

“The Public Immoralist”: Discourses of Queer Subjectification in Contemporary Turkey

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This study examines the forms of queer subjectification that have been molded through regular acts of gender- and sexuality-based violence against LGBTQ+ citizens as encouraged by the dominant religious and secular discourses in Turkey. Within that context, this article explicates the discursive mechanisms at work in the statements that were made by politicians and journalists between 2002 and 2018. In those discourses, the qualities attributed to nonheteronormative sexualities, such as perversion and disease, are perhaps the most widespread means of negating the existence of LGBTQ+ citizens and claiming that their lifestyles are “immoral.” Based on a case study that incorporates the existing historical and sociopolitical background, which props up a heteronormative patriarchal culture, this study critically analyzes the discourses that have emerged in a state of moral panic regarding queer in/visibilities, dis/appearances, and aversions/subversions in the Turkish sociopolitical sphere.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, queer subjectification, gender, sexuality, discourses, Turkey

By adopting a performative approach to gender, this article critically analyzes the discourses of Turkish politicians and journalists in the last two decades concerning LGBTQ+ citizens’ rights, or the lack thereof. Drawing on a case study of Turkey that takes into account the historical and sociopolitical background, which has propped up a heteronormative patriarchal culture, this study emphasizes the “moral panics” (Thompson, 1998) that have arisen regarding queer in/visibilities, dis/appearances, and aversions/subversions. In the article, the notion of moral panics is framed within the hetero-/nonheterosexual order, particularly in terms of how it has been governed and regulated through the Turkish government’s discourses of morality and policymaking in light of the scrutiny inherent in the religious and secular moral positions of the media, interest groups, and authorities. The aim here is to

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Date submitted: 2019–04–19

¹ I would like to express my appreciation to my coconspirator Namalie Jayasinghe as her work in this article is deeply rooted and therefore infinitely valued. I would like to thank Esra Özcan, the editor of this themed section, for inviting me to be a part of the project and her support throughout the process; to Cansu Nur Şimşek for her valuable work during the research; Mark Wyers for his reviews of this study; and the journal’s anonymous reviewers, whose generous comments and suggestions contributed to the final form of this article.

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critically analyze the discursive landscapes underpinning the anti-LGBTQ+ discourses mainstreamed in the Turkish media by taking up a queer theoretical framework, which is necessary if we want to better understand the religious and secular stances that have been used to subjectify LGBTQ+ citizens as "immoral," even when they are exposed to further gender- and sexuality-based violence.

The term *queer* in this study refers to the strategic spaces occupied by LGBTQ+ individuals—not just the subjects themselves—that are used as a means of resisting the reductive "national whole" ideology of the nation-state, which is employed by oppressive heteronormative patriarchal ideologies. On that point, it will be useful to recall Eve Sedgwick's (1993) conception of *queer* as "a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, troublant. The word 'queer' itself means across. . . . Keenly, it is relational and strange" (p. xii). Following Sedgwick, I regard queerness as a product of signs and means by which the normative self and gendered subject are performed "across genders, across sexualities, across genres, across 'perversions'" (p. xii). It does not just refer to homosexuality and same-sex desire, but the potentialities and possibilities of what queer promises in multiple forms, particularly as regards my explication of queer subjectification in contemporary Turkey. As such, the content of the discourses analyzed in this study should be seen as a call for the Turkish nation-state to reevaluate its prescriptions for homogenous identities and acknowledge gender difference and sexual variance.

Research on queer theory has illustrated how gender- and sexuality-based violence targeting LGBTQ+ individuals is a form of brutality that further reinforces control over and domination of queers (Ahmed, 2006; Berlant & Warner, 1998; Butler, 1993; Doan, 2007; Halberstam, 2005; Jacobsen & Pellegrini, 2008; Jagose, 1996; Muñoz, 1999; Namaste, 2000; Puar, 2007; Sedgwick, 1993). Scholars of LGBTQ+ studies around the world have built up a substantial body of work that showcases the myriad ways that LGBTQ+ individuals' have experienced stigma in terms of employment, housing, healthcare, and civil and family law and also how they have been victims of police harassment, violent hate crimes, and AIDS-related discrimination (Tyson, 2006). As part of that corpus, this study also draws on LGBTQ+ research and scholarship focusing on Turkey, which has expanded in the last two decades (Altınay, 2008; Bereket & Adam, 2006; Berghan, 2007; Birdal, 2013; Çakırlar & Delice, 2011; Ertür & Lebow, 2014; Görkemli, 2012; Özyeğin, 2012; Savcı, 2016; Selen, 2012; Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2016).

Scholars working in the field of queer studies have also been criticized for the blind spot(s) they have in terms of addressing LGBTQ+ issues in light of queer subjectification. Among the many prominent LGBTQ+ scholars, Annamarie Jagose (1996) and Viviane Namaste (2000) were the first to theoretically examine how queer studies position and thereby reduce LGBTQ+ subjectivity to (White) homosexuality and queer's indifference or denial of trans* experiences. Moreover, as Jagose argues, "There are many voices of gay people that do not accept the term queer, and see it as 'an enemy' or 'anti-homosexual'" (pp. 114–115). In addition, Lik Sam Chan's (2017) strategic review of LGBTQ+ scholarship from the perspective of the field of communications presents a thorough and diverse assessment of the interrelationality of LGBTQ+ studies with a provision on the conflation of LGBT and queer studies.

