36. Negotiating cultural identity among gay men in Turkey: From belonging to becoming Strangers, to the diaspora of global gay[1]

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Abstract

This article aims to figure out how gay men in Turkey construct their cultural identities and to what extend they feel a sense of belonging to Turkish culture by focusing on how they define Turkish culture, whether they identify themselves as ordinary consumers of Turkish culture or as strangers to it. While doing so, the article also pays attention to impact of globalization which is considerably influential upon the formation of cultural identities. That is, in addition to the circumstances available in Turkey, we aim to discuss how the possibilities enabled by globalization and global gay culture play a significant role for the ways gays construct their cultural identities. Thus, our questions are formed in accordance with the way they define Turkish culture, how they position themselves within it, to what extend they feel as a part of it, and how they interpret global gay culture by comparing it to the circumstances available in Turkey. Based on interviews, we conclude that gays in Turkey do not identify themselves merely with the Turkish culture that they are organically related to and within which they often feel as strangers. Moreover, they culturally feel as members of the diasporic gay communities as a result of the impact of globalization.

Keywords: Cultural identity, gay men in Turkey, stranger, global gay culture, diaspora

Türkiye'deki gay erkeklerin kültürel kimlik müzakeresi: Aitlikten yabancılaşmaya ve küresel gay diyasporasına geçiş

Öz

Bu makale, Türkiye'deki gay erkeklerin Türk kültürünü nasıl tanımladıklarına ve kendilerini Türk kültürünün sıradan tüketicileri ya da onun yabancıları olarak tanıtmalarına odaklanarak, kültürel kimliklerini nasıl inşa ettiklerini ve Türk kültürüne ne kadar aidiyet hissettiklerini bulmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çerçevede, makale ayrıca kültürel kimliğin oluşumunda oldukça etkili olan küreselleşmeye de önem vermektedir. Yani, Türkiye'deki mevcut şartların yanı sıra küreselleşmenin ve küresel gay kültürünün tanıdığı imkânların da gay bireylerin kültürel kimliklerini oluşturmada nasıl bir rol oynadıklarını da tartışmayı amaçlamaktayız. Dolayısıyla sorularımızı gay bireylerin Türk kültürünü nasıl tanımladıklarını, kendilerini bu kültürün içinde nasıl konumlandırdıklarını, ne kadar içinde hissettiklerini ve küresel gey kültürünü Türkiye'deki koşullarla karşılaştırarak nasıl

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yorumladıklarını göz önüne alarak şekillendiriyoruz. Görüşmelere dayanarak, Türkiye'deki geylerin kendilerini yalnızca organik olarak ilişkili oldukları ve kendilerini genellikle yabancı hissettikleri Türk kültürüyle özdeşleştirmedikleri sonucuna varıyoruz. Ayrıca, küreselleşmenin etkisinin bir sonucu olarak kendilerini kültürel olarak diyasporik gey topluluklarının üyeleri olarak hissetmektedirler.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kültürel kimlik, Türkiye'deki gay erkekler, yabancı, küresel gay kültürü, diyaspora

1. Introduction

Considering the difficulties, discriminations, exclusions, misrepresentations, and the symbolic as well as physical violence they are exposed to within Turkish society and culture, it seems plausible to present gay men in Turkey as an otherized minority group (Özbay, 2015). As a member of a minority group, the way a gay man consumes and constructs his cultural identity could differ considerably from the way a straight man does. In other words, as they find themselves in conflict with the majority of the society and culture due to their subjectivities and particularities, it could be asserted that, gay men might not acknowledge membership in Turkish culture as much as those who do not experience such handicaps. This article discusses the mechanism by which gay men in Turkey construct their cultural identities and concludes that they are not able to identify with a complete, unquestioned, and unchallenged sense of belonging as they consider themselves to be the strangers of Turkish culture. Together with this fact, they also bear an affinity to the diasporic global gay cultures. Hence, we aim to figure out to what extend the gay community identifies itself with the characteristics of Turkish culture and how much they are influenced by the impact of globalization while constructing their cultural identities. In accordance with the literature that claim Turkish culture is fiercely homophobic to the gay community (Duyan & Duyan, 2005; Sakallı & Uğurlu, 2001; Gelbal & Duyan, 2006; Cesur-Kılıçarslan & Işık, 2017; Oksal, 2008; Sakallı, 2002a; Yüzgün, 1993), this article presents the gay perspective towards Turkish society and culture and aims to show how gay men negotiate those perspectives with a sense of belonging to a wider global community.

