

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY: SOME REFLECTIONS ON TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

Masculinity as a gender pattern is an important phenomenon within the strong structure of gender stereotypes. The perception and manner of living of masculinity differ, therefore in this context it can be claimed that there are different patterns of masculinity. The strong, harsh and heterosexual masculinity is dominant and places itself in a superior position above other masculinities within the hierarchical structure of gender and subordinates “the others” – who are inappropriate according to the defined ideals – by othering in order to maintain its dominance. One of the most important groups which are subordinated by dominant patterns of masculinity is homosexuals. Homophobia is the most effective tool of this subordination process. In this context, homophobia is a strong and important instrument which the dominant pattern of masculinity uses for subordinating homosexuals. Homosexuality in Turkey, in general, is perceived as a phenomenon which obscures gender patterns and disrupts the social order. In this context, male homosexuality is considered as a disapproved pattern of masculinity and a conduct threatening masculinity. The relationship between homosexuality and the dominant pattern of masculinity is being discussed in this study.

Key Words: Gender, Hegemony, Masculinity, Hegemonic Masculinity, Homophobia.

ÖZET

Toplumsal cinsiyet örüntüsü olarak erkeklik, toplumsal cinsiyet stereotiplerinin sağlam yapısı içinde önemli bir olgudur. Erkekliğin yaşanış ve algılanış şekilleri farklılık göstermektedir ve bu bağlamda farklı erkeklik örüntülerinin söz konusu olduğu ifade edilebilir. Söz konusu bu farklı erkeklik örüntüleri içinde hakim olan, kendini toplumsal cinsiyetin hiyerarşik yapısı içinde diğer erkekliklerden üstün bir konuma yerleştiren, sert, güçlü ve heteroseksüel olan erkeklik örüntüsü, kendi devamlılığını sağlamak ve hegemonyasını sürdürmek için,

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tanımlanan ideallerin dışında kalan “diğer”lerini ötekileştirerek tabi kılar. Erkekliğin egemen söyleminin ötekileştirerek tabi kıldığı en önemli gruplardan biri eşcinsellerdir. Söz konusu tabi kılma sürecindeki en etkili araç homofobidir. Bu bağlamda homofobi, egemen erkeklik örtüsünün, eşcinselleri tabi kılmak için kullandığı güçlü ve önemli araçtır. Türkiye’de genel olarak eşcinsellik, toplumsal cinsiyet örüntülerini muğlaklaştıran ve toplumsal düzeni bozan bir olgu olarak algılanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda erkek eşcinselliği de erkekliğin onaylanmayan bir örüntüsü ve erkekliği tehdit eden bir pratik olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Bu çalışmada, Türkiye’de erkekliğin egemen söylemi ve eşcinsellik arasındaki ilişki tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Hegemoni, Erkeklik, Hegonamik Erkeklik, Homofobi.

I. INTRODUCTION

Many new ideas are being generated on the subject of sexuality within the field of sociology and social sciences. New unfolding discussions on an ever increasing phenomenon have demonstrated that it is necessary to examine sex and sexuality from a social, psychological, cultural and historical perspective rather than merely using a biological reductive approach. In this context gender indicates that the roles attributed to men and women are determined by cultural environment so that it constructs an undeniable part of normative structure of society. This normative structure seems to operate in a rather different way from femininity in the context of gender, concerning men, the “masculine” role and masculinity. Power attributed to men accompanies the situation of “being dominant”. This paper will address questions like, how the process of “being dominant” operates, how masculinity constructs itself as well as homosexuality as an important form of subordinated masculinities.

II. HEGEMONY

Clarifying the emergence and history of the concept before discussing what hegemonic masculinity is and what it indicates, seems to be useful. The concept of hegemony appears in the Prison Notebooks of Gramsci, where it was used in order to explain class relations. Here, the concept of hegemony is related to how the ruling class dominates the ruled class, and how it acquires and maintains this power. In this context, fundamental elements of the situation of

being hegemonic impose something; to produce concepts about events and subjects and to hold the power of defining morals. For these conditions to be accomplished the support of social institutions, which are important for social change such as media, is required. Nevertheless hegemony needs to convince the majority of the population by appearing as “natural”, “usual” and “normal” especially in the organization of media and social institutions (Donaldson 1993, p. 645).