However, given the large amount of cross-disciplinary scholarly and activist LGBTQ+ work that has been undertaken in the last three decades, the notion of "queer" is still relevant for identifying, resisting, and transforming the heteronormative structures of patriarchy by means of which LGBTQ+

individuals are subjected to violence and exclusion and also denied their rights as citizens. Accordingly, this article takes into consideration three strategic questions that are concerned with gender and sexuality in Turkey: How does gender performativity disclose critiques of secular and Islamic discourses vis-à-vis queer subjectification? How does the state generate discourses regarding LGBTQ+ citizens? And, how are such discourses manifested in the mainstream media? This study thus reifies ongoing dominant discourses concerning LGBTQ+ citizens in Turkey, individuals whose subjectivities are largely formed through repeated acts of violence based on gender and sexual variance as promoted by government officials and journalists.

I use a hybrid qualitative methodology that takes a performative approach to critical discourse analysis and content analysis from a queer theoretical perspective (Butler, 1993; Muñoz, 1999; Sedgwick, 1993). The material for the study at hand was based on data collected from online newspaper and news portal articles that include the Turkish words for *LGBT*, *LGBTQ*, *LGBTQ+*, *transsexual*, *transvestite*, *homosexual*, *bisexual*, *gay*, and *lesbian* as stated in the discourses of politicians and prominent journalists. In the course of my research, I reviewed a total of 10 daily online newspapers and 10 online news portals, all of which are published in Turkish, for a 15-year period from 2002 to 2018. That timeline encapsulates the years in which Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the leader of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party [AKP]), has been in power as the prime minister of Turkey (2003–2014) and as president (since 2014). The search yielded 62 original stories in newspapers and 22 news portal articles after duplicates were eliminated.² The articles were read and reviewed in relation to the content and the newspapers' and news portals' affiliations with sociopolitical camps in terms of being progovernment, moderate, or oppositional. During my research, I selected discourses that were either directly quoted from the speeches or comments of high-ranking politicians and articles written by widely read journalists who have the potential to have a substantial impact on LGBTQ+ lives. I used Nvivo 12 to code the data set and selected 10 articles based on word frequency as well as their content, choosing those that include the above-mentioned keywords and the words *moral*, *immoral*, *perversion*, *disease*, or *threat* in Turkish. Last, I carried out critical discourse analyses to reveal discourses about im/morality, perversion, and disease as well as to prepare content for further qualitative analyses concerning the articles' contextual frameworks.

In the following sections, I first outline the queer theoretical and performative framework I employ to critically analyze discourses involving gender, sexuality, and im/morality in a Turkish context. I aim to provide a survey of the situation of minorities—sexual or otherwise—by addressing how the Turkish nation-state operates, while critically pointing to the core of its construction, which is based on a heteronormative patriarchal notion of modernity. Next, by taking up a minoritarian perspective, I assess LGBTQ+ in/visibility, mainstreaming, and rights, and go on to analyze sociopolitical discourses concerning sexual morality. I then draw on similarities between the denigrating discourses used by an Islamist and a secular journalist to illustrate how their moral panics further restrict the queer spaces in which LGBTQ+ existence is confined. The last section showcases those blatantly and/or maliciously heedless discourses

² It should be noted that *Kaos GL* published a collection of anti-LGBTQ+ discourses voiced by politicians between 2002 and 2015 on its website in both Turkish and English (*Kaos GL*, 2015). All references to the quotes included in this article were also crosschecked with the content by *Kaos GL*; however, all of the Turkish-to-English translations in this article were done by the author.

that fuel trans*- and homophobia across the country and also result in queer erasure and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals.

A Minoritarian Take on Discourses of Im/morality

Following Michel Foucault's use of the term, this study considers *discourses* to be an essential mechanism of the authority to exert power through language. Discourses can be regarded as a panopticon based on power relations that exclude, classify, and imprison individuals in society "to strengthen the social forces—to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality [and] to increase and multiply" (Foucault, 1995, pp. 207–208). In the context of communications/LGBTQ+ studies, it is important to critically analyze dominant discourses in the mainstream media in terms of their performative contexts and cultural content in a concurrent manner to bring to light how they produce exclusive language that further subjectifies LGBTQ+ individuals as being "immoral." John Flowerdew (1997) argues that critical discourse analysis (also see Fairclough, 1995) is a reliable method that "emphasizes the interconnectedness of discourse and social reality and critically examines specific situations where relations of power, dominance, and inequality are instantiated in discourse" (p. 455). Through a Foucauldian perspective, this study employs discourse analysis as a method to critically analyze a set of assumptions about how the world is constructed through language while aiming "to discover hidden assumptions (in language use) and to debunk their claims to authority" (Flowerdew, 1997, p. 455).