The gay community in Turkey experience various difficulties and handicaps within Turkish culture in many spheres of life such as in politics, institutions of religion, media, in their social relations, work life, and so on. For Turkish politics, Özbay (2015) states that sexualities - especially same-sex sexualities - and sexual identities are not generally dealt with in discourses relating to these spheres. It could also be stated that there is a strong and a fierce opposition to non-heterosexuality by the current regime. Furthermore, Religious Affairs Administration, on a Friday khutba, recently targeted homosexuality by introducing it as a sin with the assertion that it is a cause for diseases. Repercussions of such proclamations could be observed in daily life experiences as well. For example, depending on having an out sexual identity, both in public and private sectors, gays experience numerous difficulties such as hate speech, discrimination during recruitment, feelings of insecurity, anxiety, unhappiness, and inability to have close friends or a sense of belonging in workplaces (KaosGL, 2020a; 2020b). Therefore, the reason why gay men and women in Turkey go through such unfavorable circumstances in different spheres of life could be linked to the fact that they fail to match with the instructions, requirements, and expectations of the dominant Turkish culture and meet its needs. As such, this conflict is predicted to have an impact upon the way they in turn interpret the Turkish culture and the process by which they construct their cultural identities.

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During the last few decades, especially the post-structuralist theories of cultural identity have emphasized the anti-essentialist character of identity suggesting it to be constructed rather than given. It is argued that, as subjectivity, individuality, and the nature of human agency are in constant motion and change, cultural identity could be challenged, questioned, shaped, and reconstructed. Accordingly, Hall states that cultural identity is not only about being but also about becoming (Hall, Cultural Identity and Diaspora, 1994). Among various factors for individuals to reconstruct their cultural identities, dissatisfaction with the available local circumstances and the possibilities enabled by globalization could be given as two significant ones. Castells (2010) states that individuals who are alienated to their own societies tend to act as global citizens. Likewise, global gay culture generates numerous possibilities and chances for gays all around the world (Altman, 2001). Based on these assertions and Özbay and Erol's suggestion that gays in Turkey are "well-integrated" to global gay culture, it could be argued that in the face of the negativities they experience, gay men and women construct their cultural identities, in a globalized world where identities are not necessarily supposed to remain bound to local origins (2018, p. 848).

In brief, depending on the social & cultural circumstances available both in Turkey and across global platforms, it could be asserted that the process of construction of cultural identity for gay men occurs at the intersection of the local (where the community is significantly disfavored) and the global (where it is acknowledged) settings.

2. Theoretical framework: Definitions of culture, culture as discourse, globalization, global gay culture, and Simmel's Stranger

The term culture, which is flexible and difficult to define, has various meanings and usages. Introducing the definitions of culture, Williams (2008) informs us that its early usage focused on cultivation of human mind and on intellectual development, i.e. being a cultured person. Later, the term came to refer to high Culture (culture with capital C), with emphasis on art, literature, and aesthetics (Arnold, 2006). Hoggart (1957) with his study on working class culture, contributed to the term by stating that culture does not belong to the elites only but to common people as well. In his famous definition, Williams (2008) claims 'culture is ordinary' emphasizing that it is about a way of life, common sense, and common meaning.

The term could be expanded and identified with its descriptive, normative, historical, and psychological definitions. However, this study acknowledges it with its ordinary meaning and as a way of life characteristics and focuses on its descriptive and normative definitions. The descriptive definition involves "knowledge, belief, art, laws, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1871) . On the other hand, the normative one, approaches the term as a way of life that directs behaviors, ways of thinking, talking, and acting. In Wissler's terms, it is the "standardized beliefs and procedures followed by the tribe" – as quoted in Smith (2001:, p. 3). To sum up, culture is a means through which its members take, interpret, and react to messages roughly in the same way (Hall, 1997). However, it should be born in mind that besides being unitary, culture is open to change, never fixed and a priori, as it could always be questioned, challenged, and reshaped.

Jessop proposes that social relations and social subjects "are mediated and reproduced in and through discourse" (Jessop, 2019, p. 12). Depending on his proposition and the theoretical definition of culture that this study follows, it could be argued that discourses play a significant role upon the ways standardized beliefs, knowledge, laws, morals, and customs cause a culture to come into being. This

means that discourses are essential ingredients of culture because they are consumed by individuals as common sense as a consequence of propagation of the norms and values of certain, dominant discourses by power holders, authorities, or elites. In other words, the more the articulatory practices of certain discourses are performed by individuals the more they become norm and reality. In this way, they generate a hegemony that leads them to be significantly consumed and reproduced. Consequently, with the reproduction of such discourses through the impact of their hegemonic bloc, their requirements turn out to be the definers of a given culture (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Following this argument, within the issues surrounding gender and sexuality culture could be defined through the discourses on patriarchy, masculinity, and heteronormativity.