The concept of hegemony Gramsci asserted, has been applied to the field of gender in order to analyze the problems about gender. However, it had some drawbacks. The concept, which is asserted by Gramsci, was exposed to critics due to the fact that it did not focus on the point of historical change. An important criticism, the concept of hegemonic masculinity comes under is that the idea of hegemony could be reduced to a simple model of cultural control without a focus on historical change (Connell; Messerschmidt 2005, p.831).

III. HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

In fact, the concept of hegemonic masculinity prioritizes other forms of the other existing masculinities. In other words, a model of “multiple masculinities” emerges along with the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

The presence of different masculinities and power relations in the context of the “male gender role” has been put forward within the research on gender. Some men who are on the new left wing attracted attention on the class distinctions in the expression of masculinity by trying to organize by the support of feminism. Weakness of the “masculine sex role” theory was realized along with the research done and documented in the 1970s. The most important ones of this weaknesses implied the homogenization of the concept of the “masculine role” and difficulties in power negotiation. Empirical research approved the presence of multiple masculinities and the complexity of the construction of masculinity and demonstrated the combat of dominance inherent in Gramscian hegemony (Connell; Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832).

There is a power combat in the living domain of multiple masculinities and only one pattern of those masculinities wins and that is the hegemonic one. The winner of this combat determines the dominating norms.

This hegemony mentioned here is not a superiority established through weapons. According to Connell, “ ‘hegemony’ doesn’t mean absolute cultural dominance and removing alternatives. Rather, it means superiority which is acquired within a balance of power, in other words during a game. Other patterns and groups are placed at an inferior position instead of being wiped out” (Connell 1998, p. 247).

Hegemonic masculinity, as it is expressed above, brings the other masculinities to forefront and separates itself from these masculinities, especially from subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity doesn’t have to be a pattern shared by a majority, it can just represent a minority and it usually does. However, it is definitely normative, it is the honorable way of being a man and it expects men to position themselves concerning it. Nevertheless, it ideologically legitimates the subordination of women as well (Connell; Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832).

Hegemonic masculinity subordinates other masculinities which do not share its ideals. Setting out at the point that there is a hierarchical structure among masculinities, it can be claimed that homosexuality represents an important pattern subordinated by hegemonic pattern of masculinity which is on the top of this hierarchic structure.

“Studies of men and masculinities routinely refer to gay men, along with women, as constituting the most significant ‘others’ of hegemonic masculinities. Homosexuality is rightly seen as disrupting conventional ideas about what it is to ‘be a man’” (Garlick 2003, p. 158).

Connell defines hegemonic masculinity with these words:

“ ‘Hegemony’ in the concept of hegemonic masculinity..., is the social superiority acquired in the game of social power which leads to organization of private life and cultural processes going to beyond of cruel power contradictions... Hegemonic masculinity differs from a view of general ‘man sex role’... In fact, to acquire hegemony generally contains that creating

masculinity models which are completely original and artificial like the movies character animated by Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne and Sylvester Stallone” (Connell 1998, pp. 246).

It is not accurate to handle both masculinity and femininity as a constant essence in the context of gender patterns. Masculinity and femininity are manners of living and these manners of living can vary.

When it comes to Turkey, it is likely that constructed patterns concerning hegemonic masculinity can differ from John Wayne or Sylvester Stallone but there are some overlapping aspects which are the characteristics attributed to the subject who is in the position of the instrument in order to determine the ‘honorable’ masculinity. Although few men fulfill the necessary conditions to be a ‘real man’ and overlap with these images, a remarkable majority of men are in cooperation to maintain these images as it is important, for a man, to continue to benefit from the hegemonic masculinity ideology.

IV. MASCULINITY / HOMOSEXUALITY AS A GENDER NORM IN TURKEY

When it is considered that gender which varies from sex is a set of roles that society expects men and women to fulfill it becomes obvious that those gender roles are a crucial part of the social structure of Turkey. Nevertheless the ‘male role’ and ‘masculinity norms’ determined for woman and man in a distinct way within gender roles are very important and in this context normative and hegemonic.

