Performing Modernity in Turkey: Conflicts of Masculinity, Sexuality, and the Köçek Dancer

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PERFORMING MODERNITY IN TURKEY:
CONFLICTS OF MASCULINITY, SEXUALITY, AND THE KÖÇEK DANCER

by

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A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Middle Eastern Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis reexamines the history of the köçek dancer in Turkey and thereby opens modern heteronormative constructs of masculinity and sexuality to contestation, particularly as they have been symbolically embodied by the rural population of Anatolia. It traces the evolution of the köçek dancer from the early modern Ottoman Empire when the dancer embodied notions of divine love and the ideal of beauty as a young male object of adult men’s desires. In the nineteenth century, perceptions of the köçek began to change, primarily among Ottoman elites, whose modernization efforts were influenced by the European gaze and travelers’ Orientalist interpretations of köçek dancers as feminine and lascivious. Köçek dancing in Istanbul was subsequently banned in the mid-nineteenth century. In contemporary Turkey, the occupation of köçek dancing has become increasingly stigmatized with a rise in homophobic attitudes towards the dancers, who are perceived to be effeminate. The figure of the köçek can generally be viewed as having transformed from a professional urban performer belonging to well-trained companies of desirable dancers in Ottoman Istanbul to a marginalized, unmanly lower class entertainer in present day Anatolia. However, this study’s reevaluation and more comprehensive integration of scholarship and sources on the köçek in terms of the dancer’s production of historicized concepts of male gender and sexuality reveal continuous disruptions of this incomplete heteronormative transformation. Furthermore, the Kemalist modernization
project’s inability to totally transform the mores of the Anatolian peasantry is also exposed along with the conflicts that arise from ambivalent performances of gendered national subjectivities.
Köçeks with other entertainers from Levni’s *Surname-i Vehbi*. Source: Esin Atil (1999).
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Men sat in rapt attention, light running silver down the side of a face or the jutting archipelago of a nose. The half-darkness was rapacious and secretive and all eyes were directed to the boy who swayed in moaning rapture, his dark shadow leaping up the wall behind him—monstrous, gigantic….The moon was high in the sky, infinitely remote, symbol of men’s dreams….In my mind’s eye I saw, as in a witch’s ball, the figure of myself, spellbound.

— Irfan Orga, *The Caravan Moves On: Three Weeks among Turkish Nomads*

INTRODUCTION

This thesis deconstructs modern concepts of masculinity and sexuality in Turkey by examining the contradictions, transgressions, and interruptions of a heteronormative regime promoted by Kemalist ideology during the single-party Republican period of the 1920s through 1940s. These themes are explored in terms of how gender and sexuality, as performative acts, have been embodied by the ambivalent figure of the male köçek dancer, whose body is a site of discursive convergence and conflict with other regimes of power including class, race, and kinship. Köçek dancing is historicized with an analysis tracing its praxis from the early modern Ottoman Empire to present day Turkey. The weakening of the Kemalist project of Westernization and modernization has left it increasingly vulnerable to criticism over the past two decades resulting in the emergence and heightened visibility of multiple national subjectivities. At the same time, its legacy of authoritarianism and nationalism continues to drive public life and a national identity that is defined by rigid boundaries of community embodied on multiple levels. It is not the purpose of this thesis to evaluate the Kemalist nation-building project in terms of success or failure, as studies of Turkey have often done in the past. Rather, it aims to expose its constructions and problematize the ambiguities of a middle ground of modernity, where reified binary concepts like male and female roles, backwardness and civilization, past and present, and secular and Islamic can be critically engaged with and challenged.

The köçek dancer is a central figure of this study, which traces the dancer’s evolution from a professional, urban performer and young, beautiful object of male desire in the early modern Ottoman Empire to a rural, lower class entertainer in contemporary Turkey stigmatized for such origins and whose perceived effeminacy threatens national integrity. Nevertheless, the
köçek still retains a homoerotic allure for male audiences. The contradictory, ambivalent identity produced and reproduced by köçek performances represents the incomplete transformations attempted, or merely symbolized, by Kemalist reform efforts, particularly the heteronormalization of gender and sexuality in rural Anatolia, and the conflicts that emerge as a result.

The introduction of this thesis discusses the contributions and gaps of scholarship on the köçek and masculinity and sexuality more widely in the Middle East. It additionally presents the theoretical landscape and historical setting in which I situate the arguments of this thesis, primarily drawing on Afsaneh Najmabadi’s work on the heteronormalization of beauty, desire, and gender in Iran, Leela Gandhi’s identification of the conflated identities of the “homosexual” and “savage” in Victorian era Orientalist discourses of sexuality, and Judith Butler’s deconstruction of modern heteronormative binaries of gender and the sexed body as performatively constituted and discursively produced by systems of power. Modernization’s transformation of the köçek’s identity is illustrated in Chapter One with the ambivalent account of an urban intellectual, Irfan Orga, from the 1930s describing a rural köçek performance that inspires simultaneous feelings of fear and desire. In doing so, the köçek emerges as a homoerotic specter of a sexually “decadent” past haunting heteronormative modernity. This discussion of his writing is bracketed by a comparative reexamination of scholar Metin And’s work on Turkish dance, which Orga helps open to critique. Chapter Two contextualizes the modern marginalization of the köçek as an effect of the peasantist ideology of the Kemalist elite and the state’s coercive practices in rural Anatolia, the Kemalist position on sexuality, and the invention of an exclusionary national folk dance tradition and heteronormative standard of performance. Lastly, Chapter Three provides a comparative analysis of contemporary köçek dancing based on
a cinematic portrayal and ethnographic evidence that reflect how the stigmatized, ambiguously
gendered body of the köçek is embedded in the Kemalist legacy and produced by discourses of
national identity.

**Review of literature**

Metin And is the pioneer scholar of dance and folklore in Turkey and has written
numerous books in both Turkish and English on these topics. His work is still often cited in
historical studies of the performing arts in Turkey, yet is rarely reevaluated. In addition to dance,
he has also frequently addressed Turkish theater, particularly Karagöz shadow theater, in his
studies. Most of his works were published between the 1950s and 1970s, but he continued to
produce books through the 1990s. Those that have been considered in this study will be
examined in the following chapters in relation to more recent scholarship addressing köçek
dancers. And clearly writes with the perspective of a Kemalist intellectual. This is reflected in
his descriptions of the dancers as effeminate, a heteronormative, modern view of the dancers,
who had, prior to the nineteenth century, widely been considered objects of desire by adult
males. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the dancers were typically of non-Muslim, non-Turkish
origins to define them as outsiders in relation to the Kemalist imagining of national identity. He
projects this perspective onto the dancers, who he mostly discusses in the urban Ottoman context
to also position them as part of the past rather than as representatives of Turkish national dance,
which was instead invented by the state from the manipulation of Anatolian folk dances and
projected a reserved, refined image often with couples representing companionate male-female
pairing. The peasant population from which the “national” dances were cherry-picked
comprised 80 percent of society in the early years of the Republic and symbolized the real, pure
Turk for Kemalist elites. And acknowledges the existence of köçek dancing in rural Anatolia, but addresses it far less in this context to minimize its continued presence and its association with homoerotic desire and same-sex prostitution that was well-known in Ottoman Istanbul.

Since And’s time, Arzu Öztürkmen has emerged as the most prominent contemporary historian of Turkish dance and folklore. Most of her works are concerned with the folk traditions of Turkey that were invented during the Republican period of the 1920s to 1940s. Her work on the emergence of folk dance in the context of the Kemalist nation-building project will be addressed in Chapter Two. While she has acknowledged that some of And’s work is exclusionary and problematic (personal communication, July 2013), she does not typically critique the obvious aforementioned biases of his in her own publications and even upholds some of them. Additionally, she has only written about köçeks in the Ottoman context, focusing on their role in imperial festivals and repertoire of movements rather than their significance in terms of sexuality and their performances in Istanbul taverns for eager male audiences. She has also stated that the köçeks “dressed as females”¹ when other scholars, namely Afsaneh Najmabadi and Anthony Shay, have indicated that it was not their intention to portray themselves as female, which will be addressed later on. This feminization derives from the derogatory view in European travelers’ accounts of köçeks² as typically effeminate and lascivious, which spread among Ottoman elites in the nineteenth century under the influence of the European gaze. The

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projection of this heterosexist perception onto the köçek has frequently reoccurred in other scholarship following And’s, including that of Eugenia Popescu-Judetz,3 Dorit Klebe,4 and also Esin Atil’s publication of Ottoman statesman and artist Nakkaş Levni’s Surname-i Vehbi,5 a richly illustrated manuscript depicting the poet Vehbi’s account of an imperial festival in the year 1720. Atil does not acknowledge the prominent role of köçek dancers, who clearly appear in several illustrations and are correctly identified in works such as And’s.6 Instead, when she does specifically discuss the dancers, she characterizes them as çengis, who she describes as young female professional dancers, in contrast to other scholars’ assertions that female performers were depicted less frequently than males in Ottoman surnames.7

Most recent studies that have addressed köçek dancing, like the ones just mentioned, do so in the Ottoman context and commonly use several of the same historical sources. And’s work is frequently relied upon, particularly Dances of Anatolian Turkey (1959) and A Pictorial History of Turkish Dancing (1976), which will also be discussed in this study. Like And, other scholars also often look to Ottoman miniatures illustrated in the surnames, which were created to record important events and celebrations of the Ottoman court, according to Öztürkmen.8 Levni’s Surname-i Vehbi especially is one of the best sources for images of köçek dancing at the height of its popularity between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries where the dancers appear in