With respect to the ways discourses operate, a focus on the influence of certain discourses such as patriarchy, masculinity, and heteronormativity could be helpful in order to define and grasp the nature of Turkish culture as well. Turkish society could be said to be a patriarchal one acknowledging male dominance with its specific gender roles where male is the dominant one (Kandiyoti, 1995; 1988; Özbay, 2016). Moreover, as the values of patriarchy and male dominance is protected and supported by institutions, they have the power to maintain their influence (Boratav, Fişek, & Ziya, 2014; Öztürk, 2011). In this way, patriarchy and masculinity turn out to be elevated, highly appreciated characteristics within Turkish society (Özbay & Erol, 2018). Furthermore, the subordination and the discrimination of sexual minorities in Turkey are allowed and legitimized by the discourse of heteronormativity as it excludes, ignores, condemns, and even bans those who deviate from its values to the point where deviant ones are presented as sick, sinful, nonhuman, and as less than citizens (Çakırlar & Delice, 2012; Bolat, 2016; Eslen-Ziya & Koç, 2016; Ataman, 2011). To sum up, as these discourses are highly influential in Turkish society, they are viewed as norms of proper conduct, and their repercussions are, as stated earlier, easily observed in many spheres of life. Therefore, in general terms, Turkish culture could be defined as patriarchal, masculine, and heteronormative, within which same-sex sexualities are highly disfavored.

Even though circumstances seem to be negative for gays in Turkey, globalization and the global gay culture it generates are in favor of same-sex sexualities. In order to indicate the relation between same-sex sexualities and globalization, it should be noted that globalization makes the borders "increasingly permeable" (Çağlar, 1997, p. 169). It allows individuals, technology, finance, media, and ideas to interact with each other (Appadurai, 1999). As Giddens (1990) claims the interaction between things and social relations are so intensified that localities are shaped even by those miles away and vice versa. Furthermore, Beck (2000) informs that by means of globalization, individuals shop, marry, love, work, learn and so on internationally while they live and think transnationally. Under these circumstances, nothing remains the way they are including cultures and identities.

In line with that, put forward by Altman (1997; 2001) suggesting that in an era when ideas, approaches, and perceptions are disseminated swiftly through globalization, same-sex sexualities are also globalized generating global gay culture that appeals to individuals with same-sex sexualities from different parts of the world. That is because, the global gay culture, it could be argued, provides an escape hatch for gay identities, and movements across the globe (Altman, 2001; 1997), upgrades the derogatory position of same-sex sexualities from being a sin or a crime to the single and collective identity of gay (D'Emilio, 1993; Weeks, 2011; Lowe, 1995), enables shelter by making them feel at home at any part of the world (Weeks, 2011), assures protection of rights (Phillips, 2000), provides recognition, visibility, and political voice (Young, 1990), encourages activism with an emphasis on human rights (King, 2002), and

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generates international network (Duyvendak, 1995)[4]. For such reasons, the global gay culture appeals to gays in Turkey as well and plays a significant role upon the formation of their cultural identities.

Simmel's Tragedy of Culture i.e. the conflict between the objective and subjective cultures and the term 'Stranger' is employed in this study as it seems useful on how gays regard their cultural identities.

Simmel (2004) suggests that in a society there are objective cultures produced by man such as language, politics, religion, science, art, the legal system, moral codes etc. As these structures are produced, appreciated, and applied heavily, they "dominate the actors who created, and daily re-create them" (Ritzer, 2011, p. 172). That is, despite being the products of men, these structures take the control into their own hands, rule over their own producers, direct, shape and reshape them. Such an approach indicates the unitary aspect of culture. On the other hand, there is also a subjective/individual culture which is the man's potential to produce, follow, alter, resist, or deny the objective culture. As the conflict between the objective and subjective culture unfolds, the dominant, objective culture has the options of negotiating, ignoring, excluding, refusing, or repressing the subjective one. Yet, the most likely consequence of these alternatives tends to be the refusal and repression of the subjective culture as it endangers objective culture's existence. The repression of subjective culture eventually produces 'strangers' in society. Therefore, stranger turns out to be the one who is attached to and at the same time, is detached from a certain group because of his/her qualities that do not match with the group (Simmel, 2018). How participants of this study viewed themselves as the Strangers of Turkish culture is discussed below in section 5.

3. Methodological framework

This study is based on fifteen semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions and answers, conducted with gay men between the ages of 22 and 48, in order to understand how they interpret, to what extend they acknowledge and identify themselves with Turkish culture, and how they construct their cultural identities under the impact of globalization and global gay culture.

For sure, culture and cultural identity are broad terms that are difficult to limit, define, or measure. However, in order to figure out the ways they interact with Turkish culture, interpret global flows, and construct their cultural identities under the influence of both the local and the global, the participants were asked to define Turkish culture through their own perspectives, elucidate on how they positioned themselves within the Turkish culture, and whether they would have liked to live abroad. Their responses were analyzed within the framework of culture's characteristics of being both a unitary construct and/or as fragmentary, on the bases of how they reflected Simmel's notion of the Stranger, and on the impact of global gay diaspora.