While employing a qualitative and performative approach to critical discourse analysis, this study takes into consideration the Turkish term *ahlak* (meaning "morality"), which has been defined as "modes of behavior and rules that people have to obey in society" and/or "good conduct" (*Ahlak*, 2019).³ Here, the concept of morality is construed in four discursive yet performative ways, each of which leads to discourses that (1) exercise and distribute power, as in a public statement; (2) construct social reality, as in a set of principles or rules of conduct; (3) disseminate an ideology, as in a system of moral conduct; and (4) create social change, as in encouraging people to conform to ideals of "proper" human conduct. At the same time, however, im/morality signifies the contested psychosocial standing of LGBTQ+ citizens in Turkey through dominant discourses and sociopolitical controversies concerning their affiliation with ideological strains. In this study, each discourse is cohesively framed within the policies of the nation-state and also taken up as representing the political shortcomings of the existing heteronormative capitalist patriarchy. Those discourses performatively occupy intricate transfer points in relations of power and dominance in terms of how sexuality is construed as a discourse, form, and means of identification through processes of subjectification.

³ By extension and with reference to Islamic theology, morality can also be paired with the Turkish word *edep*. *Edep* (2019) means to behave with social/good morals, finesse, and decency, and it has also been a significant term particularly in the discourses of politicians. Although *edep* is inherently tied to individuality, it could present coherence in a Foucauldian discourse analysis. With regards to queer subjectification, however, *public immorality* is rather a phrase that is frequently used by politicians and journalists. As a counterstrategic speech act, LGBTQ+ individuals and allies perform "public immoralist" to queer the notion of morality in Turkey.

Although there are no laws in the Turkish civil code that criminalize homosexuality, bisexuality, or transsexuality, nonheteronormative sexualities are cast as "immoral" through ambiguous references to public and religious morals, and they foster panics. Judith Butler (1993) notes that "the presumption is that the law will constitute sexed subjects along the heterosexual divide to the extent that its threat of punishment effectively instills fear, where the object of fear is figured by homosexualized abjection" (p. 110). For the current neoliberal capitalist Islamist government in Turkey, sexuality, and nonheterosexuality in particular, are tinged with a fear of "immorality" or "moral erosion" generated by the existence of LGBTQ+ individuals. Therefore, in this article, the expression *public immorality* denotes a performative tactic that is used to deconstruct discourses that denigrate LGBTQ+ issues.

In Butler's use of the term, *performativity* is a product of what becomes visible as a result of conflict with its mandatory repetition. Performativity, in a combination of gender as identification and difference, includes not only social productions of the self/other, but also elaborates on the repetitive compulsion of that which constitutes the social construction of "gender." Rarely is the performativity of gender a matter of choice. Gender both constitutes and complicates modalities of subjectification and heteronormative structures. My focus on the performativity of gender and sexuality necessarily designates a queer theoretical perspective for analyzing judgments of im/moral behavior in the hetero-/nonheterosexual order. As such, mainstream gender performativity in the secular and Islamic Turkish nation-state recapitulates the power/knowledge structures of gender and sexual boundaries (Selen, 2007). The boundaries of both gender and sexuality are understood as being evinced, leaving little or no space to exist outside prevailing structures including hetero- and nonheterosexuality, with the former as moral and the latter as an immoral state of being. However, it should also be noted that even heterosexuality has limits in terms of sex. Women, for example, are only considered sexual when engaging in sex outside wedlock, which automatically casts them as amoral if not immoral, and it is a form of gender oppression and sexual dominance over women and their bodies in a patriarchal system that dates back to the founding years of the secular republic in the early 20th century (see Kandiyoti, 1988) as well as in the earlier Ottoman era (see Wyers, 2012).

Since the founding of the republic in 1923, the regulations that officially construct Turkish (sexual) citizenship generate an artificial vision of in/equality between men and women, creating the source of the problem while also exacerbating it by negating racial, ethnic, and gender variance in state policy. This artificial state of equality creates either the ultimate masculine or the domesticated woman and excludes all variations of nonconforming identifications from rights to citizenship. An example of this kind of exclusion can be found in a speech that Erdoğan gave in 2016 that commemorated those who lost their lives during the failed coup attempt that took place in the same year:

Aren't we all going to die one day? We will. There is dying like a "man"—I was going to say something here, but I won't—and there is dying like a "madam." Let's die, but die like a man. (Erdoğan, 2016, para. 6)

In Turkey, the word *madam* refers to two distinct identifications; One is a polite form of address placed before the name of Jewish or Christian women, and the other is a generic name for

female heads of brothels.⁴ Although the two identifications may or may not merge into one, Erdoğan's interlocution concerning "madam" is a definitive form of hate speech that is rife with discriminatory discourses ranging from the denigration of non-Muslim (female) citizens to ethnoracism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and ageism. His discourse, first and foremost, proposes that being a "man" is the only worthy subjectivity, even in the face of death. When he said, "I was going to say something here, but I won't," he was making a derogative reference to male homosexuality, and anyone who speaks Turkish would understand what he was implying. He not only refers to "immorality" by making a public implication referencing the word *faggot*, but also derogatively implies that everyone who died trying to carry out the coup that night was a "faggot." In addition, the coup attempt was officially described as a terrorist attack carried out by the Fetullah Gülen terrorist organization and the people who launched the coup are deemed to be traitors, if not terrorists. Erdoğan's marginalization of homosexual men as being "a less-than subject" while equating them with a "madam" (either a non-Muslim woman or a brothel-keeper) and then a traitor/terrorist can perhaps be seen as a sustained representation of the nation's un/conscious notions concerning minorities, sexual or otherwise.

