikte. Ama hepsini işte totalde düşündüğün zaman yani giden bi nokta var. O da bağımsız bir aktivizmle yürütülmesi gerekiyo bu için. O yüzden de avukatlık yapmayı tercih ettim hayatım boyunca [...] Gelip burda bağımsız işte avukatlık büromu kurup çalışmak isteyince de kendimi işte lgbt alanına sevkettim. 2012’den itibaren de trans erkeklerin yalnızca cinsiyet geçiş tabi geçiş sürecinde verilen hukuki destek ve hizmeti değil aynı zamanda mağdur olmuş olman, ayrımcılık işte iş yerinde uğradıkları ayrımcılık, sosyal çevrelerinde, okulda gibi yani eğitim işte ya da barınma aileleri tarafından uğranılan her türlü şiddetin ya da ayrımcılığın hukuki boyutu bi yanıyla da sosyal ve sosyolojik olarak da aktivistliğini yapmaya çalışıyorum.

⁴⁸ Aslında kanunun lafzı yani kanunu okuyunca anladığımız şey aslında yeterli bi şey. Şuna dair söz söylemek benim profesyonelliğimin işi değil. Yani ben bi hukukçu olarak işte süreç şey mi ne bileyim? Mesela psikolojik olarak altı ay sürmeli mi işte bu olmalı mı şu olmalı mı? Buna dair söz hukukçu sıfatıyla değil aktivist sıfatıyla söyleyebilirim. Bence hiçbirine gerek yok, beyan esastır zaten.

a team for constituting a unit which would enable trans individuals to “alter their bodies” towards the end of the 1980s in a university hospital with her colleagues, especially the endocrinologists. She also mentioned that there is a need for organizing a well-organized team including the professionals from a variety of medical departments to enable the medical spaces to provide the transitional processes for trans individuals since “transness is not only about human psychology” in her words.

In a similar way, Barış highlighted the requisites of providing a “healthy” atmosphere within the hospitals for the transitional processes of trans individuals. He mentioned that it would not be possible for him to work with trans individuals if they could not be in solidarity with other psychiatrists. Accordingly, he stated:

“It is not a job that I can explain like ‘I could do even if I were alone.’ Let me say that Ayşe has been involved in this branch since the first day that I started to work on these issues. Actually, I have always carried on this work with Ayşe. Okay, I carry out these works or Okay, I carry out these works or I work in the clinic by myself. But, if you ask whom I go ahead arm in arm with both in national and international meetings or whom I work with when there is a need for writing a press statement or a stance or a report about these issues within X [a social association] and Psychiatric Association of Turkey, there are some people I always work with. I mean, the people, for instance, who are educated on sexual therapy might have a more positive approach to these issues but unfortunately it is not determinative per se. However, there are some people who work on gender issues and sexual orientation like Zeynep, Ayşe and me. I consider three of us as a team.”⁴⁹

As another layer of the solidarity mechanisms within the state institutions, the lawyers that I interviewed laid emphasis on the strategies among them to transform the “legal loopholes” of the law into an advantage for trans men in accordance with their expectations from the transitional processes. Gizem, for instance, explained how their “lobbying” as a small group of the lawyers in solidarity enables the judges to reconsider their decisions as follows:

“The judges don’t have a strict attitude about this issue, they are confused. I mean, a judge who interprets the Article 40 in a strict way is actually a clear judge because the Article 40 is such an article. There is no chance to make it flexible actually because it is an explicit article. We just try infiltrate into its

⁴⁹ Bu ‘Tek başıma olsaydım yapabiliirdim’ diyebileceğim bir iş değil. Şöyle söyleyeyim yani ben bu konuda çalışmaya başladığım günden itibaren burda olan alanda olan Ayşe hanım var. Ve hep Ayşe hanımla yürüttüm aslında. Şimdi bu çalışmaları ya da klinikte yaptıklarımı bağımsız yürütüyorum evet. Ama hem ulusal toplantılarda hem uluslararası toplantılarda hani kol kola ilerlediğim kim var dersek ya da işte X içinde, Psikiyatri Derneği içerisinde bu konuyla ilgili basın açıklaması, bir duruş, bir rapor olacağı zaman birlikte çalıştığım kişiler mutlaka var. Yani cinsel eğitim, cinsel terapi eğitimi almış olan kişiler mesela (...) bu konuyla daha pozitif bi tutuma sahip olabilirler ama tek başına bu belirleyici olmuyo maalesef. Ama yani onun altında da cinsiyet konusuyla uğraşan, cinsel yönelimle uğraşan insanlar var işte Zeynep, Ayşe hanım, ben. Üçümüzü bi ekip olarak tanımlayabilirim.

gaps. What we do is actually a negative practice of law, I mean, it is to make a room there for trans men or all trans individuals by creating an adverseness of the norm. Thereby, there is seriously a space for lobbying. In terms of the associations, the supreme board of judges and prosecutors or Ministry of Justice might lobby in a good way because the judges are confused. I mean, there is a conscientious layer there because a judge is a subject who makes decisions with his/her personal conviction as well. So, that subject is confused, I mean there is something makes him/her feel uncomfortable there.”⁵⁰

This “lobbying strategy” was narrated also by Demet and Gül as being one of the most effective achievement of their solidarity. In a similar way, Gül highlighted the various strategies to influence the judges’ decisions:

“We strive to find different ways to change the perception of judges on the matter. Lately we have been discussing another thing; In such law cases, there are very limited evidences, you give your back to such evidence as witness evidence, reconnaissance, expert, some written evidence if you have any, expert witness reports, expert reports... We try to get these 'expert reports' from doctors who are also activists on the subject or try to get the pictures, visuals of surgeries done wrong in the files. I mean, we try to play at their conscience. That's the way it is, because thinking that the judges - sadly- will be, or are influenced otherwise, we don't try to go unbiased, quite the opposite, we try to help them form empathy.”⁵¹

It is also crucial to mention that it was striking that all of my participants know each other through the professional gatherings, conferences and/or events organized by the associations and the activist organizations. They also narrated that they ask each other for their help when they face with a difficulty or struggle within their workplaces. Accordingly, it seems that there are “informal/unofficial” solidarity networks not only among the lawyers and the psychiatrists per se, but also among both of them. These solidarity networks also underlie my effort to analyze the medical and the legal

⁵⁰ Hakimlerin bu konuda aslında net bi tavrı yok, hakimlerin kafası karışık. Yani Madde 40’ı böyle çok şey algılayan aslında hakim çok net bir hakimdir ki Madde 40 öyle bi madde. Yani burda şeye izin yok ay böyle mi olsun şöyle mi yani çok net bi madde. Biz sadece o boşluklardan girmeye çalışıyoruz yani yaptığımız aslında negatif hukukçuluk, yani norm karşıtlığı yapıp orda bi alan açmaya çalışmak trans erkekler ya da translar için. Dolayısıyla çok ciddi bi lobcilik alanı var. Dernekler açısından yani hukukta işte adalet bakanlığı işte HSK hakimler nezdinde çok iyi lobcilik yapılabilir çünkü hakimlerin kafası karışık. Yani orda bi vicdani bi şey var çünkü hakim aynı zamanda vicdani kanaatıyla karar veren bi öznedir. Dolayısıyla o öznenin kafası karışık yani onun içine sinmeyen bi şey var orda.

⁵¹ Hakimlerin algılarını değiştirmek için türlü türlü yöntemler bulmaya çalışıyoruz. Şu son zamanlarda konuştuğumuz başka bi şey var, hukuk davalarında deliller çok kısıtlıdır belli delillere dayanırsın işte tanık delili, işte keşif, bilirkişi, varsa birkaç yazılı delil, işte bilirkişi raporu, uzman raporu... biz artık bizim uzman raporu dediğimiz şeyi bu konuda aktivizm yapan doktorlardan almaya çalışıyoruz ya da ameliyat yanlış yapılan ameliyatların fotoğraflarını, görüntülerini dosyaya sokmaya çalışıyoruz yani biraz vicdana oynamaya çalışıyoruz artık. Yani bu şekliyle çünkü hani yargıçların başka türlü etkileneceğini ya da etkilenecek karar vermek zorunda maalesef hani kaldıklarını düşünerek o bağımsız mağımsız değil tam tersine bağımlı ve taraflı kısmından çıkartarak bi empati kurmasını gerçekleştirmeye çalışıyoruz.

regulations as a whole by employing the term “medico-legal” rather than separating them as independent unites. Regarding his solidarity with the lawyers including Gizem, Barış stated:

“I have had contacts with lawyers, and there are mostly indirect and interpersonal relations. There are some speeches I did about it [legal dimension of the transitional process] before but Gizem, for instance, is here... I mean, she was a person that I collaborated by favor of T-Der as a group of people who had worked on trans issues in Ankara while it was working. And, we still have a connection and ask each other “What should I do with that client? There is a case like this, can I send you?”. There is no such a continuous process but, for example, I might need their help in the trials a lot. Sometimes, I have to convince the court board about any problem with the social construction of trans masculinity and/or unnecessary of a penis [construction] surgery. I might need to write some reports about this issue. When a judge asks me like ‘So, has his sex changed?’, I might need to write a two-three paged text which tells him/her, ‘Look, gender actually means this and that’.”⁵²