The participants were from different cities of Turkey. Three of them, were born and raised in Turkey, who now live abroad in Germany, the U.S., and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Except for the seven subjects who had not been out of Turkey, eight of them had been abroad either on business or for education. One of the participants did not have a university education and another had dropped out of

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[4] It should be emphasized at this point that global gay culture has cons as well. For example, acknowledging it as a priori means generating a metanarrative that holds for each and every individual and culture. Moreover, as it places Western societies, especially the U.S. at the center, it has the potential to create a categorization or a hierarchy where certain cultures are taken as favorable while certain ones are not. In addition to neglecting the power of local cultures, considering global gay culture as such a dominant force also means neglecting the subjectivity and agency of individuals. For detailed information see (Parker, Garcia, & Buffington, 2014), (Kollman & Waites, 2009), (Long, 1999), (Martel, 2018), (Bravmann, 1997).

university. Except for these two, and including the one who is still a student, 13 of the participants of this study have had university education. Eleven participants had white-collar jobs, one was a student, and three did not share their professions. Six of the participants wanted to have pseudonyms while the rest did not care about discretion and wanted to use their own names. Two of the interviews were conducted face to face, the rest were conducted online through Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, and phone calls. All of the participants allowed voice recording. However, four of them asked us to delete the recording after transcription.

As we were "outsider researchers" who were not members of the gay community, contacting participants was an extremely difficult journey which is why the number of participants are limited and not representative of the larger gay community from all lines of age, education and way of life (Mercer, 2007). Initially, we contacted four participants with the help of an acquaintance. Following that, snowball sampling was used, by which new contacts were realized through the initial contact (Heckathorn, 1997). As a result, 4 more participants were interviewed. Then, in order to contact more participants, we introduced our study in different branches of a chain store that has a policy of employing non-heterosexual individuals and that identifies itself as gay friendly. In this way, we had two more participants. Finally, we were able to find five more interviewees online through gay chat rooms and Instagram accounts.

In addition to causing difficulty for finding participants, being outsider researchers put us in a position where we lacked advantages such as "the value of shared experiences; the value of greater access; the value of cultural interpretation; and the value of deeper understanding and clarity of thought for the researcher" (Labaree, 2002). Being outsider researchers, we held the risk of not being trusted in our ability to grasp and convey the nature of the experiences, opinions, and feelings of the research group. Nevertheless, our interviewees responded positively to our inquiry. As they expressed in extended ways the difficulties they experienced, we had the impression that they viewed us as messengers through whom they wanted their voices to be heard.

4. Defining Turkish Culture through gay perspective

Considering its descriptive and normative definitions, culture is about the taken for granted norms and values of our daily lives. It involves common, learned, and shared behaviors of the individuals of a society such as belief systems, morality, customs, knowledge etc. In brief, this aspect of culture indicates collectivity. That is, once culture is spoken of, it tends to be considered as appealing to any member of a society who, with the help and use of culture, generates, consumes, (re)produces, articulates, exchanges, and represents similarities (Hall, 1997)

However, culture is also fragmentary. Because of the individual's subjectivity, agency, and particularity, it is never fixed, always incomplete and flexible (Hall, 1997). As Laclau and Mouffe put it, even though culture is generated within the collective activity of the collective man and woman and stands as the dominant representation of a society, it is always formed heterogeneously as it always includes "multiplicity of dispersed wills" that are "welded together with a single aim, on the basis of an equal and common conception of the world" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp. 67-68).

With respect to this position, the participants were asked to define Turkish culture bearing in mind their sexual identities. It is observed that their approach to Turkish culture was highly negative as they were not able to fit themselves within the boundaries and the expectations. Although they were all born and

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raised in Turkey, and personally inherited and experienced the characteristics of Turkish culture, within the terms of gender structure of the culture, they stood as the antagonists in an ever conflicting relation with culture. Among other things, repressive, limiter, terrible, gross, hypocritical, bigoted, conservative, retrogressive, proscriptive, exclusionary while seeming inclusionary, obvious, and funny were some of the adjectives that interviewees used to define Turkish culture.

One of the most prominent characteristics of the Turkish culture, according to one of the participants was that there were specific, given and almost fixed gender roles. The role and influence of masculinity and heteronormativity as a burden was easily observed through the responses of the participants who emphasized that Turkish culture did not look favorably to those who deviated from its requirements as it dictated males to act like a 'man'. In other words, individuals were expected to play the role that had been assigned to them by the Turkish culture. This is asserted clearly in the words of Rüzgar and Savaş.

> I feel like it is more about traditional teachings. It is more of a conservative one. It is not a culture that could be okay with homosexuality. It is more like its rules are predetermined and certain identities are allowed. (Rüzgar)

> Turkish culture is nice and all but for whom? Not for me. How could it be good for me? It does not like or want me, but excludes me. It cannot even stand my existence. It is always angry with me, does not let me breathe. It dictates me to be the way it desires, tells me to be a man. It interferes in all things, telling me to love a woman, be with her. What's more, it wants me to be married to her. (Savaş)

Considering themselves as ones who were not able to fit within the Turkish culture because of their subjectivities and particularities, the participants emphasized the collective and binding nature of common culture when defining it. To them, as Turkish culture is extremely collective and unitary, the ones who do not take place within its borders were not allowed or welcomed in. Therefore, for one to get along well with the culture, s/he was supposed to follow its requirements and meet its needs. Mehmet, Yılmaz, Mete, and Yunus Emre presented this feature of Turkish culture as follows;