There are different masculinities in Turkey. In other words, the culturally offered ideal of masculinity does not overlap with the characters of all men. However, there are “masculinity values” all men benefit from it and strive to sustain it. These ideals are crucial elements of hegemonic masculinity that are being continually reproduced. This reproduction process is performed through a vigorous cooperation of social institutions. Here, the most important function is performed by media.

Concerning media television is not the only most important factor. Alongside television, it is significant to consider other mass media like magazines, newspapers etc. D. Prusank (2007) quotes the results of the research undertaken by McRobbies which focused on representation

forms of masculinity in a given teen magazine from the 1960s through the 1980s. The results demonstrated that although the effects of the feminist movement in 1970s are certainly apparent for a short period, there is a tendency to turn back to the conventional gender patterns in 1980s. According to McRobbies, teen magazines promote heterosexuality as a focal point of women's life (Prusank 2007, p. 161). Prusank (2007), additionally, suggests that the heterosexual relationship pattern is promoted for men as well.

Besides the conventional masculinity images prevalent in the media it is likely that the masculine images which digresses from conventional masculinity images will appear as well. Masculinity representations which are outside of the patterns of hegemonic masculinity can be found in the television and magazine advertisements, in the series and movies. Variations of the representation of gender patterns has no order. In other words, while conventional masculinity patterns are being represented intensively in some periods, intensive representations of "new men" can be seen in other periods (Demez 2005, p. 157). But Prusank (2007) underlines that the represented sentimental, delicate and sensitive masculinity ultimately turns to a representation of the hegemonic masculinity. In this context, the presence of the various representations of masculinity does not mean that gender stereotypes are changing for the better.

Demez, in the context of Turkey, states the following to elucidate the variousness of the representation of masculinity in television series: "Although it was likely to see types of men who got rid of patriarchy, need a woman to direct them and need woman's tenderness in the 1990s in Turkey, along with beginning of the 2000s, the desire of the lost traditional Turkish man model has showed up and the modern landowner (they are not only the owner of the land, but the leader of the tribe and the entire family as well) well-educated, protective man type has come to the agenda again with high ratings." (Demez 2005, p. 158).

Being a man in Turkey requires one to have characteristics and features which consist of many gender patterns. These patterns include success, toughness, a lack of emotion, a strong economic, sexual disposition and the ability to consume large amounts of alcohol (Demez 2005, p. 135).

It is significant not to ignore the close relationship between hegemonic masculinity, homosexuality and homophobia. So it is important to approach homosexuality and

homophobia from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity in the context of Turkey or universally, as the construction of hegemonic masculinity contains subordinated masculinity. Michael S. Kimmel (2004) states that homophobia is an irrational fear of homosexual people and fear of being perceived as a homosexual by others. Furthermore, he suggests that it is one of the elements of cultural definition of masculinity and a hatred which makes “men” straight.* According to Kimmel (2004), homophobia is the reproducing instrument of the expression that homosexuals are not “real man” (2004, p. 104). Hegemonic masculinity, in other words, places the subordinated masculinities on the opposite side of and inferior to itself as the other, as a negative reference that is “irrelevant to masculinity” and maintains its existing hegemony by reproducing this process constantly.

“The most particular feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual, that is, it is linked to the marital institution and hereby homosexuality becomes the most important form of subordinated masculinity” (Connell 1998, p. 249). This action of subordination requires both mutual and ideological interaction and struggle. In this context, actions toward homosexual people as violence, discrimination, humiliation, legal harassment etc. indicate a strong relationship between homophobia and hegemonic masculinity which uses homophobia in order to produce and reproduce itself.

The masculinity pattern that is idealized by hegemonic masculinity is in a close relationship with the subordination of homosexuals and othering them so that those who are the target of homophobia shown by heterosexuals are not only homosexual men or women. For instance, a heterosexual person behaving “inappropriate” according to the identified gender patterns can be confronted with homophobia as well (Kimmel; Mahler 2003, p. 1446). It can occur in the form of a homophobic joke, harassment or physical violence.