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6 Metin And, A Pictorial History of Turkish Dancing (Ankara: Dost Yayınları, 1976).
7 Öztürkmen, “Performance, Iconography, and Narrative,” 80.
Danielle van Dobben, “Dancing Modernity: Gender, Sexuality and the State in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic” (Thesis, University of Arizona, 2008), 43.
8 Öztürkmen, “Performance, Iconography, and Narrative,” 78.
several instances performing in a variety of settings including tightropes, rafts on the water, and in the midst of many other types of performers such as zurna and davul players, who still accompany köçek dancing today. Köçeks also appear in Ottoman costume books which were originally produced as souvenirs for European travelers, who themselves recounted köçek performances in their travel writings. Another major Ottoman source documenting köçeks is Evliya Çelebi’s Seyahatname, a travelogue of the author’s journeys throughout the Ottoman Empire with prolific accounts of its cultural landscape in the seventeenth century. He describes the companies of professional köçeks, known as kols, in Istanbul as comprised of hundreds of desirable, skillful young dancers, who were either Jews, Gypsies, Greeks, or Armenians. The last main references in historical studies of Ottoman köçek dancing are the poet Enderunlu Fazıl Bey’s works Defter-i Aşk and Çenginame, which contain amorous poems about köçeks in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and give some of their stage names like Altıntop (Golden Ball) and Kanarya (Canary).

Despite the majority of studies on köçeks continuing to project heteronormative interpretations similar to the biases of European travelers’ accounts, more critical scholarship has emerged that considers the historical context of sexuality more carefully. In his book Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality, and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance, Stavros Stavrou Karayanni discusses Orientalist European accounts of young male dancers across the Middle East and Central Asia, including köçeks, from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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10 Ibid., See Section 44, 240-41.
11 And, Dances of Anatolian Turkey, 30.
12 Stavros Stavrou Karayanni, Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality, and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004).
He argues that some of the many fearful, anxious accounts of their deviant and immoral sensuality that at the same time express a fascination with such performances represent a conflict between male viewers’ heteronormative subjectivity and the attempt to subvert an inner homoerotic desire aroused by the dancers. Karayanni also is one of the only scholars to condemn And for simultaneously coloring köçek dancing as an occupation held in low esteem and thus not often written about while mentioning how the dancers’ praises were sung in poetry without exploring the social dynamics involved in such paradoxical assertions that he often presents in his work.\(^{13}\) Karayanni also introduces İrfan Orga’s ambivalent account of a köçek dancer in rural Anatolia during the 1930s, a “crucial intervention”\(^{14}\) in the “tradition” of heteronormativity, which will be returned to with a more extensive, in-depth analysis than Karayanni’s in the following chapter. Anthony Shay argues against three persistent problems in scholarship: the idea that solo improvised dance by males in the Middle East and Central Asia is a “female form of cultural expression”; the confusion of the same-sex practices they may engage in with gay or homosexual identities; and the notion that the appearance of male dancers like the köçek is a parody of women.\(^{15}\) Like Karayanni, he also points to the more ambiguous gender positionality that these male dancers began to take on in the nineteenth century under the European gaze as they eventually disappeared as predominant societal institutions in urban centers. This thesis is an effort to build on and contribute to these emerging studies that address the ambivalences of normative modern gender and sexuality, embodied by the köçek, and problematize the shortcomings of past scholarship.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 81-82.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 83-85.
Furthermore, the vast majority of scholarship on köçek dancers relates to the urban Ottoman context with almost none on the dancers in the countryside during the Ottoman period or after, despite the continuation of köçek dancing to present day in Anatolia. This likely occurred, as I argue in Chapter Two, because köçek dancing was excluded from the national folk dance repertoire by modernizing Kemalist elites who were hoping to rid the peasantry of the “decadent” sexual practices with which the köçeks had been associated for centuries. It thus became a marginalized and stigmatized occupation that is growing more so with a rise in homophobic attitudes towards the dancers. This transformation was clearly well underway at the time of And’s work. Nevertheless, the köçek has continued to persist and provoke feelings of both fear and desire in male audiences. This thesis attempts to push scholarship on the köçek beyond the Ottoman era through the latter half of the twentieth century as a new, important way of examining heteronormative constructs of gender and sexuality along with their interruptions and what they reveal about the legacy of the Kemalist project and modernity in Turkey. Chapter Three will discuss accounts of köçek dancing occurring after the 1950s, relying in part on Berna Kurt’s ethnographic study as what seems to be the only published academic work focusing on contemporary köçek dancing in Turkey.\footnote{Berna Kurt, “Dans Erkeği ‘Bozar’ mı? Sinop’ta Köçeklik Geleneğine Kısa Bir Bakış” (Does Dance “Corrupt” Manhood? A Quick Look at the Köçek Tradition in Sinop), \textit{Kültür ve Siyasette Feminist Yakla\v{s}malar} 3 (2007), accessed December 2013, http://dansyazilari.blogspot.com/2010/04/dans-erkegi-bozar-mi-sinopta-koceklik.html.} While they are generally less visible today, köçek figures have appeared in Turkish cinema, including \textit{Aya Seyahat} (2009)\footnote{\textit{Aya Seyahat} (Journey to the Moon), directed by Kutluğ Ataman, 2009, film.} and \textit{Beynelmilel} (2006)\footnote{\textit{Beynelmilel} (The International), directed by Muharrem Gülmez and Sırrı Süreyya Önder, 2006, film.} (discussed in the final chapter), which treat the twentieth century köçek as a figure marginalized by Kemalist modernization, yet one who has persisted through its unsuccessful
efforts in the countryside. A film entitled Köçek (1975) is about an androgynous young man, played by famous actress Müjde Ar, and the social conflicts that revolve around his ambiguous gender and sexuality.¹⁹

There are a variety of works emerging on gender and sexuality in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, although the majority of these have traditionally pertained to women and especially their symbolic role in the Kemalist modernization project. Masculinity and male sexuality are understudied topics across most scholarship, which this thesis intends to further illuminate in the Ottoman/Turkish context through its analysis of köçek dancing and the paradoxes of modernity. The body of literature regarding male gender in twentieth century Turkey is small and is mostly confined to studies of contemporary gay or trans identities,²⁰ some of which will be discussed in the final chapter, and the military as an institution of masculinization for young Turkish men.²¹

Studies of sexuality in general during the formative Republican period (1920s-40s) are even more rare and mostly pertain to discourses on prostitution, medicine, and reproductive health.²² Same-sex practices are almost never addressed, in part because of a lack of discursive evidence, which is an issue that will be discussed in Chapter Two. While there have been more works on homoeroticism and the plurality of male sexual practices in the Ottoman Empire, a comprehensive history of Ottoman sexuality remains to be written. Additionally, as scholars like

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²⁰ For a historical study of homosexuality in Turkey see, Arslan Yüzgün, Türkiye’de Eşcinsellik (Homosexuality in Turkey) (Istanbul: Hür-Yüz, 1986).


Özgen Felek have pointed out, there is a wide variety of opinions in historical documents regarding male same-sex practices that range from condemnation to celebration. Furthermore, personal pronouns are not gendered in Turkish so it is often difficult to discern the gender of beloveds in Ottoman poetry, which may have been automatically assigned the feminine in European translations. In *The Age of Beloveds*, Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı address the presence of multiple types of beloveds, including young males, in early modern Ottoman poetry, the influence of the heteronormative European gaze, and the later eroticization of power in both the West and East.

In addition to the few works that focus primarily on sexuality in the Ottoman/Turkish context, there are also several books comprised of diverse collections of studies addressing masculinity and sexuality across time and geography in the Middle East and Central Asia that aim to emphasize their variability and move beyond scholarship that has traditionally painted the Islamic world as monolithic and atemporal. In *Islamicate Sexualities*, Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi present literary studies ranging from Medieval Egypt to nineteenth century Iran with topics including cross-dressing and male homoeroticism in an effort to historicize gender and sexuality as they vary among different times and spaces. *Imagined Masculinities* examines constructs of male gender identity in Israel, Turkey (in relation to the military), and the

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23 Özgen Felek, “Imperial Men: Manhood and Masculinity in the Early Ottoman Empire” (lecture, The Graduate Center, CUNY, December 5, 2013).
For additional studies of sexuality in the Ottoman Empire see, Selma Nilgün Erdoğan, *Sexual Life in Ottoman Society* (İstanbul: Dönence, 2000).
Murat Bardakçı, *Osmanlı'da Seks* (Sex among the Ottomans) (İstanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 2005).
Arab world.\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Islamic Homosexualities} is an extensive collection with literary, historical, and anthropological studies from the Balkans to sub-Saharan Africa.\textsuperscript{27} However, the other two later works have departed from using the term “homosexuality” to describe what is now more appropriately referred to as same-sex practices and desire as it carries a connotation of modern and naturalized heteronormative identity. Some important, nuanced works concentrating on male gender and sexuality in the Arab world include Wilson Chacko Jacob’s examination of the paradoxes of colonial modernity and the shaping of bourgeois masculinity in Egypt during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries\textsuperscript{28} and Joseph Massad’s study of sexual subjectivities, nationalism, and perceptions of the past among Arab intellectuals of the same period.\textsuperscript{29} The central historical studies that inform the theoretical framework of this thesis, accompanied by Judith Butler and Leela Gandhi’s work, are Afsaneh Najmabadi’s \textit{Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards} and Dror Ze’evi’s \textit{Producing Desire}, to which I will now turn. Their analyses provide nuanced accounts of modern changes and conflicts related to gender and sexuality in the Ottoman/Turkish context and help to develop an in-depth comprehension of similar issues this thesis reveals by tracing the evolution of köçek dancing.

