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**RECONSIDERING THE NEGOTIATION AMONG
INTERSECTING IDENTITIES: LGBT+ ALEVIS IN
ISTANBUL**

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Reconsidering the Negotiation among Intersecting Identities: LGBT+ Alevi in Istanbul
Kesifsen Kimlikler Arasındaki Muzakereyi Yeniden Dufsunmek: İstanbul'daki LGBT+ Aleviler

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- 2) LGBT+ Identities
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PREFACE

In this thesis, I aim to contribute to the existing literature on Alevi and LGBT+s by exploring the experiences of LGBT+ Alevi in Istanbul. My research subject has been very inspiring for me and became a part of my life since the day I have decided to work. The process of constructing the theoretical framework related to 'marginalized' identities, and discovering the experiences of people who bear those identities have nurtured me in many ways. It was a very eye-opening experience to listen to LGBT+ Alevi's wide range of stories from the sexual practices to the gendered interpersonal interactions. Most of the time I felt I am a part of those 'familiar' stories. At the same time, the process was relatively challenging for me because LGBT+ and Alevi identities had not been studied together before in academia. At least I did not come across to any academic work on the intersection of Alevilik and LGBT+ until the day I write these sentences.

Here, I would like to specify a point that would make the thesis easier to understand. I could not include deeply the effects of every 'intersection', which would deepen the discussions about the lives of LGBT+ Alevi. Since I thought I wrote the first chapter of a story of which other pieces could be produced in future, I have proceeded solely on the ground of faith and sexuality. I have not separately addressed regional, educational, ethnic, and especially class differences and similarities that could better reflect the overlapping and separated sides of the lives of LGBT+ Alevi. I am sure such other considerations would help us to enhance our knowledge of the interdependent nature of oppression and privilege in the intersection of faith and sexuality. I must state that the other aspects of the subject are as important as the titles I highlighted but discussing them all together was not possible due to the time limitations of an MA thesis. Besides, I wanted to avoid the 'ambitious' scope that would push me to the more complex network of communication, relatedness, and experience. I hope further researchers and I might focus on different aspects of the issue I had to exclude in this thesis in future.

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I owe special thanks to my beautiful ‘big’ family. Writing something for each one of the members of my family might take pages. I express many thanks to each one of them who always believe that I am on the right path and doing good stuff. I feel gratitude for their help and encouragement. Moreover, I would like to thank my dearest friends, Seda and Yağmur, for their love, support, and awesome WhatsApp messages full of 'yellow' emojis. I am so grateful to Batuhan for being there and acting with solidarity when I feel devastated. I am so thankful for our friendship. I am so glad to be a friend of Ezgi, Başak, Umut, Mine, Buse and Toprak with whom I share all the joy and sadness. I also extend thanks for the support from my dear friends, Merve, Melike, Tuğba, Ayşegül, Dilek and Müge. Lastly, I thank everyone who I could not mention their name here, for all that they have taught me. Through this thesis, I salute the decent people seeking world peace, who remind me where I should stand and who I want to be.

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ABSTRACT

How do LGBT+ Alevis tend to behave in their society? Are there any intertwined axes of oppression, which they experience related to their social identities? What kind of gender-specific expectations do they face in their Alevi environments? Departing from these questions, this thesis seeks to understand how being a LGBT+ Alevi might mean in Turkey. By using the intersectional perspective as an analytical tool, the thesis aims to establish a link between the very well documented but exclusively isolated literature on Alevi and LGBT+ worlds. In this context, the thesis presents an overall picture of the dynamics of the Alevi faith and sexual diversity in Turkey. The gender in Alevi faith and practice has been discussed in the literature, which is based on the rhetoric of women-men equality, and the social roles played by Alevi heterosexual women and men in their society. Considering the stories of LGBT+ Alevis in Istanbul, the thesis tries to open a new space within the ongoing discussions of gender in Alevi faith and practice. Moreover, the thesis draws attention to the allegations of being sexually deviant that Alevis and LGBT+s have been exposed in Turkey. The thesis strives to imagine possible political alliances waiting to be formed between Alevis and LGBT+s, because of such sexuality-based allegations, which determines their everyday experiences of oppression. Thus, this research initiates discussions about the oppressor-oppressed relations among the ‘others’ and suggests reconsidering the negotiable and non-negotiable boundaries of the intersecting identities.

Keywords: Alevi Identity, LGBT+ Identities, Faith, Sexual Diversity, Intersectional Perspective

ÖZET

LGBT+ Aleviler toplumlarında nasıl davranma eğilimindedirler? Sosyal kimlikleriyle ilgili tecrübe ettikleri, iç içe geçmiş baskı eksenleri var mıdır? Alevi çevrelerinde karşılaştıkları toplumsal cinsiyete içkin beklentiler nelerdir? Bu sorulardan yola çıkarak, bu tez, Türkiye'de aynı anda Alevi ve LGBT+ olmanın nasıl bir anlam ifade edebileceğini anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Kesişimsel perspektifi analitik bir araç olarak kullanan çalışma, Alevi ve LGBT+ dünyaları üzerine çok iyi belgelenmiş, ancak birbirinden oldukça ayırık literatürler arasında bağlantı kurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Türkiye'deki cinsel çeşitlilik ve Alevi inanç dinamiklerinin genel bir resmi sunulmaktadır. Alevi inanç ve pratiğinde toplumsal cinsiyet meselesi, literatürde kadın-erkek eşitliği söylemi ile Alevi heteroseksüel kadınların ve erkeklerin toplumlarında oynadığı sosyal roller ışığında tartışılmıştır. İstanbul'daki LGBT+ Alevilerin hikayelerini göz önüne alarak tez, süregiden Alevi inanç ve pratiğinde toplumsal cinsiyet tartışmaları içerisinde yeni bir alan açmaya çalışmaktadır. Ayrıca, tezin dikkat çektiği bir diğer konu, hem Alevilerin hem de LGBT+ların Türkiye'de maruz kaldıkları cinsel sapkınlık ithamlarıdır. Alevilerin ve LGBT+ların günlük baskı deneyimlerini belirleyen cinsellik temelli bu ithamlardan dolayı tez, bu politik gruplar arasında kurulmayı bekleyen olası siyasi ittifakları tahayyül etmeye çalışmaktadır. Böylece bu araştırma, 'ötekilerin' içindeki ezen-ezilen ilişkilerine dönük tartışmalar açarak kesişen kimliklerin müzakere edilebilir ve edilemez sınırlarını yeniden düşünmeyi önermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Alevi Kimliği, LGBT+ Kimlikler, İnanç, Cinsel Çeşitlilik, Kesişimsel Perspektif

INTRODUCTION

The cool DJ, the drag queen with fancy body makeup, the hottest dancers with the erotic underwear, kissing and flirting couples, the smell of the alcohol and more... I could not describe better the ambiance of a gay nightclub attracted many in Istanbul. At one day, I assume it was Saturday, I was there with my usual motivation of dancing until the early hours of the morning and I met one of my friends by chance. In fact, he can be considered my relative because of the *kirvelik* relationship our families engaged¹. My *kirve* told me his friend standing next to him is also ‘from us’². Such statement meant that his friend was also an Alevi. Honestly, I never thought about this story until I started to work on this thesis. Then I realized that the short dialogue with my friend was bearing much more meanings. That scene turned into a flashback that triggers me to search for who I am, what my origin is, where I come from, what I would like to become, what makes up us, who the others are. The dialogue was a manifestation of being Alevi in an environment where people were enjoying their mostly same-sex desire. Maybe if I had encountered my friend in another setting in which the Alevi identity was visible, this time he might have highlighted being LGBT+. As Aydın Uğur puts it, the phenomenon we call identity resembles toy blocks that children play. Uğur reflects we change our identities like the pieces of Lego in our encounters with the others in different contexts (2004). When I collect these pieces, I recognize my friend was also playing with his identities and create a semantic world, which he feels belonging when he was literally playing in the dance club.

As seen in the brief anecdote, it is not possible to mention only one identity we bear. We are simultaneously involved in many overlapping groupings that seem to

¹ I should begin by underlining that I have intentionally written some Turkish terms with italic characters to avoid possible confusions in the thesis.

² *Kirvelik* relationship that is very valued among Alevis is established through the rituals of circumcision. The *kirve* is the person who meets some expenses of the circumcision feast and supports the child during the circumcision. The members of the families engage in *kirvelik* relationships call each other *kirve*. Moreover, “the name ‘Alevi’ is mainly interpreted as referring to the followers of Ali” (Çaha, 2004: 326).

have been formed based on lineage, ideology, region, language, lifestyles and so on. The specific ways through which we experience the world are shaped by our complex identities. I regard the meaning clusters we have constituted and positioned ourselves within is the product of a complex interplay between sexual, racial, national, religious, cultural and suchlike identifications. In this thesis, I specifically highlight the experiences of LGBT+ Alevis living in Istanbul and explore how they construct and situate themselves in relations to their surroundings. For me, the current study is a start of rethinking on how being an Alevi and LGBT+ at the same time might mean in Turkey. By this way, I hope to put disparate Alevi and LGBT+ worlds in dialogue with each other through an intersectional perspective and to offer a comparative review of the well-documented but exclusively isolated literature on these two worlds.

I see many Alevis highlight the idea of being tolerant of differences in relations to the dominant society and their community. The gender equality in Alevi belief and practice has also been claimed by many based on the theological references. According to Nimet Okan, the acceptance and claim on gender equality has been one of the basic arguments of the community while mentioning the ethno cultural borders (2016: 15-16). The borders are drawn for separating Alevi path from the traditions of other faith-based communities, specifically the Sunni groups. In this framework, how Alevis response LGBT+ presence in their societies and how their experiences on religiosity, spirituality shapes their conception of LGBT+s has become the object of my curiosity. It has been important to explore whether Alevis, who have been suppressed in religious-cultural ground show tolerance to sexual diversity. This perspective should not be interpreted as an academically judging the values of a community which is fragmented, diverse, non-homogeneous in itself. Instead, understanding how LGBT+ Alevis interact with the Alevi circles and how they construct themselves in the Alevi world they believe in is my intention.

By applying the principles of intersectionality as an analytical tool, I consider the representation of the intersectional location of LGBT+ Alevis as the challenge to

the ideas that regard the bearers of cultures as single, identical entities. In other words, I shall address the complexities and fluidity of identity categories in the current work. I would say that the intersectionality, as a framework, helped me to develop the method of the thesis and to contextualize what is happening in the lives of LGBT+ Alevis critically. I also share the idea of Patricia Hill Collins arguing that the intersectional analysis might also be helpful in our ability to identify the oppressor within us (Cited in Garry, 2011: 827). In the scope of this thesis, such 'us' might refer to being a member of the 'others', that is Alevi and LGBT+ communities, which have claimed to be systematically discriminated and marginalized in Turkey for years. Alternatively, 'us' might not refer to any person and its meaning might change; I am still questioning.

Studying the relations of Alevis and LGBT+s with the powers in historical, political, and social contexts is important and makes the subject more comprehensible. It is equally significant to outline also the struggle histories of the 'others' for which Hrant Dink's 'pigeon-like timidity' analogy is valid to a certain extent³. The thesis begins and unfolds in this way. However, on the ground in which the sexuality and faith intersect, for me, illustrating the unique experiences of LGBT+ Alevis has been primary necessary to reflect that the marginalized ones are not homogeneous within itself and their boundaries may be slippery. Besides, sometimes the others also have a part in reinforcing the inequalities and biases of the world around us. I ponder the negotiable and non-negotiable boundaries of the politicized identities from my self-perspective and the perspectives of LGBT+ Alevis who helped me a lot. Towards the end of the thesis, I strive to imagine the possible alliances that may be fostered by the subversion of boundaries through the commonalities between Alevis and LGBT+s.

³ Hrant Dink is a Turkish-Armenian journalist murdered in 2007. I commemorate the memory of him with huge respect.

PART I. THEORETICAL, CONCEPTUAL, METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK & CONTEXT WITH HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. METHODOLOGY

In the current study, I recognize that the intersections of gender identity, sexual orientation, and *Alevilik*⁴ may affect the everyday lives of people including their experiences with oppression. The reference to the intersectionality scholars, this thesis' primary effort is to see things from the unique world perspectives of participants with multiple identities and not simply from our unique standpoints (Walker, 2003: 991, cited in Shields, S. A., 2008: 309). It is also vital to underline that not all situations are intersectional to the same extent; it can vary. According to Garry, for example, the degrees and kinds of intersectional intermeshing need an empirical investigation because of this possibility (2011: 830). "To the extent that a complete picture of intersectionality is obtained with attention to phenomenological experiences associated with intersectionality, it is not surprising that qualitative research has often been held to be central to an intersectionality approach" (DeBlaere et al., 2013: 642). Due to these reasons, in-depth interviewing has been applied as a qualitative research technique that involves conducting individual interviews with a series of people living in Istanbul for the research.

Contrary to the ordinary daily conversation, in-depth interviewing carried out in a different way depending on the purpose of the research. The primary motivation to choose in-depth interview as a technique to collect data based on the idea that the opinions, thoughts, viewpoints, and experiences in the research area of the participants are important. I also recognize such interviews provide useful insights in interviewing individuals as culture-bearers in cross-cultural settings. According to William Schneider, in cross-cultural contexts, the narrator is creating narrative from his or her oral tradition and personal experiences, while the person

⁴ I use the word *Alevilik* in the sense of Alevi belief and practice. On the advice of my advisor, I prefer to use the word *Alevilik* instead of the English version in order not to be understood as I was talking about the ideology.

interviewing is conducting the interview to create a record that they or others will analyze and reference in their work (2011: 51). Considering that the Alevi tradition is mostly oral, the participants holding Alevi identity were able to carry their *Alevilik* understanding within which they are lodged to their narratives.

The current study consisted of six interviewee who are living in Istanbul, express their sexuality either as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or combination of those. They are also identified themselves as Alevi. With methodological terminology, the only criterion for inclusion was the participant had to self-identify with such advertised focus group. I reached my informants through personal contacts that I had before. I have done face-to-face interviews with each one and all of them recommended me other potential participants for the study. The duration of the interviews was about two hours. I have used the voice recorder except for the interview I made with Bozkır. Since Bozkır did not prefer me to record our conversations, I took notes on papers. When he wanted to check the 'written' record, I did not refuse to share. We have proceeded in this way. Two of the interviews took place at cafes, which the interviewees have chosen. One of them occurred at my residence and one at my office at Istanbul Bilgi University. For last two interviews, I have met with the interviewees either in their residence or in office. My aim was meeting with the participants in the place they feel comfortable. Herein, I need to note that I negotiated with all interviewees whether I should use the real names in the thesis. Because of the ethical and academic concerns, I kindly asked each one of them to pick a pseudonym that I could use to identify them in the thesis. In this context, Zeynep, Melis and Bozkır are well-known names in Turkish that some of the respondents asked me to use instead of their actual names. E.N. is the abbreviation of the name of one of my interviewees who did not want me to use a pseudonym. Other two interviewees were persistent on using their names instead of pseudonyms or abbreviations. I interpreted their requests as politically motivated and did not want to sensitize the subject for them. Even though I have still confusion about revealing their identities, I have decided to use their real names without surnames.

I had a foresight at the beginning of the research that the level of religiosity of the participants might vary and it could be a dimension enriching the study. For example, the religiosity of Alevi going to Cem Houses can be very strong, but some others may define themselves as non-practicing Alevi. Similarly, if ones are socialized in a family and neighborhood in which ethnicity is prioritized and politicized, they may emphasize their *Alevilik* as ethnic identity. In this respect, the levels of religiosity of the participants were not initially taken into consideration like their age, marital status, family status, employment status. Even though I did not reach my participants based on those socio-demographic characteristics, I realized some commonalities and differences in their lives within the process. The ages of people I interviewed were 30 and above and they all have a profession. Bozkır and Özgür are teachers, Zeynep is a lawyer, Çiğdem is a scriptwriter/director and Melis is a DJ. E.N. works as a public official as the eldest participant I met. E.N. is 42 years old. Although they live and work in Istanbul, the birthplace of a majority is different from this city. Bozkır and Çiğdem were born in Erzincan in the eastern region of Turkey. Melis was born in Kahramanmaraş and Özgür was born in Adana. These both cities are in the Mediterranean region of the country. E.N. was born in İzmit which is geographically near to Istanbul. Lastly, Zeynep was born in Istanbul but her parents originally from Malatya. As it is mentioned in different parts of the thesis, Alevi are dispersed to different parts of Turkey and this fact reflected in the current study. In addition, there is the issue of differences in ethnic level parallel to such regional distinctions. For example, Bozkır, E.N., Zeynep, and Özgür said they come from Kurd families. Even though I did not involve the ethnic dimension in the thesis, I opened the subjects about being Kurd during the conversations. For example, Bozkır reflected that he is the only person who self-identify publicly as Kurd within his Alevi family members. Çiğdem who was born in Erzincan like Bozkır has the opinion that there cannot be Kurd Alevi. Such diverse approaches to the intersection of ethnicity and faith-based identities can be examined deeply in further researches however I need to note that my participants' sense of belongings to the much-politicized groups like Alevi and

Kurds might have determined what they told me during the conversations. People I interviewed did not explicitly identify themselves as being an activist however they have been part of the LGBT+ movement and used to be in the political acts. They carried their political awareness to the interviews and enabled me to deepen my discussion on the potential alliances between Alevi and LGBT+s in Turkey.

Apart from the ones mentioned above, what has been important to me was the relationship we build at the intersection of our worlds. As Paola Bacchetta demonstrates, in sets of fieldwork, there is the need “to enter into the subject’s specific modality of thought and communication, that is, in the sense of their categories, assumptions, logics, terms” (2010: 156). My way of relating to the others has determined the moments we thought, talked, laughed, felt sorry, mused on the context. I must say that I did not avoid showing my cultural experiences, which might sometimes transform the interview and the text into a self-reflexive autobiographical structure, as a researcher who is also LGBT+ Alevi.

There are several reasons why I considered Istanbul as a rich field of the study. First, Istanbul has a gay scene, and the identities are relatively more visible compared to other cities of the country. For example, LGBTI+ pride parade has been organized annually since 2003 in Istiklal Avenue that is the hub of the city. The foundations and non-governmental organizations in support of LGBT+s are also common in the city. Second, Istanbul hosts a wide Alevi population and it has many Cem Houses, which are most common gathering and worship places of Alevi community. There are some neighborhoods mostly populated by Alevi in the city such as Okmeydanı and Gülsuyu. Such areas are also known for their politicized character. In parallel to these reasons, I may suggest that Alevi living in Istanbul are more familiar with LGBT+ culture than the ones living in any other Anatolian city.

2. APPROACHING THE ISSUE OF IDENTITY FROM THE INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

I must note at the outset that it was a hard job to write down my thoughts on identity. It is not primarily, because they are relatively abstract concepts but rather because the complexity of the identity issue that has shaped the lives of people and the responsibility of articulation over an enormous literature that has been discussed for years. The identity I refer to is a statement of belonging. When I say identity and intersectionality, I first recognize that our identities are constructed through the intersection of multiple dimensions. In other words, each of us holds multiple identities based on the race, class, gender, religion, etc. When we are socialized, we produce different forms of relatedness through these identities. We find ourselves in a group we thought we belong. Both within and between such non-homogeneous groups, 'us versus them' approach is employed and sustained. In the world of conflicts derived from the dichotomies, the imbalances in access to economic, social and cultural capital that the members of the groups face create further tension, inequalities, and discrimination. In my opinion, it needs to highlight how oppressions intermesh with each other or are used to construct each other intersectionality points to, in contrast, additive or pop-bead models of identity or oppression (Garry, 2011: 829). Lisa Bowleg argues this as a dilemma for intersectionality researchers. According to Bowleg, “the additive (e.g., Black + Lesbian + Woman) versus intersectional (e.g., Black Lesbian Woman) assumption inherent in measurement and qualitative and quantitative data analyses contradicts the central tenet of intersectionality: social identities and inequality are inter-dependent for groups such as Black lesbians, not mutually exclusive” (2008: 312).

In this study, I acknowledge LGBT+ identities and Alevi identity as identity intersections in some people’s lives. These identities “represent some of the social identities afforded meaning in terms of relative sociocultural power and privilege” (Black and Stone, 2005, cited in DeBlaere et al., 2013: 639). The oppression and privilege based on the ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and so on, with the

remarks of Ann Garry, “do not act independently of each other in our individual lives or in our social structures; instead, each kind of oppression or privilege is shaped by and works through the others” (2011: 827).

It is important to highlight the identities as unidentified, unstable, messy, changeable, fluid, and complex on the contrary to the claims of universal essentialist views. For this reason, moving from conceptualizations of the “identities solely as categorical socio-demographic predictors to conceptualizations of the experiential and contextual manifestations of these constructs as nuanced and continuous variables presents a potentially fruitful direction for further intersectionality research” (DeBlaere et al., 2013: 643). This aspect of intersectionality research differs from identity politics, “which take as natural certain categories that are socially constructed” (Crenshaw: 1991: 1298). Crenshaw stresses that those categories have descriptive content and “the narratives on which they are based have privileged some experiences and excluded others” (1991: 1298). From this point of view, rather than attributing certain categories to them, thinking about the possibility of producing different forms of relatedness, which may never be expected, within/between groups became more important for me in this research. Examples of such possibilities have been experienced in Iran. According to Pardis Mahdavi, Iranian young people insisted that the hetero/homo binary –so fixed in the West- did not exist in the Iranian case, as they move in the space between the fluidity of sexual identity and the politicization of sexuality towards social reform. Since 2005, Iranian “young people seeking to be part of a movement to change discourse and attitudes toward sexuality in Iran find themselves drawn into organizing for larger social and political reform” beyond sexuality and Islam (2012: 224). Mahdavi refers these happenings as the strategic construction of sexual identity in Iran and from this aspect; I see the identity as a site of resistance for members of different marginalized groups. As Julia S. Jordan-Zachery reminds us, “intersectionality was also about the issue of liberation” at the beginning (2007: 261).

In my opinion, it is also vital to move from conventional rights-based identity politics which have promoted being ‘minority’ to the possibilities which encourage politics of diversity. Here, I assert that it is important to go beyond the concept of binaries of identities and the categories of denigration and subordination. That is why I wonder, for example, whether there could be potential coalitions waiting to be formed between Alevi and LGBT+ communities. In other words, it is important to explore if there is any common context of struggle in the politics of everyday life between the members of these two groups beyond calling them the minority. Thus and so, it would be possible to see if discrimination that one group has been exposed is reproduced against another group. If the members of a community that claims to be oppressed and politicized in religious-cultural ground begin to see themselves as privileged when it comes to sexual diversity (or vice versa), intersectionality might be put forward as an analytical tool to give meaning and even distort such relations. LGBT+ Alevi’s novel experiences of their identities and their social relations that are distinctive became the reference point for me to set the framework of such argument.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE SEXUAL DIVERSITY & THE POLITICS OF SEXUALITY

Every individual has a sex, a gender identity, and sexual orientation; all can be considered continuums and can be fluid (changing) in any person’s life. Biological sex is how we are assigned as female, male, or intersex at birth according to our physical appearances and external genitals. Sexual orientation is about whom we are attracted to, and it differs from the gender identity, which is about whom we believe ourselves to be. LGBT(+) stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans. The ‘plus’ might be considered as the inclusion of any other groups such as questioning, gender-fluid, etc. The word lesbian refers to women who are attracted to other women and, gay refers to men that are primarily

attracted to other men⁵. Bisexual is used to refer to people who are interested in both males and females. Transgender (or just trans) is used to refer a wide range of people who do not feel that they belong to the sex that they have been assigned at birth according to their physical body. Actually, it is necessary to acknowledge the complexities of using the acronym LGBT. According to Herek, for example, “the expansion of the acronym reflects an attempt to move away from archaic conceptualizations of (often implicitly, male) homosexuality and pathology to broader and more inclusive conceptualizations that include lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and other sexual minority populations” (Herek, 2010, cited in DeBlaere et al., 2013). In this research, similar to Herek's approach, I use the abbreviation ‘LGBT+’ as an all-encompassing term to include persons with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. I referred to the people interviewed with the abbreviation LGBT+, instead of LGBTI, which is another common usage, because the people studied, did not include intersex people. On the contrary to the argument of Herek, some researchers assert that such acronym still excludes some sexual minority identities as queer, pansexual (DeBlaere et al., 2013: 641). However, some others also criticize this point of view saying that the tendency of adding Q to the acronym LGBT means reducing queer into an identity category (Partog, 2012: 175). According to another opinion, “the acronym also has the potential to obfuscate within group variability and the complexities represented in the acronym itself, such as the separation of L and G by gender, the conflation of people of various gender identities within B, the simultaneous inclusion and otherness of T as persons with a separate letter in the acronym who may also be located within the L, G, and B parts of the acronym” (Fassinger and Arseneau, 2007, cited in DeBlaere et al., 2013). The discussion over the complexities of sexual orientation and gender identity can be seen as both theoretical and political/practical acquirement in my opinion.

⁵ In some parts of the thesis, I used the word ‘gay’ for any sex and gender expression outside of heterosexuality. In other words, because I thought using the term homosexual to describe LGBT+ people might be offensive, I preferred using the gay as plural.

These important concepts do not fit in the normative gender binary categories of women and men or the concept of heteronormativity that excludes different sexualities outside of heterosexuality. For one of the lesbian feminists, Monique Wittig, the category of sex (woman-man) is the political category that establishes society as heterosexual, which only accepts the reproductive sexuality as normal (2013: 85). In other words, the capacity of sexual activities and feelings has been limited to the monogamous heterosexual marriage and the reproduction that occur within that marriage. Thus and so, the premise that people and their sexual object choice may change over time is not recognized by hegemonic power. That is why Wittig highlights the sexuality as a certain field of struggle in the sense that we want to be out of the sexual economy and reproductive conception imposed by the dominant heterosexual regime (2013: 88).

In the book called *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, Annamarie Jagose mentions some ambiguous circumstances, which “cast doubt on the precise delimitations of homosexuality as a descriptive category” (1996: 7). One of the examples of such ambiguous situations “is the man who lives with his wife and children, but from time to time has casual or anonymous sex with other men” (1996: 7). Jagose states that many people in this situation did not identify themselves as gay and even some interviewees rejected a gay identity more explicitly. Such examples are interesting regarding initiating the discussion of the fluidity of sexual identities. To Jagose, for instance, “whereas essentialists regard identity as natural, fixed and innate, constructionists assume identity is fluid, the effect of social conditioning and available cultural models for understanding oneself” (1996: 8). Based upon the distinction between these two approaches, a self-identified heterosexual man married to the woman and had sex with other men would not be welcomed by essentialists. On the other hand, constructionists “would assume that different meanings can attach themselves to the same sexual acts” and “they would argue that identity is not a demonstrably empirical category but the product of processes of identification” (Jagose, 1996: 9).