Consequently, it seems that the lawyers and the psychiatrists that I interviewed have made an effort to “challenge” and “transition” their workplaces through “benefiting” the loopholes within the law. Even though they emphasized the difficulties and limitations of their solidarity and alliance with each other in the changing and reforming medico-legal regulations, they have had practical achievements up to now.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explore the interactions between trans masculinities and the state institutions through a discussion of the medico-legal regulations and state interventions in terms of the legitimization and the medicalization of trans men in Turkey. I laid out the disagreements between the judges, trans men, and their LGBTI+ friendly lawyers and psychiatrists about the needs and desires of trans men regarding their own bodies and legal status. On the other hand, the lawyers and the psychiatrists that I interviewed explained how they develop strategies with their colleagues to make the borders of the law and the attitudes of the judges more flexible and how they provide a solidarity

⁵² Hukukçularla ilişkim var yani şöyle oluyo, dolaylı ve kişiler arası ilişkiler oluyo. Yani var öyle bi konuşma yapmışlığım vesaire ama mesela ne bileyim Gizem var işte... yani Ankara’da T-Der varken trans konusıyla uğraşan bir ekip varken, onun aracılığıyla işbirliği kurduğum birisiydi. Ve hala da yani ‘şöyle bi hastaya napıyım? Şöyle bi vaka var size gönderebilir miyim?’ tarzında iletişimimiz oluyo. (...) Öyle sürekli işleyen bi şey yok ama mesela mahkemelerde çok işim oluyo. Yani trans erkekliğin sosyal kuruluşuyla ilgili bi sıkıntı, penis yapılmamasıyla ilgili mahkemeleri ikna etmem çok gerekiyo yani. Bu konuda yazılar yazmam falan gerekiyo. ‘Peki cinsiyeti değişmiş midir?’ diye hakim bana sorduğunda böyle iki sayfa üç sayfa ‘Cinsiyet şu demek bu demek aslında’ falan gibi anlatmak.

mechanism to support trans men's legal and medical rights. In this manner, it seems that their efforts to make the cases more relieved for each trans man might be helpful and supportive even though there has not yet been a major change in the law.

All these tensions between the state institutions, LGBTI+ friendly professionals and trans men themselves constitute a space of struggle for the diversity of trans masculinities. The diversity among trans masculinities challenges the binary and normative understanding of sex and gender adopted by the law and the medicine in Turkey. Consequently, trans men construct their masculinities in interaction with, and often in spite of these "compulsory" regulations and interventions, which impose a proper trans subjectivity and masculinity. As I argue in this chapter, lawyers and psychiatrists who have developed a nuanced and empathetic understanding of transitional processes play a key role in these negotiations.

CHAPTER 4

PRACTICES OF TRANS MEN'S COMMUNITY BUILDING

In Chapter 4, I explore the importance of trans men-only political and social platforms in Turkey, that are, organizations and platforms which enable trans men's access to information on transition, act as networks of solidarity, and contribute the visibility of "trans man" identity. Through an analysis of these platforms, exploring the insights and possibilities offered by trans lives and masculinities, I aim to provide a particular challenge to the understanding of masculinities within the binary comprehension of sex and gender.

Throughout this chapter, I introduce trans men-only online platforms and their efforts to create and maintain a "transmasculine culture," also identifying the contribution of lawyers and psychiatrists to these processes. I discuss the community-building practices of trans men and their perception of each other not only as fellows and peers but also as competitors, since they stand on different stages of transition, and have a diversity of backgrounds and experiences. Based on the narratives of my interviewees, I investigate how trans men perceive not only themselves but also each other in terms of authenticity (of masculinity) and "transness."

4.1. Trans Men-Only Platforms

In the last decade, there has been an intense interest in LGB and queer socializations especially in terms of solidarity and cruising in Turkey (Özbay 2010, Savcı 2013). However, trans men have not yet been able to produce their own spaces to regularly socialize with other trans men even though there have been monthly meetings, especially in big cities such as İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir. These meetings are not consistently held in the same places due to the everchanging make-up attendees. At this point, socialization of trans men seems to distinctively differ from other queer socializations including LGB communities in terms of content, purpose and mobilization. In what follows, I discuss these differences and highlight that trans men have made an effort to build and maintain their own trans men-only spaces through online solidarity mechanisms in terms of the circulation of their experiences within social and institutional mediums, and the information of identity.

As I mentioned while discussing online searches and the process of accessing information on identity related questions, the Transmasculine Data Bank and other blogs have been an essential source of information for trans men in Turkey in terms of self-identification and transition. In this chapter, I would like to continue this discussion and take it further, focusing on the trans men-only platform T-KULÜP (Transmasculine Culture Production Platform) which is based on a closed Facebook group and founded in 2013.

Trans men recently began creating new online platforms such as United Unicorns and Mavi Çatı, and to discuss reactivating the former ones for publishing articles, news and informative texts, with the aim of increasing their visibility and fostering solidarity among the persons who identify in the same ways or share similar processes in their lives. In what follows, I discuss the reasons behind the “unstability” of the platforms among trans men, focusing on their functions in the communities, mechanisms for solidarity and alliance with legal and health support. I pay attention to T-KULÜP rather than other platforms-in-the-making since it was the more explicitly mentioned platform in the course of my fieldwork, being the longest standing and the most widely known platform. In fact, all of my interviewees tended to call T-KULÜP as *kulüp* at some point. I argue that this tendency can be regarded not simply as a practical, colloquial preference but rather by virtue of the feeling of “fellowship” among trans men.

T-KULÜP has been created as a platform for activism and solidarity among trans men providing a space for the expression of a transmasculine culture in Turkey. As my encounters with trans men show, trans men could not easily organize and establish their own spaces independently of the LGBTI+ movement. A common explanation for the lack of physical spaces that my trans friends and interviewees have expressed is that trans men indeed prefer to access information on transitions via social and online platforms. Many trans men in Turkey prefer to live their social lives as ‘men’ rather than as a member of the trans community. In other words, trans men-only platforms are used mainly for providing and circulating information on trans men’s altering their bodies through hormones and surgeries.

T-KULÜP works through an invitation system: only if a group member invites you, you can be a member. In other words, one necessarily needs to know someone from “inside” to get this invitation. Afterwards, there is a compulsory written interview conducted by a small group of people to get permission for being a member. This effort reveals the need for maintaining a “safe zone” among trans men where each member

can be sure that only trans men could access to the circulation of visual and written material they share. All of the posts on T-KULÜP become available for members and new comers even if their authors have left the group. Hereby, all the posts which include useful information for other members are accumulated within one platform and they can reach some specific information via a search button.

When I asked some of my friends who are also members of that Facebook group how I could reach people that I can potentially interview, they suggested me to write an informative text on my research with my e-mail address and then they could share it in T-KULÜP, so people could write me back in this way. Since I did not think this idea methodologically fit for my research, I did not reach people in the way that they suggested. However, the motivation behind their suggestion seems to be their knowledge that there is a wide diversity of trans men on T-KULÜP in terms of geographical region, age, cultural background, religion, education and so on.

4.1.1. Solidarity within T-KULÜP: “Even drinking together is a part of our solidarity”

As my interviewees pointed out, this diversity of the members in T-KULÜP enables its members, especially new ones, to feel “relieved” that they share a common identity with many others with different backgrounds. Therefore, even when a member does not prefer to meet other trans men in person, he might feel empowered by being informed about the existence of hundreds of trans men like himself.

A well-known leader in the transgender rights movement and writer, Jamison Green (2004) emphasizes the importance of “Get-Togethers” through his own experience within the FTM community in 1990s. Although he did not consider himself as a regular in the meetings or being in need of more people in his life besides his partners, family and work associates, Green found himself feeling “fascinated” and “encouraged”:

“[But] the truth was that even though everyone wasn’t just like me, even though everyone wasn’t someone I’d have chosen as a close friend, it was fascinating to meet and hear stories from people who shared my own feeling of knowing we were male people who had been born with female bodies. It was encouraging to meet others who were all in the process of trying to understand themselves and manage their lives” (Green 2004, 56).

Green's self-expression reveals the significance of coming together with people who share the same identity with oneself and he, thus, came to be intrigued by the different experiences of other people who are self-identified as transmasculine or trans man.

My interviewees frequently highlighted the encouraging impact of meeting people who share similar self-expressions with themselves. Kaan, for instance, compares the community dynamics of trans men with that of trans women in order to emphasize the experience of a distinctive togetherness amongst trans men, especially through *külüüp*:

“People make feel each other good there [in T-KULÜP] I mean, it is generally said that there is a ‘shade throwing’ among trans women but there is no such a thing among trans men at all. Everyone supports each other. There might be some small things but only among the old ones. But there is no such a thing among trans men in general.”⁵³

Kaan's comment on the relations between trans men shows how significant the support of trans men for each other is. Similarly, Ümit recounted that:

“At first, I did not get what was happening, but told myself that ‘it is going on’. Meeting with even only one person was enough. After seeing so many of them [trans men], I was really shocked. I was both so envious of them and really happy for them to having overcome all those difficulties. I was always passively following what has been written. Then, I started to search for doctors etc. I don't exactly what I had been feeling at that time though, that was a long time ago. But it was like as if buying a new pair of shoes, I guess. You know, that kind of excitement to touch it for the first time.”⁵⁴

As another comment on T-KULÜP, Ali described it as an “encyclopedia” in which trans men could reach all the information on what they need and wonder about:

“I describe it [T-KULÜP] as an encyclopedia about us in my own way. For instance, there is a concern on something, think as if you are about to build a machine, you can find a video on Youtube. The same is happening here when there is a private issue, they capture a video and send it to you.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Ordaki insanlar birbirlerine iyi geliyolar hani çok böyle bi şey var genelde trans kadınlar arasında böyle biraz madilik olduğu söylenir ama trans erkekler arasında hiç öyle bi şey yok, herkes birbirine acayip destek. Ufak tefek mutlaka oluyodur onlar da böyle artık başlar, böyle eskiler falandan oluyodur. Ama trans erkeklerde öyle bi şey yok.