\textbf{Theoretical framework and historical setting}

In her book \textit{Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards}, Najmabadi argues that the heteronormalization of love, which took place during the nineteenth century, was a key element

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, eds., \textit{Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East} (London: Saqi, 2000).
\item \textsuperscript{29} Joseph A. Massad, \textit{Desiring Arabs} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
\end{itemize}
influencing the political and cultural shifts of emerging Iranian modernity. She examines other male “gender positionalities” which existed during the nineteenth century before the modern gender binaries of man/woman and heterosexual/homosexual became the paradigm for sexuality. During this transitional period, “homoeroticism and same-sex practices came to mark Iran as backward; heteronormalization of eros and sex became a condition of ‘achieving modernity,’ a project that called for heterosocialization of public space and a reconfiguration of family life.” Najmabadi states that beauty transformed from a concept that could lead a man to love and to desire a young male or female regardless of gender to one that polarized gender in the context of “natural” heterosexual love. She suggests this “enormous cultural transformation” had occurred by the end of the nineteenth century as Iranians were exposed to the European gaze and increasingly interacted with Europeans who viewed homoerotic desire and homosexual practices as vices.

In Affective Communities, Leela Gandhi discusses how in Western Europe the figures of the homosexual and uncivilized, colonized Other were collapsed into each other through Victorian era discourse. Victorian views on gender and sexuality would not only influence Iranian modernity, but also late Ottoman society through the European gaze and the effort to modernize and would carry on into the twentieth century with the construction of a moral pedagogy in the early Turkish Republic. In the historical context of nineteenth century sexology and social Darwinism, Gandhi asserts that anticolonial writer Edward Carpenter finds it necessary to speak against Western hegemony and “civilized” society through his homosexuality

31 Ibid., 3.
32 Ibid., 5-6.
33 Ibid., 4.
because he, “arrived, or came into being, at the outer margins of ‘civilized’ or intelligible
sociality, and in the company of a crowd of outcasts and outsiders whose numbers included
Europe’s subject races.”

She points to Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* as a “manifesto of heteronormativity” based on the idea that Europe had progressed far beyond its “primitive,” colonized subjects in terms of morality and civilization. Heteronormativity had to be compulsory because the evolutionary success of Western civilization depended on sexual selection and monogamous reproduction by dimorphic male and female sexed bodies. Darwin argued that the ambivalent gender and therefore unintelligible sexual difference characterizing inferior races resulted in the failure of sexual reproduction to produce civilization. Similarly, because of the emphasis on sexual difference and reproduction, the ambiguous figure of the homosexual is also excluded as a pathologically backward and primitive being within the Western civilizational fantasy. Gandhi argues that the “functions and identifications” of both the “homosexual” and the “savage” were discursively produced so that they were conflated and became one in the same.

All spaces outside the West, particularly the Orient, became characterized as a “sotadic zone” of sexual decadence and unnatural homosexual perversions and vice.

Persian poetry and paintings in early Qajar Iran (1785-1925) often feature beautiful young, beardless males known as the *ghilman, or amrads*. For a male adolescent, it was considered inevitable, if not accepted and valued, to be the object of adult men’s desires. Like Najmabadi indicates in Iran, Dror Ze’evi draws the conclusion that male sexuality was viewed in

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35 Ibid., 47-49.
36 Ibid., 50.
37 Ibid., 51-52.
38 Najmabadi, 15.
two distinct phases in the Ottoman context as well. Until puberty boys were thought to have an untamed sexuality which they could use to seduce older men, but they could be attracted just the same to other boys and women. Once a man developed a full beard, a symbol of manhood, he was expected to become the desirer rather than the object of desire; those who desired other adult men were thought to be suffering from an illness. However, some adult men, known as mukhannas in Iran, shaved their beards to attract the desires of other adult men. The binary of modern sexual categories has perceived amrads and mukhannas as effeminate, thus rendering homoerotic desire as “frustrated heterosexual desire.” For contemporaries, however, the taboo surrounding the shaving of an adult man’s beard was the association of beardlessness with amrads, not with femininity. Sexual practices were not static and bound by concepts of sexual orientation in the early modern Islamic world.

Ze’evi’s Producing Desire further elaborates on the connection of concepts of beauty to their Sufi origins as well as to their ability to incite love and desire for both young males and females. In the Ottoman Middle East, Sufis developed the idea of gazing at beauty as a path to true love of God. According to Ze’evi, since men were considered more perfect beings than women and the latter were not permitted inside Sufi lodges, beardless young men became the “objects of loving contemplation” in the practices of some heterodox Sufi sects. Taboos against sexual relations broke down after gazing at the beauty of young men was combined with the song and dance ritual sama, which often produced states of trance and ecstasy and involved bodily contact. This eventually became a common practice, but considered politically subversive by the orthodox Sufi order that comprised the religious backbone of Ottoman society in the

39 Dror Ze’evi, Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 93.
40 Najmabadi, 16.
41 Ze’evi, 83.
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.\textsuperscript{42} Same-sex practices in the Middle East had been recognized and tolerated since the beginnings of Islam and little was done to prevent or punish them as long as they were kept private, but as indicated previously, they were also condemned in some legal and moral perspectives.\textsuperscript{43} It is also worthy to note that expressions of divine love for young males in Ottoman poetry sometimes advocated abstaining from sexual contact with them in order to maintain the purity of the male beloved and therefore the spirituality of the lover and his sense of longing and reflection.\textsuperscript{44}

In the nineteenth century, homoeroticism became problematic not because of Sufi politics, but due to expectations for men that changed from attraction to males and females with love for young men as the most virtuous to heteronormative sex and love accompanied by distinct ideas of beauty for women and men.\textsuperscript{45} Ze’evi suggests that the process of heteronormalization occurred over a longer period of time and less rapidly in the Ottoman Empire than it did in Iran.\textsuperscript{46} Many Sufi groups were disbanded out of a new sense of fear and shame regarding homoerotic love and sex, now viewed as deviant and perverse.\textsuperscript{47} The final blow was delivered in the 1920s when Mustafa Kemal outlawed Sufi activity as a corrupt relic of the Ottoman Empire that needed to be swept away to accommodate modern society.\textsuperscript{48} Najmabadi explains that, by the end of the nineteenth century, beauty was no longer genderless in Qajar Iran; it had become feminized, as was occurring elsewhere in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Andrews and Kalpakhl, 49, 56.
\textsuperscript{45} Ze’evi, 96.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{49} Najmabadi, 26.
She argues that the heteronormalization of Iranian social values occurred largely through increased contact with Europeans who erroneously linked same-sex practices with homosociality and amrad dancers, whom they perceived to be effeminate and dressing up in female clothing. M. Şükrü Hanioğlu also indicates that during the Tanzimat era same-sex practices became stigmatized among the Ottomans as an effect of European criticism accompanied by the disappearance of “boy-lovers” and the shame elites began to feel, who subsequently made efforts to hide such preferences.\(^\text{50}\) Iranian men drew parallels between the shaven faces of European men and beautiful amrads or ghilman, which Najmabadi identifies as the point where the connection between effeminacy and beardlessness, resulting in the feminization of the object of male same-sex desire, was initially made.\(^\text{51}\) Homosociality began to function as a masquerade for homosexuality and homoeroticism could be masqueraded as heteroeros, marking the adaption of the modern binary concepts of heterosexuality and derivative homosexuality.\(^\text{52}\) Love had also shifted from the homosocial domain to that of companionate marriage, which could act as a temporal type of masquerade for homosexual preference.\(^\text{53}\)

Najmabadi argues that through the 1930s, the Europeanized dandy farangi ‘ma’ab embodied the excesses of modernity and became a source of cultural anxiety for Iranian men being pushed and pulled in different directions by the upheavals and transformations of modernization.\(^\text{54}\) Furthermore, the farangi ‘ma’ab’s beardless face conjured simultaneous images of the beautiful amrad, the feminized dancing amrad and mukhanna, and the adult male desirer of both young men and women, all of which cast him into a masculinity loathed by Iranian

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 35.
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 38.
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 58.
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 138-39.
modernity. Najmabadi explains that the evolution of the farangi ‘ma’ab into the modern man was another reason why efforts were made to erase the amrad and ghilman from Iranian cultural memory. Similarly in the Ottoman context, Elif Bilgin identifies an anxiety over what was portrayed in late Ottoman literature as the proliferation of the gender ambiguous, “over-Westernized” male dandy. In novels of the period, the effeminacy of such characters is constantly implied, though never addressed directly, and they are overly concerned with body image. Bilgin argues that the over-Westernized Ottoman dandy was feminized because of his association with the West, which was viewed as a woman, yet represented characteristics of both femininity and masculinity. While this contributed to his threatening ambiguity, I further suggest that, like the farangi ‘ma’ab, the Ottoman dandy’s representation of both feminine and masculine qualities can be seen as the simultaneous embodiment of the feminized amrad and the adult male desirer. Before bridging Najmabadi’s ideas regarding the amrad to an examination of the köçek, it is necessary to contextualize the theoretical arguments presented thus far in Judith Butler’s broader discussion of heteronormativity and its performance. Butler’s work addressing the discursive production and boundaries of modern gendered subjects and sexed bodies facilitates an understanding of how they can reveal and expose to contestation their own construction, and thereby that of the national imaginary.