> Turkish culture is repressive. It does not matter whether you live in Turkey. It does not matter if it is Eastern or Western part of Turkey. It is all the same. If you mind your behaviors and do not stand out, you will not have any trouble. (Mehmet)

> It is terrible. If you are a homosexual, you are not supposed to live here. If you do not mind the social restrictions and act freely, you will naturally be excluded. That is why I am trying to hide it. If I do what I wish, for example, if I wear makeup or clothes that I like, I could be killed or get a hammering. That is why I dropped out of university. People made fun of me. (Yılmaz)

> When it comes to us, it is like a catastrophe that everyone rejects. Men, women, young, or old people, it does not matter. Everyone is against us. (Mete)

> It is not a tolerant culture. It is not only about homosexuality as well. It has lately been a culture that does not tolerate any kind of identities. There have been many surveys about it. They asked people if they wanted a homosexual neighbor. People did not want Greek, Armenian, gays, or transvestites. People do not want any other identity except for what they believe is the best. (Yunus Emre)

In addition to these, while defining Turkish culture, in comparison to the others, the participants considered it to be regressive. In their terms, the more a society or a culture is in peace with the discourse of homosexuality, the more developed or enlightened it is. Therefore, since Turkish culture is not in peace with homosexuality, Cenk and Rüzgar defined it as backward.

> Bigoted, unenlightened, and conservative. I do not think we have progress about it. On the contrary, there is a huge retrogression. Time to time, I, naturally, believe that it is not possible to live in this country. (Cenk)

> Culture needs to be changed. It is not possible to make people accept things without having a touch upon the culture. Progress. That is why we do activism. Compared to the West, it feels like it will happen later in the future. Not in 10 but maybe in 50 years. (Rüzgar)

What is more, while presenting peace with homosexuality as a sign of progress, Savaş pointed to a distinction between straight interpretation of culture and his by saying;

> Please do not be offended but this is a backward-minded society. (Savaş)

In addition to identifying Turkish culture as backward, Savaş stressed its unitary aspect as well. He assumed that he and the researchers interpreted Turkish culture differently. As we were not members of the gay community, but he was, he believed that we embodied a "unified identity" or a "comforting story" with Turkish culture (Hall, 1992, p. 277). Here, with 'comforting story', Hall indicates those who consume their culture the way it is given to them without questioning. Depending on it, Savaş could have assumed that we simply consumed Turkish culture as the way it is given to us as we do not experience the difficulties he does. In other words, he supposed that Turkish culture and the way it operates are so unitary that we identified ourselves with it in a complete, unified, untroubled, and consistent way.

Furthermore, the participants believed that people in Turkey significantly do not know much about the nature of homosexuality but still judge it. What is more, being judged without adequate knowledge, they asserted that Turkish culture regarded it as an act of corruption or crime while, to them, there are much more serious and dangerous things corrupting the society. Berk and Mete's arguments go as follows;

> There are all kind of distortions here. Turkish culture has a great hatred for gays. They just oppose without knowing what it is. (Berk)

> Turkish culture, with one word, is funny. Why funny? In this country, kids are raped but no one makes a noise about it. Women are killed but no one says anything. For example, theft, favoritism, giving preferential treatment. There is no one talking about these. When it comes to us, it is like a catastrophe that everyone rejects. (Mete)

It could thus be said that our interviewees have negative views on Turkish culture. They inform us that this was a result of the domination and excessive articulation of heteronormativity and masculinity, and the hegemonic power they generated. In other words, they believed, as these hegemonic discourses were embraced by ordinary people in their lives, the outcome in regulations, norms, values, and requirements were naturalized as representing Turkish culture. The domination was emphasized by the interviewees as they regarded culture through the collective acts of collective men, highlighting that they stood as the antagonists of Turkish culture who did not fit within its boundaries.

5. Strangers of Turkish culture

As the previous section indicates, interviewees define Turkish culture in significantly negative ways. They explicitly express their pessimistic opinions about Turkish culture. Depending on their responses and bearing in mind that cultural identity is about belonging or feeling attached to a certain group, it could be thought that gays in Turkey might not have strong bonds with Turkish culture. In other words, it could be assumed that they might not identify themselves through the characteristics of Turkish culture because lacking the desired heterosexual identity challenges and unsettles both the national internal unity and belonging (Muñoz, 1999).

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At this point, Simmel's Tragedy of Culture i.e. the conflict between the objective and subjective culture and the term 'Stranger' could be useful on how in turn gays regard their cultural identities vis a vis the dominant culture.