The Right to Queer Im/morality

Minorities in Turkey significantly rescinded their demands for ethnoracial, religious, linguistic, sexual equality, and rights in the 1970s as the country suffered a series of economic and political disasters, as there were increasing fears on multiple ideological fronts that an Islamic revolution would take place. Following an abortive coup in 1979, there was a full-scale military takeover in 1980. Starting in September of that year, the military launched numerous interventions across the country and the lives of more than half a million people were disrupted as the result of disappearances, detentions, and arrests that led to torture, imprisonment, loss of citizenship, and forced exile (Zürcher, 2004). Under military rule, LGBTQ+ supporters individual (particularly gay men and trans* individuals) and supporters were cast as "left-leaning anarchists" and this led to strict surveillance, discrimination, and harassment tactics (Selen, 2012). Such strategies of suppression continued and became normalized when the country returned to civilian rule in 1983.

The rise of an organized LGBTQ+ movement in Turkey was of extreme importance, paralleling the significance of the coup, for the development of queer consciousness in Turkey. It was impossible to hold public LGBTQ+ demonstrations until May 2003, when a Gay Pride parade was held in Istanbul with the participation of just 20 people. Lambda Istanbul, Turkey's first LGBT organization, was founded in the same year and it was followed by other associations such as Kaos GL, Bursa Rainbow, Pink Life, and SPOD. The activities of these associations, however, are generally vulnerable to interruption, and they are constantly under threat of legal action because of government policies and the lack of a legal framework to protect LGBTQ+ individuals and groups (see Selen, 2012).

⁴ At this juncture, "Madam" Matild Manukyan (1914–2001), an Armenian Turkish businessperson, should be acknowledged here despite various accounts about how she treated the sex workers in her "houses." She was listed as the "tax champion" of Turkey for decades, even though her contributions to the Turkish economy have been disavowed during the years of the AKP's rule.

Despite the current volatile sociopolitical atmosphere in Turkey, which is apparent on many fronts, the country witnessed the first positive acknowledgment of homosexuality by a politician in 2002. A week before national elections were going to be held, a university student asked Erdoğan on the TV show *Genç Bakış* (Outlook of the Youth) about his plans concerning LGBT rights if he was elected as prime minister. He sympathetically answered, "Homosexuals must have legal security that frames their rights and freedom" (Leydence, 2013, 1:06). It is not a coincidence that LGBTQ+ activism gained major momentum after his avowal of LGBTQ+ rights. Erdoğan's comment can be regarded as "pinkwashing" (Puar, 2013) employed to garner votes as he presented himself as a "liberal" Islamist. Since 2003, LGBTQ+ activism, most notably through prominent protests and trials, has increased the visibility of LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey.⁵ Following his statement, LGBTQ+ associations quickly moved to demand equal rights in the constitution. Erdoğan also gained the support of a vast majority of liberals as a series of sociopolitical transformations took place during the terms of the two consecutive governments he presided over.

For example, in May 2010 a significant shift took place regarding the country's Kurdish minority with the proclamation of a "Kürt Açılımı" ("Kurdish Initiative"), which was launched by the AKP as a strategy for consolidating power. The plan of the AKP government involved taking short-, medium-, and long-term steps for the solution of the Kurdish issue, according to erstwhile Prime Minister Erdoğan. He stated, "Turkey has to face this problem and solve it through democracy. The time has come for a radical solution to the problem. We will take steps at any cost" (Hacaoğlu, 2009, para. 3). Although that process has been referred to as a "democratization initiative," it simultaneously created a political, legal, and public rift. The process also coincided with the founding of the Halkların Demokratik Partisi (People's Democratic Party [HDP]) in 2013, which supports Kurdish representation in parliament and seeks to normalize the long-standing conflict between Kurdish resistance fighters and the Turkish military, while also demanding rights for Turkey's Kurdish citizens. Significantly, that progress could have helped lead Turkey to full EU membership. Thus, even when full accession to the European Union was hanging in the balance, human rights conflicts in Turkey carried more weight in the post-2002 era than in previous decades. It is worth noting that the HDP and its previous coleader Selahattin Demirtaş have been the only party and politician to vocally support LGBTQ+ rights in Turkey in a consistent manner.