Butler argues that gendered subjects which juridical systems of power claim to represent are in fact produced by them through hegemonic discourse. Becoming feminine or masculine

55 Ibid., 141.
57 Ibid., 104.
58 Ibid., 107-08.
is not a decision made by an individual; rather these gender identities are, “the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment.”\textsuperscript{60} She demonstrates that gender, as a socially constructed, reified category, is not fixed and is continuously reproduced in different ways through cultural processes. Gender is itself a repetitive, performative act of “becoming” regulated by various political, social, and religious factors. In \textit{Gender Trouble}, Butler states that, “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”\textsuperscript{61} It is also entangled with other subjectivities like race and sexuality that cannot be separated from one another. She posits that sex, considered to be a “natural,” biological given, is a binary category no less socially constructed than gender and is in fact an effect produced by gendered discourse.\textsuperscript{62} There is no one prediscursive sex that leads to taking on a specific gender norm. Rather, gender identity is an effect of various discursive practices and the norm is an assigned ideal that can never actually be fully embodied or inhabited by its subject.\textsuperscript{63}

In a heteronormative regime of gender, masculine and feminine genders are assumed to be continuous with male and female sex and their corresponding reflection in heterosexual desire. The perceived unity of physical attributes and therefore integrity and intelligibility of the naturalized, sexed body in fact fragments it and facilitates its invasion and domination by systems of power.\textsuperscript{64} Such binaries of gender, sex, and desire are constructed as an opposition with each element constituted and realized to the extent that it is not the opposite. Non-

\textsuperscript{60} Judith Butler, \textit{Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”} (New York: Routledge, 1993), 232.
\textsuperscript{61} Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 25.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 6-7.
\textsuperscript{63} Butler, \textit{Bodies that Matter}, 231.
\textsuperscript{64} Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 96, 106.
normative, discontinuous gender identities and sexuality are excluded within a heteronormative regime and are used to reinforce the norms by demonstrating what they are not. However, Butler argues that the persistent presence of such exclusions within a “heterosexist” system of power supporting “masculine hegemony” provides a critical entryway to expose the boundaries and regulations of the reified norm and the means by which it can be potentially contested and subverted.\(^{65}\) Additionally, the repetition of heterosexual constructs in a non-heterosexual framework destabilizes the naturalized construct of heteronormative categories to cause confusion and thereby “gender trouble.”\(^{66}\)

The focus of this thesis now turns to how the *amrad*, analyzed by Najmabadi as a contested and troubling figure of male gender and sexuality, also produced the ambiguity of heteronormative modernization specifically in his ability to perform these concepts through dance. As indicated by Najmabadi, the *amrad* initially became a feminized figure because European travelers who observed dances performed by *amrads* thought they were dressing in women’s clothing and trying to imitate women’s mannerisms. Her analysis of the *farangi ma’ab* and the parallel I have drawn to the Ottoman dandy indicate how the effeminate *amrad*, particularly as this perception was associated with and performed through dance, became a sexual and cultural conflict for modernizing society leading to the attempted subversion of the figure of the *amrad* and his shameful homoeroticism. The following chapter discusses the transformation and attempted suppression of the *köçek* dancer as the embodiment of the young male beloved, and the ultimate effeminate male and deviant of modern heterosexuality.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 30.
\(^{66}\) Ibid., 33-34.
CHAPTER ONE

THE KÖÇEK: FROM YOUNG MALE BELOVED TO TROUBLING SPECTER OF DISCONTINUITY

Certain dances were traditionally performed by köçeks in the Ottoman Empire to their own genre of music known as köçekçe. Köçeks were either professional or amateur dancers, some slaves, who could be found performing for the imperial Ottoman court and living in the palace, performing in the taverns and coffeehouses of Galata and Pera in Istanbul, or for male audiences throughout the Anatolian countryside from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries when they were most popular. The young male dancer existed, and still exists, in various manifestations throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. The travel writings And uses as sources in Dances of Anatolian Turkey (1959) illustrate how the dances of young men offended Europeans’ heteronormative conceptions of sexuality and beauty, yet at the same time also had the ability to enthrall them. This parallels, in part, Najmabadi’s argument that Europeans linked same-sex practices, viewed as an appalling vice and impediment to modernity, to amrad dancers in Iran, contributing to the feminization of the dancers in the nineteenth century.

The köçeks were adored by local male audiences and their praises were sung in poetry like that of Enderunlu Fazıl Bey’s Defter-i Aşk (Book of Love) in which he dedicated 170 couplets to the famous eighteenth century köçek Çingene Ismail (Gypsy Ismail). In regards to another dancer, Mısırlı (Egyptian), he writes, “when he starts to dance with his whole body, he

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67 For a study of köçeks in relation to the taverns see, Reşat Ekrem Koçu, Eski Istanbul’da Meyhaneler ve Meyhane Köçekleri (Taverns and Tavern Köçeks in Old Istanbul) (Istanbul: Doğan Kitapçılık, 1947, 2002).
68 And, Dances of Anatolian Turkey, 25, 28.
69 Karayanni, 77.
70 And, Dances of Anatolian Turkey, 24.
71 Popescu-Judetz, 51.
drives the public crazy…He has a myriad of lovers. Both his face and his walk are pleasant; he looks more pleasant when he unfastens his šalvar....”\textsuperscript{72} In his \textit{Seyahatname}, Evliya Çelebi describes the köçek company (kol) Babanazlı in the seventeenth century as, “two hundred boys, whose voluptuous motions set all the assemblies at circumcision feasts in an uproar” and the Chelebi company as, “the most famous of all in stripping their admirers by their charms and caresses.” He goes on to assert that, “since Adam descended from Paradise on earth, never was there seen such a crowd of tempting boys than under Sultan Murad IV.”\textsuperscript{73} And quotes Çelebi’s passages from the same English translation of \textit{Seyahatname} in an appendix at the end of \textit{Dances of Anatolian Turkey}, but calculatingly excludes the terms “voluptuous,” “caresses,” and “tempting.” In keeping with his eschewal of these more amorous local accounts in favor of European ones that reveal both fascination and disgust, And states that the dances and appearance of the köçeks “suggest femininity” and that “sometimes they dress like girls.”\textsuperscript{74} However, in his article, “The Male Dancer in the Middle East and Central Asia,” Shay emphasizes that young male dancers were not trying to impersonate females, except for comical purposes, but were using elements of both male and female costume and appearance, including long, tiered skirts or loose pants (šalvar), colorful silks, jewelry, and long hair, along with other markers of maleness, to enhance their beauty as young male performers.\textsuperscript{75} This reflects Najmabadi’s point that beauty was only recently feminized in the nineteenth century, accompanied by the discursive disappearance of the young male object of desire that And

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Narrative of Travels}, trans. Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, Section 44, 240-41.
\textsuperscript{74} And, \textit{Dances of Anatolian Turkey}, 26.
\textsuperscript{75} Shay, “The Male Dancer in the Middle East and Central Asia,” 150.
attempts to facilitate, but nevertheless still surfaces in the Europeans’ expressions of enthrallment he quotes.

Like European accounts, And’s description of the köçek as feminized reflects a heteronormalized, modern view, additionally reflecting a sense of Kemalism that was instilled in elite urban Turkish society by the time of the book’s publication. While professional dancers were often from non-Muslim origins, And demonstrates several times, and illustrates with the traveler accounts, that köçeks were “not Turks” and that “Turks would not enter such a degraded profession.” He defends the image of the modern Turkish heterosexual male by casting the köçek as a feminized and therefore “degraded” masculinity and relic of the Ottoman past. This indicates the elevation of the term “Turk” as a marker of national identity based on racial purity, which was used traditionally by Ottoman elites as a negative connotation for the uneducated peasant. Professional dancers in the Ottoman Empire, like many köçeks, indeed seem to be typically from non-Muslim minorities. However, And’s emphasis on their non-Turkishness in addition to their non-Muslimness indicates not only the modernization of masculinity but also its nationalization, thus casting Turkishness as historically morally superior and the minority dancers (mostly Armenians, Jews, Greeks, and Gypsies according to And and Çelebi) as feminized Others. In doing so, And still associates, although indirectly, the köçek with homoeroticism and same-sex practices while trying to distance them from the Turkish nation as an indication of what it should not be when they were in fact still a reality of lived experience as Irfan Orga’s writing will reveal. Butler has argued that non-normative gender identities and

77 And, Dances of Anatolian Turkey, 28-29.
79 And, Dances of Anatolian Turkey, 29.
sexuality are excluded within a heteronormative regime and are used to reinforce the norms by demonstrating what they are not. However, the persistent presence of such exclusions within a “heterosexist” system of power supporting “masculine hegemony” provides a critical entryway to expose the boundaries and regulations of the reified norm and the means by which it can be potentially contested and subverted.\(^{80}\)

Danielle van Dobben has identified a general tendency in Turkish scholarship to characterize paid performers in the Ottoman Empire through the early twentieth century as non-Muslim (and therefore non-Turk) because of their occupation’s reputation as low class when in fact Muslim Turks very likely did also work as performers, just like contemporary Turkish köçek do. She goes on to suggest that Turkish historians have sought to distinguish Ottoman performers as foreign in the effort to disconnect the Ottoman past from the modern Turkish nation.\(^{81}\) Furthermore, I suggest that this perception of the past also links notions of backwards same-sex practices with feminized outsiders, which was discussed in the introduction in terms of the Ottoman dandy’s threatening ambiguity associated with feminized concepts of the West and the young male object of desire. This also reflects the influence of what Gandhi has identified as the conflation of the “homosexual” and “savage” in Victorian era European discourse relating to the penetrable Oriental Other, but in this case the feminized, or effeminate, Other has been constructed as anyone non-Turk. This argument will be returned to in the last chapter.