Queer sexualities can also be included in the scope of such sexual diversity. With its indefinable character, queer resists the desires, which are standardized. Queer locates and exploits the “incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire” and “its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery” (Jagose, 1996: 3). Besides, queer has also been there to point out that the limitations of heteronormative order affect not only same-sex sexualities but also some heterosexual identities. According to Tuna Erdem, non-monogamous heterosexual relationships, the sexual intercourses that include the use of sex toys and other differences constitute the queer side of heterosexuality (2012: 47). To me, such sexualities can be understood as a kind of political action in which people refuse to follow the line the hegemonic power draws. By learning from Fanon’s phenomenology of being black, Sara Ahmed summarizes the straight-line analogy (2006: 155). “For as we know, the experience of negation, of being stopped or feeling out of place, of feeling uncomfortable at home, does not “stop” there. It is around such experiences that bodies gather, getting together, acting, refusing this inheritance of whiteness, refusing even the desire to follow that line,” Ahmed wrote in *Queer Phenomenology*. Likewise, Fred Moten’s understanding of the black aesthetic also says a lot about the breakdown of orderliness. To Moten, “as song’s disruption of speech, the cry’s disruption of song, gesture’s disruption of the cry, the criminal animation or animalistic derangement of the human, the movement of law into the interstitial space of theater or drama’s irruption into the subject’s pure locale and cause and so on” (Cited in Halberstam, 2013: 130). The deviation from the straight line encouraged by heteronormative order may create new possibilities for a new life. José E. Muñoz is one of the pioneers who explored the topic of the queerness of potentiality: “Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (Cited in Halberstam, 2013: 126). Even if many can discuss the limits of queerness (queer performances), the hope for another world seems vital to make the differences alive and constant. Being organized is very important to make the hopes

permanent and to make them real. Acknowledging the respectable history of the struggle worldwide in the field of sexuality, at this point, I intend to present an overview of the critiques on queer and identity-based politics, -LGBT+ politics- in particular.

One can start to review the queer activism and LGBT+ politics based on the 'identity' issue. Before entering the details of the so-called contestation between queer and LGBT+ politics, it is necessary to underline that they have the same root. "According to its canonized Genesis, the queer perspective was born about 1990 in the USA as a combination of poststructuralist theorization and demand for the radicalization of gay and lesbian politics in the wake of the AIDS crisis" (Wickman, 2010). This genealogy shows the fact that the queer politics also have their origins in gay and lesbian politics associated with the AIDS crisis. Escoffier and Allan Bérubé have introduced the emergence of queer politics as follows:

Frustrated with what was perceived to be the scientific "de-gaying" and assimilationist tendencies of AIDS activism, with their invisibility in the more traditional civil rights politics of lesbian and gay organizations, and with increasing legal and physical attacks against lesbian and gay community members, a new generation of activists began to process of building a more confrontational political formation-labeling it queer politics (Cited in Cohen, 1997: 439).

It seems in the previous studies that the new queer movement and LGBT+ politics have gradually separated from each other regarding their primary motivations. Most of the scholars agree on the fact that the LGBT+ politics –the traditional gay and lesbian movement in particular- remains the identity-driven movement. Robert J. Hill, for example, argues this way of LGBT+ politics by suggesting another way of activism called convergence activism. According to Hill, the social movements such as the lesbian and gay movement have identity politics as their center, "whereas the convergence movement is built on collective anti-oppression activism" that also contains queer activism (2004: 89). Thus and so, Hill summarizes the intersectionality of micro and macro practices, which seem relevant to queer politics:

A bumper sticker proclaims, "Think Globally/Act Locally." The confluence of theory and practice means desiring and acting and participating in the "new" new social movement — called the convergence movement — constructed on this principle, which is sustained by convergence activism. It builds coalitions around anti-globalization, environmental justice, queer activism, the social construction of whiteness, third-wave feminism, anti-capitalism, animal rights, and peace. It contests empire building, the so-called war on terrorism, racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, bigotry, and discrimination based on age, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation and gender identity, creed, native language, and other forms of oppression (2004: 88-89).

The problem with identity politics seems to me that it did not sometimes embrace the separate identity groups both inside and outside of the LGBT+ coalition. In other words, identity politics seem to be concerned with the content and the goals of one single identity group. Queer, on the contrary side, is here not regarded as an issue of norm breaking that only a given group of people would be involved in (Wickman, 2010). It may concern more than that. Another criticism against the dominant gay and lesbian politics is that it does not distance itself from the homo/hetero binary and the sexuality/gender identity categories. Blackston approaches this issue with the notion of resistance and destabilization of the identities. "If resistance is not read as a progress narrative whereby one can wholly subvert dominant paradigms of gender and sexuality through performative actions, the concept of resistance can still be useful. As mentioned briefly in the introduction to this thesis, queer is not a sexuality or an identity, in any singular manner," Blackston wrote (2012: 31).

Besides, there are those who think that the queer critique against normalization and assimilation within the identity politics has changed tone over time. Wickman has been one of those claiming that "many of the critics do not oppose the concrete goals of same-sex marriage or adoption rights as such but express concern over the family rights campaign having become so dominant in the LGBTI organizations that alternative choices and lifestyles become marginalized even in the LGBTI/queer communities themselves" (2010). Wickman's statement can also be read as a critique of neoliberal sexual politics that sustain the dominant heteronormative regime.

Even though queer activism implies a challenging approach to sexual politics as summarized, similar criticisms have also been directed also to some groups within the queer movement. According to Cohen, for example, experiencing deviant sexuality as the prominent characteristic of their marginalization, some white queer activists begin to envision the world concerning a "hetero/queer" division (1997: 447). While acknowledging the potentiality of the idea of queerness and the practice of queer politics, Cohen argues that a genuinely radical or transformative politics has not resulted from queer activism. Instead, "queer politics has served to reinforce simple dichotomies between heterosexual and everything queer" (1997: 438).

Finally, it is important to state that queer politics with its potentiality and the identity politics have to negotiate. In my opinion, if one of the primary goals of the queer movement is the liberation of anyone oppressed by the heteronormativity, then it cannot ignore the problems energized by identity politics. Annamarie Jagose beautifully explained this matter in the 90s as followings:

Queer is not outside the magnetic field of identity. Like some postmodern architecture, it turns identity inside out and displays its supports exoskeletally. If the dialogue between queer and more traditional identity formations is sometimes fraught—which it is—that is not because they have nothing in common. Rather, lesbian and gay faith in the authenticity or even political efficacy of identity categories and the queer suspension of all such classifications energize each other, offering in the 1990s—and who can say beyond?—the ambivalent reassurance of an unimaginable future (1996: 132).

One of the reasons for reviewing the politics in this thesis is my belief that “local activity can transform global politics and that global actions might have local implications”, as Hill argues (2004: 89). The literature notes I have included so far are generally produced in the United States, but they also seem stimulating for understanding the context of Turkey. Because of the arguments I have outlined briefly, this thesis draws inspiration from the literature on queer perspective, and it opens up some discussions on the potentials of the intersecting identities. In addition, Alevis and LGBT+s in an organized manner have their respectable

struggle history in Turkey. More interestingly, Alevis living in Turkey have been depicted as ones who practice deviant sexuality for years. As aforementioned, Cohen emphasizes the same deviant sexuality for LGBT+s as the significant characteristic of their marginalization. Such ‘deviance’ commonality from the rhetoric of hegemonic heteronormative order has been submitted as a matter of sexual and social morality of the society. Under these circumstances, within the scope of the research, I also explore how LGBT+ Alevis undertake the deviance claim and express their political stance alongside possible struggle ways for such an ‘unimaginable future’ referred by Annamarie Jagose. Beyond that, such general political review paves the way for discussing the experiences of LGBT+ Alevis based on the morality, sexuality and gender issue in the next sections of the thesis.

4. REVIEWING THE SITUATION OF LGBT+ COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEXT OF TURKEY

In academic works discussing LGBT+ rights, Turkey's unique geopolitical position in the world has been emphasized. For example, for H. Burcu Baba, Turkey is considered a hinge country that is situated in the Middle East since most of the countries to its east penalize same-sex desire whereas most countries that fall to the West provide legal rights (2011: 57). Indeed, this is a factual reality. The thing that makes this information relevant for the current work is that countries with a sizeable Muslim majority to Turkey's east have been ruled by Islamic states. The Islamic opposition to LGBT+s has had a strong effect on people living in the so-called secular country, Turkey. On such a geographic location in which the social and spatial accommodation of both religious and sexual identities has been a subject of the political agendas, social taxonomies of religion and sexuality play a role in the experiences of LGBT+s at the same time. The experiences of the LGBT+ Alevis are examined with this premise in the current study. From this point of view, in this part, I briefly review how the Islam approaches the same-sex desire and how Islamic arguments affect the attitudes of people towards LGBT+s in Turkey.

In the academic works investigating the Islamic perspective on same-sex sexuality, one can easily see the references to the story of Lut. According to Siraj, same-sex sexuality “is considered a grave sin and denounced in the parable of Prophet Lut in the Qur’an” that is the central religious text of Islam (Siraj, 2014: 195). Amreen Jamal gives place to the Lut passage from Qur’an about same-sex practice as follows:

And Lot, when he said to his people, “What, do you commit such indecency [faishah] as never any being in all the world committed before you? See, you approach men lustfully [shahwah] instead of women; no, you are a people that do exceed [musrifun].” And the only answer of his people was that they said, “Expel them from your city; surely they are folk that keep themselves clean [tahir]!” So We delivered him and his family, except his wife; she was of those who tarried [ghabirun]. And We rained down upon them a rain; so behold thou, how was the end of the sinners [mujrimin]! (Qur’an 7: 78-82; Jamal, 2001: 11).

Jamal remarks the necessity of examining the use of the words elsewhere in the Qur’an and asserts that the word “lustfully” (shahwah) from the root SHHY seems to suggest same-sex content. The story of Lut and the other hadiths seem to be condemned the same-sex sexual activity. For Siraj, the Qur’an’s explicit condemnation of same-sex sexuality fosters a theologically based homophobia (Siraj, 2009, cited in Siraj, 2014: 196). In a study entitled *Islam, Homosexuality and Gay Muslims*, Siraj demonstrates that the four schools that continue to serve as a guide for Sunni Muslims differ in the prescribed punishment for same-sex sexualities as follows:

According to the *Hanafi* school since same-sex acts do not constitute adultery, punishment is based on the judge’s discretion. The *Maliki*, *Hanbali* and *Shafi* schools consider *zina* (illegitimate sexual intercourse) to be any form of penetrative sex outside of marriage; anal penetration, for instance, is forbidden irrespective of whether the object of desire is a man or a woman (Zollner 2010, 210). Therefore, those committing acts of same-sex intercourse should be stoned to death (*Hanbali*), the *Maliki* school proposes the *hadd* punishment but the person’s marital status should be taken into account. The *hadd* punishments are prescribed by God in the Qur’an and hadith for crimes considered to be against Allah. The *Shafi* school states that a married person be punished as an adulterer (by stoning to death), and an unmarried person as a fornicator (by flogging) (Siraj, 2014: 196).

In general, the Islamic viewpoint fosters the restriction and penalization of diverse sexual activities. Herein, it would not be wrong to suggest that some other researchers claim the opposite or approach the issue more moderate. For instance, with the acceptance of the prohibition of same-sex sexual activity in the Qur'an, Junaid B. Jahangir, and Hussein Abdul-latif suggest Muslim scholars investigate the issue based on a higher ethic derived from the teachings of the Prophet. "Do not harm and accept no harm," "Wish for your brother what you wish for yourself," "When some Muslims hurt other Muslims ache," were some of the Prophet's teachings sorted in the study of Jahangir and Abdul-latif (2016: 946-947). Apart from these, the institution of heterosexual marriage has been idealized in Islam. "Islam emphasizes the complementarity and unity of the two sexes with distinguishable and distinct gender roles associated with males and females" (Yip, 2004, cited in Siraj, 2014: 196). Although Turkey is not being governed in accordance with Islamic law, "Muslims remain associated with the school that has historically dominated their region" (Lombardi 1998, cited in Siraj, 2014: 196). That is why it is more important to see what all these means for Sunni Muslims, and indeed for Alevis in Turkey.

In Turkey, engaging in consensual same-sex sexual activities is not a criminal act. Even though the majority of people residing in the country identify as followers of Islam, different sexual orientations and gender identities are not criminalized explicitly on the contrary to other Muslim-populated countries like Libya and Saudi Arabia. However, same-sex sexuality remains a taboo subject for the society, and Islamic religious arguments have been put forward when it comes to lifestyles and rights of LGBT+s. One of the most striking examples in recent years is the forbiddance of the annual pride march in Istanbul. The pride parade has been under threat from ultra-nationalist and conservative groups that have pledged to do what is necessary to stop the event⁶. Such attitudes targeting LGBT+s have been tried to be legitimized by focusing on the values and norms of the Islamic

⁶ Ultranationalist group threatens LGBT Pride March in Istanbul. (2016, June 15). Last accessed December 5, 2017, from <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/ultranationalist-group-threatens-lgbt-pride-march-in-istanbul--100505>

morality of the society. In the eyes of those groups, LGBT+s are the ones who have been degenerated and disrupt the morality of society with their fantasies. In *Din ve İdeoloji*, Şerif Mardin describes the Islamic society as a society full of norms that reveal the shame on people in an exceptional way. Here, shame means to fear of the society's wrath. When someone acts in the way that the society does not approve, the feeling of guilt shows itself. Mardin mentions the *takiye* as an Islamic reflection of this kind of shame (2016: 82). Interestingly, *takiye* also refers to the Shi'a practice of dissimulating one's beliefs, and it is a part of the core of Alevi faith. It is not wrong to say here that LGBT+s living in Turkey have been engaging in such *takiye* for years while experiencing sexuality. If the performative Cem rituals are the sign of breaking down the practice of *takiye*, coming out of the closet I detail in next chapters can be considered same for LGBT+s.

Apart from exclusionist religious arguments, LGBT+s have been facing multiple forms of discrimination in Turkey, and existing legal system has inadequacies for protecting the rights of them. Neither government policies nor general public attitudes toward LGBT+s in Turkey are affirmative. Physical violence, emotional and verbal abuse, employment discrimination, the problems of housing, education, and healthcare on both the state and individual level can be sorted as the common themes of experiences of LGBT+s in the country. The fact that oppression against LGBT+s is politically motivated has encouraged the organized struggle in Turkey at the beginning of the 1990s. According to Erdal Partog, the history of LGBT+ movement in Turkey can be divided into three phases. The first term between 1993 and 2000 has been an identity construction period for LGBT+s. The second term at the beginning of the 2000s has evolved in parallel with the global multiple social and political movements such as anti-militarist movements. Visibility in public sphere has grown in this second term. In the third phase, the movement has met with queer politics (Partog, 2012: 167-178). Instead of maintaining the identity politics focused on the integration of LGBT+ people in the mainstream and the demands for equality with heterosexuals like the marriage equality, deconstructing identity politics has been one of the premises of queer politics. Queerness relies on the discourses of civil liberties and civil rights, and it

“is often a marker of one's distance from conventional norms in all facets of life, not only the sexual” (Epstein, 1994: 195).

I assume that the LGBT+ movement has gained new momentum in Turkey since the Gezi Park protests, which took place in summer of 2013⁷. LGBT+s who would not be welcomed another time in public space constituted one of the most visible groups during the protests under the name of ‘LGBT Blok’. Gezi Park had been one of the important spaces of the LGBT+ history of the country. It is a well-known place for LGBT+s -especially gay men- to cruise. According to Zengin, the majority of Gezi Park’s visitors included gay men looking for casual sex, young rent boys under eighteen years old, and trans women selling inexpensive sexual services, as well as recent transgender and gay migrants to Istanbul looking connections with other queers in the city⁸. Because of the presence and political representation of LGBT+s, the Gezi Park protests have started another process where the politics of sexuality has been questioned in the academic and non-academic environment. For me, LGBT+s’ involvement to such public movements is important for the visibility and recognition in Turkey and what happened in 2013 has inspired me to imagine the negotiation between different identities with their multiplicity and interconnectedness in this thesis.

5. ALEVI IDENTITY & ALEVINESS IN TURKEY

In this chapter, I summarize the differences between Alevi faith and Sunni Islam. First, this section of the study is to the understanding of the religious origins of the conflict of Alevi/Sunni communities. Second, it is for discovering whether there is an attribution for same-sex desire in the literature on Alevis.

⁷ The Gezi Park movement is one of the massive public demonstrations in recent Turkish history. The very first thing that provoked the Gezi Park events was an urban development project of the ruling party referred to the ‘Project for the pedestrianization of Taksim’. Within the project, the demolition of the Gezi Park which is a small green area in the city center of Istanbul was planned for the construction of a replica of 19th-century Ottoman barracks (Topçu Kışlası) and a shopping mall in the area. From this aspect, the Gezi Park movement has initially been considered an urban protest but later turned into a wave of massive mobilization against the government.

⁸ Zengin, Aslı. (2013, October 31). What is Queer about Gezi? Last accessed January 29, 2018, from <http://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/407-what-is-queer-about-gezi>

Then, I move to overview of the gender issue in Alevi belief and practice, which facilitates better understanding the experiences of LGBT+ Alevis I interviewed.

5.1. Alevis with Different Belief and Practices as Subjects of Historical Discrimination

One of the main answers of why *Alevilik* differs from dominant Sunni Islam throughout the history is the religion. Different interpretations and implementations of any religion, which are systematized, reveal some sub-religious groups called the sect, order, and denomination (Gölbaşı, 2008: 43). Islam is one of such systematic religions, which have very deep-rooted sectarian differences as Sunni Islam and Shi'a Islam. When Turks came and settled in Anatolia from Central Asia during the ninth century, they mostly had already converted to Islam, in particular, Sunni Islam, which is inherently different from Shia Islam concerning its theology and practices (Çaha, 2004: 325). In many religions, such divisions have been elaborated by the theological discourse itself. Classifying what was and what was not true according to the holy books has formed the terms 'orthodoxy', 'heterodoxy' and 'heresy' in theological discourse. Because of Islamic heresiology, Shi'a Islam, which has similar cultural codes with Anatolian *Alevilik* was compared to Sunni Islam and classified as heterodox. This usage had a meaning of deviation from the 'true' Islamic belief and practice. The esoteric characteristics of the Alevi tradition prohibiting the disclosure of their religious writings may be the reason for this classification as seen in Western studies as well (Karolewski, 2008: 436).

Alevilik, which has been accepted as a heterodox identity, has different origins compared to Sunni Islam. When Turks had to convert to Islam, Alevi groups, namely, many nomadic Turcoman communities and other local mostly Iranian groups rejected the Sunni Islam and the political authorities of the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires connected to it. They continued to practice Shamanism that was the religion of Turks before their conversion to Islam. They tried to synthesize Shaman elements in their belief system with Islam and Zoroastrianism (Çaha, 2004: 326). In other words, they kept alive their cultural characteristics after they

had to accept another religion. Even if *Alevilik* in Turkey is consistently categorized under the Shia Islam, it is significantly different through the protection of original cultural codes. Such story is the very common narration on the origins of *Alevilik* but there are alternative accounts as well.

Alevis give a particular importance to the Prophet's lineage including Ehli Beyt, the twelve imams. Nevertheless, the most prominent religious figure followed by Alevis is Hazrat Ali and his sons Hasan and Hussein as different from Sunni Islam. The academic literature is offering a variety of interpretations of the relationship between Alevis and Ali. For example, Alevis reject the caliphate of Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman. They see only Hazrat Ali as the legitimate successor to Prophet Muhammad (Çaha, 2004: 325-326). This was because they believed that other caliphs seized Ali's right. This aspect of Alevi-Ali relationship can be seen as more political than religious since the caliphate was a form of the government as much as supreme religious authority. Also, Ali instead of Muhammad is accepted as the gate (bab) to esoteric knowledge by Alevis. In connection with their position, classical Sunni ulama classified them as exaggerators, outside the orthodox and righteous Islamic fold (Zeidan, 1999: 79). Alevis have also mentioned Ali as 'superhuman' or 'the incarnation of God' (hulül) during the history because they have the belief that a life of holiness consists of the unity of Allah, Muhammad, and Ali.

The most common gathering and worship place of Alevis are Cemevi (Cem Houses). They have always been a matter of discussion since 1970's in Turkey. As a religious and cultural center, Cem Houses have been important in daily lives of the Alevis of Turkey. For instance, the findings of the study conducted by Özdemir and Arıcı show that Cem Houses are defined as an institution of worship that provide cohesion and solidarity among the Alevi community by Alevis (2012: 2014). *Alevilik* also has a different type of worship called ayin-i cem. Alevis gather in Cem Houses instead of the mosques for the celebration. Some say that Cem ceremonies include a sacrificial meal (lokma), poetry (nefes), a ritual alcoholic drink and dancing (semah) accompanied by music (see Akbulut & Usal,

2008: 435). Alevis use Turkish rather than Arabic during the celebration. While the one who leads the prayers is called as imam in Sunni Islam, the Cem ceremonies are ordained by a dede (grandfather) in *Alevilik*, i.e., a dede is the spiritual leader of the worship in *Alevilik*. The institution of *dedelik* is often referred to as the guide, the light, the inspiration to Alevi community and it is essential for maintaining oral traditions in Alevi community (Akbulut & Usal, 2008: 435).

Apart from these, Alevis do not regard the Five Pillars of Islam as binding. According to Trowbridge, most of the Alevis do not perform the Hajj (the pilgrimage), do not feel bound to offer the Zakat (the legal alms), do not go to mosque for the Namaz (Islamic prayers), do not keep the fast of Ramadan (the holy month of Islam before bairam) and do not make the saying of the Kalema (Trowbridge, 1909: 351, cited in Shah, 2013: 265). Actually, according to Kehl-Bodrogi, Alevis make the saying of the Kalema but they add an expression ‘Aliyyün Veliyullah’ (Ali is the friend of Allah) to it (2012: 105). Moreover, Alevis claim that Sunnis distorted Islam by misinterpreting and changing relevant passages of the original Qur'an. For this reason, Alevis interpret the Qur'an in an allegoric, esoteric and symbolic manner than literally and they have an alternative holy book called ‘buyruk’ that contains the teachings of *Alevilik*, written by its chief spiritual leaders (Akbulut & Usal, 2008: 434). Alevis fast in the month of Muharram for 12 days in memory of Hussein's death at Karbala and the sufferings of the twelve imams.

Furthermore, one of the principles of *Alevilik*, which has been highlighted in the literature, is ‘takiye’ that refers to the Shi'a practice of dissimulating one's beliefs. *Takiye* is a part of the core of Alevi faith which can often be encapsulated by a simple maxim, namely that of ‘eline, beline, diline sahip ol,’ (be master of your hand, your loins, and your tongue). In the context of the principle of *takiye*, Kehl-Bodrogi asserts that Alevis usually hide their identities so that they prevent their colleagues and neighbors taking a hostile stance towards them in a Sunni environment (2012: 186). The circumstances may change over time, but I observe

that the *takiye* principle, which has been practiced for hundreds of years, lasts until today in one form or another. *Takiye* principle which encourages Alevis to hide their identities in public reminds me the notion of ‘coming out’ which will be discussed in detail in next sections. Coming out of the closet, or only coming out refers to the act of sharing your sexual orientation and gender identity with other people. The term coming out has generally been used for LGBT+s’ self-disclosure of their sexuality. In Turkey, LGBT+s have been facing the dilemma of hiding their identities publicly or coming ‘out’ as who they are. Although the contexts are different, I guess the term coming out can also be used for today's Alevis as opposite from *takiye*. Although hiding seems like a survival strategy for both communities, becoming visible in public area is necessary for the struggle of recognition in my opinion. The extent to which individuals who undertake both identities experience the process of coming out is one of the crucial questions addressed in this thesis.

Another rule accepted as necessary for a stable moral system in *Alevilik* is being the master of one's loins. It refers to not committing adultery in the first place. According to Kehl-Bodrogi, however, among Alevis, someone who is the master of his/her loins is also expected to avoid the different forms of sexual intercourse such as sodomy and homosexuality (2012: 138). The words of Kehl-Bodrogi seem one of the rare references touching upon the same-sex desire in the literature on *Alevilik*. If the same-sex desire is not allowed in Alevi faith, as it is claimed, the question of what extent LGBT+ Alevis come out in their environment becomes more of an issue for this study.

Alevis claim that they have systematically been discriminated throughout history in Turkey. In this part of the thesis, I seek to understand the dynamics of *Alevilik* in Turkey and its relationship with the hegemonic powers throughout the history. Some Sufi currents with apparent Alevi characters such as Kızılbaş and Bektashis appeared in the Ottoman Empire by sixteenth century (Yıldırım, 2014: 93). ‘Kızılbaş’ was the name given to a wide variety of Shi'a-affiliated groups who wore a red rag on their heads and ‘Bektashis’ were the ones that developed a Sufi

order around the name of Hacı Bektaş. According to Yıldırım, Kızılbaş and Bektashi were being considered as peculiar and consequently became the asylum within the Ottoman fold (2014: 93-95). For example, some pejorative terms such as ‘Rafizi’ ‘Mülhid’ and ‘Zındık’ had been used to describe Alevi in the Ottoman documents until the nineteenth century (Ortaylı, 1997: 205-211, cited in Taştan, 2012: 3). It shows that Ottoman dignitaries had a skeptical approach to the small heterodox communities because they were considered as belief systems with the potential to disrupt the social order. Alevi were not accepted as a privileged like Muslims, or rather Sunni Muslims, and they could only survive by following the rules of the central political authority. The reason of why *Alevilik* was perceived as such religious opposition by Ottomans is that nomadic Kızılbaş tribes were integrated with Safavid sheiks that were centered in the northeastern of modern Iran. The Safavid dynasty was initially a Sunni order, which turned to extreme Shi'ism in the mid-15th century when the sheiks of the order began to seek political and material power against the Sunni Ottomans. Especially in the 16th century, the Kızılbaş were labeled as the ones who sided with the Safavids and followed expansionist policies by spreading revolt against the Ottoman Empire. After they became dominant in Eastern Anatolia, conquered Azerbaijan and all of Iran, Anatolia became the scene of long-term warfare between the Sunni Ottomans and the Sufi-Shi'a Safavids (Zeidan, 1999: 75). The first persecution of the Kızılbaş tribes also took place at that period, under Selim I, the ninth emperor of the Ottomans. According to Kazım Ateş, the conflict between Safavids and Ottomans in the 16th century constituted the most definitive momentum for the Alevi-Kızılbaş identity construction (2011: 249).

Among the historical sources, which indicate how the Ottomans constructed the idea of Kızılbaş heresy, are juridical documents, imperial orders, and political writings. Almost all Alevi were also accused of further misdeeds that are not at all linked to the reality of their religious practice or political tendencies in the polemical writings that were mostly ordered by the imperial command (see Karolewski, 2008: 441-443). For instance, ‘Kızılbaş’ was used as the expression of insult when blaming a person of immoral and sexual debauchery, most of all of

the incest (Dressler, 2005: 165, cited in Karolewski, 2008: 443). This widespread rumor known as *mum söndü* (*extinguishing the candles*) in Anatolia is based on the idea that Alevis extinguish the candles and then sleep with the partners of each other in Cem rituals. Through such allegation, Alevis are pictured as ones having deviant fantasies and engaging in any sexual intercourse prohibited in the holy book. Because there is no separation of the sexes in Cem rituals and other Alevi practices, Sunni Ottomans might have spread the accusation of sexual debauchery. Regardless how the rumor is originated, I may stress that it shaped the mind of people and constituted the base of sexual taboos touching Alevi way of life.