Simmel's views on the conflict between objective and subjective culture seem to hold for this study as well. While Turkish culture dominated and shaped by discourses of heteronormativity, patriarchy, and masculinity stands as the objective culture, the discourse of homosexuality, subjectivities and particularities of gay men turn out to be the subjective one. With respect to this perspective, the participants were asked to what extend they positioned themselves within Turkish culture. As it is realized there, the basic requirement of being a Stranger is the polarization between the subjective and objective cultures (Marotta, 2012). With his statement, Mehmet reflected on this position and exemplified the argument.

> We define ourselves as 'we'. It is always 'you' and 'us'. I think, they (heterosexuals) imposed it to us. They suppress and exclude us as they say, you are this or you are that. I have always experienced that. They always say your people. (Mehmet)

Berk's response clearly indicated his strangerness. His answer was as follows;

> We cannot live because of the culture. For sure, I cannot feel a sense of belonging. I feel like an outsider. I want to experience certain things, be a part of it but the society pushes you to the other way. There is a pushing force. I cannot feel that I am from here because of my own people. (Berk)

Berk explicitly identified himself with the Turkish culture and admitted that he belonged to it. However, what he emphasized was that the objective culture, the dominant force of the culture pushed him away. That is, although he did regard himself as connected to the culture, he was not allowed in at the same time. In other words, true to Simmel's view on the Stranger, he was close to the culture and belonged to it but at the same time, he was made to feel by the larger society that he did not belong.

In a similar way to Berk, Mete, identified himself with the Turkish culture. He emphasized his sense of belonging and informed us that he did not even wish to change that. However, even if his attachment to the culture was strong, he informed us that he was not welcomed or allowed in. He backed his assertion with a comparison between the Turkish gay community and foreigners living in Turkey, with the suggestion that even foreigners were more likely to feel a sense of belonging to the culture because of the way they were treated more favorably. Depending on his comparison, it could be suggested that Mete is an insider, but at the same time, is remote, hence an outsider, forced to be a stranger. His response was as follows;

> I place myself right into the center of the culture. I am a child of this nation even if they don't want me. ? Now, take me wherever you want in the world, I live like a Turkish person. Would I change? Would I like to change in the first place? For sure, I wouldn't. But you know what? They sicken you. Believe me, they bust our hump. They antagonize you to yourself, your home, your neighbor. I am one of your people. Why do you push me away? And now, many people from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan have come to Turkey. They even help and embrace them. They have homes and jobs. As if we are the foreigners. As if it is us not them but us who have come here from somewhere else. They just don't let us in. (Mete)

One of the most significant responses implying strangerness came from Savaş who defined Turkish culture as a stepmother.

> Do you know what Turkish culture is for me and for those who are like me? A stepmother. She cannot accept these kids. We have a stepmother. We are the stepchildren of this society. I want to place

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myself somewhere within but I am not given space. I am a member of these lands. As I just said, she is the stepmother. We live in the same house but we cannot get along well. We cannot love each other. I am not loved back. She turns me into a guest, makes me feel like a guest in my own home. (Savaş)

Alexander indicates that strangerness is about being "in, but not entirely of, his society" (Alexander, 2004, p. 88). That is, a Stranger is already within the group, society, or community. However, due to his/her particularity, s/he is not completely a part of them. S/he is close but remote at the same time. In the case of analogy that Savaş makes, he becomes the child while Turkish culture is the stepmother. They live in and share the same house. They are close to each other. However, depending on the power relation in which Turkish culture is the dominant one, he is forced to be remote or to feel like an outsider. Accordingly, the two; the child and the stepmother, have an inevitable but also an inorganic relation. They are not only attached to but also detached from each other which is why he felt like a guest or a stranger in his own house.

Atakan approached strangerness through presenting himself as a minority. His response was as follows;

> I am at odds with the society. I define myself simply as a minority. I am a member of a minority. Being minority is not all about ethnicity. I am a minority because of my sexual identity. At the end of the day, I am a Turkish citizen. I was raised here and I possess the cultural codes of these lands. I am interested in what my country goes through. I get happy and sad for my country. I can never say that I do not belong here. But how do I say? I am a person who denies the gender structure of this culture. Yes, yes, I am a minority. (Atakan)

Atakan's statement matches with Harris et al. (2015) who conclude that social dynamics which keep societies together, such as nationhood, norms, values, and historical contexts create minorities and also strangers whose characteristics do not match with social and cultural 'norms'. In order to demonstrate his proximity to his culture, Atakan emphasized how much he was related to his country and society through various examples. He constantly reminded us that he was a member of the culture. However, he was also aware of the distance that kept him away from proximity. According to him, there was more than the aspect of ethnicity to feel like a stranger or a minority. He explained such an assertion by arguing that his subjectivity did not get along with the 'norms' of the culture and hence he was a minority, in other words, a stranger.

Depending on the responses of the participants, it could be concluded that although the interviewees explicitly claimed that they were a part of the Turkish culture, their particular identities as gay men did not match with it. That is, they experienced a conflict or a dilemma between their subjective culture which stood for their own individuality-subjectivity and the objective culture which stood for the homogenizing, taken for granted forces. Accordingly, they went through an experience where subjective and objective cultures constantly interacted and negotiated. As a consequence of this interaction, objective culture suppressed and disregarded gays, forcing them to be the strangers of Turkish culture.