The figure of the köçek became misconstrued under the European gaze as a feminized stand-in for women in terms of dance and sexual relations, allegedly as a result of gender segregation. European observers viewed the sensual movements and facial expressions in köçek dances, which also involved skilled athleticism, acrobatics, and mimicry, as lascivious and

\(^{80}\) Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 30.

\(^{81}\) Dobben, 45-46.
morally degraded. However, they did not give consideration to the often comical or satirical intentions of sexual references.\textsuperscript{82} Still, the köçek was an object of adult male desire and, as Karayanni explains in \textit{Dancing Fear and Desire}, the köçeks were sexually available and courted by men, including the Janissaries.\textsuperscript{83} Their performances could so impassion their audiences that they could lead to “an ecstasy of obscene and blasphemous words, glass breaking, and sword and dagger brandishing” in the taverns of Istanbul.\textsuperscript{84} This also contributed to infighting among the Janissaries and Sultan Mahmud’s forbidding their performances in order to preserve the order of the army.\textsuperscript{85} As their reputation as a scandalous guild grew among Ottoman elites, they were officially outlawed by Sultan Abdülmecid I in 1857, although many had earlier already fled to Egypt and various parts of Anatolia after the dissolution of the Janissary corps.\textsuperscript{86}

Deniz Kandiyoti refers to an influx of adolescent youths, starting in the seventeenth century, enlisting in the Janissary corps and boarding with older Janissaries who became their patrons.\textsuperscript{87} Popescu-Judetz suggests that the term köçek was originally applied to these young men as well as apprentices to senior dervishes.\textsuperscript{88} According to an entry entitled “Young Man’s Veil” that Kandiyoti mentions in the \textit{Dictionary of Turkish Costume and Self-Adornment}, young novices among the Janissaries wore golden veils to deflect the gaze of “ill-intentioned people” for a period of approximately 50 years until the Janissary corps was dissolved in 1826.\textsuperscript{89}

Andrews and Kalpakli argue that paying young men for sex was a common practice related to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Shay, “The Male Dancer in the Middle East and Central Asia,” 147.
\item Karayanni, 78.
\item And, \textit{Dances of Anatolian Turkey}, 30.
\item Ibid., 30-31.
\item Popescu-Judetz, 52.
\item Popescu-Judetz, 48.
\item Kandiyoti, “Gendering the Modern,” 114-15.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
such systems of patronage that grew from the early modern era. This occurred frequently among men in the subculture of the bathhouses with their young attendants and also with entertainers like köçeks.\(^90\) The official banning of the köçek in 1857 suggests that the dancer represented a threat to public order because by this time he was a figure connected to homoerotic debauchery in the taverns by Europeans, on top of the social problems of sexual violence and criminality in such spaces,\(^91\) whose views influenced Ottoman elites attempting to modernize, a heteronormalizing process with which the köçek did not align. For an example of the European perception, Popescu-Judetz refers to a passage from the diary of the seventeenth century English traveler Dr. John Covel that states in a description of köçeks, “there was a delicate lovely boy, of about ten years old, had as comely a head of hair, long as most women. With him danc’t a lusty handsome man (about 25), both Turkes. They acceded all the roguish lascivious postures conceivable with that strange ingenuity of silent ribaldry….\(^92\) In addition to this European view of their appearance and erotic movements, the sexual availability of köçeks to other males compounded their image as vulgar and effeminate and that of Ottoman/Eastern morality as depraved and backward in the eyes of European observers.

And indicates that, although the köçeks had disappeared in one of their traditional urban forms as companies of professional dancers in Istanbul, at the time of his writing (1950s) they could still be found performing as professional or amateur dancers in Anatolian villages, particularly at weddings where contemporary köçeks also often perform.\(^93\) Additionally, Ş. Şehvar Beşiroğlu notes that köçeks still performed on stage in the 1950s at nightclubs

\(^{90}\) Andrews and Kalpaklı, 49, 143, 285.
\(^{91}\) Ibid., 285-86.
\(^{92}\) Popescu-Judetz, 49.
\(^{93}\) And, Dances of Anatolian Turkey, 25.
And states that, “the boys dance as long as they preserve their good looks and can conceal their beards. In some Anatolian provinces, even today, they become drummers to other dancing boys when they lose their looks and their beards grow.”\footnote{Beşiroğlu, 13.} This indicates that homoerotic notions of male beauty and sexuality persisted well into modernity at least among the peasantry, which comprised approximately 80 percent of Turkish society in the first years of the Turkish Republic, a topic that has yet to be explored at any length by other scholars. The repeated efforts of nineteenth century Sultans to ban köçek performances and And’s insistence on distancing the dancers from the imagining of the modern Turk, or at least constructing them as an example of what a properly Westernized, masculine national subject should not look like, imply that homoeroticism and same-sex practices continued to be commonplace and therefore difficult to control or completely ignore.

The travel writings of Irfan Orga

“When you are older, I shall tell you all these things…But always remember that to certain men boys are more valuable than girls, especially a nice-looking boy like you.” She said no more beyond adding that I must try and put this day out of my head.\footnote{Irfan Orga, \textit{Portrait of a Turkish Family} (London: Eland Publishing, 2000), 162.}

— Advice given to Irfan Orga by his mother after a frightening experience of being publicly groped by a man during his childhood in Istanbul, as recounted in his memoirs.

The imagined national identity and history of the Turkish Republic are characterized by a temporal break. In Kemalist ideology, a divide was constructed between the Ottoman past and the new Turkish nation, the latter being a fantasy of the present and embodiment of an idealized future that would never arrive. During the Republican period of Turkey, lasting through the mid-
1940s after the nation’s establishment in 1923, the Ottoman era was associated with Islam, decay, and decadence and cast as backward while the new nation of Turkey was being constructed by various Kemalist modernization projects as Westernized and secular. The new façade of society was to present a modern, civilized, and future-facing image to the rest of the world. The implementation of social homogeneity was viewed as necessary for a primordialist notion of Turkish national identity to cohere and take root. Cultural and sexual pluralities that were tolerated in the Ottoman past signified backwardness as relics of a historical time that had become disassociated from the present. For the authoritarian Kemalist state, such features of an unwanted past were obstructions to achieving modernity and had to be concealed, if not all together destroyed. However, in the beginning of his travelogue from the 1930s (originally published in English in the 1950s), Irfan Orga recalls an experience where the past seemingly merged with the present:

My most potent memory of Izmir had nothing to do with its changed appearance or with its new generation of stolid citizens….Perhaps my head was filled with thoughts of classical Izmir, perhaps I was in a receptive enough mood to see gods walking in the streets. At any rate, I certainly caught site of a young god in a garden. He was kneeling on the grass when I saw him, staring up at an old woman who seemed to be scolding him. It was a garden surrounded by trees, holding in its heart an old stone house with hooded, secret windows. It was a garden where anything might happen. At any moment, the pipes of Pan himself might pierce the air. I halted beside the tall grilled gate, staring at the boy and the old woman, captivated by that smooth old-young olive face. What sensuality it expressed, what rapaciousness! He couldn’t have been Turkish, for no Turkish face was ever carved with such delicacy, or such weakness. His beauty was in his weakness. He was Antinous, thwarted by the old woman of some trivial desire. He was Beauty and Evil. He was the Youth of Smyrna. Like a figure on some Etruscan vase, he knelt there in the warm grass, his frozen gaiety, his quiescent passion, epitomising a grander era than this.

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This passage sets the tone of Orga’s travel narrative, *The Caravan Moves On: Three Weeks among Turkish Nomads*, in which he describes his travels in rural Anatolia during the 1930s in pursuit of a group of Turkic nomads, the Yürük. In his writing, he presents different social tensions he observes, including those between the perpetually “primitive” peasantry and modernization efforts, strict codes of conduct for men and women and lustful homoerotic encounters, and his own conflicted feelings of fear and desire towards young men. Orga was a Turkish air force pilot who grew up in Istanbul during the difficult years surrounding the First World War. He later moved to England and became a writer married to an Englishwoman. The encounter in the passage above occurred in the Aegean city of Izmir, formerly known as Smyrna, before his journey led him deeper into central and southeastern Anatolia. Smyrna had previously been home to a large population of Greeks and Armenians, who were exiled after Turkish forces nearly burned the city to the ground in 1922, killing thousands.