After the Ottoman period that lasted more than 600 years, the new regime called Turkish Republic was established in Anatolian geography. According to Vorhoff, building roads through Alevis' formerly isolated areas, introducing compulsory schooling, improving social communications and drawing the marginalized Alevis into active contact with broader Turkish Muslim society were some of the positive impacts of Kemalist ideology on Alevis (Cited in Zeidan, 1999: 76-77). Within the frame of the principles of national unity and secularism flourished before and after the French Revolution (1789-1799) throughout the world, Atatürk has also gained the tremendous respect of the Alevis. The new construction of an authentic Turkish nationalism favored the Alevis as the real bearers of the ancient Turkish Anatolian culture, while secularism separating religion from the state promised them equality with the Sunni majority (Zeidan, 1999: 76). Distinctly from the modernization in the late Ottoman period, "the republic severed the ties to Sunni Islam as a state religion and ended formal discrimination against Alevis, though the Kemalist policy of closing down the places of worship of religious sects adversely affected their religious practices too" (Shah, 2013: 271).

Some researchers submit that there are deficiencies and weaknesses of the Kemalist reforms as secular modernization. One of these thinkers is Kehl-Bodrogi who reports that the new republic downplayed the religion in public life and the Westernization of the ruling elite turned *Alevilik* into just one of several cultural themes in Turkish nationalism (Cited in Zeidan, 1999: 77). In like manner, Shah

has also criticized the republic for maintaining the privileged position of Sunni Islam as an essential feature of the Turkish identity by progressively supporting the practice of Sunni religion. According to Shah, the reason of why a vast majority of Alevi accepted the Kemalist Republic as an assurance of their survival may be the attacks of Sunni Muslims who rediscover religion as a tool for political demands and threaten the existing secular system over time (2013: 271).

Contemporary Alevi communities began to emerge during the 1960s in parallel with the migration wave from rural to urban that started in the 50s. From 1960s on a generation gap appeared between older Alevis who remained Kemalist and hoped that the state would officially legitimize the Alevi Bektashi order, and the Alevi youth that became very politicized and affected by revolutionary thought in universities, high schools and trade unions (Vorhoff, 1995, 72, cited in Zeidan, 1999: 77). The young generation has reinterpreted *Alevilik* in socialist and Marxist idioms. The international developments during the Cold War and the socioeconomic changes after rural-urban mobility have entirely changed the political climate of Turkey in the 1970s. A series of social problems lasted for years arose from the struggle between Alevis portrayed as leftist and Sunnis regarded as the rightist. In that period, violence has been observed in mostly Alevi-populated cities such as Kahramanmaraş, Bingöl, Malatya, Çorum, and Sivas.

It is unquestionable that the military coup regime in 1980 opened a new and dark period in Turkey. The military's dominance over Turkish political life has created social unrest across the country. Alevis became aggrieved party over again because of the discriminatory policies of military leaders in the 1980s. One of the most visible examples of this was forbiddance of the ceremonies of the Hacı Bektaş for several years (Akbulut & Usal, 2008: 436). Already existing social and cultural divisions have increased further because of such pressure. Turkey has experienced inter-communal violence events in the 1980s and 1990s with the growth of Islamism, the Kurdish issue and the pressures on the left movement. One of those events occurred in the city of Sivas in July 1993. Thirty-seven

people, mostly Alevi intellectuals, who had gathered for the Pir Sultan Abdal Festival in Sivas were burned to death at a hotel called Madımak. Similar bloody events took place in the neighborhood of Gazi in 1995 in which the centre-right political party, Welfare Party (RP), received the highest vote in the general election (Ertan, 2015: 50). After several teahouses used by Alevi residents of Istanbul's Gazi district had been riddled with bullets, the four-day lasting unrest across the country began. Dozens of people died or wounded because of the clashes between the Alevi demonstrators and the police forces accused of taking actions too slow at the beginning of the event. All these happenings in the recent history of Turkey reveal that many layers of society did not welcome Alevis that defend the secular principles, and the Islamic movement has gained enormous momentum across the country.

Based upon the Bourdieu's perspective on social orders, Kazım Ateş argues that politics begin when the heterodox that has the potentiality of disrupting the existing order challenges the orthodox (2011: 241-242). According to Ateş, what makes the Alevi identity heretical is that it takes a stand against Sunni-Islamic Orthodoxy, which has been represented and reproduced by official institutions. The Alevi identity disrupts the naturalness and universality of Sunni-Islamic Orthodoxy. In the late 1980s and 1990s, a new Alevi identity began to emerge during the Alevi politicization process. For some, this was a 'revival' period of the Alevi identity that has been depicted as heterodox for years. As classified in the research of Shah the rural migration which reached its climax during the 1970s, the collapse of the socialist block in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism over years, the significant population of Alevi Kurds and their civil rights struggle, the Alevi Manifesto written in March 1989 and the European Union regulations are important factors which triggered the Alevi revival process (2013: 266-267). Another factor "was the rise of new media characterised by private TV channels and radio stations, which in turn opened up a representative space for various Alevi organisations and for the Alevis in general" (Göker & Erman, 2000: 99-100, cited in Karaosmanoğlu, 2013: 581). In parallel with these developments and the constructional conversion of

Turkey with the liberal politics, which have been applied in the late 1980s, the Alevis have experienced ‘the coming out processes’ in public life. According to Zeidan, Alevis who increased their political activism “fought for legitimacy as a unique Islamic community, legalization of their religious rituals, integration of their doctrine into the state education system, and a fair allotment of broadcasting time in the official media” (1999: 75-78). The notable yields of this process were the establishment of different Alevi associations and Alevi religious communities, and the public practice of Alevi religious rites.

It is possible to claim that the struggle of the Alevis for such representation is still in progress under different headings with the various actors. One of the actors is the Justice and Development Party (AKP) established by Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his colleagues in 2001. It has been the ruling party of Turkey since November 2002. The ongoing Sunni-Alevi issue was brought up to the agenda of the country like many other social problems by AKP in its second term in government, starting from the year 2007. In the scope of the Alevi Opening, seven workshops were organized over a year with the participation of hundreds of people including the religious leaders of Alevi groups, Alevi intellectuals, representatives from various Alevi associations of different political views. As Borovalı & Boyraz noted, it would be right to interpret the initiative of the ruling party at the time as a part of the larger Democratic Opening process, which also included dialogue with Kurds and the Roma population (2014: 482). According to Kazım Ateş the AKP government, early or late, has been forced to confront with the presence of Alevis who have been expressing the identity demands in an organized manner since the 1990s (2015: 162). In my opinion, two things can be considered as remarkable here. First, the Alevi-Sunni relations debated for centuries came to prominence once again across the country. There also seems ambivalence about the objectives of the process. Second, the historical relationship between the Alevis and the governments that have Sunni-Islamist roots regained different specifications as ‘rapprochement’ and ‘reconciliation’ following ‘revival’ period. In the new convergence process, one way or another, a right-wing government began negotiations with the Alevis for the first time. Nevertheless, the results were not

entirely satisfactory for Alevi representatives because many things remained in theory. There is still the lack of legal regulations, which would provide Alevis the same social, political and juridical status with Sunni citizens of Turkey.

5.2. Gender Issue in Alevi Belief and Practice

The literature on Alevis and gender issue focuses on the claims of male-female equality in Alevi belief and practice and the critics on non-internalization of the principle of equality by Alevis. The egalitarian claim has been demonstrated by some religious references, which have been emphasized in nearly all resources. These can be listed as follows: there are no women and men but only the *can* (soul) in the Cem rituals, only monogamy is allowed in *Alevilik* and men who divorces his wife without reasonable justification is declared *düşkün* (fallen) that results in the alienation of individual from the community, Alevi women have right to choose their dress without any coercion (see Vorhoff, 1999; Menemencioğlu, 2011; Bodrogi, 2012; Salman, 2016; Okan, 2017). Moreover, the claim of equality between women and men has been strengthened by the examples of lives of particular women as role models such as Fatma, the Caliph Ali's wife, Mother Kadıncık, etc. (Okan, 2017). Aside from these references, the idea that women were created for a man is rejected in certain parts of the holy book called 'Buyruk' is also common (Kehl-Bodrogi, 2012: 183).

For some scholars, the above-mentioned faith-based references are used to demonstrate the supposed truth of the claim of gender equality in *Alevilik* (see Okan, 2017). The word 'supposed' points out that the gender relations among Alevis also carry the patriarchal features. For example, Nimet Okan questions the rhetoric that women and men are equal in the book *Canların Cinsiyeti*. Okan highlights the male violence against women in the daily life of one of the local Alevi communities called Anşabacılar. According to Okan, for those men who humiliate women, women are seen as incompetent and weak minded whose lives need to be supervised and controlled by a man (2016: 188). Similarly, the inequality concerning inheritance and the position of women in the Cem has been argued by Okan as the signs that reveal patriarchal aspects of gender relations in

Alevilik. In another example, Gülfer Akkaya refers to the Alevi women as ones who are forced to become 'secret' by Alevi men. Akkaya aims to portray the *Alevilik* in the eyes of Alevi women and states that the idea of being *can* is distorted by hegemonic masculinity seen among Alevis, in her book *Sır içinde Sır Olanlar* (2015). The narratives of Alevi women in the book of Akkaya are stimulating for capturing the diversity of gender-based experiences among the various Alevi groups in Turkey. For example, the story of one of those women, Hülya Nehir, who was born in Antakya and self-identify as Arab Alevi, forms an impression about the place of women within Arab Alevis. Nehir narrates the religious beliefs and practices that prioritizing men in the Arab community but at the same time, argues that the Arab Alevi women have proceeded in their 'liberation' movement despite the pressures to accommodate patriarchal traditions. In this context, Nehir draws attention to the importance of organized struggle among Alevi women. In another example, Sibel Keskin who self-identify as Çepni Alevi and live in the southeastern region of Turkey pictures *Alevilik* as a non-discriminatory faith about the gender. However, Keskin also criticizes some daily practices of Alevi men, which restrict women's right to move freely in their living quarters. These and other Alevi women with their different backgrounds have problematized the conservative policies and practices of dominant powers, as a common theme in the abovementioned book. Such critical narratives prove that the field of gender has the political character, which also affects the lives of LGBT+s I deal with in this thesis.

It may not be possible to come across any source directly opposed to such arguments that women face disadvantages in Alevi communities. Instead, the studies, which see women-men equality as an innate feature of Alevi tradition, interpret such negativities as the enforcement derived from the social-cultural conditions (see Seyman, 2004 & Bahadır, 2004). Such studies emphasize that, for example, the Alevi tradition itself does not give any men any right to marginalize the women, but men who do not internalize the egalitarian values of *Alevilik* may do such things.

The difference of opinion between relatively essentialist views and approaches that are more critical also becomes visible in the arguments on the position of women in the Cem. Some researchers point the fact that certain duties like *süpürgeci* (sweeping the cem meydan symbolically) have especially been doing by women (see Okan, 2017 & Vorhoff, 1999). For Okan, the act of sweeping is commonly recognized as part of a woman's role in the traditional gendered division of labor, and its representation in religious practices reproduces the sexism of daily life, albeit here that it is a symbolic expression of the purification of the soul (2017: 10). In a faith-based critique, İbrahim Bahadır mentions the jobs like *süpürgeci* as a part of twelve duties performed for the twelve Imams revered by Alevi and emphasizes that they are all precious and cannot be distinguished (2004). Bahadır also adds that important female figures and dervishes took their positions in the religious hierarchy according to their qualities, not their gender identity.

On the other hand, Cemal Salman gives a new dimension to this discussion. Because the rhetoric that women and men are equal in *Alevilik* is often expressed by using the data from the rural area and through idealized *Alevilik*, Salman highlights the changes of Alevi women's position based on migration and urbanization, within the context of society-opinion leadership (2016: 163-198). According to Salman, the migration and urbanization allow for a pseudo-freedom on the position of Alevi women while post-migration relation networks and the habits of patriarchal structure reproduce the social roles and form new types of oppression fields (2016: 195). In another example, Dilşa Deniz examines the construction of masculinity of the Alevi faith in Dersim region by taking references from the myths (2013: 61-71). As a social scientist with an anthropology background, Deniz asserts that male-female equality in the real sense is non-existent in the Alevi faith.

Apart from these, the gender relations in *Alevilik* have also been examined within the context of the *musahiplik* relationship. In the simplest terms, *musahiplik* refers to a kind of ritual unity, which is supposed to last lifelong in *Alevilik*. According

to Krisztine Kehl-Bodrogi, the term *yol kardeşliği* (brotherhood of the path) is one of the common synonyms to *musahiplik* and two young men choose each other as *musahip* before marriage (2012: 151-152). Those men are thus obliged to lifelong mutual solidarity including far-reaching moral and economic support, and they have to take care of each other's family as if it were their own (Bodrogi, 2012: 152). A married woman can participate in the relationship circle based on *musahiplik* by giving consent to the choice of her husband. In the study called *Alevilikte Toplumsal Kurumlar Ve İktidar* (1996), Ayhan Yalçınkaya does not find the way women take part in the *musahiplik* relationship suitable to the principles of men-women equality in *Alevilik* (1996: 70-71).

To sum up, the egalitarian discourses about the gender among Alevis have used to be interpreted as the distinctive features of *Alevilik* from Sunni Islam. The academic works more critically approaching the gender issue and revealing the contradictions between Alevi theology and the daily life practices of Alevis have been increased recently. Instead of extending what the literature says on gender issue in Alevi belief and practice, it is also necessary to highlight the other dimensions of the subject, which the literature does not cover at all. Although the *can* discourse that has been used as a point of reference underscores the way of being genderless in the Cem, there seems to be no assertion about different kinds of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. Since it is hard to mention a single monolithic *Alevilik* or a homogenous Alevi community, it is also equally challenging and misleading to assume that there are only heterosexual sexualities among Alevis. Therefore, it is required to consider the fact that gender is not limited to the discussion of equality or the roles played by Alevi heterosexual women and men in their society. To move beyond the rigid categories of male-female restricting the framework of the gender issue in *Alevilik*, would be more efficient for seeing the level of 'tolerance' of both *Alevilik* which has been idealized and Alevi communities.

PART II. LGBT+ ALEVIS IN ISTANBUL: INTERSECTIONS OF LGBT+ & FAITH

There is a saying in *Alevilik*: “yol bir sürek binbir”. The *yol* (path) refers reaching the God with an inward-oriented journey independently from the outside world. The *sürek* refers the differences in practice during the *yol*. *Yol bir sürek binbir* thus becomes an expression indicating that various ways to meet the same goal can be followed by Alevis. Alevis are believed to become the *insan-ı kamil* (perfect human being) at the end of the *yol*. From this point, you will start reading the ways through which LGBT+ Alevis pass and follow. You will see the interaction of LGBT+ Alevis' different ways of life with the *yol* cherished by Alevi world.

6. DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF FAITH AND SEXUALITY AMONG LGBT+ ALEVIS

6.1. The Sense of Belonging to Alevi World and Adherence to Religious Practice

I should note at the outset that I avoid giving a particular definition of the *Alevilik* in this thesis. The first reason is that the Alevis living in Turkey have spread to a wide geographical area and they have distinctive characteristics. For this reason, *Alevilik* has been considered as an umbrella term for a large number of different nonhomogeneous and unorthodox communities living in different parts of Turkey. For example, Bruinessen says that there are four groups may be remarkable regarding language. There is a group speaking Azerbaijani Turkish in the eastern province of Kars. The Arabic speaking group is living in southern Turkey especially Hatay and Adana. According to Bruinessen, whereas these two are small and their roles in the country have been insignificant, the Turkish and Kurdish speaking groups are the most important ones. They have the capability of forwarding the concerns of the Alevis to the larger society (1996: 7). The Zazaki speaking groups can also be added to the list of Bruinessen. Similarly, a lecturer in Political Science, Jamal Shah focuses on the same fact that *Alevilik* is broadly

divided into some groups (2013: 268-269). Benefiting from several articles on the issue, Shah summarizes such groups; the first group considers *Alevilik* as a liberation theology and is considered as the materialist branch. The second branch believes that there is no difference in religions and they cannot be arranged hierarchically. The third is a more traditional branch defines itself as an integral part of the Muslim faith and belonging to the Jafari sect. The other group is the one which has an ultra-nationalist approach which is to be considered more as a kind of reaction rather than as an alternative *Alevilik*. The sixth group believes a 'Marxist/Atheist' claim on *Alevilik*. The distinctive feature of this group is its criticism of the religious, conservative, anti-modernist aspects of *Alevilik*.

The second reason of why I avoid giving a particular definition of *Alevilik* is that I also avoid the very notion of categorization. The common belief of 'one does not become an Alevi but comes into the world as an Alevi' does not mean that everyone adopts and practices the *Alevilik* in the same way. It does not also mean that everyone born within an Alevi family has to identify as Alevi as taught in the family. Approaching *Alevilik* solely as an identity 'given' may overshadow the process in which identities are constructed on the subjective level. Luckily, *Alevilik* itself seems to carry a flexible character potentially opens a space for the Alevis to redefine themselves vis-à-vis the existing socio-political context without giving much credit to the essentialist narratives (Karaosmanoğlu, 2013: 586). In this research, I take the flexibility of the concept of *Alevilik* into consideration while exploring the experiences of LGBT+ Alevis. To put it another way, I approach the issue with the premise that "the ambivalence surrounding the question of what Alevism genuinely stands for reveals itself with the formulation of identities on a subjective level" (Karaosmanoğlu, 2013: 587). Such method based on the statement of LGBT+ Alevis in a sense also enables to discover how they embrace their own identities and whether they emphasize those identities equally under different conditions at different times.

Highlighting *Alevilik* as a belief, a life philosophy or a unique culture has been one of the tendencies I see both in the previous academic works and in the field.

The emphasis on human life, which is also included in the teaching of *Alevilik*, has been one of the common notions highlighted in the interviews. Çiğdem who have been practicing the Alevi faith like fasting in the month of Muharram highlighted such humanitarian traits of *Alevilik* in the words of Hacı Bektaş Veli: “my Kaaba is the human being.” E.N. who self-identify as an atheist and favors *Alevilik* as an ‘incredible’ life philosophy, similarly to Çiğdem, expressed the importance given to human being in *Alevilik* by another saying of Hacı Bektaş Veli: "the greatest book to read is the human being." Although their level of religiosity varies, Çiğdem, E.N., and others stressed the importance of being a good person who first knows oneself and behaves well to the other people and nature in *Alevilik*. Such approach is closely related to the *can* discourse which I examine in details in the following chapters.

Although some written texts include the teachings of *Alevilik* such as buyruks and ‘Makalat’ of Hacı Bektaş Veli, it would not be wrong to suggest that *Alevilik* differs from the common faiths or book-based religions. Thanks to such characteristic, the idea that *Alevilik* is a strong belief far from formalism and it is not rule based is reinforced. Again, due to such particular aspect, *Alevilik* has been positioned as the heterodox faith, which contains the oppressed. In this respect, E.N. told that *Alevilik* embraces the oppressed as a different interpretation of Islam and this is the reason why Alevis are so close to socialism. The argument of E.N. reminds me the group regarding socialist and Marxist ideologies as consistent with Alevi ideas, pointed out by Jamal Shah. Within this direction, Melis also told her own *Alevilik* as political and considerably secular faith. Melis stated that she politically supports the struggle for Cem Houses nowadays although she does not practice the Alevi rituals.

When sharing different perspectives of LGBT+ Alevis on *Alevilik*, I also need to share the criticisms raised against the Alevi practices. For Bozkır, the idea that a human being can prostrate oneself to everything that is created is the essence of *Alevilik*, and a person can reach to God through nature. For example, a visited site in *Alevilik* sometimes can be a headwater sometimes can be the edge of the tree.

According to Bozkır, shedding blood through sacrificial animals in such places of the visit is a contradiction. Even though sacrificing has been accepted as the conventional method of Alevi almsgiving by most of the Alevi, some including Bozkır, Melis, and Zeynep find such practices unnecessary, superstitious and even absurd.

Herein, based on my insights from the interviews, I can assert that LGBT+ Alevi I interviewed do not have strong religious affiliations except Çiğdem who fasts and prays as a believer. E.N. and Zeynep both self-identify as atheist whereas Özgür calls oneself agnostic and Bozkır calls oneself deist. Among these names, Melis is neither atheist nor deist but non-believer in many ways. The fact that most of the interviewees do not have strong religious affiliation does not show that they do not embrace the *Alevilik*. They attribute diverse meanings to *Alevilik* and express their adherence to it distinctly. Not only religious adherence but also the issue of political representativeness plays a significant role in understanding the effect of intersecting identities in the lives of people. Tatari and Mencutek indicate that different identity markers are contextual, and intersecting identities are not only changeable but also relational. Thus, identities can sometimes be expressed simultaneously, and at various times certain identities may be emphasized over others (2015: 435-436). These two researchers, based on the case of female Muslim councilors in London, also suggest that emphasizing a particular identity at a given time may depend on sets of structural, social, and contextual factors and the personal experiences. In the case of LGBT+ Alevi, the situation is not very different. The interviewees do not refrain from putting their Alevi identities in the foreground in the spaces they socialize. They also deliberately highlight their own *Alevilik* in environments in which LGBT+ issues have been discussed. For instance, E.N. experiences the *Alevilik* intensely as an organized LGBT+. E.N. shared one of the anecdotes, as follows:

Last week, I have participated the meeting of ILGA Association⁹ during two days. At the end of the meeting, the committee from Europe asked us to go the middle of the hall and hold hands with each other. After a while, I asked them whether they are Alevi. Translator became highly confused. Then I told translator that Alevis lament by holding hands with each other (E.N., interview, May 26, 2017, Istanbul)¹⁰.

In another example, Zeynep said that because Alevi and LGBT+ identities have been oppressed, she feels the responsibility to defend the rights of people holding these identities in every environment. The explanation of Zeynep strengthens the idea of Tatari and Mencutek that the emphasis on a particular identity at a given time depends on sets of several factors:

To show our existence, I have to make propaganda of these identities in the counter environments. I try to demonstrate the existence of LGBTIs in an Alevi environment or vice versa. In an environment where everything is all about me, I have to say women exist and I am a woman. Despite I do not embrace such identities personally; I know there are LGBTI Alevis. There are Kurdish Alevis who embrace both identities. I do politics of these issues within the Republican People's Party in Turkey. I feel connected to the oppressed identities on behalf of others¹¹ (Zeynep, interview, May 9, 2017, Istanbul).

These examples are important regarding understanding how the LGBT+ Alevis deal with their intersecting identities in daily life. Furthermore, the relationship of LGBT+ Alevis with the Alevi world may also be examined through their approaches on Hazrat Ali, the symbolic figure of the Alevis, and Cem Houses, the places of faith. When I asked the interviewees whether they go to Cem Houses, I mostly got answers starting with 'yes but' or 'no because.' As it can be predicted, 'yes but' indicates the action with a critique. Bozkır said that he goes to Cem Houses but:

When I go to Cem Houses, I was listening to the stories of the martyr. The Cem rituals of neo-nationalist Alevis was like a state propaganda. If the

⁹ ILGA is a worldwide federation campaigning for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex rights. Its headquarter is in Geneva, Switzerland.

¹⁰ I share the longer Turkish version of the sentences of LGBT+ Alevis I interviewed in Appendix A. Please, see Appendix A1 for the first one.

¹¹ See Appendix A2.

institution of dede that passes from an ocak family to another ocak family transform to the reigns, this is dangerous. Conventional one comes to the fore instead of ones who know the job. Dedes continue to be unconscious at the same level with same taboos. Becoming conscious is considered as getting out of the path. However, if they get to the heart of the *Alevilik*, the path will draw itself¹² (Bozkır, interview, May 8, 2017, Istanbul).

The expression of 'no because,' however, does not refer to the denial or an excuse. It tells the self-isolation from outside world because of having the different sexuality. For example, Melis who has transsexual experience shared her memory about Cem Houses as follows:

I do not go to Cem Houses nowadays, but I did once many years ago. It was 15 years ago in Istanbul. I have met with the Alevis from other territories through the neighborhood and the labor relations in those days. However, I never felt belonging interestingly. Those times were much different though. When you are profoundly alone, you isolate oneself instinctively¹³ (Melis, interview, May 27, 2017, Istanbul).

As aforementioned, the most prominent religious leader adored by Alevis is Hazrat Ali. In Manisa where I grew up, Alevis hang the pictures of Ali on the walls of their houses and pray with the name of Ali. Despite the fact that the stories behind my first name and my father's name (his name is also Ali) are partly based on that image, I never attribute immense importance to it. However, Ali means something beyond being solely a picture in the lives of most of the Alevis. E.N. was the one who hung the pictures of Ali and Imam Hussain to the walls of their house in the city of İzmit. For Bozkır, on the contrary, Ali represents *Alevilik* with a dark face, which seen on the wall carpets. Bozkır is among those who say '*Alevilik* without Ali.'

All these and some other differences make it hard to define a collective community, which can be conceptualized as Alevi (Ateş, 2011: 246). However, it is easy to suggest that LGBT+ Alevis' different levels of commitment with the Alevi world lead to the various forms of relatedness in their lives. I will examine

¹² See Appendix A3.

¹³ See Appendix A4.

the reflection of their *Alevilik* to the other areas of their lives including sexuality in next chapters.

6.2. Gender is More Than Two: Sexual Affiliations

“Even if I have five penises or even if I carry ten penises at the back, I am a woman. Even if I fuck a man in bed, I am a woman”.

These sentences belong to Selay who is a trans activist seen in the video of A Social Justice and Art project of Gabrielle Le Roux¹⁴. The statement of Selay reminds me several premises that guide me in the process of the research. First, the fixed notions of gender as something determined by one's biological sex are problematic. As Selay states, being a woman has nothing to do with having a vagina or being a man has nothing to do with having a penis. Besides, people's sexual desires and sexual activities can be messy and fluid that cannot be limited to the category of woman/man. The existence of gender categorization based on such binary oppositions is open to discuss in the first place. Second, the fact that people are assigned as woman or man at birth does not mean that they will feel and live in that way. Gender is about whom we believe ourselves to be and it is based on how we express ourselves. Moreover, how people see and represent themselves determines the societal privileges, fears, anxieties, insecurities, and discrimination they face across a variety of social situations and structures within the relations of power. As Wittig puts it in *The Straight Mind* “the category of sex is a totalitarian one [...] It shapes the mind as well as the body since it controls all mental production. It grips our minds in such a way that we cannot think outside of it” (2013: 41). That is why Wittig suggests us to destroy the category of sex and start thinking beyond it.