6. A Diaspora of the global gay culture

In August 2021, a popular Instagram page named Cinsel Yönelim Eşitliği (Sexual Orientation Equality) broadcasted a live feed under the title of Amerika'ya Nasıl İltica Edebilirim? (How can I apply for asylum in the USA?). Okan Şengün, the spokesperson of the live feed, stated that numerous non-heterosexual individuals in Turkey desired, tried to, and did migrate to the USA because of the discrimination, mistreatment, and violence they were exposed to. It has been indicated that gays as well as other non-heterosexual individuals wished to leave their own society, culture, nation, people, and country in order to live in different societies and cultures where their sexual identities and rights were acknowledged. In

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other words, gays in Turkey are potential members of diaspora, living in societies and cultures where they would feel more comfortable.

Diaspora, in general terms, is used "to indicate the dispersed network" of people who are related to each other with respect to what they have in common such as nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion etc. (Barker, 2004, p. 51). In addition to that, collective trauma (while in the homeland) and a sense of community transcending national frontiers (home and away) are two of the causes for one to feel diasporic (Kalra, Kaur, & Hutnyk, 2005).

Depending on these definitions of diaspora, negative circumstances of gay men in Turkey stand as collective trauma while for gay communities stands as a community transcending national frontier. Hence, gay men in Turkey are argued to be among those of diasporic.

Depending on the negative circumstances of gay community in Turkey, it could be argued that they experience a collective trauma in homeland. Moreover, the global gay culture creates positive outcomes as it accepts the discourse of homosexuality, provides shelter under the identity of being gay, assures protection of rights, enables visibility, recognition, and political voice, encourages activism, emphasizes human rights, and generates international networks. Therefore, it stands as a community transcending national frontier. With respect to these two points, gay men in Turkey could feel as diasporic members of global gay culture and culturally identify themselves with it rather than with the Turkish culture.

The interviewees in the study were asked whether they would have liked to live abroad, why and why not. Except for the three participants, they gave affirmative answers with an emphasis on freedom, individuality, and subjectivity.

Mehmet and Yılmaz, in their responses, claimed that culture in Turkey is highly unitary and influential upon individuals' way of life.

> I love my country but considering it as a salvation, I would. I really love my country but here, I need to live in a more careful way. I pay attention to anything about me. Probably, in order to get rid of this lower status, I would because I get tired. I am tired, I am always tired. I would prefer to live in the U.S. or Germany (Mehmet).

> In terms of freedom, I would like to live abroad but I love Turkey no matter how much they exclude me here. It could be Holland, Germany. I guess, it is legal to marry in Germany. In short, I would like to live at a place where I could do something crazy out in the street with my boyfriend (Yılmaz).

Mehmet informed us that it was an obligation for him, or in general terms, for gays in Turkey, to be careful with what they did, say, think, or wear. That is, they were supposed to follow the requirements of the culture in Turkey even though they did not want to. To put it differently, Mehmet argued that, he pretended not to be gay and his actions conflicted with his personality which was why he called his condition 'lower status'. Just like Mehmet, Yılmaz wanted to break free from the constrictions of the unitary aspect of culture and to experience his own subjectivity. In brief, with their statements, it could be understood that the interviewees did not consider themselves as free agents who could experience their subjectivities within the limitations of Turkish culture. Therefore, they felt as diasporic members of the global gay culture that could look upon them favorably.

Complaining about lack of freedom, Berk and Mete's answers were as follows;

> Hundred percent. As a free country, I would like to live in the USA, England, Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland. A place where people are not limited, where taboos are broken (Berk).

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> I would. Otherwise, it would be a lie. Where would I go? Europe or the USA. It does not matter. All I need is to live like a human being, freely, as I deserve (Mete).

Like many other interviewees, Berk emphasized freedom. What makes his answer quite different is that while picking a country, unlike others who mention one or two countries, Berk mentioned five. It seemed like, it did not necessarily matter where he wished to live. What really mattered for him was living freely in a place where taboos could be broken. On the same point, Mete's answer is explicit. He stated that where he would wish to live did not really matter as long as he felt free.