Orga clearly finds himself attracted to the boy he sees who he imagines as filled with desire, an impression more potent than the modernizing Turkish city itself. However, Orga refuses to believe that he is Turkish because his beauty and delicacy are weak, and implicitly feminine, traits, which is similar to the way And refuses the possibility that köçek dancers were ever Turks instead of feminized minority Others, like Greeks or Armenians. Thus, Orga paints the boy as a Greek, not one of the recently exiled Rum Greeks of Anatolia, but belonging to the classical era, which the boy’s “quiescent passion” epitomizes. Orga not only confines Greek culture to the distant past, but displaces homoerotic desire there as well, which he connects to what is often referred to as “pederasty” in the classical world by likening the boy to Antinous, the Roman emperor Hadrian’s young Greek lover who was later deified. This may be the influence of the tendency Gandhi has identified in Victorian era discourse to anachronistically
view same-sex practices in the contemporaneous Orient as continuous of ancient pederasty, except Orga does not wish to connect his homoerotic feelings with the more recent Ottoman past because it had become constructed as a period of cultural decay in the Kemalist national imaginary. The boy’s gaiety is “frozen” in the past and his “quiescent” passion waiting to be awakened in the garden “where anything might happen.” Orga wishes to distance the boy and his own attraction to him, but clearly is possessed by the moment, in which he longs for a “grander era,” and by both the “beauty and evil” of the boy, torn between his feelings of desire and his fear of them.

This discussion of Orga’s work begins an exploration that will continue in the following chapter, through his early twentieth century perspective, of how male sexuality and desire were constructed by Kemalist intellectuals in relation to time and contrasting how they were actually lived through the experiences of individuals from both urban and rural backgrounds. Orga’s referral to the boy in Smyrna as a “young god” renders him as an almost otherworldly or supernatural being. Not only is the boy capable of inducing an enchantment and Orga’s worship; he also inhabits a spatiotemporal zone that is neither entirely past nor present, but one where they intersect, therefore invoking a haunting fantasy in Orga’s mind, simultaneously alluring and frightening to his modern sensibility. In doing so, the young male beloved and object of Orga’s desire emerges as a specter of discontinuity in Turkish modernity drifting, neither flourishing nor dead, between not only the past and present, but also the sexual practices and concepts of gender that are divided between them. Butler has asserted that in a heteronormative regime of gender, masculine and feminine are assumed to be continuous with male and female sex and their corresponding reflection in heterosexual desire. Genders that do not conform to either one of

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99 Gandhi, 52-53.
these binary norms are constructed as culturally unintelligible “specters of discontinuity and incoherence” between gender and sex and their expression in sexual desire and practice.\textsuperscript{100}

Another account from Orga’s travel narrative demonstrates the disruption of modern heteronormative binaries by the intervention of “past” homoeroticism embodied by a spectral manifestation of the köçek who performs the ambiguity of modern masculinity and sexuality. It captures how homoeroticism could prove to be resistant to top-down modernization, and therefore heteronormalization, in Turkey, particularly among the rural population. Orga recounts the experience he had observing an “erotic dance” performed by a köçek one night in an Anatolian village. In contrast to the denouncement of such performances by European travelers in the Ottoman Empire, Orga’s account is much more ambivalent:

We ate in the stone-flagged kitchen of the farmhouse, where candles stood in saucers were too feeble to illuminate shadowed corners. Drinking vast quantities of raki, as if it were water, Hikmet Bey grew amorous and called in some of the labourers to drink with us. The candle-light flickered on dark faces and tattered shirts. Hikmet Bey fondled a good-looking young man with a mouth as sweet as a girl’s. Dursun Bey looked faintly shocked. I longed for a camera to photograph that ring of dusky faces which, loosened by raki and the suggestiveness of love, was assuming a primitiveness as exciting as a Rimsky-Korsakov suite.\textsuperscript{101}

Someone produced a small drum and an ud…and presently the deep throbbing rhythm of a fast Anatolian peasant tune broke on the air. A voice took up the tune, feet tapped in appreciation. The singer was a youth of about twenty, a slender, womanish figure with large dark eyes. Hikmet Bey, twisting in his chair, groaned his appreciation, and the singer’s voice grew low and sweet, teasing Hikmet Bey’s emotions. The thrumming of the ud, the dull noise of stamping feet on the earth floor, the singer’s voice, all made a dark pattern on the senses of something half as old as time itself. The flickering candles highlighted lips and jutting noses, the skin stretched tautly across high Asiatic cheekbones, and the jewel-like liquidity of a dark eye. There was a sharp smell of stale sweat.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{100} Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 17.
\textsuperscript{101} Orga, \textit{The Caravan Moves On}, 49.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 50.
Orga sets a highly homoerotic mood leading up to the köçek dance by describing an intimate atmosphere with a drunken, amorous crowd of youths and older men, the tensions of desire between them hidden in darkness and shadows. It is a scene like one might imagine in the taverns of Ottoman Istanbul. Yet, it is not one that is immediately familiar to the outsiders who come from the city, Orga and another guest, Dursun Bey. Orga paints the men’s growing lust as primitive and belonging to a timeless past, drawing a temporal boundary between it and himself while at the same time finding this environment thrilling and worthy of immortalizing in a photograph. As Najmabadi has argued regarding companionate marriage, when a man was in theory supposed to cease homoerotic behavior, Orga’s displacing it in the past serves as another kind of temporal masquerade beneath which it is allowed to continue. Additionally, Orga feminizes both the good-looking young man with the sweet mouth, his beauty, and the singer in order to masquerade homoeroticism as heteroeros and a derivative of heterosexual desire.

A boy of perhaps fifteen was pushed into the centre of the floor. His fresh adolescence was a touching thing in that stale old room….He singled me out for his attentions, standing so close in front of me that I was aware of the little pulse beating in his throat and his head outlined in flaring candlelight. He stared at me for a moment, his eyes taunting me, then he flung back his head in laughter. He leaned forward to snatch my hand and kiss it, and all the time his lightning gaze flashed from my ring to the gold watch on my wrist. Hikmet Bey pulled him close to plant a kiss on his upturned mouth, then said thickly that he was to dance.

For a few moments the boy stood slackly, but one felt the ripple of excitement that went through the watching men. For a little longer the boy timed his movements against the beat of the music, little hesitant movements that were suggestive of young amorous limbs….His smooth young face was as blank as a sleepwalker’s. He weaved a pattern with his feet, but his mind was somewhere else. His artistry was superb, for the movements of his body and the fluttering hands portrayed unmistakably a young girl’s first reluctance to physical love, her gradual desire to experience it, finally her surrender.

103 Najmabadi, 38-39.
105 Ibid., 51.
Orga describes a young male dancer who, as evidenced by his flirtations, is accustomed to being the object of his older male audience’s affections. Orga is touched by his “fresh adolescence,” which recalls Najmabadi’s description of “the ambivalence of youthful masculinity, a transitional age when the young man became adult men’s most coveted object of desire.”

The descriptions of the dancer’s “smooth young face” as “blank as a sleepwalker’s” and mind as “somewhere else” also reflect this ambivalence, which position the köçek temporally not only as an ambiguous figure of transitioning male sexuality and desire, but also as an ambiguous figure of transformative modernity. Orga’s views conflict as he at once is drawn in by the dancer’s beauty, yet justifies this sentiment by interpreting the dance as a young girl’s “surrender” to physical love. Again, Orga’s homoerotic attraction can be masqueraded by feminizing the dancer. The köçek’s movements also resemble the pantomiming of “physical love with an expression of restrained passion” that Ottoman dancers have been described as performing.

Men sat in rapt attention, light running silver down the side of a face or the jutting archipelago of a nose. The half-darkness was rapacious and secretive and all eyes were directed to the boy who swayed in moaning rapture, his dark shadow leaping up the wall behind him—monstrous, gigantic. The music rose and fell, offbeat, infinitely sad, for it spoke of passing earthly joys. The languorous boy stood quite still in the middle of a twirl, one foot poised above the other, the posture sustained magnificently, then, in time to quickened music, abandoned himself to the consummation….His low sad cry of surrender echoed round the startled room, and then he flung himself to the floor, twitching.

Orga expresses a sentimentality and sadness for the dance and its homoeroticism as something in the process of “passing.” In one respect this indicates the climax and end of the

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106 Najmabadi, 32.
dance along with the pleasure that he and the rest of the audience take in it. In another, the dancer, as a declining cultural feature, performs his demise by languishing and succumbing under the forces of modernity. However, Orga also describes the dark atmosphere of the performance as “rapacious and secretive” with the dancer’s “monstrous, gigantic” shadow looming on the wall behind him. This may also illustrate that, on the other hand, while marginalized to such spaces, how the köçek and his legacy of male homoeroticism would be reborn as the spectral representation of a present absence or loss haunting Turkish modernity, never truly disappearing. Additionally, this can also represent Orga’s anxiety over indulging an unspeakable desire.

With the ending of the dance cries rose from dark corners where men sat clasping their hands between their thighs, lost, abandoned to the erotic moment. Someone shouted, ‘All-ah,’ unable to contain himself any longer….I found the experience of that night both moving and chilling, an experience so primitive that it could not fail to stir the blood, yet so expressive of man’s lower nature, so imprisoning, that one felt brushed by the Devil himself.¹⁰⁹

Again, Orga attempts to reconcile his conflicting feelings of being moved by the dance by temporally masquerading his pleasure, driven by other men’s, with a view of the experience as “so primitive that it could not fail to stir the blood.” Throughout his narrative, it is clear that Orga considers himself an outsider to the cultures of the Anatolian peasants and nomads he encounters. He describes them every so often as “simple,” “primitive,” and lacking reason. He attempts to romanticize the Yürük nomads, resistant to Kemalist modernization efforts, as continuing the same untouched way of life for centuries despite the progression of civilization. By displacing homoeroticism as a relic of the past, he can justify being moved by it because of its foreignness to him as a “modern” man. Furthermore, he describes the experience as being

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 52.
“expressive of man’s lower nature, so imprisoning, that one felt brushed by the Devil himself.”