The question of whether we should abolishing identity categories and even the notion of identity has been continuing to discuss by social scientists. Fortunately, I

¹⁴ See the video mentioned: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvgtDUjEc0>, last accessed December 5, 2017.

do not feel that I have to choose between the approaches seeking to undermine identity categories deeply or the strategies pushing those categories to a higher level. In my opinion, in the light of the premises that I have mentioned above, shedding light on the experiences of those who embrace those identities and therefore marginalized in one form or another is as important as such ongoing discussion at the intellectual level. In the case of LGBT+ Alevis, before going into details about the role of faith and spirituality in their sexualities, it is necessary to summarize how these people conceive of sexuality and express their sexual affiliations. By doing so, I also reflect how they approach the issues around LGBT+ identities, queer subjectivities, and the sexual politics.

I need to admit that through my fieldwork, which I have limited to a few people, I met very different sexualities. While some of the interviewees express the gender identity and sexual orientation as relatively definite and stable, others have characterized their sexualities as more fluid and changeable. For Zeynep, for example, it is hard to say something certain about the sexual orientation, but she sometimes questions the pansexuality¹⁵. Özgür who used to self-identify as bisexual in old days said that they also question the pansexuality¹⁶. The gender identity and sexual orientation are not stable also for E.N.. Therefore, E.N. remarked they adopt the somewhat queer way of life as follows:

I identify myself as gender-fluid. I can become a trans and a bisexual. There were the times I was putting on makeup to my bearded face. Actually, I do not like the tags like gay, lesbian, trans, etc. I live what I feel at that particular moment¹⁷ (E.N., interview, May 26, 2017, Istanbul).

In the interviews, I listened to different interpretations that came about the queer way of life and queer subjectivities that E.N. also pays attention to. Queer resists the sexualities that are standardized and favors the broad spectrum of sexual diversity not limited to reproduction occur within the heterosexual marriage. Based on my

¹⁵ I use the pronoun 'she' here because Zeynep told me she feels like a woman when I was interviewing with her. However, based on my insights from the interviews, I need to state that Zeynep and others may change their statements on gender identity at different times.

¹⁶ In some parts, I use the pronoun 'they' as a singular gender-neutral third-person pronoun. I use this pronoun when the individual self-identifies as gender-fluid/queer in the sense of sexual affiliations like E.N. and Özgür.

¹⁷ See Appendix A5.

readings, I associate the queer way of life with the encouragement of diversity and the possibility of resistance in all facets of life including sexuality. As it can be understood from the discussions on the meaning of the word ‘queer’ over the past few decades in academia, queer means many different things to many different people. Besides, the old habit of using the term queer as the umbrella term for LGBT+s is still in the progress although there is a risk that the differences in experiences of lesbian, gay, transgender, etc. become invisible. Among the interviewees, the heterosexual woman who has transsexual experience, Melis, sees herself as queer in the sense of demeanor:

I interpret queer as an attitude. It is against to the dominant normative situations. To say I am a queer by refusing all the sexual orientations would be another story. In addition, queer is not highly connected with the appearance of someone. You do not become queer when you cut half of your hair. Maybe a tiny bit but not completely [...] sometimes, queer becomes something involving the harmony of contrasts. For example, the love of a Kurdish Alevi woman with a nationalist conservative man is queer in my opinion¹⁸ (Melis, interview, May 27, 2017, Istanbul).

Özgür, similarly to Melis’s narrative, interprets queer as something that has arisen against being trapped in fixed identities. The opinion of Özgür can be a tool for us to remember that queer was born as a reaction to conventional identity politics in the first place. According to Tuna Erdem, the politics feeding by the essentialist point of view define each type of sexuality as a phenomenon that develops outside of people's free will and does not change lifelong (2012: 50). Then, Erdem declares five axioms, which she believes they form the basis of queer perspective. The fifth of these axioms suggests that people and their objects of desire are changeable. Things that are pleasant people at some point in their lives may no longer be satisfactory at another time in their lives. Things that bother people at some point in their lives can give pleasure at another time and vice versa (Erdem, 2012: 39). I consider the fifth axiom as significant regarding referring to the personal choices and acts. The statement of Özgür was like the reflection of this axiom in real life:

¹⁸ See Appendix A6.

I do not think queer has a limit in no sense. I am an open person. For example, I like having outdoor sex, and it appeals to me. After age 30, I discovered the bathhouses. I started to enjoy things that I found disgusting before. I do not know what I will like in next year¹⁹ (Özgür, interview, May 9, 2017, Istanbul).

Having sex in public area, which Özgür pays attention to, can be a small part of the sexual diversity that includes all different types of sexualities and the possible differences list. I know that there are much more variations people can add to their sexual repertoire. While I defend people have free will to live their own sex lives, I also strongly agree with the idea that all kinds of harassment, rape and child pornography should be the red-lines of the queer way of life.

The prevailing view on difficulties in describing the queer way of life and setting the boundaries of sexual acts also appeared in the interviews. In the eyes of people I talked, the reasons that create these difficulties are not personal but societal. There is the common belief that the society in Turkey is not ready for the queer discussions in today's conditions. In other words, because the sexuality is one of those taboo topics in Turkey society, many tend not to discuss the queer publicly. It is interesting that LGBT+ Alevis also quote the much-mentioned 'sensibilities' that are used as a tool for legitimizing the discriminations against different sexualities by the dominant communities. For example, Çiğdem said most of the people in Turkey had accepted the same-sex sexualities in one way or another, but they are not ready to discuss queer sexualities. Çiğdem gave the example of Bülent Ersoy who is Turkey's best-known transgender celebrity, to support her argument. Bülent Ersoy is used to be called as 'diva' or 'big sister' of the society, and many have a lot of respect for her. Ersoy earned such respect thanks to her struggle since the 1980s when she underwent the gender correction surgery. However, I am not sure whether the love for Ersoy and other socially prominent persons with LGBT+ identities is real and intimate. In fact, Turkey is a country in which the participation of a transgender celebrity to Ramadan dinner of government authorities and the police intervention to the LGBT+ rally might happen at the same time. Maybe pessimistically, I do not believe that these types

¹⁹ See Appendix A7.

of examples demonstrate the society's real tolerance level towards LGBT+s in Turkey. In my opinion, instead of the denial of the phenomenon, the recuperation and ridicule what Wittig underlines as the weapons of heterosexuality, have been functionalized in many cases in Turkey²⁰.

In my opinion, the idea that there is the possibility of always changing ourselves against the system rejecting us is highly motivated by queer perspective. I also need to underline that one of the things we can change is our sexual preferences. For this reason, the idea of 'we are born this way', which is still in use by many LGBT+s for cultural acceptance, is more complicated than it seems. Going further, the idea of 'born this way' becomes only an effortless way for making a compromise with the dominant heteronormative regime. With their awareness of the queer perspective, Çiğdem stated that being LGBT+ is not an emotion emerging in a minute whereas E.N. remarked that being LGBT+ is not a choice but orientation issue. Melis also said she has a transsexual experience, which she thinks it is an innate feature.

I need to highlight at this point that people I interviewed are aware of ongoing discussions around sexual identities and sexuality politics. Although the stories they shared, the examples they gave or the things they believe in are different, LGBT+ Alevis have the standard view that both LGBT+ and Alevi identities have been oppressed in Turkey. As Tuna Erdem puts it, ethnic oppression, class distinction and patriarchal order are highly intertwined with the system that restricts sexuality (2012: 54). I can add religious and faith-based discriminations to this. In this thesis, I interested to examine how such interwoven relations are being experienced and observed by LGBT+ Alevis who hold intersectional identities. Although I believe that LGBT+ and Alevi identities and inequalities around them are not mutually exclusive, in this part, I purposefully presented how LGBT+ Alevis perceive these identities separately. To outline how LGBT+ Alevis describe their own *Alevilik* and express their sexual affiliations was an

²⁰ For Monique Wittig, the denial of the phenomenon, recuperation and ridicule are the best weapons that the heterosexual institution has against lesbianism. Wittig opens a parenthesis for recuperation: it's erotic for men to see two women together (2013).

important step for the better understanding of the experiences of them. From now on, I concentrate how the experiences of LGBT+ Alevi around the faith have influences on their sexualities.

7. THE ALEVI WAY OF LIFE: GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE LGBT+ ALEVIS?

Alevi have been considered as one of the religious ‘minority’ groups in Turkey with their different beliefs and cultural values. Because the majority of people residing in the country identify as followers of Islam, for example, the policies on religious education in Turkey have been shaped mostly according to the anticipations and sensitivities of Sunni Islamic communities. There has been important debate surrounding the issue of compulsory religious education and the current curriculum in Turkey for years. I can claim that the misconceptions of people on the issues surrounding the Alevi faith and its followers continue due to intense Sunni Islamic education and policies. Sexuality among Alevi is one of those issues remaining taboo in the Islamic society. The widespread rumor ‘mum söndü’ that is based on the idea that Kızılbaş Alevi engage in any sexual intercourse including the incest prohibited in the holy book can be given as an example of the misconceptions about Alevi. The traditional and closed social structure of the Alevi especially living in the rural areas and the practice of *takiye* may have affected the Sunnis’ perception on Alevi way of life. However, it is still difficult to make satisfactory explanation on the origin of public misconceptions about sexual practices of Alevi.

According to Kehl-Bodrogi, women and men are not separated in Cem rites, which have been held at nights accompanied by music, alcohol, and dance. Because of such tradition, Alevi are aware that Sunni Muslims perceive them as ones who are engaging in sex orgy (2012: 163). Moreover, in some sources, there is a claim that two Alevi men become part of the spiritual brotherhood called *musahiplik* after they have sex or sleep with each other’s wife (see Kehl-Bodrogi, 2012: 163). I am not sure whether these examples indicate that there is an authentic tradition among Alevi about the sexuality. Even if there had been such

practices within the *musahiplik* tradition or Cem rituals, it is not surprising that Alevi kept them secret. Besides, these references are not enough for shedding light on the sexual practices of Alevi nowadays but they may help us to understand how the category of 'heresy' attributed to Alevi has been constituted. When I consider such references are based on the binary gender category, I wonder what would be the reactions of those who create social norms regarding sexuality when it comes to LGBT+ Alevi.

At the end of the article called *Hizadan Çıkmaya Yoldan Sapmaya Dair*, Tuna Erdem suggests other researchers examine the sexual practices of same-sex sexualities to discover whether there is the queer existence in Turkey. Inspired by such needs, I reserved this chapter of the thesis for exploring the place of a vast and various sexual cultures pointed out by queer perspective, in the lives of LGBT+ Alevi. More specifically, I first examine how LGBT+ Alevi's *Alevilik* understanding and experiences around it have influences on their sexualities. In this context, the experiences of LGBT+ Alevi around the opinion of others also become significant because there is a prevalent idea that both *Alevilik* and the sexuality are something that can be socially learned. Later, I present an overview of the ideas of LGBT+ Alevi about the Alevi commandment, which is attributed to Hacı Bektaş Veli: "eline, beline, diline sahip ol," (be master of your hand, your loins, and your tongue). Particularly being the master of one's loins has been accepted as a basic principle for a stable moral system in *Alevilik*. From this viewpoint, I also intend showing different moral understandings of LGBT+ Alevi in this part of the thesis.

7.1. The Influence of *Alevilik* on Sexual Practices

It would not be wrong to suggest that the LGBT+ Alevi I talked define Sunni Islam as a religion with a fixed set of rules, which govern all aspects of human activity including their sexualities and bodies. In most of the 'conservative' Sunni families, children grow up by learning that they should fear Allah and the hell. They are taught that the sexualities outside of heterosexual marriage are full of sin and therefore forbidden. Considering such Islamic framework detailed also

in previous parts of the thesis, I can easily state that the experiences of LGBT+ Alevi regarding sexuality have not been shaped primarily by the religious principles and teachings. One of the common ideas of LGBT+ Alevi I talked was that growing up in an Alevi family has facilitated their identity development process concerning their sexualities. Most of them conveyed that they have discovered their sexualities with more freedom and less trauma. With the word of trauma, I do not directly refer to disturbing experiences resulted from any kind of sexual abuse. For LGBT+ Alevi, learning the fear of Allah's punishment in both this present world and the hereafter is also a kind of traumatic experience affecting people's sexual lives lifelong. Çiğdem shared her thought on relevant issue as follows:

Alevi are not very rigid. There is no such belief in *Alevilik* that people will burn in hell if they do something wrong. The fear of Allah was not taught among things that we should fear of. On the contrary, the love of Allah, the human love, the morality, the importance of knowing yourself and other people were the themes coming into prominence in my family [...] Thus, by going deep in my soul, I learnt that the same-sex desire neither a crime nor a sin²¹ (Çiğdem, interview, May 6, 2017, Istanbul).

Similar to Çiğdem, Melis said she does not exactly know what the sin means or what is considered a sin in *Alevilik*. While sin in Islam refers any act of disobedience including same-sex sexuality against the commands of Allah, for Melis, there is no such sin in *Alevilik*. Not just same-sex desire but also any form of penetrative sex outside of marriage has been considered illegitimate and sin in Islamic societies. For example, 'losing' one's virginity before marriage is an important issue judged by people in Turkey society. When I learned that the red ribbon, which is tied around the bride's waist by her brother in Turkish weddings, symbolizes her virginity, I was surprised. The red ribbon that I tied to my sister's waist just before her farewell to those who stay at home in her wedding was a sign that we will never leave each other. I have never thought of that ribbon as a proof of my sister's virginity. However, because I grew up in an Alevi family, such custom may show that the virginity, which is very significant issue in Islam, is

²¹ See Appendix A8.

also valued for Alevis. Considering that Alevi population in Turkey consists of diverse individuals and groups with widely varied experience, it would not be very accurate to generalize any of this discussion to all Alevis. Zeynep who grew quite comfortable with his younger brother told how her mother raised them and approached the issue of virginity:

Until there are puberty-based changes in our bodies, my mother was washing my brother and me together. We did not refrain from each other. Therefore, we could tell each other everything, and still, we are. We dressed and undressed together. We could walk around with our underwear at home. My mother never said a woman and man could not walk around like this. Instead, she told us that we are siblings and there is nothing wrong. Especially my brother overcame the sexual taboos in our home by making jokes [...] my mother never wanted me to experience sex before college. However, it was not about my virginity. She did not prefer because she thought that I would get tired and have troubles with the wrong people. Therefore, she just recommended me to wait until I go to the college. In her opinion, I was going to be an adult after graduation and could do whatever I want²² (Zeynep, interview, May 9, 2017, Istanbul).

Based on the statements of the interviewees and my experiences, I may remark that Alevis do not sanctify the human bodies, the genitals in particular, and they do not develop rigid, elaborate rules about sexual conduct. Especially in the sex lives of LGBT+ Alevis, the faith does not seem a determinative. Therefore, they do not have the feeling of responsibility for confessing something regarding their sexualities to God. Besides, LGBT+ Alevis' sense of sexual freedom becomes more apparent in sexual encounters with Sunni conservative people. In our interview, E.N. shared their experiences with Sunni conservative sexual partners:

I have a koli²³ from the İsmailağa Community. We met through Hornet²⁴. He comes to my home and knows that I am an Alevi. He wears salwar and religious gown. We discuss the politics and have sex. Then, he performs ablution and goes. Sometimes after sex, I make fun of him by saying I

²² See Appendix A9.

²³ Lubunca is a type of slang used among the LGBT+ community in Turkey. It has historically known as the secret language of LGBT+s. 'Koli' that E.N. used is the Turkish word for 'package', but in Lubunca it also means 'sexual partner' or 'client of sex workers'.

²⁴ Hornet is the gay dating app.

bring your prayer rug for prayer. He is relaxed when he gets here²⁵ (E.N., interview, May 26, 2017, Istanbul).

After sexual intercourse or ejaculation, Muslims are required to perform the ritual ablution of the whole body²⁶. There are some points that people need to follow for a valid ghusl otherwise it becomes a regular bath. I understand from the words of E.N. that their religious conservative sex partner also performs such religious bath for 'purification'. The thought of purifying the body and soul by pouring water over the whole body with religious reflexes seems a kind of giving up the action considered a sin. In addition, it is obvious that the meanings concerning the concepts of purity and dirtiness have been created culturally. In some cases, Alevi are considered 'dirty' because they do not perform ghusl²⁷. Özgür who have similar experiences with E.N. submitted that LGBT+ Alevi live their sexualities with less barrier. Özgür detailed such argument with examples regarding directly sexual conducts as follows:

My Alevi sexual partners or my other LGBTI Alevi friends can become both bottom and top in sexual intercourse. It is because LGBTI Alevi do not internalize the fears and traumas such as the story of the people of Lut and the *fili livata*²⁸. Of course, we also take shower after sex for cleaning but it is not something religious-based. We do not have to perform the Ghusl in *Alevilik*. It is not obligatory. My religious sex partners, for example, are trying to get rid of what they have done immediately. Sometimes they regret after the ejaculation. I can even observe that my religious sexual partners could not have sex without drinking alcohol or smoking weed. Whatever is in the mind of them, first there is the religious barrier²⁹ (Özgür, interview, May 9, 2017, Istanbul).

These examples are striking for understanding the sexual practices of LGBT+ Alevi. It seems that they do not have both strong religious norms and sexual taboos. As I emphasized, it is not possible to generalize these arguments to whole Alevi world or LGBT+ Alevi. We should remember that there are Alevi families

²⁵ See Appendix A10.

²⁶ Ghusl is the Arabic term referring to the ritual ablution of the whole body and it is widely used in Islamic environments.

²⁷ In a study called *Kirlilik Kavramı ve Aleviliğin Asimilasyonu (2011)*, Mevlüt Özben examines the role of dirtiness in the marginalization of Alevi living in Turkey. I have not completely read the book but I suggest it is one of the first texts concerning the concept of dirtiness and *Alevilik*.

²⁸ The term *fili livata* is used for sodomy and anal penetration.

²⁹ See Appendix A11.

that can be considered conservatives blending Alevi teachings with Sunni Islamic perspectives. For instance, Bozkır, as a member of relatively conservative Alevi family, stated that being an Alevi did not facilitate his sexual practices. According to Bozkır, “every human being in Turkey is raised with public morality one way or another”. As it had happened in the case of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s throughout the world, the conservatives consider the LGBT+ people responsible for the issues, which cause huge panic and conflict of public morality that Bozkır remarks. In the next part, I try understanding such issue, which can be summed up as 'the conflict between sexuality and much-mentioned public morality' from the eyes of LGBT+ Alevis.

7.2. Being the Master of One’s Loins: Moral Understandings of LGBT+ Alevis

The issue of 'public morality' has remained on the agenda of Turkey in recent years. Public morality became a means of oppression that is used both by the government and by the opposition against it. The problem is that the widespread moral discourse regardless where it begins to develop has the power to influence all of the people. The conservative moralistic understanding when it combined with sexism makes the lives of women and LGBT+ identities difficult. Then, the systematic discrimination these people face is legitimized under the name of 'social sensitivities'. At the most basic, the concepts like morality and ethics deal with the principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior. In Turkey, on the other hand, morality is associated with the sexuality. Being moral depends on whether the sexual behavior of a person conforms to the moral code of society. Thus, as Nil Mutluer puts it, in societies in which power relations have been established based on the kinship, the sexuality of individuals becomes the matter of whole society (2013: 21). In my opinion, Alevi society also adheres strictly to the kinship relations. I assert this highly based on the family relationships in my hometown and my observations of traditional *Alevilik*. Even the *musahiplik* relationship among Alevis can be considered a type of kinship even though it does not depend on the blood relation. As

aforementioned, men who choose each other as *musahip* are obliged to lifelong mutual solidarity including far-reaching moral support and they have to take care of each other's family as if it were their own (Bodrogi, 2012: 152). I know such kinship model that also has moral references has a very high value for Alevis. This is also valid for *kirvelik* relationships seen in *sünnet* feasts³⁰. Families that engage in *kirve* relationships form a virtual kinship. Nevertheless, this close relationship is strengthened with a basic rule that marriage is banned between those families. In my opinion, such traditions eventually become moral issues that define boundaries of people's sexualities. The common sense of the Alevi society becomes the controller of the sexuality.

In addition to what has mentioned above, *Alevilik* has developed moral codes expressed by the commandment, which is attributed to Hacı Bektaş Veli: “be master of your hand, your loins, and your tongue”. Being the master of one's tongue refers avoiding any inappropriate activities such as lying, slandering whereas being the master of one's hand refers avoiding taking another person's property without permission (Kehl-Bodrogi, 2012: 137). These two may show that the concept of morality in *Alevilik* is not only dealt with sexuality. However, among these criteria, the principle of being master of one's loins highlights the Alevi orders concerning sexuality. It favors monogamy and advises Alevis not engaging in sexual intercourse with people who are not Alevi. Kehl-Bodrogi stresses that someone who is the master of his/her loins is also expected to avoid the different forms of sexual intercourse such as sodomy and homosexuality that are forbidden because of their unnatural characters (2012: 138). As aforementioned, the words of Kehl-Bodrogi are one of the rare references touching upon the same-sex desire in the literature on *Alevilik*. Based on the comment of Kehl-Bodrogi, if the LGBT+s are perceived marginal existence against the general moral codes of the *Alevilik*, the viewpoints of LGBT+ Alevis on the concept of morality become more precious for this thesis. In other words, it

³⁰ Sünnet is the word used in Turkish for circumcision.

is important how the principle of being master of one's loins is understood and internalized at the individual level.

I may assert that the meaning of the principle of being the master of one's loins is ambiguous for LGBT+ Alevi. For example, E.N. said they have discussed such principle with their friends and questioned whether Alevi are moralistic. At the end, E.N., like other interviewees, came up with the idea that the principle of being master of one's loins refers avoiding committing any type of sexual assault as follows:

There is a very serious difference between my understanding of morality and the Alevi understanding of morality. I think people should be able to have sex easily. When I think as an Alevi, however, I may have some moral rules [...] I do not know. Lewd, deviant... When *Alevilik* enters into my... I do not know how to say. When I behave more like Alevi chauvinist, I consider something needs to stop at a certain point. On the one hand, I intensely live *Alevilik* as the life philosophy but on the other hand, I am also a person who lives sexuality free. Does not it try to tell the rape and harassment? [...] I want to understand in that way. Be the master of your loins... That is to say, do not rape, do not harass³¹ (E.N., interview, May 26, 2017, Istanbul).

It is interesting that LGBT+ Alevi do not interpret the principle of being the master of one's loins as something about same-sex sexuality as Kehl-Bodrogi suggested. Most of them do not feel that such principle excludes their sexualities. They approach the issue more concerning the patriarchal structure of Turkey society in general. One of the common themes LGBT+ Alevi put forwarded in this regard was the issue of honor killings. The concepts of honor and morality are really intertwined in the eyes of people living in Turkey. Honor corresponds to the limits of sex and sexuality of whom their meanings are continuously changing and determined by the power. What behaviors are to be excluded and punished is determined through those limits (Mutluer, 2013: 23). For example, women are 'punished' by murdering if they do not preserve their virginity to their husbands. It is an established fact that the crimes against women and LGBT+ individuals in the name of family honor are common in the country. Apparently, according to

³¹ See Appendix A12.

LGBT+ Alevi I talked, the honor killings emanate from religious-cultural extremism. They were quite decisive that the extremism is not likely to be seen among Alevi. Özgür shared their ideas on the relevant topic as follows:

I do not even consider the principle of being master of one's loins as *zina*. It refers to rape, harassment [...] I have been examined the news carefully for years. For example, have you ever heard the news of an Alevi woman who was killed because she had sex before marriage? I see a big difference in the sense of the brutality. Of course, there may be anger and fight within the Alevi families but, it does not end in murdering as it happens among Sunni bigots³² (Özgür, interview, May 9, 2017, Istanbul).

From all these discussions, I may suggest that the moral values of *Alevilik* regarding sexuality seem to have flexible character potentially opens a space to different understandings. For Çiğdem, for instance, morality comes from family and it means living in respect of human rights. Although she believes in God, she thinks an atheist can also be very well behaved. It means morality does not identify with the religion in the life of Çiğdem. On the other side of the coin, from Zeynep's perspective, morality does not also identify with the sexuality. Zeynep stated that her understanding of morality corresponds to values that are more ethical and she does not care about the sex lives of people as long as there is the consent of participants engage in sexual activity. The level of Zeynep's belief in people's 'free will' regarding their sexual activities resembles the queer views of sexuality that I noted before. The statements of Zeynep I quoted below may have described by many religionist conservatives as deviant thoughts. However, I assume that Zeynep, as a lawyer, follows the discussions about the age of consent regarding sexuality and under which conditions to what extent consent can be legally valid. Besides, in my opinion, trying to understand a large variety of sexuality beyond the moral codes of our societies regardless the cultures or religions is more important than blindly believing in what taught us. Here is what Zeynep thinks of and tries to figure out from time to time:

What would be my reaction to one who tells me he/she is in love with his/her sibling and they have sex? I guess I would not react at all. If they both agree to have sex, it is none of my business. Sometimes I also think

³² See Appendix A13.

of necrophilia. People give their consent that a particular person can have sex with their dead body. One gives the consent before his/her death. The other has a fantasy that is considered illness. However, they mutually accept it one way or another. In the face of such situation, I would say it is not my concern again. It is not a rape. I never associate the sexuality with the morality but I consider people who defend to sex without permission as immoral³³ (Zeynep, interview, May 9, 2017, Istanbul).

It would not be wrong to suggest that the faith and sexuality are not alternatives of each other in the lives of LGBT+ Alevis. Therefore, it is not easy to mention the conflict between the two. On the other hand, it is possible to assert how the compulsory Islamic education I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter causes the conflicts regarding the faith and sexuality in the lives of people who hold intersecting identities. The memories of Özgür from the years of secondary school are one of the concrete examples of such situation:

I did not grow up with Islamic teachings in my family. However, I was listening that same-sex sexuality is sin in the religion lessons of secondary school. Our teachers were telling us the story of Lut. We were the little boys and what taught us at school was completely different from the belief and perception at home. Sometimes I was thinking that my family was sinful³⁴ (Özgür, interview, May 9, 2017, Istanbul).

In addition to the religious-based and social pressures, which restrict the field of sexuality, there is also the issue of marginalization of Alevis. These factors make the identities of LGBT+ Alevis politic. The claims of equal rights such as the removal of compulsory religious courses become the topical issues. In the interview, E.N. said their political stance distorts what taught them and the very notion of public morality. E.N. told me one of the short interesting stories about their LGBT+ Alevi friends the following:

Let me tell you a *gullüm*³⁵. This happened recently. It is an absurd story but makes me laugh every time I remember. We have a gay friend who perfectly plays *bağlama*³⁶. He performs Alevis' folk poems with his *bağlama*. One day, one of our friends said we should organize a Cem ritual. "Let's get Ali, Jesus, and all of twelve Imams to our Cem meeting.

³³ See Appendix A14.

³⁴ See Appendix A15.