Patterns of hegemonic masculinity reproduce itself within homosocial association intensively. This concept (homosocial association) indicates the preference of the same sex of being together and showing the same behavior patterns within this preferred space. Cafes, billiard salons and the military etc. which are shared largely by men can be counted among these spaces. The thing which is performed within these places that occupy a significant place in the infinite socialization of masculinity, is excluding women and behavior patterns attributed

* It is a concept signifying those who are not homosexual but heterosexual.

to femininity and reproducing patterns of hegemonic masculinity, although it is in crises sometimes (Onur; Koyuncu 2004, p. 39). As it is stated above, one of the most powerful weapons which is used within the process of reproduction is the construction of homosexuality in the context of masculinity as feminine and developing homophobia against it.

This situation constitutes the reality in the context of Turkey. Homosexuality in Turkey is perceived as a phenomenon which is far from masculinity, not “normal”, which should be excluded from the patterns of hegemonic masculinity heterosexual men benefit from and should be removed. Homosexuality in Turkey, like heterosexual masculinities, is experienced through multiple roles. These roles performed by homosexuals often are not approved and rejected by the heterosexual society. This rejection is based on homophobia and the resource of the homophobia is inherent in masculinity values. Heterosexual men benefitting from hegemonic masculinity whether they share the ideals of the hegemonic masculinity or not, use homophobia as an instrument in order to construct their masculinity and to maintain it.

The results of the research which is called “Household and Masculinity in The Axis of The Market”, conducted by Prof. Dr. Serpil Sancar are enlightening and summarizing.

“22 years old university student whom we had conversation said that:

‘Man, you call these faggot gay or something, right? They are faggot, faggot! It’s better to f**k and exterminate them’” (Cengiz; Tol; Küçükkural 2004, p. 50).

To see the violence, hostility, hatred, exclusion and willingness of exterminating, “racism without race” with the words of Balibar, briefly homophobia in the context of our subject is not difficult. Homosexuality is constructed as “something” irrelevant to masculinity by assuming that it is equal to femininity and bearer of the weakness of woman. Thus, homosexuality is perceived as a threat towards hegemonic masculinity which is produced by culture collectively and reproduced through socialization.

It should be mentioned in addition to the reasons mentioned of homophobic attitudes towards homosexuality that homosexuality does not stand on the same ground with procreation demanded by the heterosexist society. Procreation is a crucial condition of heterosexual and

patriarchal societies in order to be able to maintain their reign. Homosexuality is a phenomenon deconstructing this condition.

“Antagonism towards gay men is a standard feature of hegemonic masculinity. Such hostility is inherent in the construction of heterosexual masculinity itself. Conformity to the demands of hegemonic masculinity pushes heterosexual men to homophobia and rewards them for it... In other words, male heterosexual identity is sustained and affirmed by hatred for, and fear of gay men” (Donaldson 1993, p. 648).

V. CONCLUSION

It is seen that masculinity considered in the context of gender is not a single and stable structure. Multiple masculinity forms appear when it comes to the construction of masculinity. These multiple masculinity forms are products of different socialization processes implying psychological and cultural factors. Masculinity, in other words, is a cultural product. Hegemonic masculinity which is, determined by culture, attributed values, holding power, subordinating all other masculinities and women and superior to the multiple masculinity forms maintains its existence as a fantasy. Media, military and places of homosocial association appear as agents in which hegemonic masculinity is produced and reproduced.

Hegemonic masculinity that has a heterosexual characteristic seeks to attribute sense to its existence through the combat of remotion of homosexuality. It never mentions eradication outright. What results in this homophobia is a desire to combat homosexuality, which not only alienates homosexuality from the system of hegemonic masculinity but it subjects homosexuality as an inferior state of being and it relegates homosexuals to an inferior status as human beings and as men. This combat includes violence and various forms of discrimination towards homosexuals. Hegemonic masculinity is naturalized in so far that this combat gets support from the majority of society, state and institutions as well. In other words, homophobia is legitimized.

Finally a big question appears: *how can homosexuality which is in the clamp of hegemonic masculinity and confronting homophobia be rescued from this clamp?* It is obvious that it

will not come true in a short period when the relationship of the production process of gender with culture is considered, as it requires the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity patterns which is only possible just through cultural transformation. In this context, social institutions in the position of the castle of hegemonic masculinity should provide equal living spaces rather to encourage the power struggle among the masculinity patterns. It is important, in this context, to interrogate the stabilization of gender, to keep alive the idea that masculinity and femininity are manners of living which imply historical, psychological and sociological factors.

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