To Orga, the dance represents a morally corrupt, backwards past from which he seeks to distance himself, yet one which continues to haunt him.

The room was full of raki fumes, of sweating humanity and the queer acrid odour of the copulations of older men. To stagger out to the sweet night air was a form of relief, for unless one has lost one’s senses in drink it is impossible not to be appalled by licentiousness. Dursun Bey came out to stand beside me….‘I could have gone outside with that boy,’ he said to me regretfully. ‘You know, he looked at me many times.’ I was moved again by the memory of the dancer and the certainty that he would never grow old. The moon was high in the sky, infinitely remote, symbol of men’s dreams….In my mind’s eye I saw, as in a witch’s ball, the figure of myself, spellbound.110

Orga closes his account of the dance with yet more contradicting impressions. While continuing to express revulsion towards the homoeroticism he experienced, he is once again moved by the dancer and “the certainty that he would never grow old.” Dursun Bey, who looked “faintly shocked” when Hikmet Bey fondled one of the young men has now allowed himself to be utterly seduced by the dancer. Orga attempts to romanticize the dancer in order to place him in a distant, timeless past, yet also implies that, as a cultural feature, the young male dancer and his associated homoeroticism would continue to haunt the modern present and future. Orga describes the moon here as a “symbol of men’s dreams.”

This parallels several descriptions in Najmabadi’s book where male (and female) beauty is compared to the moon. She provides two excerpts from different texts, one describing beautiful young males as “moon-faced”111 and one about how a young servant’s “moon” lost its brightness as his mustache grew.112 Additionally, there is a köçekçe song from the early nineteenth century, which Klebe indicates was likely composed by Sultan Mahmud II himself,
with the lyrics, “My thoughts are with the lips of a rosebud, A coquettish creature full of charm and grace, I have seen a young boy shining brightly like the moon.”

Interestingly, this is the same Sultan mentioned earlier who first allegedly attempted to ban köçek performances. Klebe also discusses the presence of topoi and metaphors such as these in poetic court language that often refer to divine beauty and the “religious-mystical supersensory.” By using the moon as a metaphorical representation of the adolescent male dancer’s idealized beauty, Orga places him in a world of adult male fantasy.

Ambivalent himself as to whether this world is part of a depraved past or modernizing present, Orga is nonetheless “spellbound” by the apparition that has been conjured in the darkness, just as he was by the otherworldly beauty of the youth of Smyrna.

Orga’s conflicting feelings about the dancer indicate, as Najmabadi notes about the (fe)male sun in Iran, “something ‘secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returns from it’ (Freud 1955, 245).” Additionally, his account evidences her assertion that, “despite denial, disavowal, and transcendentization, not to mention suppression and punishment, the figure of the ghilman continually threatens to break through modern normative masculinity.”

The homoeroticism represented by the dancer is no longer thriving, but neither is it dead; instead it has evolved into a specter, occasionally bursting through the façade of Turkish modernity and disrupting its dichotomous construction of past and present. The köçek is a specter performing past sexual difference undergoing a suppressive transformation that haunts and questions the homogeneous imagining of Turkish national belonging. When this process of loss is made visible in the form of a specter who continuously haunts the present, is true absence...
ever created? When loss is ever-present, constantly disrupting a dichotomous imaginary of backward past and modern present, was the former ever truly forgotten? In this liminal space of the present where the past exists when it should not, the specter seems to be just another modern imagining. The questions raised by this chapter regarding the temporal positioning of Turkish modernity in relation to its Ottoman past open a space for the recognition and reconsideration of the voids and silences of difference that structure national belonging and survival. We will see in the following chapters, however, that the köçek was left by the Kemalist project to linger in the rural periphery of the national imaginary.

I have thus far engaged with Najmabadi’s arguments regarding the ambiguity of heteronormative notions of modernity in the Ottoman/Turkish context, particularly by analyzing male gender and sexuality as it is performed and interpreted through köçek dancing. However, Najmabadi’s arguments for the transformation of masculinity and male sexuality are based on what she views as the effects of the European gaze and of Iranian male elites’ interactions with Europeans, as well as their subsequent responses to European social norms and judgments of Iranian mores. As Orga’s case indicates, this transformative process may not have been internalized as widely among Turkish elites as she sometimes portrays in the Iranian context. She does not detail cases of how or to what extent homoeroticism is masqueraded. Furthermore, she does not address in depth to what extent concepts of masculinity and male sexuality among the peasantry, as the majority of the population in Iran and Turkey, may have been transformed, nor how this would have occurred once they changed among elites. While the young male beloved may have largely disappeared in discourse or art, he clearly still survived in lived experience and much more strongly among the rural men whose collective copulations and

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117 Suner, 13-27.
ecstasy Orga briefly experienced with simultaneous feelings of fear and desire. This study necessarily expands to address heteronormative modernization efforts by the Turkish Republic as they related to the Anatolian peasantry.

As discussed previously, according to And, the köçek could still be found dancing in rural Anatolia at the end of the 1950s. Although, the dancers were most likely marginalized by then to performing homoeroticism in the “secretive,” “dark” type of space Orga describes, such as the gazino nightclubs Beşiroğlu has mentioned. It is striking that towards the end of Dances of Anatolian Turkey, And states that, “as has already been stressed Turkish dancing developed on two planes, that of the old Istanbul and urbanized dances and that of the peasant dances.” It is clear from And’s description of the “dancing boys” that he considers them foremost as part of an urban tradition associated with Ottoman Istanbul stating, “they were mostly in vogue in old Istanbul, even at the seraglio level, and their quarter was Tahtakale.” However, despite the urban prominence of professional köçek dancing, it is evident from his own descriptions of young male dancers, as well as those of Orga, Shay, Karayanni, Beşiroğlu, and others, that they were a cultural feature throughout the Middle East, including the countryside. And’s description of the köçek’s presence in the rural context is vague and does not account for how the urban dance form spread or evolved among the peasantry. It would seem that the dances of köçeks did not develop primarily on an urban plane as And indicates, but can indeed also be considered a “peasant dance.” Why, then, does he draw such a conclusion while leaving out a discussion of the significance of köçek dancing among the peasantry?

While this could be explained by a lack of sources on the rural context, And’s going so far as to blatantly censor the sensual references from the Ottoman ones he uses indicates that

118 And, Dances of Anatolian Turkey, 57.
119 Ibid., 25.
there is a greater issue at hand. This is part of the persistent effort he demonstrates to distinguish the *köçek* from modern Turkishness and the peasantry as a primarily low, urban art form of feminized Ottoman minorities associated with an unspeakable lasciviousness, yet one that he implicitly acknowledges in disapproval and constructs in opposition to the national imaginary. By categorizing *köçek* dancing as an urban phenomenon, yet paradoxically acknowledging its rural presence, And, unsuccessfully, attempts to position it in the Ottoman past of “old Istanbul,” just as Orga attempts to displace his homoerotic experiences in Smyrna and the Anatolian village in a past encompassing both a “grander era” and a morally depraved, primitive time.

Furthermore, the peasantry was viewed by the Kemalist regime as an integral resource for its nation-building project. The symbolic separation of male same-sex desires and practices associated with the *köçek* from the peasantry aims to facilitate their suppression which was necessary in the pursuit of heteronormative modernity.

Another way he separates the peasantry from this perceived legacy of Ottoman decadence and decay is by employing concepts from the Turkish History Thesis to describe peasant culture. In this fantasy of Turkish nationalism, it was imagined that the Turkish race was united by a common bloodline from its ancient, Shamanistic roots in Central Asia.\(^\text{120}\) Archaeology was used to find “evidence” of this primordial identity in the material culture of almost every single civilization that had passed through Anatolia and made claims of Turkish identity reaching as far back as the Hittites and even Neolithic era, rejecting the Ottoman period and Islam. And reflects this anachronistic and erroneous theory by making broad sweeping connections and characterizing various Anatolian peasant performances and rituals as the vestiges of past civilizations in the Turkish lineage. For example, he claims that mimetic elements of plays,

including the pantomime of physical love that köçeks often performed, is an ancient Near Eastern symbol of the “fecundity of the earth”\textsuperscript{121} and has written an entire book about the Anatolian peasant worship of Dionysus.\textsuperscript{122} In his book \textit{Türk Köylü Dansları} (Turkish Peasant Dances), he includes a photo of a Neolithic wall painting of human figures from Çatal Höyük with the caption, “this shows how the Anatolian peasant’s 9\textsuperscript{th} millennium ancestors used to dance.”\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{121} Metin And, \textit{Drama at the Crossroads: Turkish Performing Arts Link Past and Present, East and West} (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1991), 48-49.
\textsuperscript{122} Metin And, \textit{Dionisos ve Anadolu Köylüsü} (Dionysus and the Anatolian Peasant) (Istanbul: Elif Yayınları, 1962).
\textsuperscript{123} Metin And, \textit{Türk Köylü Dansları} (Turkish Peasant Dances) (Istanbul: Izlem Yayınları, 1964).
CHAPTER TWO
PEASANTISM, SEXUAL DISORDER, AND THE INVENTION OF NATIONAL FOLK DANCE IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

This chapter will further discuss how köçek dancing was excluded from the Turkish folk dance repertoire of “authentic” Anatolian dances that embodied and performatively constituted national identity. A discussion of the köçek in relation to rural society and the invention of national folklore, including dance, is vital to revealing how the discursive ideal of heteronormative peasant subjects, and therefore the national imaginary, engaged with the realities of peasant life and the extent to which they in turn expose such constructions. As the previous chapter has demonstrated, homoeroticism clearly was resistant to Kemalist rural reform efforts, albeit driven “underground,” and embodied by the spectral figure of the köçek. Orga describes the peasant as such: “His life is a constant struggle against the elements, the sickness he does not know how to deal with and the red-tape of local officials which he cannot understand….Much has been planned to better the lot of the peasant, but his ignorance is the greatest obstacle the government has to overcome.”¹²⁴ I argue that the perceived sickness of the peasantry included bodies engaging in same-sex practices. According to Butler’s interpretation of Foucault, historical practices and discourses of sexuality, including those focused on reproduction and masculine activity, produce the illusion of essential, natural sexes to disguise them as removed from power relations which thereby in fact perpetuates such power.¹²⁵ When bodies deviate from their naturalized heterosexual purposes, they are disordered, but this pathological homosexuality becomes part of an oppositional binary with heterosexuality and excluded within a system of power to demonstrate what the norm is not and thereby reinforce it.