³⁵ *Gullüm* means amusement and a fun gathering in Lubunca.

³⁶ The *bağlama* is a traditional long-necked instrument. Alevis commonly use it in the Cem rites.

After we do group sex," he said. This is the nice political stance. It is like a slap to the notion of morality³⁷ (E.N., interview, May 26, 2017, Istanbul).

Apart from these, from my observations and the experiences of the LGBT+ Alevi I have listened, I may assert that LGBT+ Alevi have also been exposed to moralistic and sexist discourses from their families and surroundings. Alevi society is not sterile from patriarchal values and gender norms. Although they do not directly emanate from the faith, they still make the process of identity construction of LGBT+ Alevi regarding sexuality difficult. On the other hand, also a new Alevi generation adapts to social realities much more quickly in recent years. The relatively elder groups with conventional ideas among Alevi also try to keep up with the times. The relationship of LGBT+ Alevi with old and new Alevi generations affects their visibilities in public space. In this regard, in next chapter of the thesis, I analyze the concept of 'coming out' to theorize the relationship between LGBT+ Alevi and their surroundings. Through this way, it may be possible to understand how the members of the faith in which everyone is accepted as a genderless soul negotiate with the different sexualities.

8. WHO COUNTS AS A MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY? THE CAN DISCOURSE & COMING OUT AS LGBT+

Immoral, sinful, guilty, diseased... Which one would I hear from my father? Would he directly say to me or would he use my mother as a messenger as he has done in many times? Who knows? Maybe my mom acts before him and says she does not give her blessing to me. I should not forget my brothers either. Maybe they would violate the rule that the first word belongs to the elder, and hurt me before my parents. What about the environment? For example, what would be reactions of my middle uncle that played bağlama in the henna night of my sister and said her "be the beauty of three houses"? What would he say to me? The disgrace of our home, the dishonesty of our home... Would I hear these from him? Why my souls get bored when writing these things?

These are the first sentences of my piece I wrote in 2012 fall, which I always remember while talking about the issue of coming out somewhere somehow. Obviously, I was scared of saying I am gay to my loved ones in those days. I was not afraid of murdering by my father or brothers. I did not even think that my

³⁷ See Appendix A16.

parents would reject me. I was scared that they might not understand exactly how I feel. The reason is also valid today. My parents and brothers still do not know about my sexual orientation. However, I shared with my sisters that I am gay on the first day of 2013. My sisters have always been positive to me and, I feel seen, heard, and supported thanks to them. Sadly, I will never tell my uncle that I am gay because he passed away last year. He became the first loss of our three-decker apartment.

Since this dissertation is about the identities which I am subject of, I first wanted to situate my experiences of coming out. I am among the ones who choose to break the silence and come out of the closet. However, I know there are ways of growing up in life and people's experiences of coming out differentiate in many aspects. Most of the LGBT+ people are not open to their surroundings about their sexualities in Turkey. It may be a choice of the person or for other reasons such as fear of one's safety, peer or family rejection, loss of the job. The come out of the closet is highly related to the personal experiences of sexuality, which is the result of a complex interplay between sexual and other cultural identifications, as I highlighted in the previous chapter. The religious affiliations of people also influence the process of coming out. In this chapter, I first discuss the concept of coming out for better understanding the relationship between LGBT+ Alevis and their mostly Alevi surroundings. In this way, I also give part of the discussions around the *can* discourse among Alevis from the perspectives of LGBT+ Alevis.

For LGBT+s, the coming out is necessary and important to feel like a part of the collective identity and being visible in public life. In most cases, the emotion-laden disclosure paves the way for the transformation of the identities both at the personal and societal level. The different forms of coming out that can be considered the manifestation of sexual diversity challenges the general moral norms and perception of the society mentioned in the previous chapter. In the opposite case, as Tuna Erdem puts it, being in the closet which implies hiding from the outside world functions as a guarantor of the sexual hierarchy and the

sexual standardization. The real problem for the system thus becomes the ones who explain their sexualities with pride (2012: 47).

As aforementioned, although the contexts are different, I may use the term coming out for today's Alevi when they openly practice their Cem rituals in public and share their identities with others. The coming out may refer the breaking down the practice of *takiye* which refers to the Shia practice of dissimulation one's beliefs for Alevi. In fact, one should not consider *takiye* only as a protectionist practice against possible threats from the outside world. Alevi sometimes do not expose their identities because they commit the process called four doors forty posts in which the spiritual leaders guide them. At the end of the process, they are expected to meet total completeness of oneself with inner and deeper spiritual insight. In other words, Alevi are cleansed from their physical feature and become a perfect human being. Such inward-oriented process is a kind of path (*yol*) to reach the God independently from the outside world.

At this point, I address the extent to which people who undertake both identities experience the process of coming out. Firstly, I should underline that the families we are born into may have both negative and positive impacts on our personalities and habits including our sexualities and sex lives. However, many in Turkey, LGBT+ people, in particular, do not commit qualified discussions with their families about sexual issues because the sexuality remains the taboo subject in the society. Sometimes LGBT+s do not prefer to come out because they see their sexuality as a private matter but in most of the time, they do not feel comfortable and confident because of the social meanings attributed to different sexualities outside of heterosexual marriage. Under these circumstances, families do not know what their children go through in the societies full of patriarchal values and gender stereotypes. LGBT+ Alevi I interviewed, on the other hand, seem very open to their families and surroundings. Indeed, there is a significant effect of maturity, as the ages of people I interviewed were 30 and above. They are at a different stage of life experience compared to relative youth who newly discover oneself and develop the understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Bozkır is one of LGBT+ Alevi who could not bring the unspoken sexual identity to the attention of the family. He is open only to his nephew about his sexuality. However, Bozkır thinks that whole family members may understand that he is gay from the Facebook posts he shares. According to Bozkır, his family regards sexualities outside of heterosexuality as a 'slanting'. In other words, the family of Bozkır does not take LGBT+ and queer sexualities seriously. Since I believe people's sexualities are fluid, I imagine that people may have motivated to experience different types of sexualities with the intense and eager enjoyment of which Bozkır's family calls as the fad. I also believe their enthusiasm on engaging different sexual practices may end one day and people may return to their old sexual habits. In most of the families including Bozkır's, there is an idea that the same-sex desire will be short-lived. Such traditional understanding of sexuality favors the sexual essentialism, which sees sexuality as biologically ordained and not socially and historically constituted.

The idea of Bozkır that he might be discovered from his social media posts manifested itself also in other conversations. This time, the personal narratives of Çiğdem and E.N. show that it is likely to be disclosed as LGBT+ when disobeying patterns of behavior attributed to biological sexes. For instance, while sharing her coming out stories, Çiğdem also talked about her gay cousin and highlighted the effect of the subject's effeminacy and masculinity in the process. The mother and aunt of Çiğdem know that she is a lesbian. However, Çiğdem does not prefer coming out to her siblings because she does not want to get into trouble with them for some reasons. Çiğdem thinks that her sister might guess that she is lesbian but she cannot be sure. Interestingly, unlike her situation, Çiğdem seems sure that whole family and relatives know the sexual orientation of her cousin. This is obviously to say that her cousin reveals oneself with the different dressing, speaking style and most importantly desiring to be someone else. Like many others, Çiğdem might be preoccupied with traditional notions of masculinity and femininity and express her feelings towards effeminate behavior in her gay cousin. In fact, there are also some LGBT+s who internalized such socially constructed masculine and feminine stereotypes and have positive feelings about

‘straight-acting’ gays. One of the anecdotes of Çiğdem I quoted below is striking for understanding that there can be diverse reactions of Alevis to LGBT+ subjectivities:

Everybody knows that my cousin is a gay but ignores this fact. Indeed, in our society, I say my family and surroundings that my cousin is instinctively behaving. His behavior, style of speaking, desires... Actually, my cousin survived very bad things. He was living in Bağcılar district and was attacked by about 15 people. He was beaten. It is not an easy experience. Being gay is not a choice [...] upon this incident; some in our society said my cousin as a male should not pluck his eyebrows. My cousin's jawbone was broken but some people were talking about his eyebrows³⁸ (Çiğdem, interview, May 6, 2017, Istanbul).

As I understand from the words of Çiğdem, their families assisted her cousin when he was beaten and needed care. They have provided him security under their protection however; it also seems that they tend to blame him for not behaving like a proper man. Such blame approach concentrates on choices and lifestyles of LGBT+s and makes them feel like a guilty victim. The blaming strategy, which is often seen in cases of violence against women and LGBT+s in Turkey, makes the coming out process very difficult. Such reactions from first-degree families of LGBT+s who continue to face bullying and discrimination in school, at work, put them at further psychological risk. In this way, their families perceive their LGBT+ children who cannot come out as different from their fellows, but they are not named as the LGBT+. In most of the time, one's sexuality becomes a known but never talked issue.

Another interviewee, E.N., has friends and family members in their hometown who knew that E.N. is a LGBT+. Similar to narratives of Çiğdem, E.N. said that parents feel their children are different somehow as follows:

All family members know my sexuality. I have always been a gay. Parents are not stupid. They understand who you really are. My parents may have waited the day I come out. I was different. I did not behave in a masculine way, which our families taught us. I was sometimes behaving in a feminine way [...] that is why my uncle's children were making fun of me.

³⁸ See Appendix A17.

However, I am a person who loves to struggle. As I always say, being gay is a political stance³⁹ (E.N., interview, May 26, 2017, Istanbul).

As seen in the words of Çiğdem and E.N., the society attributes distinct gender roles to biological sexes and expects everyone adapt it. When LGBT+s do not confirm those gender roles, which the society imposes, they are more likely to face bullying and discrimination over their sexualities in many facets of life. Also, I may suggest that during the process in which LGBT+s develop self-understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity and come out to outside world, most of them dramatically feel both the oppression of religion and morality and the society's oppression that directly limits the sexual practices. In this context, E.N. narrated that there is a difference between coming out as LGBT+ and being disclosed by others. The latter expounds that the lives of LGBT+s in closed societies have been monitored and controlled by the others. The reason that forced E.N. to leave their hometown in which many Sunni conservatives along Alevis live was the urge of having free sex. In other words, E.N. felt trapped in the conservative atmosphere of the small city and moved to Istanbul to cross the limits, as many LGBT+s have done in Turkey. Even though E.N. moved to Beyoğlu district that is the hub of Istanbul full of art and culture as well as gay scene back then, we also talked about the ghetto Alevi neighborhoods in our conversation. The words of E.N. about the young LGBT+ Alevis residing in mostly Alevi populated neighborhoods prove 'what the neighborhood cannot tolerate'⁴⁰:

Although our families are relatively open and libertarian, the social pressure still exists and felt in Alevi neighborhoods. For example, having sex with someone is very difficult and risky for teenage LGBTI Alevis in their ghetto neighborhoods [...] I was a gay that begins to discover oneself. Sometimes I wanted to pluck my eyebrows and have sex. Do you understand what I mean? When you tell people you are a gay, they perceive you like the sex object. There are different cases as well. For

³⁹ See Appendix A18.

⁴⁰ I borrow the sentence within quotes from the Research Report on Neighborhood Pressure publishing in 2009. I suggest this ethnographic report as a reading on debates about the notion of neighborhood pressure brought to light by Şerif Mardin. You may reach the source from http://aciktoplumvakfi.org.tr/pdf/tr_farkli_olmak.pdf.

instance, think about the grocery boy in your neighborhood. You are flirting with him and you are dying for him. However, you do not feel comforted because he is a boy of the neighborhood, and he is a neighbor⁴¹ (E.N., interview, May 26, 2017, Istanbul).

I should add that the complaints voiced by E.N. seem to have been reduced when they moved to Istanbul. It is not surprising that LGBT+ people regardless their religious background act and move more freely in metropolitan centers than other Anatolian cities. Melis, like E.N., is one of the LGBT+ Alevis whose story has started to change in Istanbul. As mentioned before, Melis has transgender experience of which she describes as the period of correction of gender she was assigned at birth. I believe that such process means many different things for Melis beyond involving the medical surgery. From her given name to the appearance, many things seem to have changed in her life. The experience that Melis and other trans women go through may also involve coming out to others starting from the family and friends. Having completed her transition in Istanbul in two years with her sister and two nephews, Melis's first meet with her parents can be the most memorable of the unlimited encounters in one's life. After two years silence, her parents came to Istanbul and saw her change. Melis expressed how she felt when she met with her parents as follows:

I went to the home in the early hours. I was working in a nightclub as the waiter in those days. My father opened the door. I was so excited and did not know what to say. I changed. Do you understand? I was living in women appearance anymore. He did not recognize me. Afterwards he called me with the name they gave me at birth. My parents were very surprised. They were staring at me but did not say anything. I astonished because did not face the fear which had been exposed me by my siblings for years. They stayed in Istanbul for several weeks. We did not talk at all. Then I started to feel out-of-place and decided to talk to them. I said, "As you see, I changed and will continue to change. I am not your son. I never was"⁴² (Melis, interview, May 27, 2017, Istanbul).

I realize that when it comes to trans experiences, the stories of coming out and being visible become more different from the experiences of other sexualities I have referred under the umbrella term LGBT+. It is perhaps inevitable to come

⁴¹ See Appendix A19.

⁴² See Appendix A20.

out for many transsexual people as changes in appearance start in the transition period. Still, I must write that there is something in common in our stories of coming out: the fear of parents. I may not be so eligible to make psychology-based comments on this. However, I may assert that the undeniable relationship exists between LGBT+ people's fear of their parents and their parents' fear of inhabitants of the neighborhood. It means that the parents live with a fear of being publicly disgraced when they know that their children are a gay. Some people including our siblings impose on us that fear of the parents despite their unconditional love. The real danger begins when the feeling of fear gains an irrational dimension. For example, the serious problems such as becoming isolated from the outside world, attempting suicide, using substance appear in LGBT+s' lives. Melis told me that once she was so isolated, silenced and she was thinking about committing suicide. Despite all the happening, Melis now considers herself, lucky compared to other trans women fighting for life in Turkey. She is open to everyone and has good relationships.

I may suggest that many LGBT+s expect to be 'accepted' by their families and surroundings when they come out. However, I prefer to use the expression of being recognized instead of using being accepted. People who have been occupied by the system of heteronormativity should acknowledge that LGBT+ identities exist, just like the heterosexual sexualities. Beyond our sensibilities about political correctness, more important thing worth to note here that LGBT+s are more likely to come out of the closet when they undertake economic actions on their own. Here, another picture within the big picture is that people around LGBT+s sometimes interested in 'how' LGBT+s earn the money. Many people still perceive LGBT+s as sex objects and they directly set up the relationship between LGBT+s and prostitution. In our conversation, Melis underlined her stance about this subject and said she would be a sex worker but preferred to make jobs that are more 'normative'. According to Melis, engaging to jobs except sex work, which is criminalized by the patriarchal hegemony, has positively affected the way in which her family perceives herself.

When LGBT+s do gender-based jobs that are more ‘acceptable’ and they have good secure relationships, their families and surroundings are more likely to go with them during the process of coming out. However, on the other side of the coin, the background of people to whom LGBT+s come out also so fundamental for healthy communication and relationship. For example, it would be expected that the parents who have experienced the disadvantages in any field of life might unify with their LGBT+ children for struggling. There should not be a precondition to fight for liberating the field of sexuality however still it cannot be ignored that there may be potentialities for the possible alliances. I detail this subject in next chapters but, here I need to share what Özgür told me about their father because I think it presents a perspective on the issue of coming out:

My father was born in the village. He just went to school until third class. After they migrated to Tarsus, he worked as a child. After he entered the factory at early ages, he met with leftist big brothers. They nurtured and educated my father. Then he interested in reading and questioning the world. He has dealt with in political parties for years. He is a man who read more than me. He is prone to open and develop himself and lives a bohemian lifestyle. Once, he was taking Yılmaz Güney as a model. He was a brave man and tried to raise us in a free environment. That was my advantage⁴³ (Özgür, interview, May 9, 2017, Istanbul).

I understand from the paragraph that the father of Özgür has engaged with left-wing politics and he has created a world in which he may feel belonging at young ages. In addition, he may have suffered as a child worker. When I add the oppressed Alevi formation to this information, I may allege that the affirmative reaction of the father of Özgür to the coming out of his child is not surprising. The father of Özgür seems to have internalized the struggle for the rights and liberation of the different identities in advance. Özgür also said they are waiting for the right time to come out to their mother.

Another interviewee, Zeynep told me that she mentioned her sister and brother about her sexuality and everything is fine. She is not open to her parents, however, says that her father and mother do not judge people at all. Similar to Özgür’s father, the parents of Zeynep were the worker and they did not go to the college.

⁴³ See Appendix A21.

Zeynep thinks that the characters of her parents are similar and it is not a coincidence. She believes that the ways her parents perceive events and people have been related to the Alevi culture they belong. The statements of Zeynep I quoted below prove that people do not have to go to the university to understand others who have different lives:

I did not come out to my parents but they know my gay friends. My parents who approached my gay friends as if they were miserable in the first place became very good friends with them in time. Last summer, in a crowded family gathering, I saw my mother as a stronger advocate of LGBTI rights than myself. I was very angry at the conversations because there were people with homophobic tendencies. However, my mother peacefully told the others that being gay is very normal and part of the society. She said them they need to be open to differences. Moreover, when I sometimes ask her how she would react if her grandchildren were gay, she says she would not do anything. She said she would be upset but at the same time show respect her grandchildren, who want to live their lives in that way⁴⁴ (Zeynep, interview, May 9, 2017, Istanbul).

In addition, the religiosity level of people lies behind the coming out stories of LGBT+s and the reactions of people towards those stories. I come up with the idea that many LGBT+ Alevis I interviewed do not have a conservative family life. However, this does not mean that there are no Alevi families, which are more engaged to the system and appeal to traditional conservative values. Having families that adhere to mostly the secular way of life seem to have facilitated the coming out processes of the LGBT+ Alevis. Apart from this, examining the relationship between LGBT+ Alevis with ones having a strong belief in *Alevilik* would give clues of how else Alevis may react to coming out stories. For instance, according to Çiğdem, Alevi society is more easygoing because Alevis do not live according to strict rules of Islamic law. Çiğdem said she is happy to be an Alevi and added that she talked with many *dedes* about LGBT+ issues:

I asked the dedes in Şahkulu Cem House and the dede of Cem House in Kartal district. They said nobody in *Alevilik* could blame and judge to other people because of their lifestyle. They cannot decide the ones chosen for heaven or ones deserving of hell. When you look from the perspective

⁴⁴ See Appendix A22.

of Islam religion, being gay can be found wrong, but it is different in *Alevilik*. There are commands in *Alevilik* as you should not even hurt an ant. Alevi society may find some behaviors strange but it is not mentioned to punish that behavior. I also talked with imams in mosques and the priests in the church but they told being gay is a sin. That is why I think the Alevis are more moderate and constructive⁴⁵ (Çiğdem, interview, May 6, 2017, Istanbul).

In our conversation, Zeynep also mentioned her young *dede* friend. Zeynep has never talked about LGBT+ identities with her friend however considers that he may be convinced about such different topics. According to Zeynep, her friend would not oppose when they ask to bury the body as a man although the one lying in the grave is biologically a woman. This thinking of Zeynep became quite striking when I listened to E.N. who told me that Imams do not do the funeral prayer of their trans friends. E.N. called the situation as ‘Sunni fascism’. The counter-stance and discrimination that Çiğdem has observed in her dialogue with imams in the mosques seem to have practiced according to what E.N. told. Such examples are important concerning understanding the views of institutionalized persons in the religious field. Regardless their reference points, the words of Çiğdem, Zeynep and E.N. remind the Alevi discourse that everyone in *Alevilik* is accepted as a genderless soul. As I mentioned before, it has been said that there are no women and men but only the *can* (soul) in the Cem rituals.

Some thinkers highlight the very notion of gender equality and focus on the Alevi doctrine of which they think it is without gender discrimination. For İbrahim Bahadır, what is important for *Alevilik* is the soul inside the body and, there is no gender implication in the concept of the soul (2004). Similar to Bahadır, Belkıs Menemencioğlu emphasizes that the image of the woman in *Alevilik* is not so different from other woman-based cultures and adds that especially for Bektashian culture; man is as human as the woman is (2011: 129). I read the same emphasis on the *can* discourse in the column of Ali Kenanoğlu which was recently published in the Evrensel newspaper under the title '*Alevilikte cinsiyet ve*

⁴⁵ See Appendix A23.

*LGBTİ'ler*⁴⁶. According to Kenanoğlu, everyone who participates in the worship of the Alevis is described as the *can* and *Cem Erenleri*, and these are sexless definitions. Furthermore, I faced similar affirmative highlights about the concept of the *can* also in the interviews I made. E.N., for instance, remarks that even a cat and dog may enter the Cem House because they have also been seen as the *can* according to the Alevi faith. In addition to these, occasionally the Alevi practices in life contradict the central tenets of the *can* discourse and trigger me to ask 'who counts as a member of the community'. As I mentioned earlier, the negativity around gender issues in the Alevi society is seen as the enforcement derived from the social-cultural conditions by some. For others, the negative samples happen because the principles around *can* discourse are not understood and internalized on the subjective level. Back to E.N.'s example, if ones who take even the cats and dogs to Cem Houses do not welcome to LGBT+s, they are not real Alevi in E.N.'s opinion.

For me, it is problematic to limit the number of human sexuality into two categories as women and men above all. In this regard, if the *can* discourse theologically favors a genderless world I would support it. On the other hand, with the binary gender-based terms, if the *can* notion is used to make women and men the same and cover the asymmetric relations between them as Nimet Okan asserts (2017: 16), the souls just become the nonsense. In addition, I should add that the meaning of *can* discourse may be perverted and used to exclude the LGBT+ sexualities. The *can* rhetoric has such openness in its practical usage. In Foucault's terms, LGBT+ Alevis have to cope with the 'disciplinary power', which is reproduced in many facets of life, both during their identity construction and the coming out processes. In this case, the tool of such power is normalization through the social norms including the hierarchical valuation of sex acts. People that do not conform to the 'normal' are pushed out and punished. For example, Melis stated that she was exposed to sexist nicknames when she was a child.

⁴⁶ Kenanoğlu, A. (2017, July 21). Alevilikte cinsiyet ve LGBTİ'ler. Last accessed October 10, 2017, from <https://www.evrensel.net/yazi/79533/alevilikte-cinsiyet-ve-lgbtler>

Because, according to Melis, from her dreams to the games she played, everything was so different from the interests of other children. Melis remains distant to the *can* discourse when she takes the problems she has had in childhood and youth into consideration. "Yes, we are also *cans* but to what extent," she said. Another interviewee, Bozkır also considers like Melis and approaches critically to the *can* discourse as followings:

There is also Alevi conservatism. There are places where you can intensely feel such conservatism. When people go to Cem, men and women sit separately. You cannot get away from heterosexuality and heteronormative order when you emphasize being the *can*. They are looking at your genitals to decide which side you will sit on. It is not only about Cem rituals. If there are still taboos around the sexual orientations and gender identities and if the class distinction exists, there cannot be such thing as the *can*⁴⁷ (Bozkır, interview, May 8, 2017, Istanbul).

To sum up, the narrations of the interviewees show that they grew up, established themselves, and came out to the people around them including the members of the families and they got mostly positive reactions. Thanks to the intersectional perspective that flourished this thesis, the narrations of the LGBT+ Alevis around their experiences of coming out go beyond the sexual and faith-based categories and the descriptive content of those categories. Even if their sense of belonging to Alevi world and adherence to religious practice seem different, the relatively liberated sexual areas of LGBT+ Alevis I outlined in the previous chapter have facilitated the coming out processes of them. The experiences of LGBT+ Alevis around sex/gender paradigm including mine show that the issue of sexual diversity is negotiable for many Alevis. In other words, the Alevi world that we contacted is tolerant with the potential effect of the *can* discourse or at least acknowledge that the sexual differences span all communities including theirs. Based on the narrations I listened and my personal experiences, when LGBT+ Alevis decide to come out as who they are within the Alevi community they somehow feel connected to, pre-existing however unnamed thoughts, emotions and issues come into existence. The gender is one of those issues that sometimes

⁴⁷ See Appendix A24.

divide LGBT+ Alevis from the Alevi world and sometimes unify them. As Bozkır emphasized, the *can* discourse by itself do not abolish the gender specific matters that LGBT+ Alevis face. In this regard, in next chapter, I intend focusing on the heteronormativity in Alevi way of life and critically examining how it affects the lives of LGBT+ Alevis. Thus I also carry the discussions around the *can* discourse one-step further.

9. COMPLEXITIES OF DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES: DIFFERENT SUBJECTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF THE STRAIGHT LINE

After I portrayed the issues that the LGBT+ Alevis have been facing in the coming out processes through the stories of the interviewees, this time, I discuss the issue of gender in their lives. I should first specify that the field of sexuality and gender could not be addressed without digging the relations of power at all level of society. I also rely on that the intersectionality is an efficient tool to touch the area of sexual conflict thanks to its focus on the multiple variables intertwined and the oppressor-oppressed relations that are continuously reproduced. Most of the academic works highlighting the power distribution and the inequalities around it among Alevis as something determined by the gendered division of labor prioritizes two strictly defined genders and the heterosexual encounters between those. Such approach is not wrong but deficient in my opinion. Sometimes within the changeable power relations, some groups that face disadvantages due to the practices of the dominant powers and therefore excluded also build their power domain and exclude the other others⁴⁸. In this regard, in this chapter, my primary concern is whether to what extent LGBT+ Alevis become the others of the others in the heterogeneous Alevi society and how they express the gendered experiences they have.

⁴⁸ In the article, *This other and other others* (2002), Sara Ahmed suggests that the feminist ethics involves responding to the particular other in a present that carries traces of the past, as well as opening up the future. According to Ahmed, such alternative understanding of the relationship between feminist ethics, time and otherness is possible through responding to particular others of which Ahmed sees as a mode of encounter that we face and face up to other others.

As I mentioned before, gender is about whom we believe ourselves to be and it is based on how we express ourselves. In other words, the only way to know people's gender is if they tell us. It would be a mistake to presume one's gender identity by solely looking at the modes of expression such as mannerisms, clothing and so on. Most people may identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. Many others, however, identify with different gender/genders than their assigned sex. As Judith Butler emphasizes in *Gender Trouble*, gender becomes a free-floating performance field “with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one”⁴⁹ (1999: 10). As seen, gender is a complex subject that needs to be studied by acknowledging broad-spectrum gender affiliations that include being male, female, both, neither, or any other genders. More importantly, how people see and represent themselves determines the societal privileges, fears, anxieties, insecurities, and discrimination they face within the gendered relations of power, which begins from the intimate sphere of the household, and reach to the highest levels of political decision-making. From this aspect, I may easily state that ‘like sexuality, gender is political’. In her essay *Thinking Sex*, Gayle S. Rubin begins the conclusion part with that sentence: “Like gender, sexuality is political”. Regardless what concept we write first, we must be aware that those are intertwined and the devil in the details:

Like gender, sexuality is political. It is organized into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others. Like the capitalist organization of labour and its distribution of rewards and powers, the modern sexual system has been the object of political struggle since it emerged and as it has evolved. But if the disputes between labour and capital are mystified, sexual conflicts are completely camouflaged (Rubin, 2007: 180).