Eleven years after he acknowledged the issue of gay rights and two months before the outbreak of the Gezi Park protests, Prime Minister Erdoğan shifted his position, as made evident when he made the statement "Homosexual coupling is immoral" (Eşcinsel Çift Ahlakı Ters, 2013, para. 1). That coincided with the period of time when Erdoğan started turning his back on the West, which affirmed that he would not continue with EU negotiations (see Çapan & Zarakol, 2019). The immediate effect of his declaration was visible during the Gezi Park protests, which were regarded as marking a major advancement of LGBTQ+ visibility and rights. The effects continued to be visible at the 2013 Pride Parade, when a record number of 50,000 people walked the length of İstiklal Street, starting at Taksim Square. Citizens from all walks of society carried banners with messages such as "Buradayız Alışın" (We Are Here, Get Used to It), "Velev ki İbneyiz" (Even Though We Are Faggots), and "Genel Ahlıksız" (Public Immoralist). That was the

⁵ Among these, the trial of renowned activist Levent Pişkin was of particular significance (see Pişkin, 2013).

last legal Istanbul Pride Parade. Since 2013, every call for Pride initiatives has been suppressed through governmental bans, police violence, and the threats of antihomophobic groups. In 2014, the government indefinitely canceled permission for all Pride-related demonstrations. That was also a significant moment for the aforementioned democratization initiative, as all progress came to an abrupt halt after 2013. The AKP government, as well as a significant segment of the opposition such as the Nationalist Movement Party and also some members of the Republican People's Party, grew concerned about the HDP's policies, proposals, and values, which ultimately led to the incarceration of Demirtaş in 2016; to this day, he remains in prison. Although minorities have increasingly made demands to be represented in the public sphere and be allowed access to the full benefits of citizenship, a culture of patriarchal heteronormativity continues to obstruct the further recognition of minority rights.

Im/moral Optics: The Religious Versus the Secular

As regards a Pride event in 2015, which was stopped via the unleashing of police violence, Abdurrahman Dilipak, an Islamist journalist whose writings tend toward conspiratorial slants, stated,

Their aims are homosexual marriage, homosexual mosques and of course homosexual imams. This will not just remain limited to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transsexuals; it will go all the way to incest. From now on, prostitution and porn will be ordinary matters. This threatens families and the youth. Through the media and art world, they are trying to mainstream/publicize the issue. It's as if they attach as much significance to it as we attach to the headscarf. Perhaps someone chose Turkey as a pilot country. They have [student] clubs at Bilgi University. They can organize events at Boğaziçi University. Some people try to associate the issue with the concept of [human] rights. The left, the HDP, tries to legitimize it through human rights activists and [the work of] liberals, artists and the media. (Dilipak, 2015, para. 6)

Some of Dilipak's claims are true by content, but deviate from the truth in the manner in which he frames them: in a state of moral panic. The fear of trans*-, homo-, bi-, and queer sexuality poses a threat for the kind of social order that the journalist projects, an order in which he confined with religious affiliations both in the public and private sphere. Although Dilipak's moral panic de/normalizes the idea of homosexual marriage, mosques, and *imams*, his discourse casts trans*-, bi-, and homosexuals as the sole bearers of the gateway to incest. His reaction to LGBTQ+ mainstreaming is a deliberate example of why the citizens of Turkey who identify as lesbian, gay, or queer have not made calls for the right to marry because officially LGBTQ+ rights are almost nonexistent in Turkey and there is much more work that needs to be done before the issue of getting married can be raised. For trans* citizens, however, heterosexual marriage has been a possibility since the 1990s so long as they have "completed" their genital surgery and officially "changed" their gender identification paperwork. Prostitution is still regulated by the state, although unregulated prostitution is almost the only way for trans* people to earn a living. Research carried out by Mark Wyers (2012) indicates that ever since the late Ottoman era, prostitution has been regulated by state authorities, although it appears that under the AKP, legal female prostitution is slowly being strangled out of existence.

Like prostitution, pornography is also regulated, either through bans or strict censorship in the media. However, regulation and restriction of prostitution and porn only limit access and cannot eliminate them from society. When Foucault (1995) made claims about the necessity of discipline and punishment, he also highlighted their normalizing effects, especially when they are unattainable. Unlike Dilipak's assertions, the media does not streamline porn but nudity, and nudity has always been geared for the heterosexual male (gaze). The utilization of porn, whether heterosexual or nonheterosexual, in the art world, however, has led to scandalous human rights violations in Turkey once works are displayed in the mainstream media, and many artists are under severe pressure to self-censor their productions (Selen, 2012).

Similar to Dilipak, Hasan Puler, a die-hard secular and veteran journalist known for his elaborate conspiracies regarding Islamists, offered discourses that exemplify the views of certain secular people (his loyal readers, for example) who disregard LGBTQ+'s exclusion from the public sphere, if not support it. In his discourses, material for hate speech was readily available, as he deplored,

Throughout history, these perversions have always existed, often hidden, but nowadays they spill out. Open a dictionary [and] you will see how many adjectives there are for these perversions. From faggotry to blowers, from Mahbub [Arabic for "beloved"; also the Quranic name for a boy] to pederasty, from lesbianism to *sevici* [the Turkish word for lesbians]. . . . To write about these things, to talk about them, to give current examples of them is a "journalist's right," but to criticize them "is an intervention in people's private lives." Really, is that so? To the fore, abusers of private life! (Puler, 2007, para. 1)

For Puler (2007), he knew that homosexuals have been hiding in the shadows, engaging in practices—privately—but it is now a problem because they are—publicly—out in the open. He accuses his "fellow" journalists of promoting these "perverse" lifestyles. However, historian and long-time columnist Murat Bardakçı (2010) notes that things that are regarded as perversions were not so hidden or considered abnormal in the daily lives of the citizens of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, in a previous article he claims, "The first known gay club was the *hamam* [bathhouse] of *Deli Birader* [the Mad Brother]," whose funeral prayer was performed at the Kaaba (Bardakçı, 2000, paras. 1–13).