⁵⁴ İlk başta hiçbir şey anlamadım ama ‘Oluyo!’ dedim. Hani bana zaten bir kişiyle tanışmam bile yetmişti. O kadar insanı görünce şok oldum. İşte yarım kıskanıyodum baya diğer yarım da işte mutlu oldum gerçekten insanların sorunlarını atlatıp bunları başarmasına. Sürekli zaten pasif olarak takip ediyodum yazılanları. Sonra işte doktor falan araştırmaya başladım. Tam olarak ne hissettim hiç hatırlamıyorum gerçekten, çok sene oldu. Ama şey yani böyle yeni ayakkabı almışsın gibi bi şey o duygu yani. Hem böyle heyecan ilk defa böyle ona dokuncakmışım gibi garip bi duygu.

⁵⁵ Ben öyle tanımlıyorum yani kendimce, bize ait bi ansiklopedi diyelim. İşte bi konu oldu mesela şey gibi düşün bi makine yapıcan, Youtube'da bi video buluyosun. Bizde de öyle mesela özel bir konu olduğu zaman ordan bi video çekip atıyolar.

What Ali means by “encyclopedia” seemed to be as a vast range of information not only from different time and places but also from a variety of personal and collective experiences and perspectives. Although I interviewed Ali in İzmir where he studied at the university before, he lives in a small city located in the eastern borders of Turkey. Ali’s portrayal of T-KULÜP shows that this information network melts the geographical gap among trans men providing widespread access to the experiences and knowledge of each other through its online accessibility. On his first get-together with other *kulüp* members in İzmir, we had a dialogue as follows:

“You said that you gathered. How was that? Was that the first time getting together?”

Exactly, we came together for the first time and that meeting was the initiator of making my friends.

How did you feel there?

Well, you see someone like you. Before all these, you think as if you are the only one, thinking of I was wrong and a sick. But no, neither I am wrong nor am I sick. When you go to the meetings, everyone has been helping each other. I was lucky when I went, because nearly everyone was at the beginning of their transition. Then after, if you get along well with each other, you keep on meeting with them. If not, you help each other at least.”⁵⁶

Like Ali, Can, who lives in a small town in the Black Sea Region for studying focused on the solidarity and supportive practices within the *kulüp*:

“At *kulüp*, we are more than 650 people and all of us are trans men. Some of them living in İstanbul, some in Ankara, İzmir, Van, Ağrı and so on. It is diverse. Even though some people living at some places have never seen each other face to face, there is still *kulüp*. They are writing, pouring out, looking for advices on what they can do about their families if they have been facing to having expelled from their home. What else, we are trying to build solidarity between each other somehow by finding a place to live or a job and so on.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ **Dedin ya toplandık, bir araya geldik. O nasıldı? İlk defa mı bir araya geliyodunuz?**

Aynen ilk defa bi araya geldik ve baya dostluklarımın falan kurulmasına ön ayak olan buluşma oydu.

Nasıl hissettin orda?

İşte kendinden aynısını görüyorsun. İşte önceden şey düşünüyön ben tekim ben yanlış mıyım işte hasta mıyım... hayır ne yanlışım ne de hastayım yani. Gidiyorsun işte herkes yardımcı oluyo birbirine. Ben şanslıydım gittiğimde kimse daha süreç konusunda başlamasında hani herkes yeniydi. Sonra işte uyuşan kafa uyuşanlar olarak beraber devam ediyosun. Kafa uyuşmayan da yardım olunca yardım ediyö sana falan.

⁵⁷ Biz kulüpte 650 kişi 650 küsür kişiyiz hepimiz trans erkeğiz işte. Biri İstanbul’da biri Ankara, İzmir, Van, Ağrı falan hani çok çeşitli. Tamam bazı yerlerdeki insanlar hani yüz yüze görüşemeseler de kulüp var. Yazıyorlar ediyolar, içini döküyorlar, akıl arıyorlar, ‘ailem konusunda ne yapabilirim, beni evden atıyorlar’. Ne biliyim yer, iş şu bu hani hep birbirimize bi şekilde destek olmaya çalışıyoruz.

When I met Yiğit who had been in the transition process for nine months, he complained that he cannot come together and socialize with his friends from the *kulüp* as much as before, and that he misses being a part of the solidarity network:

“I mean, we don’t need to do anything specific. Even just getting together and having a drink is a part of our solidarity, at least. Because everyone is getting alone. Everyone is getting alone without even realizing it.”⁵⁸

All of my interviewees mentioned how effectively this “guidance” works among the *kulüp* members; some, however, emphasized that they did not intensely benefit from the knowledge which had been circulated before their transition. Even though I already discussed the issue of having blue vs. pink ID card in the context of Turkey throughout Chapter 3, I would like to emphasize, once again, that I consider whether trans men that I interviewed have got their blue ID cards or not as a crucial and determinative information since their narratives on *kulüp* become varied through this transition, which is the focus of the previous section.

4.2 “Acting as a Network”: Possibilities of Chosen Family among Trans Men

During my fieldwork, I realized that most of my interviewees who already got their blue ID card talked about their “gratefulness” for the great solidarity of their trans men friends within the *kulüp*. On the other hand, those who were still at the “stages” of legal and/or medical transition processes laid emphasis on the discouraging influences of being part of a closed community. Especially in the narratives of Tibet, Ali, Kaan and Can who have got blue ID cards, it is possible to observe a feeling of debt and gratitude to T-KULÜP. For this very reason, I argue that even if we cannot directly consider trans men community on T-KULÜP as a “queer family,” there are strong feelings of affinity and significant practices of support and solidarity established among its members.

In their inspiring book *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*, Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan (2001) discuss the new forms of “doing family” and argue that identity is recalibrated in and with intimate relationships. Especially through “family of choice” which is not necessarily based on kinship or biology, new and varied forms of chosen relationships might be seen as a significant feature of both the heterosexual and non-heterosexual world in modern societies (Weeks

⁵⁸ Ya hayır en azından şu da olur hiçbi şey yapmayıp bir araya gelip bi şeyler içmek bile dayanışmanın bi parçası. Çünkü giderek yalnızlaşıyo insanlar. Farkında olmadan herkes yalnızlaşıyo.

et al. 2001). They argue that “People slide easily between viewing the family as a site of hostility, and as something they can invent. Friends are like family; or they are family. The family is something external to you, or something you do. This ambivalence in language is revealing. We are clearly in transition from one set of norms to another” (Weeks et al. 2001, 11). This transition is particularly evident in the experiences and narratives of LGBTI+ individuals in Turkey and elsewhere (Çalışkan 2014, Mitchell 2008).

As my fieldwork revealed, trans men’s paths cross each other at some points with the variety of online and in-person encounters, experiences and socialization. In a manner consistent with Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan’s (2001) analysis of queer family, my interviewees stated that there are some codes and certain dynamics of the *kulüp*, which might be considered as one set of norms in a sense, especially through the discussions on generations, socializations and masculinities. In the light of my fieldwork, even though my participants’ narrations on T-KULÜP were conducted mainly through referring it as an information network and a support group, I suggest revisiting the concepts of “family of choice” and “solidarity network among people like oneself.”

Although there has been a growing attention in the literature to the issue of “family of choice” among lesbians, gays and bisexuals (Lehr 2000, Mitchell 2008, Dewaele et al. 2011, Nelson 2013), analyses of friendship and family among trans subjects has remained scarce. In the context of Turkey, recent research has highlighted new forms of “doing family” and solidarity among trans women, especially the trans women sex (Çalışkan 2014, Zengin 2014).

Based on her fieldwork in İstanbul, Dilara Çalışkan (2014) employs the term “queer kinship” for the relations among trans women sex workers who have mother/daughter relationship. According to her research, trans women were creating a chain of family bonds by teaching each other not only crucial information regarding sex work and how to survive within their competitive and dangerous work environment but also about “how to be a woman” (Çalışkan 2014). In her words:

“[Q]ueer kinship evolves into an intense period in which daughters’ relation with womanhood practices starts under the guidance of their mothers [...] this process lasts between two to four years and in most cases the mothers accept and see their daughter as a ‘woman’ – even if they would not fit to the normative woman image - and ‘teach’ their daughters ‘how to be a woman.’ More than that, in this context, mother/daughter relationship turns

into a site where daughters are recognized as ‘a woman’” (Çalışkan 2014, 59).

As Çalışkan’s fieldwork with trans women revealed, knowledge and memory transfer from mothers to their daughters has become a crucial need which enables new trans women sex workers to “learn” what they could face with throughout the rest of their lives while doing sex work and “becoming” a woman. Moreover, both mothers and daughters’ narratives reveal that “the transfer of a ‘giant database’ (Muhtar) on customers that enables daughters to develop a mental shortcut to protect themselves against hate crimes, turns queer kinship into a survival kit” (Çalışkan 2014, 140).

Another well-rounded research Aslı Zengin did between 2009 and 2012 mentions the intimate relations among trans individuals including trans women and trans men. While focusing on intimate workings of Turkish state power, Zengin argues that trans individuals bring on responses to this power through making a trans community, as she calls “a form of family and trans activism” (Zengin 2014, iii). According to Zengin’s analysis of her interviewees’ narratives, queer family “enables an intimate space of friendship”:

“[O]ne should be attentive to not taking the queer family or living up to certain codes of family as a constant point of reference in trans people’s lives. Rather the emphasis on ‘real family,’ or what I analytically call queer family-making and bonding, becomes stronger in those violent moments of everyday life when trans people face exclusion, displacement, and abandonment” (Zengin 2014, 268).