According to the sexual value system Rubin elaborates, the sexualities such as monogamy, heterosexuality are depicted as good, normal and natural and, they are

⁴⁹ In the book called *Queer Theory: An Introduction* Annamarie Jagose highlights Butler's notion of performativity. Jagose writes that “For gender is performative, not because it is something that the subject deliberately and playfully assumes, but because, through reiteration, it consolidates the subject. In this respect, performativity is the precondition of the subject” (1996: 86).

encouraged. However, other sexual practices that the LGBT+s, as well as some heterosexuals, engage in are portrayed as way-out, bad, abnormal, and unnatural. Based on the performativity notion of Butler, I suggest that the sexual activities along with the gender became human products and they are constituted in society and history⁵⁰. Besides, Rubin reminds that the hierarchies of the sexual value “function in much the same ways as do ideological systems of racism, ethnocentrism, and religious chauvinism” (2007: 159). From the religions and moral codes of the societies to the populist rhetorical instruments and media representations, there are mechanisms in all areas of life that draws a straight line around sexuality and gender and reproduce the hierarchies of sexual value. Most of the time, the heterosexual encounters are naturally believed to be inside the line and affirmed as good and therefore protected. Meanwhile, the sexual identities and gendered experiences outside the line are pushed to become straight.

Here, I consider the subject becoming straight together with the phrase ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ that was popularized by Adrienne Rich in her essay called *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. Critically approaching the patriarchy and using the characteristics of male power as a framework, Rich submits, “heterosexuality has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women, yet everywhere women have resisted it, often at the cost of physical torture, imprisonment, psychosurgery, social ostracism, and extreme poverty” (1980: 653). I understand that the compulsory heterosexuality is very involved with the heteronormative contexts through which the concept of heterosexuality is eternally tried to be normalized. From the institutions of marriage and motherhood which oneself sees as unpaid production to the role of the media and literature in the idealization of heterosexual romance, Adrienne Rich perceives the means of the power of men as something specifically enforcing heterosexuality⁵¹ (1980:

⁵⁰ As I mentioned within the chapter 3, there have been several approaches to sexual behavior. The constructionists, differently from the views favoring sexual essentialism, consider that sexuality is not only biologically ordained. It is constituted in history and society. For more discussion of these issues, see Gayle S. Rubin (2007).

⁵¹ Adrienne Rich uses eight characteristics of male power in archaic and contemporary societies that Kathleen Gough lists as a framework. Those power-characteristics are as follows: "men's ability to deny women sexuality or to force it upon them; to command or exploit their labor to

638-640). In addition to what Rich underlined, the first sources of information through which we learn that the world is idealized as heterosexual place are our families, caregivers and our peers. These people assign us gendered pronouns, roles, expressions and enforce us to confirm the heteronormative way of life. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed shares her thoughts on the work of the straight line by sharing two anecdotes she experienced. Ahmed tells that one day she was with her family members around the dining table and they were, with her own words, doing the work of the family. In that gathering, the sister of Ahmed said, "Look, there is a little John and a little Mark!" pointing to Ahmed's two nephews. Ahmed notes that John and Mark are the names of her sister's partners and their children's fathers. Afterwards, Ahmed writes own reflections about the statement of her sister:

The utterance, "Look, there is a little John and a little Mark!" expresses this hope as a wish by drawing a line from father to son. The boy "appears" in line by being seen as reproducing the father's image and is even imagined as a point in another line, one that has yet to be formed, insofar as he may "become a father" to future sons. Such a narrative of "becoming father" means the future for the boy is already imagined as following the direction of the father: such a direction requires forming a horizontal line (marriage) from which future vertical lines will follow. One can think of such an utterance as performing the work of alignment: the utterances position the child as the not-yet adult by aligning sex (the male body) and gender (the masculine character) with sexual orientation (the heterosexual future). Through the utterance, these not-yet-but-to-be subjects are "brought into line" by being "given" a future that is "in line" with the family line (Ahmed, 2006: 83).

I regard such example of Ahmed as the compulsory heterosexuality's manifestation starting from the family in which sex, gender, and sexual orientation tried to keep in straight-line. Furthermore, another matter that intrigues me here is that the marriage, which is the unpaid production for Adrienne Rich, is marked as a horizontal line in which the man is responsible for continuing one's lineage. Indeed, the marriage, mostly heterosexual ones, is one of the mechanisms that

control their produce; to control or rob them of their children; to confine them physically and prevent their movement; to use them as objects in male transactions; to cramp their creativeness; or to withhold from them large areas of the society's knowledge and cultural attainments". For more discussion of these issues see Adrienne Rich (1980: 638-640).

build gender and shapes people's lives so. The marriage, reproduction occurs within that marriage, and finally mothering and fathering have interlocking relationships to the compulsory heterosexuality. I believe that for discussing the marriage institution and other mechanisms related to the gender, we need to regard the geography we live in and sociocultural contexts.

At this point, I can sort some questions teased my mind in the writing process of this thesis: Is there any relation of being proper Alevi with becoming the straight women and men who have yet to get married? Does one have to join the army to complete the process of becoming an Alevi man? Are womanhood and manhood something mythicized among Alevis? Such questions brought me to an important point that the society-based meanings and expectations around the gender affect not only heterosexuals but also the lives of different sexualities including LGBT+ Alevis. Serkan Delice, in his interview with Deniz Kandiyoti, details similar argument with the example of the discourse of Aliye Kavaf, the former State Minister responsible for the affairs of Women and Families in Turkey. In 2010, Kavaf declared to the public that she believes gay people are sick. According to Delice, the words of Kavaf can be associated with masculine restoration in Turkey society. Delice indicates that the understanding based on the idea that men should be like men and women should be like women provokes the violence against the transsexuals and reinforces the social antagonism against lesbian and gay couples holding hands on the street (2012: 158). It seems that these types of examples can be considered as the reflections of the sex wars, which sometimes originated the sexuality's intersection with gender⁵². I need to admit here that the fieldwork provided an empirical grounding for understanding how LGBT+ Alevis who embrace intersecting identities deal with all those gender-specific matters.

⁵² I first meet the phrase 'the sex wars' in Gayle S. Rubin's *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality* (2007) which helped me to think about sex.

9.1. How apparent is heteronormativity in the lives of LGBT+ Alevis? : Gender-Specific Expectations

9.1.1. The Issue of Marriage

At the outset, I need to point out that families express the heterosexual marriage as an expectation after a certain age in Turkey. The Islamic arguments that I have outlined in earlier chapters seem to play a significant role in maintaining the heterosexual norms and practices including the marriage. Even the latest discussion about the law allowing religious civil servants (muftis) to perform civil marriages in Turkey is the striking example for understanding how the gender, sexuality, and religion intersect in people's lives⁵³. In this regard, I talked with LGBT+ Alevis how they negotiate the issues like the marriage and family around compulsory heterosexuality that families usually impose on their children. By this way, it also became possible to see what meanings attributed to the marriage among today's Alevis, considering the difficulties in divorce, especially within the conventional Alevi societies. Acknowledging that the marriage has gone through many changes, Belkis Menemencioğlu states that marriage is a phenomenon, which is sanctified also in Alevi tradition, and the promises given by women-men on wedding table must be kept forever (2011: 131).

Bozkır is one of the LGBT+ Alevis who considerably feels the pressure to conform the heteronormative way of life. The name of a novel he is working on is 'the enemy at the door: marriage'. Bozkır ironically says that his family that asks him to get married should find a man for him. In fact, Bozkır is the only person naming the marriage as the enemy, which has yet to come. Other interviewees, however, emphasized the concern of their families that their children will be lonely one day if they do not get married. I realize that the families do not consider that people might still feel lonely even if they institutionalized their

⁵³ Uras, U. (2017, October 19). Turkey: Religious Officials to perform civil marriages. Last accessed November 5, 2017, from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/turkey-religion-officials-perform-civil-marriages-171019132948431.html>

relationships. Besides, the marriage is not still considered enough to get over the danger of being lonely if there is no grandchild. Zeynep mentioned that the marriage sometimes becomes the main topic of conversation with her mother:

My mother asks me to get married because I am 31 years old now. She keeps telling me I will not be lonely if I have a child [...] I sometimes tell her that she does not need to worry because making a baby is a technical issue. I do not need to marry for it. Of course, if I gave birth to a child outside of marriage, my mother would have to explain it to our surroundings. I do not think she would prefer this way. My mother approaches the marriage as something beautiful and a way to spend the life⁵⁴ (Zeynep, interview, May 9, 2017, Istanbul).

In addition, it was interesting to listen that Zeynep's mother does not support arranged marriage, which is the old tradition but still seen in Turkey's relatively conservative communities. It is not surprised when I consider the views of Zeynep's mother about the virginity issue that I addressed earlier. However, I need to underline that the flirting and socializing remains taboo in many Anatolian cities from which some LGBT+ Alevi I interviewed preferred to leave. Although there are the exceptions, it is still hard to discuss living together before marriage, having sex before marriage and in Zeynep's words, having a child outside of marriage. The rules and restrictions about dating, I guess, become the ways to distance people from their love object(s). Indeed, when such objects are same-sex, the local cultural attitudes become more complicated. Sara Ahmed beautifully reflects the story based on the happenings took place on that day she gathered with her family around the dining table:

In the face of what appears, we must ask what disappears. In the conventional family home what appears requires following a certain line, the family line that directs our gaze. The heterosexual couple becomes a "point" along this line, which is given to the child as its inheritance or background. The background then is not simply behind the child: it is what the child is asked to aspire toward. The background, given in this way, can orientate us toward the future: it is where the child is asked to direct its desire by accepting the family line as its own inheritance. There is pressure to inherit this line, a pressure that can speak the language of love, happiness, and care, which pushes us along specific paths. We do not know what we could become without these points of pressure, which insist

⁵⁴ See Appendix A25.

that happiness will follow if we do this or we do that. And yet, these places where we are under pressure don't always mean we stay on line; at certain points we can refuse the inheritance-at points that are often lived as "breaking points." We do not always know what breaks at these points (Ahmed, 2006: 90).

Inspired by the ideas of Ahmed, I question whether the advice of family members and relatives about marriage can be a pressure that can speak the language of love, happiness, and care which pushes LGBT+ Alevis along specified paths. Apparently, LGBT+s are trying to be convinced that they will not become lonely at the end of such paths. Özgür, similar to Zeynep, said that their mother who does not know about the sexuality of Özgür expects them to marry. According to Özgür, it is their mother's expectation, but not in the form of pressure which leads hegemony over their lives. The importance of 'coming out' which I expounded in the previous chapter appears here once again. The families' awareness of their children's' sexualities may start subtle changes in family patterns specifically about focusing on individuals' autonomy and preferences. However, it does not mean the coming out ceases the gender-specific expectations, as I witnessed in the story of Melis.

In our conversation, Melis expressed that she has been through transgender experience but she is not a social woman shaped by gender roles. Since she is a woman in the eyes of her family now, she said there are things she needs to be careful. Melis thinks that those things she shared below are not means of the pressure her family uses but appear in the form of care, which Sara Ahmed refers:

My mother sometimes tries to teach me the womanhood. For example, she shows me how to cook or how to wash dishes. The hours I go out and come back to home become a matter between us. Not only family but also the men I flirt with sometimes impose the gender roles. They want to see me as a woman answering traditional expectations. On the other hand, we have our facts and knowledge about life. I have tried to keep the transition process as natural as possible. I could use long hairpieces and silicone breasts but I refused. I do not distinguish between good and bad. I am only talking about my reality⁵⁵ (Melis, interview, May 27, 2017, Istanbul).

⁵⁵ See Appendix A26.

I cannot deny the importance of Melis's political awareness on such gender issues. In addition, her words reminded me the groundbreaking argument of Monique Wittig in the *Straight Mind* that “lesbians are not women”. According to Wittig, “the refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not” (2013: 47). Wittig also explains that the category of sex is a category of dominance, which cannot be a product of natural dominance, but of the social dominance of women by men, for there is but social dominance (2013: 39). Considering Wittig’s these and the other argument that the category of sex does not exist a priori, before all society as the political category that establishes society as heterosexual, I better comprehend what Melis did mean by saying she is not a social woman. Apart from these, Melis also underlined the fact of social dominance of women by men in her thoughts about the marriage. For her, the marriage, when examined the women's place, seems to be dependent on men. Likewise, Wittig argues the marriage as an institution of personal dependence, which imposed upon women and acknowledges the lesbianism culture through which the meanings of such institutions could be questioned (2013: 87). Even though the wedding traditions that are institutionalized are funny and outdated practices for her, Melis does not ignore the fact that how happy her family could be if she gets married. On the contrary to narratives of Melis, Çiğdem and E.N. both feel no pressure on the marriage. Even Çiğdem said that she did not have feelings of obligation about the marriage and never imagined herself in a wedding dress because she is a lesbian.

As seen, the marriage institution in Turkey is an issue that people face when they come to a certain age. For some scholars like Tuna Erdem, it relies on the idealization of a lifelong union and carries the monogamy (2012: 41). For Erdem, the marriage is an institution that ignores the fact that people can change their objects of desire. All of this, in fact, seems like a heteronormative and hegemonic ideal of marriage. Such marriage idealization is also encouraged by Islam and its conservative followers in most of the time. As Asifa Siraj stresses, marriage in Islam is imbued with spiritual meaning, for its followers represent the fulfillment of half of their faith, and epitomizes the only legitimate expression of human

sexuality and procreation (2014: 206). It is quite common in the Islamic environments in Turkey that the men are perceived as carriers of the lineage and women are positioned as carriers of tradition and culture. When it comes to Alevi societies, even the prohibition of marriage between families engaging in the *kirvelik* relationship shows that there may be an authentic tradition about marriage among Alevis. These traditions seem to decide what the Alevis' love object might be, which is open to discussing in my opinion. In any faith-based community, one way or another, the heterosexual marriage becomes a stop on the *yol* (path) that people are asked to follow for recognition.

9.1.2. The Military Service

Here is another point that the subjectivities which have been idealized in Turkey seem Turkish, Sunni, Muslim and heterosexual men. Especially for men, the heterosexual marriage means not only reaching one's maturity but also proving that they become real men. However, the construction of masculinity is not related only to the marriage. Pınar Selek, with her focus on different marginalized groups, suggests that for arriving at the traditionally accepted level of masculinity in Turkey, men are required to pass three stages before the marriage: the circumcision, the military service, getting a job (2013: 222). In our conversation, Bozkır added that what needed first for becoming the real men is having short hair before the circumcision. E.N. also said playing football and going to coffeehouses could be added to the list of Selek. Among these, military service in Turkey is a legal obligation and regarded as the sacred duty of all men who prove they are 'healthy'. The military considers LGBT+s as the ones having deficiencies and sick and therefore exclude them out of the military. Openly LGBT+s that have been registered in national identity cards as the male at birth have to prove their sexualities to avoid military service if they want to. Furthermore, serving in the military accepted as an important period in a Turkish man's life is celebrated with a feast within Turkey societies including Alevis. Bozkır, as a gay Alevi, narrated the days his family wanted to organize such ceremony while sending him to the military:

I went to military service. I regret. At that time, military service seemed to be a way of salvation for me. Since I could not go out of Mardin by job appointment, I applied for military service. Then I was charged as the soldier teacher to the same village in Mardin. I did not have my current political consciousness at the time. If I had to go the military service today, I would struggle for getting the pink certificate. For people in my hometown, a military service is a place where mother's boys are gathering. My family would organize a feast for me if I did not oppose. In the eyes of my family, I was as obstinate as a mule in the past since they approach me more moderate now⁵⁶ (Bozkır, interview, May 8, 2017, Istanbul).

The certificate that Bozkır pays attention to labels the LGBT+s as rotten when they refuse to serve to the military. In the process of receiving this report, individuals are expected to be feminine enough to be ineligible for military service. For example, Özgür, one of those LGBT+s who received the certificate in 2008, mentioned that they had to grow hair and wear unisex dresses to not seen as a male. They also had to hide that they were a bisexual. Because bisexuality involves orienting to the women, it would not be regarded as enough as to be exempt from the military in Özgür's opinion. The process demonstrates that the policies and standards of the military service are regulated based on the essentialist view on gender and sexuality and 'rotten' ones are positioned in the bottom lines of the hierarchies of the sexual value. To me, there is no importance of picking people according to their biological bodies and appearance because, eventually, with the words of a gay friend of mine who served in the military, "everyone seems like green frogs in those uniforms". We should be continued to question the participation of women and LGBT+s to the processes such as war and peace, which affect their lives.

Other interviewees, Melis and E.N. also refused to serve the military and received the certificate of military exemption. All of them were agreed on that the process of seeking the military exemption in Turkey is very challenging and full of humiliating practices. The experience of Melis about the military service shows that the diverse gender affiliations are not acknowledged in heteronormative

⁵⁶ See Appendix A27.

societies and it has created havoc in the life of people who have transgender experiences:

I have refused to go to the military for years. When I was trying to receive the certificate of exemption, I was processing my transition [...] the military's rules are disgusting. Some things seem easier today however people still have problems. I also had problems in getting the certificate, even though I was a visible woman. Visible! I mean, I was almost same with my current appearance. It has been three years. Because I have not gone for years to serve the military, they imposed a fine. There are such stories as well. This is a dirty situation for Turkey⁵⁷ (Melis, interview, May 27, 2017, Istanbul).

Another common theme in the stories of E.N., Özgür, and Melis is that their parents were not judgmental and did not put the pressure on them. It seems that their anti-militarist stances may have originated in the families. In fact, the violence culture involving militarist components is not praised so much among Alevis according to my observations and experiences. Nonviolence can be one of the distinctive elements of the Alevi culture. However, as I mentioned somewhere in the thesis, the new construction of an authentic Turkish nationalism in Republican era favored the Alevis as the real bearers of the ancient Turkish Anatolian culture (Zeidan, 1999: 76). Therefore, although they are not involved in the conventional definition of ideal Turkishness and live with a fear of being targeted by the governments, Alevis support the Kemalist nationalism and its military tradition with their devotion to the principles and revolutions of Atatürk. Understanding the historical process may open new ways to think the militarism from the point of Alevis. Besides, according to Nimet Okan, the place of women in Alevi society is another cause that eased the congruity between Alevi beliefs and Turkishness. Okan notes that the Republic's policies towards women-men equality, together with the assertion that this equality was innate in Alevi rhetoric and became a distinguishing feature separating *Alevilik* from other religious groups including Sunnis, formed the basis for the Alevi support of the Kemalist reforms (2017: 3). Okan details her argument with the example of secular reforms and regulations about the dress, which became the first sparks of the binary

⁵⁷ See Appendix A28.

opposition between unveiled Alevi women who supported the secular Republic and veiled Sunni women who adopted an Islamic way of life. Given all this, as I mentioned in part 4.2, Okan criticizes the rhetoric of gender equality highlighted among Alevis based on the fieldwork she has done. Okan remarks that the Alevi women in their interviews strive to recount the inequality they have been experienced (2017: 16). On the other hand, some of the researchers acknowledging the unequal, potentially exploitative gender relations among Alevis assert that the negative examples cannot be generalized to all Alevis and those happen because of the personal-based or society-based reasons, not theological. Acknowledging these diverse approaches, at this point, I would like to move beyond the rhetoric of gender equality among Alevis and suggest those questions: would LGBT+ Alevis' refusal to follow the straight line be assumed as the sign of deviation also from the Alevi path? In which situation the lines and paths intersect and create the oppression? I am looking for answers to such questions under the next title.

9.2. Looking Beyond the Rhetoric of Gender Equality among Alevis: The Multidimensionality of Oppression and the Personal Struggle Ways

As Sara Ahmed reminds us, “in the face of what appears, we must ask what disappears” (2006: 90). The heterosexual marriage is shaped by heteronormative tendencies and reinforced, however, the gay marriage whether one likes it or not, is never talked issue in Turkey society. “Parenting by same-sex couples is unheard of since there is no marriage, partnership or joint custody rights” (Baba, 2011: 61). While the militarist ideals and rhetoric has been sanctified everywhere including the mainstream media, it is not even possible to discuss the right of conscientious objection. Finally, when the academics, consciously or not, touch on the gender issue in Alevi societies through the rigid categories of women-men and only heterosexual encounters, the LGBT+ reality disappears. For this reason in this chapter of the thesis, I have given place to the different forms of masculinities and femininities that LGBT+ Alevis expressed and their own gender-based experiences. At the same time, the LGBT+ Alevis I

interviewed do not ignore the claims of gender equality in the Alevi communities, which also affects their lives. The LGBT+ Alevis affirm Alevi culture concerning gender equality when they compare it to the traditions of other faith-based communities, specifically the Sunni groups. Nevertheless, it does not obscure that there are also patriarchal structures, practices, and asymmetrical power relations in Alevi societies in which everyone is accepted as a genderless soul. I should note that it is highly probable that there are differences about the gender-specific issues between the relatively rural areas where Alevi traditions are sustained and the urban areas where those traditions transform. On the other hand, some of the examples I have seen both in the literature and in the field show that such socio-spatial differentiations do not hinder the operation of the heteronormative way of life. For instance, Melis and Zeynep mentioned that the women in their Alevi surroundings have access to the public sphere but the rulers are always men. In our conversation, Zeynep referred to numerical inequality in gender distribution among executives of one Alevi village association in Istanbul:

Only two of the executives in our village association are women [...] when we try to encourage others, they say that their work would be very difficult with childcare, home care, and so on. That is why they do not become candidates. In meetings, men sometimes encourage the women for being part of the board. I hear things like "Our women, our strong Alevi women" in the meetings. If you need a woman in the association, then first go and clean your house instead of your wife⁵⁸ (Zeynep, interview, May 9, 2017, Istanbul).

What Zeynep told me shows the institutionalized form of gender relations among Alevis in the urban area. The governance ways like co-chairing which empower women in public life have not still come to the agenda of some Alevis in the city. Apparently, Zeynep does not find such incidents politically correct, before everything else. Interestingly, Cemal Salman shares similar examples from the rural areas in his article through which he critically approaches the equality claims among Alevis. For example, somewhere in his article, Salman lists some questions that have evoked him to problematize of the gender issue as follows: "Would not I have to come across a woman who is *Muhtar* in one of these 32

⁵⁸ See Appendix A29.

villages?⁵⁹ Why do men eat first at the funeral dinners? Why was it always the woman who served while I talk with the men?” (2016: 167). Salman puts forward that the gender equality discourse in *Alevilik* sets the discussion about gender among the Alevis and more specifically on the social position of women which can be understood from his questions above (2016: 164-165). It would not be wrong to assert at this point that women are valued but not freed when I consider some of Alevi practices both in rural and urban areas. Alternatively, with the words of Bozkır, there seems an *Alevilik* understanding, which cares the women but prioritizes the men. Indeed, it is still ambiguous how the different sexualities and the ones who feel neither male nor female have been positioned in this framework.

Apart from these, whether to what extent the dominant conservative Islamic culture and the issue of the class have a part in such gendered practices of Alevis is also worth to discuss. For a starting point, I suggest looking at the words of E.N. below:

There is the issue of masculinity myth, which is also class-based among Alevis. For example, think of young Alevi men working in a manufacture of ready-made clothes in an Alevi neighborhood. When they get the salary, they come to Taksim to pick up the girls⁶⁰ (E.N., interview, May 26, 2017, Istanbul).

All these interwoven relations of gender, sexuality and the other fields of life trigger me to reconsider the distinction between becoming an acceptable man and woman and living as an appropriate genderless soul. I know that, with the words of Özgür, the Alevi societies are not hundred percent queer or gay-friendly. However, I want to believe that most of the people are open to differences and change. The words of my uncle that we lost last year show that people, even if they were 70 years old, would be able to face themselves and the others with reason and conscience. In a family gathering, my uncle said that he was sorry all the bad things he has done to his wife. Perhaps this was a way for him to receive his wife's blessings or just a confession. One way or another, maybe because I was

⁵⁹ *Muhtar* is the lowest elected representative of the neighborhood.

⁶⁰ See Appendix A30.

in the research process for this thesis, his words meant a lot about the gender and the life and helped me to reconsider where the power comes from and whom it is used against. To 'know' is vital even if sometimes it is your father, brother, friends, uncle and even yourself oppressing in the changing power relations. As Foucault notes, the power is everywhere and “produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another” (1978: 93). It is also equally important to be aware of the multidimensional of discriminatory practices arising from the power relations and how the category of heresy attributed to different identities has been constituted.

In the case of the LGBT+ Alevis, I have seen that they are not necessarily the subject of oppression because of the intersections of the straight line and the Alevi path. It seems that the sexuality and *Alevilik* also have independent effects in their lives. At such a point, it would be correct to remember the advice of Weldon on the specific ways that structures interact to shape the particular social position:

We can best explore additive effects by examining each axis of inequality (gender, race, class, sexuality, etc.) separately. We can best explore multiplicative effects by examining how the independent effects revealed in an autonomous analysis of each structure combine to mitigate or exacerbate one another's effects. Thus, a combination of analytic strategies will be required in order to paint a full picture of the politics of gender. But *comparative* analysis is key to illuminating the range of variation in structures of gender, race, class, and other axes of domination, the ways in which these structures interact, and the wide array of strategies for resistance and reform (Weldon, 2006: 246-247).

In fact, the stories that I listened in the field pushed me to give credit to the arguments of Weldon. For example, Bozkır mentioned that he has been marginalized as both an Alevi and the gay. When I asked whether he has ever exposed to such sayings that an Alevi man cannot be like him, Bozkır responded in a way that proves the axes of inequality sometimes function separately, at least on the surface:

I was a child who could not speak fully until the age of six, and I was having trouble in speaking. I could not pronounce some words including the name of mine correctly. People could not tolerate the differences. Because of my speech disorder, I was labeled as *lal*. Afterwards, I became

the *lal kari* because I did not confirm the masculinity expectations of the society⁶¹. That is how it went until I finished the high school. I was playing with girls and not boys. I wanted to wear my sister's clothes in those days. The idea that Bozkır is a girlish was also common among my teachers [...] Many were saying that an Alevi could not be like me. Since I was a person who does not kiss every elder's hands or who does say some things to dedes in Cem Houses, I was sometimes perceived as an inappropriate Alevi⁶² (Bozkır, interview, May 8, 2017, Istanbul).