In his discussion about "these perversions," Puler (2007) lists a series of adjectives that derogatorily refer to homosexuality—even the term *lesbian*. Among those, *pederasty* comes across as disquietingly uninformed given that the Turkish equivalent of the word has multiple meanings, including sodomy with a prepubescent boy. Pederasty, however, is an orientalist tradition that was devised largely in colonial France and Britain, where artists depicted the "forbidden gaze" (Alloula, 1986) of the East (Said, 1978). That tradition, however, was mainstreamed in Europe by the 19th century if not earlier, and in the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century many miniatures included (homo) sexual activity exclusively between men (see Schick, 2018).

Through a counterdiscursive alignment with Foucault's typification of new sexual taxonomies, Sedgwick (1990) underscores the carelessness of how sexual orientation has often been associated with a "problematic of sexual 'perversion' or more broadly, 'decadence'" (pp. 8–9). Around the world, the bodily conduct of LGBTQ+ citizens has been called into question by both sides of the religious/secular divide

(Jacobsen & Pellegrini, 2008), and Turkey is no exception. For example, in the case of two different camps in a moral panic, both Dilipak's (2015) Islamic and Pulur's (2007) secular discourses claim that homosexuality is a perversion, although the forms in which they present "these perversions" differ slightly—notably, with equal repugnance and as psychosocial afflictions and disorders. However, when theology functions as an identifying marker, as it did for both gender and religion in the post-1980s Turkish secular nation-state, subjects from all walks of sexual orientation and gender variance who must abide by the differing requirements of religion and secularism become separated from one another. The rise of Islamism in Turkey has had significant side effects on the issues of gender, sexual identity, and minority rights, and even among feminists, for example, as secularists and Islamists might not see eye to eye or be able to find common ground. Depending on the ideological strain they present, they categorize their activism by addressing very different centers and practices of authority, and yet both sides have the potential to generate parallel hateful discourses when LGBTQ+ individuals are concerned. Through the use of different tactics, each front and sometimes people on the same front have found common ground in their rejection of LGBTQ+ individuals through moral discourses.

As regards the 2016 Pride Parade, which was banned, Kürşat Mican, the previous head of the Alperen Hearths (Alperen Ocakları), a youth group affiliated with the Büyük Birlik Partisi (Great Unity Party), which is ideologically closer to a Turkish-Islamic synthesis than secularism, said on national TV,

It is called the Pride Parade but in reality it is immorality, [but] we will never allow for the normalization and encouragement of these kinds of immoralities. . . . We call upon our esteemed state officials . . . to end this immorality. Otherwise, our reactions will be very clear and harsh. . . . They [LGBTQ+] have always been doing this in the holy month [Ramadan]. . . . The state should put an end to this in consideration of our national values. These are not normal freedoms. This is our warning. . . . We will not be held responsible for anything that happens next. (LGBT Yürüyüşünü Yaptırmayacağız!, 2016, paras. 4–5)

Considered in light of Mican's discourse, religious and national values mark the "admissibility" of the violence that he threatens to inflict on LGBTQ+ citizens. These kinds of threats against LGBTQ+ individuals have even become more "admissible," especially in light of the fact that state attorneys never filed an indictment for the public statement. For many LGBTQ+ citizens and activists, it has become increasingly difficult to be reconciled with either a religious or secular affiliation and they identify both as major "productions" of the same heteronormative nation-state. Furthermore, (sexual) moral discourses in Turkey are about nationality as much as religion, and the family takes center stage in this balance, which is based on the notion that there is only one moral space for sex: procreation in the heteronormative patriarchal family.

For example, in 2013 before Erdoğan traveled to the Netherlands, he was told that a physically abused Turkish child had been taken in by the Dutch state and then legally adopted by a lesbian couple. In response, Erdoğan roared,

In a foster family system, if a family is Muslim, considering their culture and their values, it is more suitable that these children be given to Muslim families. . . . This [matter] could be misunderstood in my country. The issue of sexual preference is important. I say this

because most Turkish people are either Muslim or have ties to Islamic culture. *To entrust a homosexual family with a child* [emphasis added], in terms of general morals, first of all, runs contrary to the public morals of society [and] it runs contrary to the values of their faith. (Eşcinsel Çift, 2013, paras. 3–4)

Ultimately, the couple moved to an undisclosed address because they were concerned about the increasing political pressure being put on them by the Turkish government and Erdoğan's aggressive stance (Hollanda'lı Lezbiyen Çift, 2013). Erdoğan stated that, at the very least, the child should be adopted by a Muslim family (Lezbiyen Çift Tedirgin, 2013). On behalf of the Dutch government, Deputy Prime Minister Lodewijk Asscher stated, "Regardless of who [says such things], I see it as an outside force crossing the line in giving an opinion based on religion as regards the adopting family" (Hollanda'lı Lezbiyen Çift, 2013, para. 6). In response to Asscher's explanation, Ayhan Üstün, the chair of the Grand National Assembly of the Turkey Human Rights Commission, iterated that "Turkey has a right to intervene in the adoption of Turkish children in Western countries. What's at stake [here] are our citizens, our people" (Hollanda'lı Lezbiyen Çift, 2013, para. 6). That, however, is not the case here. Given that the Turkish government cannot investigate every adoption in Western countries, it becomes obvious that the issue at hand was the fact that "a lesbian couple" adopted the child.