In a similar vein to Çalışkan (2014) and Zengin (2014), my interviewees’ narratives revealed that T-KULÜP works not only for the transfer of knowledge regarding the transition processes but it also acts as a “survival guide.” As I mentioned above, it seems to me that the reason behind their preference to call this platform as “*kulüp*” does not only have practical reasons but also expresses their strong attachment and sense of belonging to this community.

Can explains his feelings on T-KULÜP as follows:

“Nothing would work, if ‘*kulüp*’ didn’t exist. It goes same for me as well, I guess. I mean it would work but hardly (...) They don’t give you a fish, instead they, I mean we, teach you how to fish. Everyone has been guiding each other. These things work in this way. You may want to think whether

you would act alone or stand together with 300-400 people. The same goes here.”⁵⁹

Even though it is difficult to observe the specific practices of doing family that Çalışkan and Zengin refer to in their work among trans men, the way they employ the term “queer kinship” reminded me of most of my interviewees’ interpretations regarding the *kulüp*. Most of trans men that I interviewed considered that learning and teaching each other “how to be a trans man,” and how to protect themselves against transphobia or any kind of hate crimes within social, legal and medical mediums as the most distinctive part of their togetherness in the *kulüp*.

4.2.1. *Kulüp* as “a house for survival”

In the summer of 2014, the news of 17-year-old Okyanus Efe’s death and his touching note circulated in social media. Just before he committed suicide, he had written: “What fucking good came out of being normal?”⁶⁰ It was a sad event which evoked LGBTI+ communities in many cities to protest against transphobia but the march which was organized in İzmir, Kınık where Efe was living, was canceled by the police department. In the following years, more suicide news circulated in the media, resounding the note left behind.

Bryan and Mayock (2017) emphasize the complexities of “the suicide consensus” which is generally taken for granted for LGBTI+ individuals and they propose a new approach and new solidarity mechanisms as “an emerging counter-discursive effort to de-naturalize the now hegemonic and universalizing cultural representation of the wounded, abject gay youth which conflates LGBT identity with suicidality, self-harm and associated mental health difficulties” (Bryan and Mayock 2017, 81).

Throughout my fieldwork, many research participants expressed concern on regarding the suicide which usually results from the stress, anxiety and hopelessness experienced by trans individuals. While some of my interviewees expressed having thought about committing suicide before, for some others, it was as an ongoing possibility. Some of my interviewees, lay particular emphasis on suicide prevention as another effective aspect of the *kulüp* in addition to relieving each other.

⁵⁹ Kulüp olmasa olmaz ya, cidden olmaz. Benim için de öyle, olmazdı herhalde. Yani olur, çok zor (...). Balık tutmuyorlar ama tutmayı öğretiyorlar. Hep bi yol gösteriyorlar, yol gösteriyoruz. Bu işler bu şekilde yürür. Sen tek başına mı yoksa arkanda 300 400 kişiyle mi daha kolay hareket edersin? O muhabbet biraz da.

⁶⁰ “Ne boka yaradı normal olmak?”.

Can, for instance, told me about some *kulüp* members' suicide attempts that they prevented by being supportive for overcoming their problems:

“We are trying to build solidarity with the ones whom have been struggling with their families. There has not been any suicide attempt among the people at *kulüp*. However, we have been hearing for two years that 2 or 3 friends of us, who were not at *kulüp* committed a suicide. I am only talking about trans men, and that's why standing together is a really good thing. For example, when a trans man writes something at *kulüp*, which is more likely a note before a suicidal attempt, everyone is trying to talk with him out of his plan beforehand, then that person starts to question what he might about to do. There have been few people like this, they didn't commit a suicide, they are still alive, nothing has happened so far. We have been holding on to something, somehow.⁶¹”

Like Can, Ali mentioned a suicidal attempt that they prevented in T-KULÜP:

“It [T-KULÜP] is a good place. You can find nearly everything concerning us, the knowledge gained through almost 600 people (...) Then there are suicide cases... We are helping those who ran away from their families etc. We are helping those who has no information on transition procedure, we are trying to improvise the *kulüp*.”⁶²

Even though trans men do not have an organization to come together and receive support in person, as Can and Ali's narratives suggest, this online “support group” helps them to be in solidarity in the face of various challenges in their lives, and it has a potential which might save each other's lives in some cases.

Besides trans men themselves, the psychiatrists that I interviewed, especially Zeynep and Barış, frequently highlighted that friendship and peer-support [*akranlık*] among trans men might be more helpful and influential than psychiatric or familial support in terms of overcoming difficulties and anxieties of trans lives. Zeynep who has had trans clients from different regions of Turkey stated that they are collaborating against suicide attempts with each other as psychiatrist colleagues:

“Once, there was a case. An adolescent psychiatrist called us about a young 14-year-old trans man living in Canakkale, who had already committed suicide twice, and in one he jumped off ferry, which is absolutely not such a

⁶¹ Sıkıntıları olanlar oluyo ailedir şudur budur yine destek olmaya çalışıyoruz. Yani kulüpte olup da hani intihar eden olmadı. Bu kulüpte olmayıp da intihar eden iki ya da üç arkadaşımız oldu iki senedir. Yani sadece trans erkek olarak konuşuyorum. Ya o yüzden hani birlik beraberlik gerçekten iyi yani. Yazıyo adam, bi yazmış tam intihar etmeden önce bi yazı yazarsın ya adam birebir onu yazmış. Hop diye herkes bi köşeden saldırınca, ‘Bi dakika ya noluyo?’ moduna bürünüyo. Öyle bir iki kişi vardı, hala hayattalar yani intihar falan etmediler. Bi şey olmuyo yani. Ya tutunuyoruz bi yerlere bi şekilde.

⁶² Güzel bi şey [T-KULÜP] her şeyi var içinde sonuçta 600 kişilik bilgi birikimi (...) Sonra işte intihar vakaları falan... bi kişiyi öyle engelledik hani orda bi şey yapınca işte evden kaçanlar falan filanlar şey yapıyoruz yardımcı oluyoruz. İşte süreçte ne yapması gerektiğini bilmeyenlere yardımcı oluyoz falan, baya geliştiriyoruz

suicidal attempt you just want to get attention. Then this trans boy came to İstanbul after my invitation to our group therapy. His older brothers [older trans men] at our group therapy encouraged him by saying ‘Have you gone mad! There is still too much to do in life.’ Since he didn’t know anything about the transition procedure, he was asking ‘Was that even possible’. The older ones motivated him that it is not a big deal and guided him what kind of things that needed to be done etc. After all, he cheered up again.”⁶³

In a similar way, for Barış, it was crucial to state that friendship between trans men enables them to be in solidarity against the possible difficulties in their lives with each other:

“For example, one of my standard questions while evaluating my advisees is if they know any other trans person. I ask if they know anyone who has been experiencing similar things, instead of directly saying ‘trans’. Sometimes I have been even trying to make them in contact with each other. I have done exactly this with a trans man who lives in a city in Anatolian region, for instance. If there is not any similar organization there, at least there are lots of formations (small groups) even consisting of few people. Like reaching out those at Facebook to intermediate between them by exchanging their telephone numbers to one another etc. Because that kind of a peer solidarity group can provide more than I can do, I believe.”⁶⁴

While discussing intimate relations among trans women, especially in the context of funerals, Zengin (2014, 268) quotes Naisargi Dave’s (2014, 170) note on queer family as it “is built of loss, necessitated by deaths both figurative and literal.” Zengin also adds to Dave’s analysis another layer of this form of family which creates a possibility of an intimate space for “friendship to flourish.”

In our interview with Sarkis, it was striking for me that he also emphasized trans men’s ways of protecting each other in the *kulüp*:

“I believe that when it comes to hormone replacement therapy, trans men have more awareness than trans women, which I assume that it may be linked to being organized in terms of our group dynamics. Because the first thing that has been told to us is that these hormones are needed to be used

⁶³ Bi vaka vardı işte Çanakkale’deki ergen çocuk psikiyatristi bizi aramıştı 14 yaşında bir erkek trans iki kere intihar girişimi var ve birisinde feribottan atıyo kendini hani şey değil böyle dikkat çekmeye çalışan intiharlar değil. Onun mesela İstanbul’a gelmişti, ben bizim şeyde grupta gruba davet ettim, trans grubuna [group therapy] mesela orda o kadar şeydi ki abileri tarafından böyle “ya saçmalama ne ölmesi! Daha yapıcak bir sürü şey var” falan deyip böyle ona şey yapmaları işte “ismini değiştir önce.” Hani “değişiyo mu isim?” diye hani hiç bilmiyo ya çocuk. “Tabi canım o halledilir” diye işte yol gösteriyolar “Bak bunu yapıcaksın” falan. Acayip morali toparlamıştı.”

⁶⁴ Mesela standart sorularımdan biri de değerlendirme sırasında, başka trans tanıyo mu? Trans diye sormuyorum, benzer bi şey yaşayan başka kimseyi tanıyo musun diye. E tanımalarını sağlamaya çalıştığım oluyo yani şöyle absürt şeyler bile yaptığım oluyo yani. Anadolu’nun başka bir şehrindeki bir trans erkeğe örneğin bunu yaptım da yani mesela, o şehirde başka ulaşabileceği bir burdakine benzer oluşum yoksa, gene de üç beş insanın bir araya geldiği bir sürü oluşum var. İşte Facebook’tan onlara uğraşıp ordan telefon numarası verip vesaire... Çünkü burda benim sağladığımdan daha fazlasını sağlayabilir diye düşünüyorum akranların.

under the close supervision of the doctors. We say each other ‘If you do not act correspondingly, you may ruin your liver, you may be severely affected by embolism and even difficulty in breathing that may eventually lead to death. We have lost many of our friends and we don’t want to lose you the same way’.”⁶⁵

As my encounters and interviews with trans men depicted, it seems that they have a good sense of when “one of them” has a problem which will make him think of committing suicide or engage in self-harm. This ability to sense and empathize with each other’s condition seems to come from having faced a similar set of transphobia, hate crime or other difficulties, and having experienced the vulnerability and helplessness that results from not only social and institutional norms and practices, but also from a lack of information.