The fact that the oppression and discrimination Bozkır, me or other LGBT+ Alevis have experienced, also practiced by the Alevis reveals the complex relatedness between the field of sexuality and other structures in life. However, sometimes I see that when we face evils from the outside of Alevi world, the *Alevilik* that we raised with, mitigate the effects of the sexuality or gender-based inequalities or we want to believe so. I am 26 years old now. Until today, I was also exposed to verbally and physically bullying on the streets. Once when I was assaulted and robbed by the strangers who hate LGBT+s like me, the 'hate' did not finish over there. I have faced the systematic homophobia spreading from the neighborhood relations to the police. I guess the different violence forms that will never find the legitimate ground appear according to how the selves and bodies are perceived, coded and projected. For example, the differences in the violence experiences of me and a lesbian and a trans can be examined with this premise. In any case, I believe as long as the bodies continue to appear with all differences and colors and stand together with beloved ones, the hate never win even if it comes either from the inside or outside⁶³. Thus, the ones acting with hate just suppose that they won.

All these bring us to a point, which Foucault also argues: “where there is power, there is resistance” (1978: 95). According to Foucault, the resistance, like power, is multiple and each form of resistance is a special case:

⁶¹ In Turkish, the word *lal* is used for the ones who are mute and, the word *kari* means the woman and wife.

⁶² See Appendix A31.

⁶³ As Nil Mutluer noted, Judith Butler argues that the history is an exclusion (abjection) history. Some bodies are built as norms in history and, some are excluded. Bodies become gendered existences in the context of power relations and within the discourse (2013: 16).

These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence, there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat (1978: 95-96).

From the words of Foucault, I understand that there is always the possibility of resistance, which also becomes the pre-requisite of the existence of power. The power and resistance have coexisted and coextensive. As I mentioned, I associate the queer way of life also with such possibility of resistance in all facets of life including sexuality and believe that we may challenge to existing mechanisms of power and make our political claims through using the intersectional perspective as a tool. For the intersectionality and queer that have guided me in the research process, Momin Rahman says that “in many ways, queer intersectionality is simply the necessary tautology: intersectionality is inevitably disruptively queer and queer must be analytically intersectional” (2010: 956). Given these premises, LGBT+ Alevis I interviewed expressed their political stances/engagements alongside possible struggle ways, which may open new spaces to different forms of relatedness, which queer also points.

‘What does not kill you makes you stronger’.

In the interviews, the phrase above came to my mind very often. When the pain does not totally stop our life functions, we generally look the ways of making the pain functional. We try to heal ourselves. In most cases, when we use our bodies as an instrument in endless encounters with others, the chance for change and transformation rises. For example, I have participated to the Armenian-Turkish dialogue workshop in spring 2017. I have learned a practical approach to historical narrative mediation in conflict context and experienced the memory walk. I may claim that when I shared that I am gay to all participants, the

discussions went beyond the 1915 events and the Turkish-Armenian controversy over history. The reason is clear: I was not there only as a pure Turk or one from Turkey. I was there as gay, Alevi, Istanbul inhabitant, a Cultural Studies student and so on. At the end of the workshop, which was held both in Istanbul and in Yerevan, an Armenian participant said he would not join a gay wedding because of the social and religious reasons. That would be a personal choice, which I may respect. More importantly, I am still sure that he will remember all things we talked and not hesitate to contact with other sexualities. He will try to understand the differences as he did during workshops. Contacting him became the cherry on top of my educational experience this year. In our conversation, Melis also mentioned her visibility as an action:

Now I am feminist. I am an anarchic queer trans and feminist person. I have dealt with the issues of the manhood, and I have suffered. Many stories we talk about come from the masculinity. In Turkey, our sense of revolution overlaps in line with our traditional family and upbringing. I am coming from an Alevi family that is left wing. Revolution, revolution, revolution... It is always the men's revolution. It is always the left's revolution. Turkey is a very interesting place. I am the revolution. I am a micro-revolutionist person. I am one of those visible proofs⁶⁴ (Melis, interview, May 27, 2017, Istanbul).

As seen in these examples, LGBT+ Alevis I interviewed and me, produce, do and try to make our bodies visible. Even our existence itself sometimes becomes the form of resistance. Sometimes we struggle with writing against to be silenced. Sometimes we use our occupations to transform our surroundings. Sometimes a photo with Zulfiqar necklace or a rainbow flag we put on Facebook opens a road to the transformation⁶⁵. Finally, sometimes our unique subjective experiences meet the unique experiences of others. They break apart, come together, grow, and have the opportunity to be represented in sexual politics. They infiltrate the struggle movement, which is supposed to be organized in a horizontal, non-hierarchical way. They are collectively mobilized this time just as Butler narrates:

⁶⁴ See Appendix A32.

⁶⁵ Zulfiqar is known as the name of the sword of Hazrat Ali.

It is not that bodies are simply mute life-forces that counter existing modalities of power. Rather, they are themselves modalities of power, embodied interpretations, engaging in allied action. On the one hand, these bodies are productive and performative. On the other hand, they can only persist and act when they are supported, by environments, by nutrition, by work, by modes of sociality and belonging. And when these supports fall away, they are mobilized in another way, seizing upon the supports that exist in order to make a claim that there can be no embodied life without social and institutional support, without ongoing employment, without networks of interdependency and care. They struggle not only for the idea of social support and political enfranchisement, but their struggle takes on a social form of its own⁶⁶.

The last idea of Butler is striking in my opinion because the struggle's transformation into social form is the key for mirroring the sexuality and gender-based prejudices, oppression, and injustices or just the ignorance within the political organizations. For example, Bozkır is a member of the LGBTI commission, which operates in the Eğitim Sen and carries out some activities on the gender issue⁶⁷. Bozkır said the commission has been established to struggle against the homophobia within the Eğitim Sen and added that the number of people they reach increase through socializing. Similarly, E.N. remarked that they, as Istanbul LGBTT Solidarity Association, have taken many actions sometimes to analyze the organized struggle itself:

In the Ramadan month of the Sunni Muslims, the earth iftar is organized and LGBTIs support it. During the Gezi Park protests, we have seen such scenes. Once, we have discussed why LGBTIs did not organize similar iftar table in an Alevi neighborhood in the month of Muharram. It is still something that can be done⁶⁸ (E.N., interview, May 26, 2017, Istanbul).

What Bozkır and E.N. have done is that they try to raise voices of the alternative narratives and politics which sometimes forgotten by the organized struggles. It seems that they develop and maintain their multiple identities by also negotiating the others engaging in the political activities. To sum up, as Mutluer points, understanding the resistance strategies of ones who are pushed out by the bans of

⁶⁶ Butler, J. (2011). *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street*. Last accessed December 5, 2017, from <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>

⁶⁷ Eğitim Sen is the short name of Turkey's Union of Education Workers.

⁶⁸ See Appendix A33.

the hegemony is significant (2013: 15). The sex acts, body, love of the ones who are pushed out become the source of freedom and act of political rebellion that gives 'hope' for tomorrows.

PART III. CONCLUSION

I have written this thesis for highlighting the idea of diversity, multiculturalism and multiple identities and focused specifically on the intersection of sexuality and faith in the lives of LGBT+ Alevi residing in Istanbul. I believe the experiences of LGBT+ Alevi, which remained unnoticed in the academic field until today can finally be heard. My intention of giving voice and visibility to the intersecting identities does not mean comprehending everything and everyone by looking down on the field with the interpretive authority that we are said to have, as the researchers. For me, this thesis has been an attempt to give space to subjective experiences, testimonies, interpretations, reactions, and aspirations of LGBT+ Alevi by eluding the ethnocentrism and sexual essentialism. Additionally, I have strived to address the process in which identities are constructed on the personal level and discuss the impact of intersectionality on the lives of LGBT+ Alevi in relation to their community.

All the stories I listened in the field, the previous academic works as well as my observations and experiences encouraged me to reconsider the negotiation among intersecting identities in Turkey, where the boundaries are drawn sharply and values hierarchies involving binary oppositions are reproduced continuously. In such a geography we live in, some people seem equal than the others. Alternatively, if there is no final equality as idealized, some have at least more area of freedom. As long as the inequalities in reaching fundamental rights and freedoms continue, groups of people, who can be considered the carrier of a particular culture, demand what the others have, and thus the identities become increasingly politicized. Alevi and LGBT+s in Turkey that I have included in the current study are some of those groups, which have expressed the identity demands in an organized way for years. In my opinion, their history of struggle proves that the history of the said 'minorities' is not always the history of the

oppressed. The fighting processes within the power relations show the identity is also a site of resistance. As Jordan-Zachery states, the searches that simply describe how marginalized groups like Alevis and LGBT+s operate or function in the face of their oppression can be helpful to formulate a political framework of liberation (2007: 262). However, again with the remark of Jordan-Zachery, when such searches stand alone, they are not designed to liberate marginalized groups. This thesis can also be counted among the searches employing intersectionality as an analytical tool for highlighting the issue of identity as something consisting of several pieces, fragmented, free-floating and sometimes-remaining indefinable. It became also possible to show the societies host different subjectivities shaping by multiple identities. Giving these, I should specify that I did not use the intersectional framework with the belief that it would liberate the LGBT+ Alevis in an instant, rather I intended imagining the role of LGBT+ Alevis in creating interaction between the Alevi and LGBT+ communities. Further, I did not also ignore the possible contribution of LGBT+ Alevis along with the queer, feminism, mostly leftist politics in creating interaction between organized movements of these communities. For me, this means to imagine the possibility of the meeting of personal identity, the body, and other micro-level phenomena with the large-scale processes.

“Eşcinseliz buradayız! Sivas’ı, Maraş’ı unutturmayız!”⁶⁹

As I encountered in my readings on queer and intersectionality, the potentiality of broad political alliances may go beyond the binary oppositions and conventional identity-politics and produce different forms of relatedness that are never expected before. The research process and fieldwork for this thesis showed me there are still potential alliances waiting to be formed among Alevi and LGBT+ communities and even in the form exceeding those. I may try to summarize why such an alliance is a more likely scenario. First, as I have pointed out elsewhere in

⁶⁹ This slogan used by LGBT+s might be translated into English as follows: "We are gays. We are here. We will not make Sivas and Maraş forget!" See the news about it: Eşcinseliz buradayız! Sivas’ı, Maraş’ı unutturmayız! (2015, July 3). Retrieved November 26, 2017, from <http://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=19773>

the thesis, the category of heresy attributed to Alevis may have been constituted based on their sexual traditions along with the religious-cultural elements. The allegations on the practice *mum söndü* can be regarded as the sharpest example. Besides, different sexualities outside of heterosexual marriage are already considered as ones committing heresy. Not solely ones engaging same-sex relationships but also people affirming vast and various sexual culture are depicted as sinful. Therefore, the sexuality is a common theme exploited by the Sunni conservative heteronormative system in classifying Alevis and LGBT+s as heretics in Turkey in my opinion. Such 'commonality' would pave the way for enabling the consolidation of 'heretic' others.

Secondly, since Alevis and LGBT+s have formed opposition against the governments through street politics and demonstrations for years, I consider the possibility of their encounter quite likely and relatively healthy. For example, I see that the leftist policies sometimes become the common context of the struggle of Alevis and LGBT+s. When differences are acknowledged and such commonalities are noticed, the politics of Alevis and LGBT+s would evolve into a completely different way of thinking, working and acting together and may take us to new possibilities for building peace in an unimaginable future. Inspired by the queer perspective, the abovementioned form of possible relatedness between Alevis and LGBT+s would create the alternative tactics, strategies and a new language that can be used against to the power. These kinds of 'convergence' processes can be much more coordinated and sustainable with the involvement of organized open LGBT+ Alevis who have organic ties to both sides. The visible presence of the LGBT+ Associations and independent LGBT+ activists in the commemoration ceremony held for the victims of Sivas and Maraş in 2015 was a great example of one of the modes of relatedness that may surprise the ones owning the power. The LGBT+s' slogan I quoted above prove the intertwined nature of the power mechanisms and the need of gathering in the common context of struggle.

Apart from these, as the third, I may suggest the *can* discourse as phenomena that may be facilitating the possible alliance between LGBT+s and Alevi. I notice that the *can* discourse has been used as a ground of the gender egalitarian claims among Alevi and as a tool to emphasize the Alevi belief and practice as different from other faith-based communities, specifically the Sunni groups. Here, I express the *can* discourse as a phenomena highlighting the humanitarian traits of *Alevilik* as well as the idea of becoming genderless existence. When I worked on this thesis last summer, The Federation of the Alevi Communities in Germany (AABF) has made a public statement about the LGBT+s⁷⁰. AABF has declared to reject all approaches, which make the representation of LGBT+s in public difficult by reminding the *can* discourse as the core of Alevi belief. The declaration was shared by LGBT+s on their platforms and thus it spread to large masses. In fact, such kind of solidarity flourishing by the *can* discourse that brings Alevi and LGBT+ communities together means something about the potential of the alliance which I have imagined.

All these can be read as my attempt to reconsider the negotiation between marginalized groups whose struggles, with the words of Butler, may go beyond the idea of social support and political enfranchisement and take on a social form of its own. Indeed, I cannot know what the future holds for everyone, but I may suggest it is necessary to problematize the oppressor-oppressed relations and, as Sara Ahmed suggests, recognize how relationships of power mediate and frame the encounter between the others for making such potential alliances intimate (2002: 570). Ahmed beautifully writes on this subject as follows:

A politics of encountering gets closer in order to allow the differences between us, as differences that involve power and antagonism, to make a difference to the very encounter itself. The differences between us necessitate the dialogue, rather than disallow it – a dialogue must take place, precisely because we do not speak the same language. The ‘we’ of such a collective politics is what must be worked for, rather than being the foundation of our collective work (2002: 570).

⁷⁰ See the relevant link: İncancımızın Kâbesi İnsan, Yolcusu Can'dır. (2017, July 18). Retrieved November 26, 2017, from <http://www.alevihaberajansi.net/inancimizin-kabesi-insan-yolcusu-candir/>

Working for the 'we' pointed out by Ahmed also necessitates being aware of potential risks. In the encounters between Alevis and LGBT+s, the practicing and mobilizing the LGBT+ phobia while condemning Alevi phobia is one of those risks in my opinion. The same is also valid for vice-versa. To put it another way, since the power relations are reproduced everywhere at any time, sometimes there arises the risk of creating hierarchy also among the marginalized others. Struggling with and for others should not mean to compare our past and present sufferings with theirs. Indeed, the others become others because of the policies and practices of the hegemonic power and there is nothing wrong to put those pains into words. 'Others' have the right to raise their voices against people, who see themselves superior just because they are born into privileged families favored by the power. However, consciously or not, when the members of a community that claims to be oppressed begin to see themselves as privileged in encounters with the other others who have differences that they believed insignificant, the possible solidarity, relatedness and alliances remain unfulfilled. At this point, I assert that LGBT+ Alevis' novel experiences of their identities and their social relations that I addressed in this thesis may become the reference point for subverting such risks between Alevi and LGBT+ groups since LGBT+ Alevis have already negotiated some of those risks. Thinking about how the LGBT+ Alevis positioned themselves in this framework is as important as the question how and with whom to be allied. The idea that alliances can be formed even with the LGBT+ and Alevi friendly Islamic environment should not be despised in my opinion. One way or another, I believe there is a cultivated potential coming from the history and waiting to be processed for the inevitable common future of those, who are systematically oppressed. For me, it is a future in which the borders will be crossed and dissolved and, the freedom in all facets of life will be raised. I wish such future for not only LGBT+ Alevis, for all different subjectivities and expressions that disturb the straight line. Ultimately, as the motto says, the liberation of LGBT+s will liberate heterosexuals as well.

The fieldwork I have done for the thesis taught me a lot. I have witnessed the experiences of LGBT+ Alevis, who are trying to make their cultures living in the

way they believe. I have tried to understand how they establish themselves and their world and locate an identity, which makes sense to them in the intersections of LGBT+ and faith. I have listened to their stories, which I often felt I am a part. Throughout the thesis process I bore in mind the fluidity of identity, I have also pondered how my personal history, stories, political stance would have affected the process itself. I have tried to figure out what it means to search and write as an ‘insider’. I sometimes remembered that the field study was done by my initiatives and interventions and the transformation of the stories, which are told in verbal form into text, is my job, as a researcher. I knew that I was a part of the public nature of the interview as an interviewer. On the other hand, I can stress that my relationship with the LGBT+ Alevi I talked with became very interactive and it went beyond the conventional field practices, which have been supposed to be neutral under the certain rules. As S. Nam Kim suggests it, the dynamic process of interactivity between the narrators and the researcher is not necessarily in harmony (2008: 1352) and I have experienced it during the fieldwork. For Kim, members of the marginalized groups can speak through oral history as it is claimed; however, they do not speak “in the abstract, but speak *to* the researcher, *with* the researcher and, in as much as the material is published, *through* the researcher” (Portelli, 1998: 72, cited in Kim, 2008: 1353). I have positioned myself as a messenger who carries the stories of LGBT+ Alevi including me to the academia. As Nimet Okan suggests, the studies that look at the extent to which the theological roots of the rhetoric of equality between women and men in *Alevilik* overlap with the lives of Alevi women today within the framework of gender relations are so significant (2017: 17). However, as I have referred before, even the studies critically examining the gender in Alevi belief and practice have failed to notice the LGBT+ reality. That is why this thesis can be understood as the review of what the field showed me and I hope it will help an open conversation of such subjects also in the literature.

I should also mention here that I could not detail everything in the framework of this thesis in which I approach prudent to the field and myself. Therefore, I would like to share the subjects, which may be elaborated in further researches. Almost

all LGBT+ Alevis I interviewed embrace *Alevilik* as a part of their cultural identifications. Some of them also identified as atheists, deists, or non-believer in many ways. However, during the preparation phase for the fieldwork, I was informed about LGBT+s who adopt *Alevilik* also as a faith and worship. Even I met with an LGBT+ Alevi *dede*. Since I limited my research with Istanbul borders, I could not arrange a meeting with that *dede* living in another city of Turkey. There was not enough time to do it either. Interviewing with the open LGBT+ *dedes* might enrich similar studies in terms of understanding the role of the sexuality and gender in the traditional institution of the *dede* in *Alevilik*. The searches focusing on the institutionalized context and actors might deepen the issues I pointed.

Moreover, regardless of the level of religiosity, I have listened to highly politicized narratives from LGBT+ Alevis because most of them have tied to an organized movement. With their political consciousness of the marginalized identities and sense of struggle history, the LGBT+ Alevis I interviewed also contributed the intellectual part of my thesis. The issue of the class which was reminded me on every occasion is one of those contributions. From meeting the basic needs to the access of the cultural and intellectual capital, a lot in life are related to the money, therefore the class. To me, it is necessary to emphasize that the class is intertwined with race, ethnicity, gender and other facets of life and the perceived socioeconomic status of people determines their power, autonomy, privileges, immunities, and the relationships with others. I should note that I did not classify LGBT+ Alevis I interviewed based on their occupations, level of income or the skin color they have, the ethnicity they belong, the mother language they speak. On the other hand, for example, the inclusion of only sexuality and the faith to the thesis does not mean that I am unaware of the fact that there are LGBT+ Alevis who self-identifies as also Kurd, Arabian and so on. I regard all these as the significant pieces related to the class issues, which are worth to discuss in details in the future.

Some incidents that took place during the days when I wrote this thesis made me think that Alevi and LGBT+s do not have the luxury of being apolitical in Turkey⁷¹. Since the conditions have been getting harder for all dissident people in the country, I recognized the necessity to imagine the potential alliances I mentioned before. However, I may still argue that some LGBT+ Alevi like ones I interviewed with come to the forefront in the political sphere while the others do not prefer it. I do not need to categorize people as apolitical because I know many of them are afraid of being labeled. Besides, as H. Burcu Baba asserts, being LGBT+ is not always a radical act or an act of resistance that brings critique to the prevailing heteronormative order (2011: 59). In one way or another, I think hard conditions make us the person who we are. Sometimes engaging, with the general term, to the politics provides the alternative solutions, which we do not find by ourselves. At the beginning of my research, my intention was not looking for the 'heroes' for my research goals; however, coincidentally I met with strong persons who critically and analytically learn something from their failures in life. I guess the reader may decide whose voice is speaking in this thesis but at the same time, the issues I dealt can be improved with more perspectives through which the differences such as the level of being politicized among the LGBT+ Alevi need to be taken into account. In addition, LGBT+ Alevi's relationship with the city and the buildings including the religious places might be one of those perspectives, which can be studied by further researchers.

Finally, I would like to remind that my focus was LGBT+ Alevi as a social phenomenon. However, based on the theological perspective, the LGBT+ issue is in *Alevilik* can also be examined. For this, for example, the written texts including

⁷¹ One of the incidents I mention took place in the capital, Ankara. The governor's office of Ankara banned the events of LGBTI organizations such as panels, movie screenings on behalf of social sensitivities from November 18. For details, see the link: Turkish capital Ankara bans all gay rights functions. (2017, November 19). Retrieved November 26, 2017, from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42043910> At the same time, the homes of Alevi living in Malatya were marked with a red cross by unknown people. Such ways of bullying, harassment, and intimidation Alevi face were so common in the 1970s, which I mentioned in chapter 4.1. It seems they did not end. Please see: Concerns rise after Alevi homes 'marked' in Malatya neighborhood. (2017, November 22). Retrieved November 26, 2017, from <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/concerns-rise-after-alevi-homes-marked-in-malatya-neighborhood-122880>

the teachings of *Alevilik* such as buyruks, 'Makalat' of Hacı Bektaş Veli and the Alevi periodicals might be analyzed with the techniques such as content analysis and semiotics. I am sure such method would pave the way for more understanding how LGBT+ reality occupies a place in the Alevi world.

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APPENDIX A

The Turkish Versions of Block Quotations from the In-depth Interviews

1. Geçen hafta Pazartesi, Salı Avrupa ILGA diye bir grup vardır, ILGA'nın bir toplantısına katıldım iki gün boyunca. Avrupa heyeti toplantısı sonunda lütfen salonun ortasına gelip el ele tutuşur musunuz dediler. Ben dedim 'Alevi misiniz?' dedim. (Gülüşmeler) Tabii tercüman aptallaştı böyle. Hayır, merziye mi yapıcaz dedim. Hani Alevi felsefesinde, el ele tutuşup ağıtlar yakılır. Onu ona anlatmaya çalıştım böyle. İşte Alevilerde böyle merziye diye bir şey vardır, ağıt tarzı, böyle el ele tutuşur insanlar kadınlı erkekli. Dibine kadar yaşıyorum, dibine kadar Aleviliğimi. Yani örgütlü bir LGBT'yim. İstanbul LGBT Dayanışma Derneği'nin yerel yönetimler sorumlusu ve yönetim kurulu üyesiyim. Dernek üyesi tüm arkadaşlarım Alevidir. Ve dibine kadar yaşıyorum Aleviliğimi. LGBT hareketi içerisinde de Aleviliğimi en son şeyine kadar yaşıyorum. Ne derler etiketine kadar mı diyim, artık ne diyim (E.N.)
2. Dolayısıyla aslında kimlikleri çok sahiplenmiyorum. Ama sanırım ezilen kimlikler olmaları bakımından her ortamda onun zıttı olanı savunmak zorunda kalıyorum, biz de varız diyebilmek için. Yani Alevilerin ortamında LGBTİlerin var olduğunu bi şekilde anlatmaya çalışıyorum. LGBTİlerin ortamında Kürtler var Aleviler var diyorum. Tamamen her şeyin kendimle ilgili olduğu bir ortamda kadınlar var ve ben bir kadını demek zorunda kalıyorum vesaire. Yani her bulunduğum aksi yönde diğer bulunduğum yönün propagandasını ve siyasetini yapmaya çalışıyorum. Çünkü ben sahiplenmiyor olabilirim ama LGBTİ Aleviler var. Hani bunu biliyorum. İşte Kürt Alevilerin hem Kürt hem Alevi kimliklerini sahiplenenleri var. Ve varlar biliyoruz filan. Bunun siyasetini yapıyorum. Şey Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi'nde siyaset yapıyorum. Orada da en yoğun üzerine düştüğüm konu LGBTİ politika (Zeynep)
3. Cem evlerine giderim. Gittiğimde şehit muhabbetleri dinlerdim. Ulusalçı Alevilerin cemleri devlet propagandası gibi gelirdi. Ocaktan ocağa geçen dedelik sistemi saltanata dönüşürse bu tehlikelidir. İşini bilenden ziyade geleneksel olan başa geliyor. Dedeler aynı düzlemde aynı tabularla bilinçsiz kalıyor. Bilinçlenmek, yoldan çıkmak gibi düşünülüyor. Biraz bilinçlenseler, Aleviliğin özüne inseler yol kendini çizecek (Bozkır)
4. On beş yıl önce falan gitmişimdir İstanbul'da gittim o zaman da. Ortak başka memleketlerden Alevilerle tanışmıştık, iş güç komşuluk vesaire derken o zamanlar gittim. Ama hiçbir zamanda içinde hissetmedim garip bir şekilde. O zamanlar daha farklıydı garip bir şekilde. Aslında çok yalnız olduğun için aslında içsel olarak kendini de dışlıyorsun (Melis)
5. Akışkan cinsiyetim diyim ben. Yani trans da olabiliyorum. Biseksüel de. Benim için akışkan cinsiyet diye koyalım. Eşcinselim. Aslında kuir kafadayım biraz ben ya. Ne bileyim sakallı olup da makyaj yaptığım peruk taktığım zamanlar da vardır yani. Kuir kafadayım evet. Şeyi de pek sevmiyorum açıkcası ben... Gey etiketi,

trans ya da biseks etiketlerini de sevmiyorum açıkcası. O anda ne hissediyorsam onu yaşıyorum (E.N.)