Im/morally Ignorant: Blatant, Malicious—or Both

For Turkey's lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, and queer individuals, among the main challenges they face are persistent legal threats to disband LGBTQ+ organizations, the blatant lack of official investigations into the bashings and killings of homosexual and trans* individuals, and institutional pressure to remain closeted, as there is always the possibility of getting fired without compensation. The qualities attributed to homosexuality, such as perversion and disease, are perhaps the most prevalent discourses that negate the existence of LGBTQ+ individuals and bolster claims of immorality. They function to legitimate the exercise and distribution of ideologies supporting religious values and public morals as well as daily practices including hate speech, violence, and the obstruction of the human rights of LGBTQ+ citizens. Among these issues, violence against LGBTQ+ individuals undoubtedly takes precedence for the reason that heterosexuality as the moral (sexual) compass of society sanctions "homosexual panics" (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 19) as an excuse—or justification—for acts of violence, which are often fatal.⁶ Moreover, trans* individuals and particularly sex workers are most often subjected to more violence than other nonconforming sexual minorities, as their "compulsory" forms of making a living cause them to be exposed to perpetrators' aggression and their "excuses." Elektra Wintour stated this clearly when she said, "They kill us because they hate what it means to love us" (Murphy & Falchuk, & Horder-Payton, 2019).

For example, in 2018 a trans* woman named Esra Ateş was stabbed to death in the district of Beyoğlu in Istanbul at the entrance to her apartment building just one minute away from a police station. The killer was arrested and in his deposition he claimed, "I couldn't understand if that person was a man

⁶ In the U.S. context, Sedgwick (1990) defines *homosexual panic* as "a defense strategy that is commonly used to prevent the conviction or to lighten sentencing of gay-bashers" (p. 19).

or woman. I realized *she was a man when we were having intercourse* [emphasis added]" (Trans Kadın Esra Ateş, 2018, para. 13). He was sentenced for murder and robbery; however, there are many trans* killings that remain unsolved. In 2016, a sex worker named Hande Kader was burned to death, but mainstream media outlets did not report on the incident (Sercan, 2016). Recently, her close friend Didem Akay took her own life (Trans Kadın Didem Akay, 2019). Another sex worker, Eylül Cansın, committed suicide in 2015, leaving behind a video in which she said, "I couldn't do it. They [other trans workers] wouldn't let me. I couldn't work [because] they [the sex work mob] prevented me from doing so and they upset me" (Trans Birey Eylül, 2015, para. 3). A lesbian couple was severely beaten when one of the women's families found out that they were lovers. The couple pressed charges against the family members, but they were released after being questioned (Lezbiyen Çift Hayatının Şokunu Yaşadı!, 2017). In Turkey, the "normal/ized" violence against women has repeatedly and continuously been condemned in the mainstream media by state officials and influential journalists who almost always exclude violence against trans* women (or any LGBTQ+ citizens). None of these women's lives were given the same attention, which in turn affirms that violence against LGBTQ+ individuals is "admissible."

It is those discourses that are based on blatant or malicious ignorance that fuel anti-trans*-, bi-, and homosexual sentiment across the country, resulting in queer erasure and violence targeting LGBTQ+ individuals. An example of such a clearly uninformed discourse was voiced by Mehmet Ali Şahin, a member of the AKP, when he spoke up at a meeting of the Conciliation Commission for the Constitution that was held in 2012. Şahin said,

What is it then? Please explain it to me, my brother! What is it? What is it that you claim as a perversion? I mean, what is that thing, pardon me, I apologize, [but] what is "sexual orientation," what is "sexual identity?" Explain that to me, what do you mean? (Uzlaşma, 2013, para. 4)

However, making proclamations such as "pardon me" or "I apologize" in a statement concerning minoritarian subjectivity in Turkey cannot be taken as an innocent utterance—not in its usual usage, such as when you performatively ask someone you offended or harmed, intentionally or not, for forgiveness. That trend was set into motion by Erdoğan when he referred to Armenian people in the following terms: "Pardon me, I apologize, but Armenians. . . ." In that speech, he was implying that "Armenian" can be an offensive word or used to swear (Agos'tan, 2014). Such blatant ignorance, however, quickly became extremely aggressive when an HDP member of the commission informed him on the matter. He said, "What if my son tells me, 'I want to marry my boyfriend.' Pardon me, I could not say, 'Keep up the good work.' As a father, wouldn't you say, 'No, get out, I will strangle [and] kill you!' Is that so?" (Uzlaşma, 2013, para. 4).