As a person who grew up in a small town and felt lonely for years, Ali summarized what T-KULÜP members mean to him as follows: “Like comrades... ultimately, it is only those who lack one eye understand others who lack an eye.”⁶⁶

4.3 Sharing Privacy: The Limits of Circulation of Private Information among Trans Men

Following the narratives on circulation of the information, most of my interviewees focused on another aspect of their socialization among trans men: sharing private information. Even though some did not use this term directly, it was possible to observe in the course of the fieldwork that one of the distinctive qualities of T-KULÜP was providing a safe, confidential platform for privacy exchange for trans men. Here, I employ the term privacy to refer to the dynamics which enable trans men to unmask their “dressed/covered” appearances to each other within the “safe zone” of T-KULÜP, in addition to WhatsApp groups of various sizes.

Notwithstanding that trans men share a kind of intimacy on T-KULÜP, there are limitations on the circulation of “sensitive” information. Most of my interviewees mentioned that there are a great variety of masculinity performances, and some of them bothered them for various reasons. Yiğit, for instance, considers that avoidance of

⁶⁵ Trans erkeklerin hormon kullanma bilincinin trans kadınlardan daha yüksek olduğuna inanıyorum ki ben bunu da bu örgütlenmeye bağlıyorum ayrıca. Çünkü mesela bizde ilk söylenen şey şeydir yani, doktor kontrolünde yapmak zorundasın arkadaşım bunu yapmazsan senin karaciğerlerin mahvolur damarların tıkanabilir, erken yaşta nefes darlığı çekip ölebilirsin. Biz böyle biçok insanı kaybettik, seni de böyle kaybetmek istemiyoruz diye başlar bizim sürecimiz.

⁶⁶ “Yoldaş gibi... Sonuçta hani [...] bi gözü olmayanı bi gözü olmayan anlar.”

sharing “private” information among trans men as a part of the “performance of masculinity”:

“There is this information sharing, you have been getting informed. People have been sharing their [top] surgery photographs, mostly with the ones having successful results. But, they don’t often share the pictures of penis [construction] surgery for some reason, I don’t know. They avoid sharing. I’m pretty sure lots of people going under this surgery; however, only few of them, one or two people share their results by adding a note saying for example, ‘Ok, take a look now, I’m gonna delete them within one hour.’ There is lack of knowledge on penis [construction] surgery and I believe it is necessarily important to share their experiences and everything regarding this surgery. But there is a huge gap of knowledge on what is going on after the surgery, whether those people feel satisfied or have been going through a kind of a trauma. But it is their privacy, and they avoid sharing their private photos of their certain parts!”⁶⁷

For the “closed” trans men-only meetings, Sarkis also mentioned similar concerns:

“Everyone has common concerns and problems, which are being talked in a moral perspective. Because the subject here –cunts, dicks, boobs- is related to privacy. Since those are private issues, no one wants to share this information about themselves I guess. They think of what if someone at the *kulüp* invites their partner [to the gatherings]. You think like ‘this woman maybe won’t be in my life and even if she will, why does she know my privacy?’.”⁶⁸

According to Sarkis’s explanation, some of the *kulüp* members avoid letting their partners and “peers” come together since they do not want to share private information about themselves.

In the course of my fieldwork, sharing of private information on T-KULÜP was discussed mainly through the problematization of the feelings of “shame” and “dissatisfaction” that prevented some members from sharing private information. Especially the ones who had recently started the transition processes mentioned that they were not happy with this attitude since they considered experience sharing, including negative ones, as one of the most influential aspects of their solidarity.

⁶⁷ Bilgi alıyosun, bilgi paylaşımı var. İşte insanlar ameliyat fotoğraflarını paylaşıyorlar, başarılı... ama şeyi paylaşmıyorlar, penis ameliyatlarını paylaşmıyorlar genelde niyeyse bilmiyorum. Çok çekiniyorlar. Yani birçok insan eminim ki ameliyat oluyo ama bir iki tane paylaşıyo ‘Hadi bakın bir iki saat sonra kaldırıcam’ diyo mesela. Yani bunlar bence önemli aşında deneyimlerini her şeyini paylaşması lazım çünkü penis ameliyatı konusunda bence bi boşluk var. Çok büyük bi boşluk var yani noluyo nasıl geçiyo sonrasında mutlular mı değiller mi travma yaşıyorlar mı ama herkes kendi şeyinde yaşıyo kendi özeli... sanki neyse o insanlar çekiniyorlar özel yerlerinden.

⁶⁸ Herkesin derdi belli, ortak nokta belli. Hani bunun üzerinde çok ahlakçı bi yerden bi yandan çünkü mahremiyet konuşuluyo, am konuşuluyo, pipi konuşuluyo, meme konuşuluyo... Özel konuşulduğu için yani galiba kimse şey yapmak istemiyo ya birisi sevgilisini getirecek, ‘ulan yarın bu kadın hayatımda olmyacak belki, bu kadın niye benim hayatımda olsa dahi niye benim özelimi bilsin ki?’ diyosun.”

Even though there was no general consensus among my interviewees on what kinds of private experiences could or should be shared on T-KULÜP throughout my fieldwork, as it might be understood from the quotations that I presented, there had been some indirect references to this issue in my interviewees' narratives at some point. In sum, while some trans men would like to share their experiences visually or in writing, especially surgical operations like mastectomy and phalloplasty, as a part of solidarity, some others might not prefer to open their "private" lives.

4.3.1 Trans men camp

In 2015, Pembe Hayat which is the first association based on trans rights in Turkey organized their annual "trans camp" in Antalya, that had included all trans identified individuals before, as open to only trans men. Although it has not been repeated again, some of my interviewees stated that they need this kind of get-togethers as only trans men since they feel more "encouraged" and "hopeful" while sharing an intense time as they mentioned.

The dialogue below is from our interview with Ali who participated in trans men camp in 2015:

"Every day we were being informed, following voice recording sessions on what we had done, how it had been going etc. That was nice to get closer and share our problems. There was a room at back where we were staying as three people, which enable us to get closer.

How many of you were there?

Twenty people in total, I guess. I mean I remember as 20, it might be more than this. After that, I turned back.

Have you shared your experiences there?

Exactly, we have done that. Then, we went swimming together. Some with post-op and some without it, together, went swimming, which was nice all-in-all to get closer with each other.

Do you still have contact with each other?

Exactly, I do. When I went to Istanbul in June, I met most of them bla bla. We had some deep conversation along with rakı table in which they drank

and so on. Well, you share stuff anyway. You see each other once, and it goes on.”⁶⁹

As it might be understood from the dialogue, Ali narrated that they were “swimming together” when I asked him about experience sharing in the camp by referring to the “transition processes.” Accordingly, it seems that “swimming together” had another meaning than the literal one as sharing an “intimate” moment that they feel comfortable since only trans men could see the naked bodies of each other.

Another dialogue on the camp were occurred while we were talking about the socialization among trans men with Ümit:

“For example, there was this trans men camp organized by Pembe Hayat Association here [in Antalya]. I went as a participant and after all I have met almost all of them in this way.

How was it, I mean, the camp?

It was tiring but also nice to have a chance to meet with people like me. Most of them underwent top surgery, and that’s why I was thinking of them as my upgraded version, which is actually not a right approach to have. I mean, not only it made me feel relief to reach that level, but also made me sad to not being at that level. That’s why I left there with a feeling of sadness. Also, I felt depressed and was stuck at home after leaving the camp since that was the first time for me to have been in such a comfortable place. I had written to those people on Facebook constantly. I mean the camp was so great. Maybe it wasn’t the kind of a camp they actually desired to organize. It was organized for the first time anyway. I guess, the organizers couldn’t meet their expectations or I was the one who couldn’t get that. Except for that, it was great in terms of improving personal relations. I socialized and that was enough for me. Anyway, I was interviewed there as well on what we’re talking right now.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Hergün şey oluyodu bilgilendirme falan oluyodu. Sonra ses kaydı falan oldu işte aynı böyle ne yaptın ne ettin falan. Güzeldi ya kaynaştık şey yaptık, sorunlarımızı paylaştık. İşte arka bi odada üç kişi falan kalıyoduk daha da pekiştik falan.

Toplam kaç kişi vardı?

Yirmi kişi vardır. Yirmi diye hatırlıyorum belki daha fazla da olabilir. Ondan sonra geri döndüm...

Orda da deneyim mi paylaşıyodunuz?

Deneyim paylaşıyoduk aynen. İşte şey yaptık yüzdük falan beraber gittik işte ameliyat olanlar var olmayanlar var işte hep beraber yüzüyorsunuz falan. Güzeldi ya işte kaynaşyon ediyon falan öyle.

Ordan tanıştığın insanlarla hala görüşüyo musun?