6. Kuir tamamen bir tavır olarak okudum, okumaya da devam edicem. O yüzden baskın olan normatif bütün hallere karşı bir durum. Şimdi şöyle bir şey ifade edicem. Asla kılıkla kıyafetle cinsellikle de çok bağlantılı bir şey değil aslına bakarsan. O hikâyelerden bir tanesi. Kişinin ben kuirim demesi yani orada mesela bütün yönelimleri reddetmesi ayrı bir hikâye, ama böyle çok da şekilci bir yer değil kuir. O yüzden saçının bir tarafını kazıtınca kuir olmuyorsun, belki bir nebze ama çok o kadar değil [...] Kuir zaten böyle bir şey. Bir zıtlık aslında içeriyor. Bir zıtlığı tabii ki var. Ama herhangi bir cisme büründüremeyeceğimiz bir şey kuir. Böyle bakıyorum. Bazen şey diyorum hatta bana çok gülüyorlar. Bence Alevi Kürt bir kadınla milliyetçi muhafazakâr bir adamın aşkı kuirdir diyorum. Ama kuir. Kuir âşıklardan bahsedeceksek çünkü sadece yönelim bazındaki bir şey değil ki kuir dediğimiz şey. Zıt olan bir şeylerin bir yerdeki uyumu da olabiliyor bazen (Melis)

7. Bence yok. Hiçbir anlamda. Yönelimle cinsiyet kimliğini ayırt etsek bile. Ya da edimleri. Ben açığımdır da mesela. Çok rahatımdır. Ne bileyim işte atıyorum mesela outdoor çok seviyorum, o bana çok çekici geliyor. İşte 30'umdan sonra hamamları filan keşfettim, yani çok oralarda daha public şeyleri seviyorum. Bir iki senedir şey hoşuma gitmeye başladı. Eskiden hiç düşünmezdim ya da bi tiksiniç gelirdi pissing falan şeyleri. O yüzden seneye benim neyden hoşlanacağımı bilmiyorum yani... (gülüşme) (Özgür)

8. Aleviler daha bir katı olmuyor. Mesela bizde şöyle bir şey yoktur işte: bir şey yaparsan gidip cehennemde yanacaksın. Yani Allah korkusu korku olarak gösterilmedi. Ya da benim ailemde en azından böyle söyletim. Daha çok Allah sevgisi, insan sevgisi, işte eline beline diline sahip ol, ahlak ön plana çıktı ve insanı tanıma. Hacı Bektaşî Veli'nin dediği gibi mesela hani benim kalbim insandır. Hani insanın özüne inme, insanın derinine inme [...] Daha da derinlere indiğimde eşcinselliğin bir suç, günah olmadığını bildim, ondan sonra da öyle devam ettim (Çiğdem)

9. Çünkü zaten erkek kardeşimle büyüdük ve vücudumuzda ergenlik bazı değişimler olasıya kadar yani cinselliği henüz keşfedene kadar annem ikimizi birlikte yıkıyordu çünkü. İşte sobalı bir evdeydik. Küvet vardı. İkimizi küvete atıp yıkayıp sonra ikimize birer havlu verip sobada ısıtıp çıkartıyordu duştan, banyodan. Ben erkek kardeşimle çok şey büyüdüm. O da çok rahattır, ben de. Yani birbirimize her şeyimizi anlatabildik, hala da öyleyizdir. İşte küçüklükten bu yana birbirimizden fiziksel olarak da birbirimizin yanında giyinmek soyunmak şey değil tabii çıplıklık olmaktan bahsetmiyorum ama denizde olabileceğimiz çıplaklığı biz evde de zaten çok rahat şey yaptık. Ben don sütyen gezebildim o donuyla gezebildi evde vesaire. Böyle hiç... Ve annem de aman şöyle aman böyle işte bu sizin en kıymetli varlığınız bir dakika bir erkek bir kadının yanında böyle dolaşmamalı, bir kadın da bir erkeğin yanında filan demedi. Erkek kardeşimin benden iki yaş küçük olması benim için şey avantajı da sağladı. Yani kardeşim evdeki o cinsel tabuları espriler ile şunlar bunlarla aştı [...] Annem bana bakirelik

muhabbetinde bile şey dedi. Ben sadece lise sona kadar hani üniversiteye gidene kadar sen yıpranma yanlış kişilerle ilişki kurma ve sıkıntı yaşama diye böyle bir şey asla yaşansın istemem. Olursa da sen yine benim kızımsın. Yapacak bir şey yok. Ama tercihim üniversiteden sonra, zaten üniversiteli olcaksın artık yetişkin biri olcaksın ondan sonra ne yapmak istersen yap, ondan sonra ben sana karışmam dediği için mesela ben hiç şey düşünmedim böyle. Zaten evlenene kadar muhafaza edeceğim bir şeye sahip değildim, sadece annem bana diyor ki ben yanlış insanlarla yanlış ilişkiler kurmandan korkuyorum. O yüzden de daha temkinli davranman adına bunu söylüyorum. Üniversiteye 18 yaşında gitceksin ondan sonra özgür bir bireysin dediği için... (Zeynep)

10. Ben sana bir kolimi anlatayım. İsmail Ağa cemaatinden bir kolim vardır benim. Ara sıra gelir böyle. Koliyi bilirler herhalde. Seks partneri. Biz bunla hornette tanışmıştık. Şalvarlı cübbeli bir çocuk. Gelir, benim de Alevi olduğumu bilir. Tartışırız, böyle seks yaparız. Abdestini alır gider. Hatta ona takılırım, getiriyim seccadeni de şükür namazını kıl diye (Gülüşme) İşte bu İsmail Ağa cemaatindeki arkadaş o kadar şey ki, buraya geldiği zaman o kadar rahat oluyor ki! (E.N.)

11. Cinselliği daha bariyersiz daha az travmatik yaşadıklarını gözlemliyorum. Hatta bir şey söyleyeyim sana. Komik gelebilir. Mesela Alevi partnerlerim tanıdıklarım ya da arkadaşlarım daha bir ap olabiliyorlar. O Lut kavmi, fiili livata bilmem ne gibi hani korku ve travmaları içselleştirmemenin getirdiği bir rahatlık olduğunu düşünüyorum. Çünkü cinselliğe o kadar yansıyor ki! Ben mesela dindar kolilerimde filan şu şeyleri yaşadım mesela. Biz de gusül mecburiyeti yoktur ya. Tamam, tabii ki yıkanırın seksten sonra da gusül gibi dini olarak hani kurtulma, arınma, temizlenme kafası olmadığı için mesela birçok dindar partnerim bir an önce yıkanmaya çalışıyorlar. Çünkü yaptığı şeyden bir yandan da nefret ediyor ya da rahatsız oluyor. Yıkanıp bu şeyden arınmaya, temizlenmeye çalışabiliyorlar. Ya da boşaldıktan sonra pişmanlık durumları olabiliyor, işte kahretsin filan. Çok yaşadım böyle şeyler. Alevilerde sanırım bu olmuyor. Alevi partnerlerimde bunu yaşamadım. [...] mesela dindar, o formasyondan gelen partnerlerimin bir içki içmeden, ot içmeden seks yapamadıklarını gözlemliyorum yani. Çünkü kafasında ne olursa olsun şey o bariyer var ve bi şekilde bariyer kaldırıcı bir madde olarak rahat seks yapabiliyorlar (Özgür)

12. Benim ahlak anlayışımla Alevi ahlak anlayışı arasında çok ciddi fark var. Ben insanların çok rahat seks yapabilmesi gerektiğini düşünüyorum. Ben olarak. Alevi olarak E.N. olarak düşündüğüm zaman da belli bir ahlak şeyim, kurallarım olabiliyor [...] Ne bileyim yani? Uçkun, sapkın... Alevilik şeyime girdiği zaman... İıı ne derler ona... Aleviliği şey yaptığım... Biraz daha şovenistleştiğim zaman diyelim daha doğrusu ona. Belli bir noktada durulması gerektiğini düşünüyorum. Ya aslında ben de biraz bunun şeyini yaşıyorum ya, çelişkilerini yaşıyorum. Bi yandan böyle Aleviliği yaşamsal felsefi anlamda yoğun yaşayan bir adamım ama bir yandan da cinselliği çok rahat yaşayan bir adamım. Ama bence şöyle de ters değil mi bu? Yani insanlar her şeyi yaşamalı, her şeyi yaşamalı ama ııı ‘beline sahip ol’ şeyi biraz da böyle, tacizi tecavüzü onu anlatmaya çalışmıyor

mu? [...] Ben onu anlamak istiyorum. Eline sahip ol, hırsızlık yapma, diline sahip ol yalan yanlış bir şey söyleme, beline sahip ol taciz tecavüzde bulunma. Budur ya aslında (E.N.)

13. Ben zina olarak bile düşünmüyorum o belineyi. O taciz, tecavüz vesaire aslında ordaki şey [...] Sen şey duydun mu mesela Alevi toplumunda namus cinayeti, işte kadın cinayeti, bu minvalde yapılan. Ya da işte kızını öldüren evlenmeden ilişkiye girdi bilmem ne diye. Özellikle yakın çağ dönemleri şey yapıyorum. Ben duymadım mesela. Yıllardır o gözle de incelerim mesela haberleri de. Ben o canavarlık anlamında da büyük fark olduğunu düşünüyorum. Tamam, belki kızılır, ailede kavga dövüş çıkar belki ama dediğim gibi Sünni yobaz kesimlerdeki o öldürmeye varan bir şeye gelmiyor yani kolay kolay (Özgür)

14. Hatta zaman zaman şey en uçları da düşünüyorum yani. Acaba bir enest ilişkiyle biri karşıma çıksa kardeşimle birbirimize aşğz ve cinsellik yaşıyoruz dediklerinde ne tepki veririm? Sanırım hiçbir tepki vermem. İkiniz de okey misiniz bu duruma, evet okeyiz ee tamam bu sizin bileceğiniz iş. Beni hiç ilgilendirmiyor. Ya da şeyi bile düşünüyorum yani. Nekrofil bir insanın, işte biri diyor ki ölünce bu kişi de nekrofil işte Ahmet benimle cinsel bir birliktelik yaşayabilir bedenimle diyor. Tecavüzden bahsetmiyorum yani. Önden verilmiş bir rıza da var. O durumda bile şey diyorum. O okey diyor. Onun hastalık gibi görünen bir fantezisi var. Ama iki tarafın rızası var, kabulleşmişler karşılıklı. Bana ne, beni ne ilgilendirir bu saatten sonra. Hani o yüzden iş tacize tecavüze rıza dışında bir yere varmadıkça cinselliği ahlakla hiç ilişkilendirmiyorum ben açıkçası. Hatta işte rızasız olanı çok büyük ahlaksızlık olarak görüyorum. Rızasız olanı savunanı çok ahlaksız buluyorum (Zeynep)

15. Ben eşcinsellik günah gibi şeyleri ortaokulda din dersinde maruz kaldım Lut kavmi anlatıldığı zaman. O anlamda da korkunç bir asimilasyon var. Daha genç bir çocuksun düşün, okulda sana başka bir şey öğretiliyor, eve geliyorsun orada başka bir inanç sistemi, algı var. Bir ara benim ailem günahkâr filan diye düşünüyodum. Bu ikilemi, travmayı da yaşıyorlar Alevi çocuklara (Özgür)

16. Bir gullümü anlatayım. Bizim bir trans arkadaşımız vardır geçenlerde olmuştu bu olay. Küfürlüdür söylücem ama sen onu şey yaparsın. Absürt bir şeydir. Hep gülerim buna aklıma geldikçe. Böyle çok güzel bağlama çalan bir arkadaşımız vardır Alevi gey bir arkadaş. Ama böyle Alevi deyişini çok güzel çalar. Bir gün Cem yapalım ayol dedi böyle arkadaş. Ali de gelsin İsa da gelsin 12 İmamların hepsi gelsin sonra hep beraber bi grup yapalım. İsa'yı Musa'yı Ali'yi filan hepsini katıp... (Gülüşme) Ya işte bu güzel bir duruş. Şeye bir tokat. Bize öğretilene, ahlak kavramına bir tokat (E.N.)

17. Herkes artık biliniyor. Tabii tabii. Görmemezliğe gelmek gibi kaçılıyo ama tabii toplum içinde konuştuğum zaman ben aileme veya çevreme işte amcalarıma halalarım falan herkese söylüyorum. Sonuçta şeyden gelen bir olay... Bunlar işte elinde olan bir olay değildir. Çünkü davranış, konuşma ve istekler... Benim amcamın oğlu çok büyük şeyler de geçirdi. Bağcılarda oturuyodu, 10-15 kişi

saldırıldı filan. Dayak yedi. Bunların hepsi kolay bir şey değil yani. Hiçbir insan isteyerek böyle bişi... Yani bunun seçim olmadığını ben aileme, herkese anlattım bunu. O yüzden bi şey demiyolar yani. Bu seçim, tercih değildir. Hiç kimse kalkıp şey diyemez, işte ben 35 yaşına geldim lezbiyen olucam diyemezsin. Bunu seçemezsin ki, bilmiyorum bu kadar basit değil yani [...] Çocuğun orada çene kemiğini bile kırdılar. Orada o insanlardan öte şey diyolar yani kaşlarını almasaydı. Böyle bir şey var mı? (Çiğdem)

18. Herkes biliyor, görüşüyorum da. Yani şeydir. Ben hep eşcinseldim. Anne babalar ebeveynler salak değil. Çocuğunu anlar. Ne olduğunu. Annemler belki benim açıklamamı bekletiler, biliyolardı. Çünkü farklıydım. Yani sana öğretilen bir erkeklik yoktu sende. Feminendim belki. Ne bileyim bi şeydim [...] Annem ve babamda 'Ne bu lan karı gibi hareketler!' falan olmadı. Amcamın çocuklarında cartlarda curtalarda falan oldu ama oldukça ben üzerine gittim böyle. Şey herhalde, genetiksel. Mücadele etmeyi, zorla uğraşmayı, zorun üzerine gitmeyi seven bir adamım ben. Ama hep diyorum politik bir duruş bu. (E.N.)

19. Burada yaşadığımız yerlerde, gettolaşmış yerlerde bu kadar değil. Şimdi bir çocuğun, Alevi ve eşcinselse ve seks yapmak istiyorsa, bu mahallesinde deşifre olmadan çok zor olur [...] Tabii canım aynen. Evet, kaşlarını almak istiyosun, yani lubunyasın çünkü açılıyorsun, kendini keşfediyosun, seks yapmak istiyosun. Türkçesi seks yapmak istiyosun. Duyulup bilinip bilinmemesi benim bireysel açıdan değil, teşhir olmak... Ya çünkü eşcinselliği açıklamak çok farklı bir olgu, seks yaptığının deşifre olması çok farklı bir olgu. Anlatabiliyor muyum? Yani evet, zaten sen eşcinselim dediğinde seni seks şeyi olarak görüyorlar. Ama mesela düşünsene mahalledeki bakkal... Çocuk yıkılıyor, ölüyorsun sen. O sana şey yapıyor pas atıyor, sen ona pas atıyorsun ama boğuluyorsun, rahat olmuyorsun. Mahallenin çocuğu, komşu (E.N.)

20. Eve gittim sabah, Gizli Bahçe'de çalışıyordum o zaman. Kapıyı babam açtı. Çok heyecanlıyım hani ne diyeceğimi... Değişmişim artık hani anladın mı? Baya kadın görünürlüğünde yaşıyorum filan. Kapıyı açtı, tanımadı önce. (Gülümsüyor) Sonra bana attettikleri ismi işte söyleyerek... Şaşırdı, yine hiçbir şey demediler. İçeriye bir girdim anne bir bakıyor filan garip garip ama hiçbir şey söylenilmedi. Hayret dedim böyle içimde bi garip bir şey oluştu. Çünkü bu kadar yedirilen bu korkuyu orada görmedim. Gerçekten görmedim. Yani çok ilginç bir şekilde. Ya muhtemelen daha önce diğer kardeşlerim bahsetmiş olabilir durumuma dair. Böyle birkaç hafta hani giyiniyorum kuşanıyorum işe gidicem ama hani böyle montla filan kamufle ediyorum hani, makyaj filan yapıyorum ama garip bir hal yani o tuhaf bir hal. Birkaç hafta böyle çok sessiz gitti ve çok rahatsız olmaya başladım ve bir gün böyle tam kahvaltı yaparken bunları aldım önüme konuşmaya başladım. Dedim hani böyle böyle gördüğünüz gibi ben değiştim ve değişmeye devam ediyorum, ben bir sürü şey yapıcım daha ben sizin oğlunuz değilim. Hiçbir zamanda olmadım dedim (Melis)

21. Oradaki durum şu. Babam köyde doğmuş, 3'e kadar okumuş diplomayı vermişler. Tarsus'a yerleştikten sonra çocukken sürekli çalışmış falan. Fabrikaya girdikten sonra da solcu abilerle tanışıyor. Onlar onu besliyor, eğitiyor, okumaya

başlıyor babam. Baya yıllarca politik partilerde, bilmem nelerde uğraştı. Benden çok okumuş bir adamdır yani. Kendini de açmaya... Açık bir adamdır. Daha bohem kafası. Biraz anarko kafası da olan düşününce. Yılmaz Güney'i de kendine rol model alan, bıçkın yanı da olan bir adamdı. Avantajımız şuydu bizi nispeten özgür büyütme çalıştı (Özgür)

22. Yine LGBTİ bir birey olduğumu aileme açılmadım. Ama eşcinsel tüm arkadaşlarımla eşcinsel olduğumu biliyorlar, transseksüel arkadaşlarımla biliyorlar vesaire. Başta ah vah tüh ya işte biz bir şey diyemeyiz ama yazık olmuş çocuklara gibi yaklaşan ailem yine bence bu kültürün bir getirisi olarak şimdi tüm o arkadaşlarımla çok yakın ahablar. Hatta geçen yaz bir aile meclisinde böyle kalabalık bir aile toplantısında annemi kendimden daha sıkı bir LGBTİ hakları savunucusu olarak gördüm. Ben çok sinirlendim, annem çok sakın bir şekilde herkese bunun normal bir şey olduğunu ve onlar böyle davrandıkları için insanlar çocuklarını öldürdüklerini, reddettiklerini, bu konuda açık olmaları gerektiğini vesaire anlattı. Torunun eşcinsel olsa naparsın dediğimde yani üzülürüm ama asla arkasından çekinmem napalım o da öyle yaşamak istiyor demek ki gibiye kadar geldiler (Zeynep)

23. ... birçok dede ile de konuştum. Gittim, söyledim. Şahkulu dedesine de sordum, işte Kartal'daki Cemevi dedesine de sordum. Alevilikte hiçbir insan karşısındaki yaşadığı yaşamdan dolayı kimseyi suçlayamaz, yargılayamaz, bunu yapamazsın. İşte sen eşcinselsin, ben değilim, ben cennete gidicem sen cehenneme gidiceksin, böyle bir şey de diyemezsin. İslam dini çatısı altında bakıldığı zaman evet yanlış, evet günah ama bunu Aleviliğe getirdiğin zaman Alevilikte şu vardır: bir gözüne bile yanlış bir şey söyleyince bir gözünden korkacaksın. Çünkü hiçbir şey sana ait değildir. Önce Allah'tan korkacaksın, işte bir karıncayı bile üflemeceksin. Böyle şeyler vardır. Mesela düzende, bizim toplum gidişatında belki o toplumun içinde olmayan bir davranış ama bu da işte ceza alacak, ceza alınmalıdır veya yanlıştır diye bir şey söylemek bize düşmez. Alevi din adamları, dedeler bunu söylüyor. Ben cami İmamına da kilisedeki papaza da sordum, o günah dedi mesela. Alevilerde böyle bir şey yok. Aleviler daha bir ılıman (Çiğdem)

24. Alevi muhafazakârlığı diye de bir şey var. Bunun yoğun yaşandığı yerler var. Cem'e gittiğinde kadınlarla erkekler ayrı ayrı oturuyor mesela. Can olmak deyince heteroseksüellikten, heteronormatif düzenden sıyrılamıyorsunuz. Cem'de hangi tarafa oturacağın konusunda senin önce önüne, çüküne bakılıyor. Sadece Cem için değil, kimlik, yönelim, cinsiyet tabuları yıkılmamışsa, sınıf farkı sürüyorsa orada can'lık diye bir şey olamaz. Bu şekilde ancak içi boşaltılmış bir can oluştan bahsedilebilir (Bozkır)

25. Yani var ama annem konuşmaya çok açık bir kadın. Evlenmemi çok istiyor. 31 yaşına da gelmem sebebiyle. Bir çocuğun olsun, yapayalnız olma bu hayatta filan [...] Şey geyiği yapıyorum sürekli yani istediğin çocuksa o teknik bir mesele o yapılır merak etme, bunun için illa evlenmeme gerek yok filan diye espriler filan yapıyorum. Çok tercih etmez tabii hala annem kendini çok geliştirmekle birlikte

bulunduğu çevreye bunu açıklamak zorunda kalacaktır. Bu kadarını istemez diye tahmin ediyorum (Zeynep)

26. Tabii ki, mesela annem bana nasıl yemek yapmam gerektiğini nasıl bulaşıkları dizmem gerektiğini öğretebiliyor mesela. Kendince bana kadınlık dersi veriyor misal. Anladın mı? İlişkilenmelere baktığım zaman mesela birçok erkekle flörtöz hallerde artık çok yoruldum bu hikâyelerden tabii ama onlar senden kadınlık bekliyor. Bende o hiç yok. Olmamasının sebebi tamamen politik bir yer. Ordaki şey benim kadınlığımı belirlemiyor. Anlatabildim mi? Bir sürü şeyin aslında böyle tuhaf bir şekilde... Hani geleneksel kadınlık deneyiminin de içine girmeye başlıyorsunuz ara ara yerlerden ama bir taraftan senin kendi gerçekliğin ve kendi bildiklerin de var artık. İııı mesela bazen bazı deneyimsel bazda da hemcins olduğum trans kadın arkadaşları görüyorum, şey diyebiliyor yani... Ben çoğu kez kısa saç kullandım mesela. Bütün sürecimi olabildiğince doğal geçirmeye, doğaldan kastım şey değil. Ne bileyim estetik çok... Silikon istemedim mesela. Uzun postişli saçlarım olabilirdi belki ama ben hepsini reddettim mesela. Olabildiğince kendimden yola çıkarak. İyi kötü burda değilim, sadece kendi gerçeğimden bahsediyorum (Melis)

27. Askerlik yaptım evet. Pişmanım. 18 gün acemi birlik yaptım. Askerlik o zamanlar bir kurtuluş yolu gibi gelmişti. Mardin’de yaşadığım ilişkiden dolayı köyden çıkmak istiyor ama tayinle çıkamıyordum. Askerliğe başvurduğum. Sonra yine aynı köye asker öğretmen olarak görevlendirildim. Bu kez ilişki de olduğum kişi köyden çıktı. Ama sonrasında örgüt uyarısıyla civardaki köy öğretmenlerinin tamamı köyden çıkmak zorunda kaldı. Nusaybin merkeze yerleştim ve orada başka köye görevlendirildim. O zamanlar politik bilincim böyle değildi. Şimdi olsa pembe teskere mücadelesi verirdim. Köy hayatıyla şehir çok farklı. İstanbul, her LGBTI için ütopya gibi bir şey. Büyüdüğüm yerde insanlar için askerlik, kınalı kuzuların toplandığı yerdir. Benim için de davullu zurnalı asker şenliği düzenleyeceklerdi ama karşı çıktım. Zaten çoğu şeye karşı çıktığım için “İşte Bozkır!” deyip geçiyorlardı. Lanetlenmiş, her şeye karşı gelen keçi gibi inatçı bir Bozkırken şimdilerde bana bakışları daha ılıman (Bozkır)

28. ... Ama sonra da yıllarca gitmedim. Bakaya kaldım. İşte rapor aldım. Kötü bir süreci o süreç. Yıllarca gitmedim ama rapor almaya da artık başladığım zaman sürecin içindeydim [...] Bu anlamda askeriyenin kuralları iğrenç. Şimdi daha bir şeyler kolaylaşmış gibi görünüyor ama herkes problem yaşıyor. Ben de görünür kadın olarak gitmeme rağmen sorun yaşadım. Görünür... Nerdeyse bu halimle yani. 3 yıl olacak filan vesaire ama yıllarca gitmedim, üzerine para cezası filan verildi. Öyle hikâyeler de var. O kirli bir şey. Türkiye için kirli bir şey bu (Melis)

29. Yani işte bizim köy derneğimiz var. 14 yöneticiden ikisi kadın. İkisi kadın ve kadınları teşvik etmeye çalışıyorsun bir kadın kalkıp ordan diyor ki kendi kendilerini şey yapıyorlar... Erkekler bodoslama dalıyor, aday olayım seçilirsem seçilirim filan diye. Emek verebilirim veririm veremezsem veremem filan. Kadınlar oturup işte ama diyorlar bizim işimiz çok zor bir yandan çocuk bakımı bir yandan ev bakımı derneğe vakit ayıramazsak o zaman biz aday olmayalım vesaire. Ama toplantı esnasında da şöyle oluyor, genel toplantıda da erkekler

diyor ki ‘kadınlarımız çok az, yönetime kadın yönetime kadın’. Anlatabildim mi ne demek istediğimi? Ee yönetime kadınsa o zaman git evinde temizlik yap da karını sokalım senin yerine yönetime... (Zeynep)

30. Erkek miti var tabii. Alevilik anlamında... Yine sınıfsal bir durum aslında. Gazi mahallesinin hep orayı örnek veriyorum ama yine başka bir Alevi mahallesinin konfeksiyonunda çalışan bir genci haftalığını aldığı zaman arkadaşlarıyla üç kuruş benzin alıp taksime karı kız avlamaya gelmiyor mu? Geliyor. (E.N.)

31. Ben 6 yaşına kadar tam konuşamayan bir çocuktum, konuşma sıkıntısı yaşıyordum. Kelimeleri yuvarlıyor, yutuyor ve tam telaffuz edemiyordum. Kendi ismimi söyleyemiyordum. Yaklaşık 3000 nüfuslu küçük bir yerde büyüdüm. Farklılıklara tahammül yoktu. Konuşma sıkıntımından dolayı yöresel tabirle lallık damgası yedim. Daha sonraları lal karı oldum, liseyi bitirene kadar böyle geçti. Çünkü toplumun erkeklik rollerine uyum göstermiyordum. Vurdulu kırdılı oyunlardan uzaktım, erkekler yerine kızlarla oynuyordum. Ablamın giysilerini, entarilerini giyip dolaşmak istiyordum. “Bozkır, kız gibi” lafı öğretmen çevresinde de vardı [...] Bir Alevi erkeği değil ama bir Alevi böyle olmaz derlerdi benim için. Cem’de dedeye laf söyleyen, kurban inancını yitirdikten sonra kurban adağını yerine getirmeyen, her büyüğün elini öpmeyen, eli öpülecek kişinin hak etmesi gerektiğini savunan biri olduğumdan münasip, uygun bir Alevi olarak görülmediğim olmuştur (Bozkır)

32. ... İıı dolayısıyla bu bilgi, bu bilgilerden sonra artık mesela daha feministim. Anarko queer trans feminist bir insanım ben. Ve erkekliğin bir sürü şeyiyle muhatap oldum ve ciddi zararlar da gördüm. Anlattığımız bir sürü hikâyenin temelinde aslında erkeklik vardır vesaire [...] Yani devrim algımız, Türkiye’deki devrim algımız, yani geleneksel aile ve yetiştirilmiş biçimimizle de çok örtüşüyor. Ben de evet sol kökenli ve Alevi bir yerden geliyorum. Devrim, devrim, devrim... Hep erkeklerin devrimi. Hep solun devrimi. Türkiye çok ilginç bir yer. Dolayısıyla ben bir devrimim mesela. Ben mikrodevrimist de bir insanım ayrıca. Dolayısıyla aslında sorduğun soru hiç ütöpik değil, hiç değil. Çünkü ben hep onu diyorum. Görünür olarak ispatlardan bir tanesiyim. Bir şeyi başardım (Melis)

33. ... Sünni Müslümanların Ramazan ayında yeryüzü sofraları kuruluyor bilmem ne. LGBT’ler buna destek veriyor, Gezi sürecinde bu olmuştu. Niçin bir muharrem ayında, 12 imamlar orucunda LGBTI ler kitlesel olarak şeye gitmiyor tartışmasını yapmıştık. Herhangi bir Alevi mahallesinde niye sofraya kurmuyor gökkuşağı bayraklarıyla? Bunun tartışmasını yapmıştık, gayet de olumlu geçmişti. Halen de yapılmıca bir şey değil (E.N.)