Aliye Kavaf, the former head of the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services, said in 2010, "I believe homosexuality is a biological disorder, a disease, I think it is something that needs to be treated" (Bildirici, 2010, para. 18), thereby voicing one of the most notorious examples that could be taken as an outright malicious discourse. Her statement prompted LGBTQ+ organizations to address her words as a human rights violation, and calls were made for the minister to resign and be put on trial. As a political discourse, her statement echoed a globally prevalent public opinion that treats homosexuality as a disease

and suggests that it can be “cured” in Turkey. Melih Meşeli, the founder of AK-LGBTI, an Islamic LGBTI organization that has a strong online presence, made one of the most intriguing responses to Kavaf’s statement. He describes himself as a Muslim and homosexual who has an affiliation with the AKP. In an interview, when he was asked about what he feels when he hears commentaries that treat homosexuality as a “perversion,” “disease,” or “the cause of the annihilation of humanity,” (Öğünç, 2015, para. 9) he replied,

Of course, we are disturbed [by such things]. We ask, if it is a disease, what is the cure? If it is a disease, why is it a sin? . . . The Pride Parade’s slogan is “Get used to it, we are everywhere,” and we say “We are affiliated with the AK Party (AKP) and we are homosexual, so get used to it, we are everywhere,” but they can’t get used to it. (Öğünç, 2015, para. 12)

Meşeli’s response aligns with numerous critiques concerning discourses around the world that treat homosexuality as a disease. In Turkey, similar discourses about LGBTQ+ citizens have been accumulating in the media, and they will likely further suffer the consequences in a mandated silence. Although Meşeli’s claim suggests that LGBTQ+ exclusion is not only based on sexuality, but also affiliations with Islam, the discourses noted in this article show that such exclusion can originate from either side of the religious/secular divide based on claims of immorality.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to conclude this article with a semipositive quote that deliberately acknowledges a queer subjectivity that has yet to be disavowed. Fatma Bostan Ünsal, one of the founders of the AKP, was dismissed from her teaching job for being one of the signatories of the petition Academics for Peace.⁷ She once stated,

They [LGBTQ+ citizens] should be able to participate in the regular [religious] community. If they are not comfortable there, we ought to overlook [that fact], should they wish to stand separately. . . . When you exclude them, they cannot get help from you either. This is not just the case for the LGBT community, but also all of us. Closing these doors would offend God. . . . You may think homosexuality is inappropriate for yourself, your child, your environment—that is [a] different [story]. However, the channels of communication must be open. We will work and eat together. If they want, we will pray together. It is said, “They have a place in the Prophet’s masjid.” (Beraber, 2013, para. 7)

Although that quote offers a shred of hope, it only does so if we have a religious outlook. Still, based on her statement, there would appear to be a measure of dissonance in terms of LGBTQ+ rights in the fight against antihomosexuality, homophobia, and transphobia on the religious frontlines of Turkey. However small, it is the kind of hope that can also be seen in the support of some members of the HDP, the Republican People’s Party, and the İyi Parti (Good Party) regarding LGBTQ+ rights at the municipal level in Turkey today.

⁷ For more on the Academics for Peace signatories, see Başer, Akgönül, and Öztürk (2017).

Conclusion

This study examines how past and present political discourses in Turkey have generated identificatory obstacles that LGBTQ+ citizens have to face, making their subjectivity subservient to the state's ultranationalist, heteronormative, and patriarchal existence. In many of the processes related to nation building throughout the history of Turkey, the nation-state has been uncompromising when confronted with demands for recognition of identity, regardless of whether they are racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual in nature. The exclusion of difference in society forcefully constitutes a sacrifice of the minoritarian subject for the majority and a toll that is exacted for the construction and maintenance of the nation-state. That in turn represents the invisible cost of modernity that is borne by some of the state's most marginalized subjects: LGBTQ+ citizens. Yet, the practices involved in the official erasure of difference take place along very restricted avenues, both publicly and privately.

Queer subjectification thus results in the disappearance of LGBTQ+ citizens' rights, as they vanish into the political and mainstream discourses of both secular and religious notions concerning morality. In the discourses of prominent officials, politicians, and journalists, gender and sexuality intermingle with race and ethnicity as facets of repression, and the hegemonic interpretation of Sunni Islam defines their difference as immoral. President Erdoğan himself has engaged in public discourses that treat homosexuality in a violent, aggressive manner or ridicule it, all legitimized on the grounds that it is immoral.

Spoken by a politician who has held power for a long time now, discourses that denigrate minoritarian subjectivities to the point of obliteration—regardless of whether they are racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual—validate, normalize, and activate multiple layers of violence. Despite his disavowals, Erdoğan once acknowledged homosexual citizens' rights back when he was performing the role of a moderate Islamic politician. There was a moment when a space could have been opened for the existence of LGBTQ+, which further exemplifies the strength of his cogent political discourses with the public, both in secular and religious terms. It may help, however, to recall Foucault's (1990) prudence when he said, "And people will ask themselves why we were so bent on ending the rule of silence regarding what was the noisiest of our preoccupations" (p. 158).

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