Aynen görüşüyorum. İşte İstanbul bu haziran ayında İstanbul’a gittiğimde çoğuyla karşılaştım görüştük falan filan. Orda baya derin muhabbetler falan yaptık hani rakı sofrası falan kuruldu içtiler falan. Orda işte sonuçta bi şeyler paylaşıyorsunuz, bi kere görüşüyorsunuz sonra bi daha gerisi geliyo zaten.

⁷⁰ Mesela burda [Antalya’da] Pembe Hayatın düzenlediği trans erkek kampı olmuştu, ona gittim orda zaten hepsini tanıdım nerdeyse. Bu şekilde oldu.

O nasıldı, kamp?

Like Ali's narrative, Ümit laid emphasis on the importance of trans men-only socialization during the camp due to that he felt comfortable there. Yet, he also added another layer of this socialization as comparing himself with other trans men, and evaluated the trans men who got surgeries and/or hormone therapy as "higher-level." I will be discussing this layer of socialization as a part of diversity within the trans men community.

4.4 Diversity of Trans Masculinities: Flourishing or Loosing the Safe Zone?

In recent years, with the rising public visibility of trans men and increasing internet usage in Turkey, trans men began to be able to find online platforms in which they can socialize with "people like them" and create certain "safe zones." For this very reason, T-KULÜP came to be a ground where its number of members have rapidly increased in recent years. However, most of my interviewees reflected their current perception of this online group as a space which is starting to lose its quality as a "safe zone."

Some of my interviewees explained this loss of safety as a result of its "overcrowdedness" and others by its increased diversity. In our interview with Ümit and Sefa, they frequently explained their feelings on the current attitudes of new "population" within the *kulüp*:

Ümit: "I have been reading everything written on T-KULÜP everyday like crazy. At that time, it used to be much more helpful since there were less people. That's the reason I guess that kulüp could be handled more efficiently. Like the same question would not be asked over and over again. What people wrote were more reasonable and conscious. With its increasing population, kulüp turned back to its starting point, the same questions again and again like 'Will I have a kid' and 'What if I apply such and such a drug on my face, would my moustache grow?' (laughs).

Sefa: There are even such people saying things like 'Sperms come out of my clitoris' etc. (laughs).

Yorucuydu kamp... hmm şey açısından güzel yani benim gibi insanları daha yakın gördüm işte zaten çoğu ameliyat olmuş insanlardı onun için... benim bi üst levelim gibi bakıyorum aslında yanlış bi bakış açısı da yani şey varacağım yerin orası olması beni çok rahatlatı ama aynı zamanda daha oraya varmamış olmam çok canımı sıktı o yüzden moralim bozuk geri döndüm. Bi de ilk defa her konuda çok rahat olduğum bi yer olduğu için geldikten sonra depresyona girdim bir hafta evden çıkmadım. Sürekli onlara yazdım Facebook'tan falan çok iyi yani çok iyiydi. Yani aslında onların yapmak istediği kamp tam olarak olmadı muhtemelen. Zaten ilk defa denenen bi şey. Yani tam verim alamadılar sanırım ya da ben alamadım. Onun haricinde o kişisel ilişkiler iyi. Sosyalleştim, yetti bana o. Zaten orda da röportaj falan alındı, orda da anlattım.

Ümit: At that time, it was really helpful to me, but it isn't right now. I'm just looking at it when I need to search for doctors."⁷¹

Towards the end of our interview with Sefa and Ümit, they mostly complained about other trans men's lack of information or misinformation.

Parallel to Sefa and Ümit, Tibet talked about the limits of the *kulüp* in terms of its crowdedness and diversity but he also added "controllability" as another layer of its limitations:

"The platform we call as T-KULÜP has a diverse dynamism, I mean we look for only one criteria which is to be a trans man without looking at their ethnical, cultural or political backgrounds. That is why this group doesn't allow you to have so much control on it, to teach them when it is needed or to satisfy everyone's expectations and needs out of this group. It is not possible on Facebook."⁷²

Tibet's comment on the diversity reveals the challenges of the *kulüp* in keeping its inclusivity with regards to making policies, establishing solidarity and enabling effective socialization.

As it might be easily comprehended, the maintenance of an identity-based and fast-growing community contains some difficulties and complications in it even though there has been a multilayered effort to make a room for each member of the *kulüp*. It seems that these efforts might not always be enough in order to deal with disagreements and conflicts, and trans men community might be faced with further challenges of remaining open to all and maintaining a safe and effective space for support, solidarity and sharing.

4.4.1. Negotiations on masculinities among trans men

Even though my interviewees did emphasize the solidarity amongst trans men as the distinctive aspect of their community, they also shared their discomforts or negative

⁷¹ **Ümit:** Ben deli gibi okuyorum her gün ama böyle yatıyorum kalkıyorum sürekli T-KULÜP. O zamanlar çok faydası vardı bi de az kişi vardı. Bi de daha kontrol edilebilirdi herhalde az kişi olduğu için. Hani aynı sorular böyle binlerce kez dönmüyo, herkes mantıklı ve bilinçli şeyler yazıyordu sonra kişi sayısı artınca tekrar kulübün yeni açıldığı zamanlara döndü, tekrar aynı sorular. Çocuğum olur mu falan gibi. İşte X'i kırıp bıyığıma sürsem bıyığım çıkar mı gibi sorular.

Sefa: Hatta şöyle şey bile var, klitorisimden sperm geliyo falan... Bunu soran bile var yani.

Ümit: O zamanlar bana çok faydalıydı, şu an değil ama şu an sadece doktor araştırırken falan kullanıyorum.

⁷² T-KULÜP dediğim çok karma bi yapı yani hiçbir etnik, kültür, siyasi temel hiçbir fark olmadan sadece bi tane şey arıyoruz o da trans erkek olması olduğu için çok karma bi grup. Kontrol edilebilmesi, hitap edilebilmesi hani yeri geldiğinde bi şeyler öğretilmesi çok zor bi grup oluyo. O yüzden Facebook'tan bu mümkün değil."

impressions on the current problems within the *kulüp*. Especially, when I asked if they have discussions or conflicts within it, they mostly spoke of masculinity issue and masculine performances as the core matter of most conflict.

In their *Understanding Suicide and Promoting Survival in LGBT Communities*, Johnson et al. (2007) lay emphasis on the complexities of embracing trans identity in social mediums:

“After transitioning, being ‘out’ may not be the desired state of being for trans people. (...) being ‘out’ carries greater risk of violence for both LGB and trans people, but it should be noted that many trans-people have difficulty ‘passing’ as simply ‘male’ or ‘female’ and experience regular and extreme levels of physical and verbal abuse because of this” (Johnson et al. 2007, 18).

Henry Rubin (2003) also highlights the different forms of masculinities that trans men might adopt:

“Transsexualism itself does not necessarily subvert or affirm dominant forms of masculinity. Transsexual men have the potential to generate either alternative or hegemonic forms of masculinity. Altering their bodies to fit this cultural expectation, these men have an opportunity, though they do not always take it, to resignify what it means to behave like a man. Transsexualism is neither essentially normative nor essentially counterhegemonic” (Rubin 2003, 144).

As a well-known scholar of transgenderism and the writer of *FTM: Female-to-Male Transsexuals in Society*, Devor (2016) also lays emphasis on differentiation of the life trajectories of trans persons. He considers “transsexualism” as a solution to a problem for people “from a variety of directions and for a variety of reasons” (2016):

“[T]here is no single pattern which could be predictive of a transsexual outcome. Likewise, I assume that persons with similar life histories might come to differing conclusions as to how to deal with their gender and sex dissatisfactions. Therefore I also assume that although any number of people may report similar backgrounds, some may come to think of themselves as transsexual whereas other people may find different and equally satisfactory ways to live their lives” (Devor 2016, 585).

Through my interviewees’ narratives, it might be said that the preference of identifying as “man” or “trans man” gives clues as to what kind of masculinities that they choose to perform. Based on the narratives of the trans men that I interviewed, I would like to discuss the interactional dynamics of trans masculinities within the T-KULÜP.

As a relatively new member of the *kulüp*, Yiğit pointed out that diversity among the *kulüp* members sometimes creates some conflicts, and criticized some trans men in terms of their masculinities and gender performances:

“For example, we fight over especially one thing. I mean, some trans men can be too sexist. They absorb patriarchal attitudes in a flash after their transition accomplished, and start to act in that manner. In this respect, when this kind of posts are shared, the people with awareness [on this matter] immediately interfere like saying ‘no!’ And this, of course, can make the knowledge or the cognitive level down because it might be repulsive like ‘These guys react to everything, shove in one’s oar and they always produce new thoughts against something. I think there is a rupture on this matter. But, I mean, this is ultimately an uprising, I mean, totally. If you alter your body all over and if you change some things in your life, you, I think, should rethink everything and change them. You must be able to change many things such as your religious beliefs, your life style and even your discourse. I think these points make people separate there.”⁷³

Similarly, towards the end of our interview Kaan recounted that:

“Masculinity... sometimes there might be discussions. For example, everyone is annoyed when someone writes ‘bro.’ People are annoyed with manhood there. For example, I still have feminine gestures like weaving my body around and I’m not uncomfortable with them at all. But, most of the people there [T-KULÜP] be like ‘you look more masculine when you do this, sit like that or swing some beads around in your hand.’ Some do this kind of thing and sometimes there breaks out heated discussion. I mean, who needs that ‘it’s cool bro!’ and whatever?”⁷⁴

The following narratives also refer to the variety of masculinities within trans men community, especially in T-KULÜP.