Savaş's response moves the attention to the unitary characteristics as well as the dominance of Turkish culture. That is, he wished to live in a different culture outside Turkey where he felt safe and free. However, the significant point in his answer was that while picking certain cultures, he abstained from those in which Turkish immigrants live. In other words, he claimed, it would not be any different to live near or around those who would still maintain the characteristics of Turkish culture. He prefered a global gay culture that was not related to Turkish culture at all. His answer was as follows;

> For sure, I would. Why would not I. I would love to live abroad because here I cannot be me, I cannot live like a human being. It is not easy to live with fear. Everyone is mad at us. Where would I like to live? Europe. But not in Germany or France. There are so many Turkish people there. I prefer places where there are not many Turkish people. It could be Scandinavian countries. (Savaş)

Eren, as an individual living in Germany, gave us a different perspective. He says;

> I would. I already do. It is all about being an individual. In social or work life, it is much easier for people here to acknowledge you the way you are. Especially in my business, in engineering, it is not so in Turkey. Work is one side of the coin. There is also the role your family gives you. Once you fail to play that role, people ask you nonsense questions. Then, it feels meaningless to live there. In Turkey, there is always the idea that gays are always feminine. People around you cannot attribute it to you. Therefore, assuming that you are not a gay, they may say homophobic things. Thus, I have left so many good friendships behind. (Eren)

For Eren to be diasporic in a Western society, his social-work life played a significant role. He stated that as an engineer who worked in a field whose values were dominated by masculinity, he had not been able to express his subjectivity in Turkey. However, according to him, the circumstances in Germany were favorable for him as he was socially acknowledged even though he was a gay man working in the field of engineering. What is more, he emphasized that the gender structure in Turkish culture was all about being a man. He informed us that it was meaningless to live in Turkey as long as it dictated individuals to play within the assigned role of a heterosexual man.

The most significant response that could indicate the diasporic conditions of gays in Turkey comes from Yunus Emre who was married to an American man and had been living in the U.S. for several years. His answer was as follows;

> I came here because I wanted to live abroad. I am one of the lucky ones. I married here. That is why I am here, because my spouse is here. I cannot marry in Turkey but here I can. It is not just because of that. 90-95 % of gays living in Turkey would wish to live abroad. I feel lucky. I am so comfortable here. My identity was out in Turkey as well but living outside the closet in Turkey and here is as different as chalk and cheese. (Yunus Emre)

Yunus Emre informed us that there was a huge difference between the circumstances in Turkey and the U.S which was why as an individual living in the U.S. he considered himself to be lucky. The reason why he felt lucky was not only having the right to be married but also living in a society and culture where he

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felt comfortable. Furthermore, in addition to talking on his own behalf, he asserted that almost all the gays in Turkey were diasporic as, he believed, that they would wish to live abroad.

Depending on the responses of the interviewees, it could be argued that, gays in Turkey have a great deal to complain about regarding the circumstances that disable them within the Turkish culture. In addition to the unsatisfactory experiences they have in their local culture, they strongly believe that global gay culture could be favorable for them and would satisfy their needs. Accordingly, assuming that global gay culture could meet their needs and expectations, like freedom, safety, comfort, and rights, they tended to feel the push for the diasporic existence in different societies and cultures.

7. Conclusion

During the last few decades, there has been an extensive survey on cultural identities across the world, including work on sub disciplines such as in gender studies. Following that line of work, this study has aimed to investigate the contradictions and capitulations of the encounters between the local and global identities among gay men in Turkey. After an extensive literature survey on both theories of cultural identity and being gay in Turkey, a study with fifteen gay men was undertaken to search for the extent of the encounters between forces of local and global cultures in defining, shaping, and influencing the perspectives towards culture of gay men in Turkey. It must be noted that, due to difficulties encountered in generating the fieldwork, the study has been limited in the sample size and in the absence of gay women. However, the following findings offer a promising starting point for further studies.

Experienced on daily basis, the literature as well reveals that discourses on masculinity, patriarchy, and heteronormativity play a significant role upon the way Turkish culture is shaped, and hence, a strict gender structure exists for the roles individuals occupy in society. Accordingly, culture in Turkey does not enable space for the discourse of homosexuality which is why the gay community in Turkey experiences various difficulties, handicaps, discrimination, and exclusion from various spheres of life. Due to the difficulties the local culture generates, global gay culture, on the other hand, with its agreeable possibilities, appears attractive. Depending on the disadvantages they experience locally, and the possible advantages global gay culture enables, it could be asserted that gays in Turkey might question, challenge, and reconstruct their cultural identities accordingly.

In summary, the narratives of the participants of this study indicated that gays in Turkey are significantly dissatisfied with the way Turkish culture is. They find it difficult to culturally identify themselves with the characteristics of Turkish gender culture. The subjects were born and raised in Turkey which is how they felt close to Turkish culture nevertheless, while negating its hegemonic patriarchal character. As their subjective positions did not match with the characteristics of the dominant Turkish culture and since they were unable to find space within it, they felt a gap, a remoteness to it. As a result of this dilemma, they considered themselves as outsiders or strangers. Furthermore, holding a belief that different societies and cultures, especially in the West, would provide them with safety, freedom, ease, comfort, and rights (the circumstances they lack in their local culture), they felt their existence as diasporic, as within the global gay culture.

Therefore, depending on the responses of the interviewees, it could be concluded that gays in Turkey are not able to construct a natural or organic relation to Turkish culture even if they wish to. While they view themselves as outsiders or strangers here, they become subjects of a diaspora across the world, within what is constructed as a global gay culture.

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