Sarkis:

“There are some unpleasant things and they are too masculine as I told. For example, someone comes there with long hair and he didn’t come out to anyone or he preferred to come out. Then, I hear while they are talking to each other and saying things like ‘Dude, I can’t feel comfortable even with

⁷³ Mesela biz şey konusunda çok çatışıyoruz... ını yani bazı trans erkekler çok cinsiyetçi olabiliyo, direk böyle erkin düşüncesini hop böyle alıp bu dönüşümden sonra bütün onlar gibi davranmaya başlıyolar. Bu açıdan şey oluyo tabii, böyle paylaşımlar olunca hemen bilinçli insanlar saldıryo tabi hemen ‘hayır’ diye. Bu da biraz şey yapıyo... bilgi, bilişsel düzeyi daha böyle geri çekiyo olabilir çünkü daha şey geliyo olabilir itici geliyo olabilir belki ‘Bunlar da her şeye şey oluyolar, maydanoz oluyolar, her şeye bi fikir üretiyolar’ gibi. Bence bu konuda da bi şey var, kırılma var. Ama yani sonuç olarak bu bi başkaldırı. Yani tümüyle... Sen orda eğer bedenini baştan yaratıyosan, bi şeyleri değiştiriyorsan bence her şeyi düşünüp değiştirmen lazım sanki. Dini inanışından yaşam tarzına, söylemlerine kadar bi çok şeyi değiştirebiliyo olman lazım. Bu iki nokta bence onları şey yapıyo, ayrıştırıyo.

⁷⁴ Erkeklik... bazen oluyo mesela işte herkes şeyden mesela ‘kardeşim’ yazılmasından mesela hani ‘kardeşim!’ Erillikten rahatsız oluyo insanlar hani. [...] Ben hala mesela feminen hareketlerim vardır, kıvırtırım hiç de rahatsız olmam. Ama orda çoğu insan şey yapıyo böyle işte böyle oturunca daha erkek oluyosun, tespih sallayınca... Bazıları öyle şey yapıyolar ordan bazen bi tartışma çıkıyo. Ne gerek var işte ‘eyvallah kardeşim’ bilmem ne... Onun dışında öyle çok şeyler olmuyo.

this short hair, how could you feel comfortable with long one?’ I mean, they don’t have such concepts as ‘man with long hair’ or ‘man with boobs’ in their mind.”⁷⁵

Caner:

“We should be people who break the gender role models, gender stereotypes but many trans men try to be a man that the gender role models impose and like swearing. Okay, I swear as well but please be a bit polite my friend! You are men who had had his period, you know that period pain. You can’t deny that a woman has that pain and gets aggressive. You can understand that, it must not be hard for you to understand that. I mean, as a person who had these experiences, you can’t be such a man who takes on the gender role models the society imposes on you.”⁷⁶

All of the narratives above show that there is a disapprobation on “problematic” masculinities that some trans men perform, and this might turn into a crisis among trans men. Especially Yiğit, Kaan, Sarkis and Caner narrated these dynamics of trans men community by dissociating themselves from “problematic” masculinities. On the other hand, while criticizing “hick/bumpkin” trans men, Can engaged in self-criticism as well:

“For example, there are the ones... I mean, you would say that even a cis-man couldn’t be that much hick, that much closed minded or rough. But those ones [some trans men] are too much hick. For example, there are some trans men who are also bisexual or gay. Okay, gender identity and sexual identity are completely different things. When I first hear about them, how can I explain? Even I said, ‘How is it possible to be both trans man and gay? (laughs) What a thing! What does it mean?’. I mean, you are closely associated with that, but even you come to a point like ‘woah!’ (laughs).”⁷⁷

As “a person who used to be biphobic” in his words, Tibet told me that he came to self-identify as “a closeted bisexual trans man” after he got his blue ID card. He criticized the current discussions on masculinities and sexualities in T-KULÜP as follows:

⁷⁵ Hoş olmayan şeyler var ve çok erkekler dediğim gibi. Mesela şey oluyo, biri uzun saçlı geliyo mesela kimseye açılmamış ya da açılmış onu tercih ediyö. Şeyi duyuyorum yani kendi aralarında konuşuyolar ‘Ulan ben şu saçım la rahat etmiyorum uzun saçla nasıl rahat ediyosun?’ felan diye. Ya uzun saçlı erkek kavramları yok mesela, memeli erkek kavramları yok.

⁷⁶ Bizim toplumsal cinsiyet rol model o kalıp modelleri kıran insanlar olmamız gerek ama birçok trans erkek kabadayılığa varacak şekilde toplumsal cinsiyet rol modellerinin belirlediği erkek olmaya çalışıyo, küfretmeyi seviyo. Tamam ben de küfrediyorum ama hani arkadaş yani azıcık da nezaket. Ya sen regl olmuş bi erkeksin. O karın ağrısını biliyosun. Bunu yadsıyamazsın ki karnı ağrıyo kadının agresif oluyo. Ya bunu anlayabilecek, bunu anlamak zor değil senin için. Hani sen bu deneyimleri yaşamış bi insan olarak bu toplumun sana dayattığı rol modelde bir erkek olamazsın.

⁷⁷ Kimileri var... ya sen natrans bir erkek dahi diyosun ki hani bu kadar kıro bu kadar gerici ya bu kadar vasat olamaz. Ama adam şey yani zırl zırl kıroluk akıyo. Mesela trans erkek olup ya da biseksüel ya da gey olanlar var. İnsan bi yerde hani karşısındaki kişi yalpalıyo. Tamam cinsiyet kimliği ve cinsel kimlik bambaşka şeyler. İlk duyduğumda, mesela ben ilk nasıl anlatsam... Ben dahi hani bunu dedim “Nası oğlum trans erkek gey? Allah allah o ne demek ya?” falan. Hani birebir içindesin ama sen bile oha falan oluyosun.

“There were discussions on masculinities those days. We were talking about gay trans men, bisexual trans men or some issues which widen or change our viewpoints. For example, it was not allowed to use transphobic or homophobic words within the group. It was not a ‘ban’ but people were always warned. Actually, we were trying hard for people not to use these words or to change their viewpoints. I mean, it was not like ‘let only trans men meet here,’ but we make ourselves miserable for discussing what real masculinity is but there are actually different kind of things and you can also look at this and that. We were trying to show this to them. I was very pleased with that process. As I see now, they have moved away from that a lot. I mean, they are in a mode like ‘If you will change your sex, why do you still like men?’. So, why do bisexuals and lesbians exist then? In the same mind, they would say, ‘Let me be a man’ because they like women too. With that kind of logic, you couldn’t do anything.”⁷⁸

By commenting on Hansbury’s (2005) “Middle Men,” Salamon (2005) argues that there is a “radical and unsettling potential” in homosocial or homoerotic bonds within transmasculine communities. Agreeing with Salamon (2005, 268), I would like to finalize this chapter by suggesting that there is also “the possibility that an already queer masculinity is located at the heart of transmasculinity.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the community building practices of trans men in terms of solidarity, support and transfer of knowledge. I presented the online group dynamics within T-KULÜP, and the trans men-only meetings and gatherings which enable trans men to undergo their transition processes with the help and the support of each other. In this regard, it seems that T-KULÜP has become the best-known platform among trans men based upon its accessibility by people from a great variety of regions and backgrounds, who have access to internet. Accordingly, I argue that this dimension of T-KULÜP melts the geographical gap between its members even if individuals could not or do not prefer to come together with other trans men.

⁷⁸ Orda o zamanlar erkeklik üstüne de konuşuluyodu. Gey trans erkekler üstüne biseksüel trans erkekler üzerine ya da ne biliyim kafa açıcı hani bakış açısını deęiřtirici yani gerçek erkeklik bu deęil... ona yönelik konuşmalar yapılyodu. Mesela işte grupta işte transfobik homofobik kelimeler kullanılmaması gerekiyodu yani yasaktı gibi. Deęil de hani uyarılıyodu sürekli. Hani dięer insanların baskısıyla beraber öteki insanların bu kelimeleri kullanmaması ve bakış açısını deęiřtirmesini saęlamaya çalıřıyoduk açıkçası. Hani orda sadece trans erkekler buluşsun deęil de gerçek erkeklięin ne olduęu aslında kendimizi bu kadar yıpratıyoruz ama aslında ‘Şöyle de bi şey var bak şuna da bak’ ona da aslında göstermeye çalıřıyoduk yani. Ben o süreçten çok memnundum. Şimdi gördüęüm kadarıyla biraz ondan baya bi uzaklaşmış durumda. Hani ‘Cinsiyet deęiřtireceksen neden hani erkeklerden hoşlanıyosun ki?’ modunda yani çünkü sanki... O zaman neden biseksüeller lezbiyenler var? Onlar da o zaman madem kadınlardan hoşlanıyo, ‘Ben erkek olayım’ der o zaman. Böyle bi mantıkla zaten bi şeye girilmez.”

On the other hand, the diversity of trans masculinities within T-KULÜP has created some conflicts since trans men might disapprove the different masculinities performed by each other. All of my interviewees criticized and problematized certain types of masculinities performed on T-KULÜP, such as hegemonic and cis-masculinity (*natrans erkeklük*). While criticizing these types of masculinities, some talked critically about their own masculinity since they used to perform these types of masculinity but began to problematize and recalibrate them as soon as they participated in or followed the discussions on masculinities within T-KULÜP, and/or meet other trans men.

Differentiating from Voltrans which was established by a group of trans men who had been engaged in feminist movements or platforms before. The group of trans men that I interviewed between 2016 and 2017 had different personal priorities than Voltrans members' because the historical moment and consolidation of trans man identity in Turkey, I suggest, has changed in the course of time. Accordingly, the desires, the needs and the expectations of trans men have changed and become diversified with the visibility of the identity and the new medico-legal regulations in Turkey. As another differentiation, Voltrans members were settling in İstanbul which is a central urban space having an important place for LGBTI+ activism in Turkey unlike the regions most of my research participations grew up or currently live in.

My interviewees' narratives show that since the discussions and the conflicts among trans men have arisen mostly by the "undesired/problematic" masculine discourses and attitudes within the *kulüp*, this togetherness has enabled trans men to self-criticize and affect each other although it seems that there has not been a dominant "transmasculine culture" up to now in the context of Turkey. In this regard, I argue that there are queer possibilities arising from the togetherness of trans men within the *kulüp*. Even though I would like to discuss the relationality of queer and trans masculinities, my fieldwork revealed that it requires further research to analyze this possible relationality.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this research, I initially aimed to focus on the experiences of trans men in terms of their queer performances and socializations in the context of Turkey. However, the fieldwork process enabled me to question the multilayered dimensions of trans masculinities. As I discussed at length in Chapter 1, the research and the research questions were shaped through my encounters with my participants on the basis of the each trans man's experiences and narrations. Due to the fact that I comprehended the difficulties of tracking the boundaries of and the fluidity between heteronormativity and queerness in trans men's experiences during my fieldwork, I did not open up an extensive discussion on queer-based performativity. However, I agree with Salamon that there are "queer possibilities" in trans men's experiences.

Based on this research, I find it crucial to emphasize that trans masculinity is a "relatively new spectrum/identity," particularly in Turkey. This means that the concepts associated with trans men's identifications, experiences and transition processes are still in the making. For instance, "coming out" has been a concept and practice predominantly within lesbian, gay and bisexual discourse and movements referring to a metaphor for people's self-disclosure of sexual orientation as I discussed in Chapter 2. However, the way my participants use "coming out" blurs its definition and expands its meaning to include coming out of the closet, self-identification, sexual and friendly encounters. One might argue that trans men in Turkey have not been in the need of new concepts to express or narrate their experiences or to create distinct concepts or language for their self-expression. In Chapter 2, I tried to avoid claiming that there is an essential "need" of new concepts for trans men in order to express their experiences of trans man identity and masculinities. However, I argue that it is significant to be aware of the limits of the language and the concepts in which trans men employ while expressing themselves in Turkish language, and I suggest looking at this dimension of trans masculine narratives in more detail for a further research.

In Chapter 2, I emphasize the ways in which my participants access information on trans man identity and the transitional process through online search and the encounters with people who triggered them to explore the identity. It is significant to

highlight that online platforms play an essential role in many trans men's embracement of this identity and construction of their trans masculinities. Moreover, I discussed the potentials of the visibility made possible by these platforms, as well as the implications of online access to key information regarding transition processes. Although there has been a limited visibility of trans masculinities in Turkey, my research show that online platforms strongly enable trans men to make their processes of self-identification and self-expression relatively easier through their accessibility. In this chapter, I also investigate how trans men come out to and negotiate their trans masculinities with their families. As one of the most influential layers of the construction of trans masculinities, trans men consider their relations with families as a space of struggle and the negotiations with them as a part of their resistance against the ideals of mainstream understandings of family.

In Chapter 3, I develop an analysis of the state-governed medico-legal regulations on trans subjectivities, focusing on particularly trans men's own experiences during the transitional processes, and lawyers and psychiatrists' efforts to enable transitional processes to be more flexible case by case. As I discussed in the introductory chapter, I conducted interviews with LGBTI+ friendly lawyers and psychiatrists who have worked with trans men. My motivation behind this methodological decision was shaped in accordance with my observations and my interviewees' narratives on the solidarity networks amongst trans men, and their lawyers and psychiatrists. As my interviews with the professionals show, there is an ambiguity in Article 40 of the civil code in terms of the state's expectations from trans men to be approved as men in the eyes of the law. Legitimization of masculinity seems to be a requirement for trans men through undergoing surgeries which are also ambiguous and might be interpreted in different ways by the individual judges.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the solidarity mechanisms and lobbying strategies among lawyers and psychiatrists by depicting their narratives not only on their professional experiences but also their critical approaches to the medico-legal regulations on trans subjectivities. As an unexpected outcome of the interviews with the professionals for me, there are multilayered solidarity mechanisms which lawyers and psychiatrists have developed together with trans men themselves. These mechanisms enable trans men to utilize the mentioned ambiguity to negotiate their trans masculinities in legal and medical processes. However, my research also reveals that the existing legal loopholes have become less utilizable and that the judges have begun to have phallogocentric

expectations from trans men to be legalized as “men” in the eyes of the state and its institutions with the visibility of trans masculinities and trans man identity in Turkey. Trans men that I interviewed had anxieties regarding the penis obsession of the judges and they were not planning to undergo penile reconstruction surgeries in Turkey for a long time since they consider the surgeons who operate these surgeries as “butchers.” My research participants also mentioned that there might be traumatic consequences of these surgeries such as gangrene, death and the minimization of the sexual pleasure. That is why trans men, as well as the professionals, make an effort to resist the penis expectation of the judges by infiltrating through the loopholes of the law. In addition to these practices within the institutions, most of my interviewees narrated that they are satisfied with the expansion of their clitoris which they call “weenie” (*pipi*) since it might perform what they desire to do in terms of their sexuality and sexual practices. Also, looking at oneself through a mirror becomes more motivating for trans men since they might be happy with their bodies’ appearance which includes “at least 3-5-centimeter penis” in one interviewee’s words and that is why, it might be said that, trans men do not typically want to “go farther and fare worse.”

Throughout Chapter 3, I focus on the negotiations of trans men with juridical and medical institutions in terms of the “construction” of trans masculinities in Turkey. Throughout this chapter, I open up a discussion on the possibilities and limitations of “alliance” between different actors in these institutions and trans men themselves, what it means to get a blue ID card in Turkey and what the possible meanings of being “full-time trans man” for trans men themselves, lawyers and psychiatrist might be. Also, I investigate how trans men narrate and discuss their masculinities within state hospitals and courts, and the ways in which they negotiate their trans masculinities, and which solidarity networks could be formed by lawyers and psychiatrists within their institutions.

In Chapter 4, I presented the community building practices of trans men. Throughout this chapter, I aimed to discuss the various dimensions of the solidarity mechanisms and the support networks among trans men. As the most well-known trans men-only platform, I discussed the supportive and encouraging aspects of T-KULÜP. On the other hand, trans men’s *kulüp* has opened up a ground to discuss the different types of masculinities and this dimension of it has had a potential to negotiate and problematize hegemonic masculinities. Most of my interviewees agreed that they have tried to reconsider their masculinities inspired by the discussions and criticisms on

hegemonic masculinities within T-KULÜP. Herein, I feel the need to mention that my interviewees were the ones who embraced the trans man identity and I am aware that none of my participants were married with a woman or a man, or identified as non-trans man since they accepted participating in my research self-identifying as trans man.

As one of the most effective aspects of the relations among trans men, online platforms have played a significant role in the self-identification and the transitional processes of my interviewees. The increasing number of the online platforms, including blogs, Facebook groups and webpages, have constituted a cornerstone in construction of diverse trans masculinities in Turkey. My research shows that there has not been a public or hegemonic “trans masculine culture” in Turkey, which provides a creative space for what Salamon calls “queer possibilities.” The online platforms and networks, which have been active only in recent years, constitute the main collective site where trans masculinities come to be shared, negotiated, and debated. My research shows that there is a multiplicity of ways in which trans men identify and perform themselves. As part of my research, I was planning to map the historical “consolidation” of trans man identity in Turkey but my interviewees’ narrative were shaped around their transition processes and experience sharing rather than activism around trans man identity or trans rights. I argue that the current dynamics of trans masculinities and their public visibility need to be differentiated from the first political formations such as the Voltrans Transmen Initiative, which had organic links to the LGBTI+ and feminist movements. Yet, I should also note that while most of my interviewees are not active within the LGBTI+ activism or trans feminist movements, all of them perceive themselves as activists in the sense that they help, encourage and support other trans men and criticize hegemonic masculinities.

One challenge I faced in the research process was the lack of written sources on the historical background of trans masculinities in Turkey. Even though I tried to present some of the key points of the construction of trans man identity, visibility and medico-legal regulations throughout this thesis, I would like to suggest that there is need for further research regarding the historicity of this relatively “new” identity in Turkey.

The overall aim of this research has been to show the diverse dynamics of trans masculinities in relation to the ways of self-expressions, the state regulations, marginalization and the solidarity mechanisms whilst problematizing normative imaginations of trans subjectivities and trans masculinities through a critical analysis.

Throughout this research, I tried to emphasize that there has been a considerable effort to construct and embrace trans man identity by making it visible, embodied and “thinkable.” I attempted to show the possibilities of this “thinkability” within the medical, legal, social and political limitations in the context of Turkey.

My research shows that it is not only within the medical and judicial establishment that trans men suffer from invisibility and discrimination, but also that trans men have not been able to achieve an effective visibility in LGBTI+ politics and scholarship. Even though there is a growing literature on trans identities and sexualities in Turkey, trans men’s struggles through social, legal and physical transitions have hardly been analyzed. It seems that understanding the making of trans masculinities and their transition processes make it necessary to look at what happened within overlapping spaces of psychiatry, law and politics in the beginnings of the 2000s. This research might be seen as a modest contribution to this literature. I hope that the findings of this research and its multi-vocality will trigger curiosity on trans masculinities, and provide a ground for other researchers to ask further questions about the diversity and fluidity of sex, gender and sexual identifications as they continue to find new expressions in Turkey and beyond.

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