¹²⁵ Butler, Gender Trouble, 92, 95, 110.
During the 1930s, one of the Kemalist elites’ major intellectual concerns was a peasantist ideology focused on forming a popular base for nationalism while preventing any opposition movements from consolidating.\textsuperscript{126} In her 2007 dissertation, “The National Pedagogy of the Early Republican Era in Turkey,” Fatma Tütüncü asserts that the strength and health of the village symbolically represented the purity of the Turkish heart.\textsuperscript{127} She argues that peasantism in the 1930s was founded on the idea of instilling the peasantry with a sense of “Republican morality” through a national pedagogy aimed at creating physically, mentally, and morally healthy and strong citizens for whom Turkishness should be regarded as the ultimate virtue.\textsuperscript{128}

The interest in and romanticization of the Anatolian peasant and village life gave rise to the peasantist genre of literature during the Republican era which reveals elite perceptions of the peasantry and the issues surrounding rural life. Similar to Orga’s account, in the work of novelist and Kemalist Yakup Kadri, the observations of fictional characters traveling in rural areas expecting to find the essence of Turkishness paint the countryside as a timeless place without history and frustratingly foreign, backwards, and prone to religious fanaticism rather than nationalist sentiment. Kadri criticizes other Kemalist intellectuals for failing in their responsibility to improve the peasants’ conditions while winning over their “hearts and minds” and molding them into proper citizens loyal to the Turkish nation.\textsuperscript{129} His criticism was successful in drawing more attention to the peasantry which was underpinned by Ziya Gökalp’s, the main theoretician of Turkish nationalism, notion that the folklore of Anatolia consisted of pre-Islamic traditions belonging to a primordial Turkish identity and its study an effective way of

\textsuperscript{127} Fatma Tütüncü, “The National Pedagogy of the Early Republican Era in Turkey” (PhD diss., METU, 2007), 120.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{129} Karaömerlioğlu, “The Peasants in Early Turkish Literature,” 130-34.
spreading nationalist sentiment. A fervent intellectual interest in studying rural life ensued during the 1930s and institutions, namely the People’s Houses and Village Institutes, were founded for activities like the collection of folklore, including folk dance, and/or the dissemination of Republican values among the halk (people/folk).

The People’s Houses operated from the 1930s through 1940s in Turkey during the nationalization phase of folklore when the state began forming such cultural and educational centers and invented its own genres of folk traditions. Yeşim Kaptan states that, “the People’s Houses collected Turkish traditions, customs, folk songs, and they published folk stories, riddles, did research on folk dances and folk culture, and established museums and organized exhibitions about local cultures.” Their overarching purpose was to emancipate and educate literate, modern citizens and foster their loyalty to the imaginary national community based on the common cultural traditions of the pure Turkish soy (ancestral lineage/bloodline). They were also aimed at narrowing the social gap between urban intellectuals and the people of Anatolia in the effort to create a unified national culture and curtail opposition. While they were constructed as elevating the ignorant masses, the People’s Houses were also used to discipline them through indoctrination with the propaganda and reforms of the Republican People’s Party. An engagement of the people in the folkloric activities of the People’s Houses, including theatrical plays, “national” sports like wrestling, music concerts, dances, handicrafts, and the celebration of

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133 Kaptan, 51.
134 Ibid., 57-58.
national days, was viewed as vital to spreading the populist tenant of Kemalist modernization.\textsuperscript{135} Many People’s Houses published their own pedagogical journals which discussed folklore and other topics like peasantism and Western literature while emphasizing adherence to the principles of Kemalism and synthesizing Westernization with the preservation of Turkish culture. Some written material was censored, such as a portion of a minstrel ballad about the minstrel’s “passion for beautiful people without a difference of sex.”\textsuperscript{136} According to Kaptan, referring to homosexuality, or rather same-sex desire and beauty undifferentiated by gender, would have been a “radical assertion” during the Republican era.

The Village Institutes were created in 1940 to train students from rural areas as teachers since there was still a low literacy rate and teachers sent from urban areas generally did not adapt well to foreign and difficult rural living conditions. The Village Institutes were aimed at training peasants in improved techniques of agriculture and construction, child and health care, and domestic life which they could then in turn teach to other villagers by acting as intermediaries between urban intellectuals and the people.\textsuperscript{137} Some of the graduates contributed to the popularization of folklore themes in literature during the 1950s, no doubt inspired by their enthusiastic reading of socialist Sabahattin Ali’s peasantist stories that were in part based on his visits to Village Institutes.\textsuperscript{138} The Village Institutes closed only fourteen years after their founding, leaving a controversial legacy.\textsuperscript{139} Like the People’s Houses, their central goal was to create a mass support base for the single-party Kemalist regime, but one that now needed to be more productive and educated in practical work while gaining control over the natural

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 84-85.
\textsuperscript{137} Öztürkmen, “Folklore and Nationalism in Turkey,” 163.
\textsuperscript{138} Karaömerlioğlu, “The Peasants in Early Turkish Literature,” 148-49.
\textsuperscript{139} Öztürkmen, “Folklore and Nationalism in Turkey,” 165.
environment. Asım Karaömerlioğlu indicates that many peasants resented being obligated to construct the institute buildings themselves, provide the land for them, and engage in agricultural work with little or no compensation which resulted in accusations of state exploitation of peasant labor by some urban intellectuals.\(^{140}\) The Village Institutes were later plagued by an unfounded association with communism and accusations of immoral behavior between female and male students by right-wing intellectuals. Karaömerlioğlu also argues that the Village Institutes came too close to realizing genuine populism and peasant mobility, which Kemalist elites advocated in theory, but did not actually want to see materialize as these developments could potentially challenge their own position.\(^{141}\) Fraught with multiple issues, the Village Institutes, like the People’s Houses, disappeared in the 1950s after the end of the single-party nation-building era.

Despite the importance Kemalists placed on the peasantry, Karaömerlioğlu indicates in his study, “The Peasants in Early Turkish Literature,” that Kemalist writers like Yakup Kadri were not so much concerned with accurately understanding the realities of village life as they were with condemning its perceived faults. According to Karaömerlioğlu, writer Sabahattin Ali presents a more realistic picture in his stories portraying an irreconcilable conflict between honest, “natural” rural life and the corruption and insincerity of the town.\(^{142}\) While he still idealizes the peasants he does not simultaneously disparage them, but instead condemns the Kemalist intellectuals for doing so. The latter’s repetition of Atatürk’s saying “the peasants are the masters of our nation” was never more than ideological rhetoric masking their disdain for the people.\(^{143}\) In Ali’s work, urban intellectuals and government officials unsuccessfully attempt


\(^{141}\) Ibid., 70-71.

\(^{142}\) Karaömerlioğlu, “The Peasants in Early Turkish Literature,” 137-39.

\(^{143}\) Ibid., 140.
to impose their “utopian and inapplicable ideas” on a peasant culture in which they are not intelligible and in doing so create more problems than they solve.\textsuperscript{144} Even worse is the enforcement of state power by abusive gendarmes who deepen peasants’ distrust of the government and its laws. From Karaömerlioğlu’s analysis, it is evident that the ambivalent feelings Kemalists held towards the peasantry inherently disabled their own mission to uplift it and rehabilitate the “true” Turk from Ottoman neglect in the service of building a unified nation.

Öztürkmen similarly acknowledges that many people had “remained distant” from the People’s Houses and the gap between urban intellectuals and the people was never bridged, although many of those involved remember the revolutionary spirit of nation-building in the 1930s fondly.\textsuperscript{145} The genres of Turkish folklore that were established by the People’s Houses still prevail today even though the collection of material by amateur researchers was not performed according to any scientific methodology and therefore proved problematic to archive.\textsuperscript{146} Karaömerlioğlu identifies such inconsistencies and ambiguities as characteristic of the single-party regime’s policies, which led to the simultaneous end of the People’s Houses and Village Institutes along with the regime without a major transformation of rural Anatolia, despite its peasantist ideology.\textsuperscript{147} Senem Aslan dispels previous scholarship’s overestimation of state power in the Republican era by also demonstrating its ineffectiveness at implementing Kemalist reforms in Kurdish majority rural areas due to a lack of resources and oversight of abusive local bureaucrats and coercive gendarmes accompanied by uncompromising ideological aims.\textsuperscript{148}

Similar to Karaömerlioğlu, she points to a constant sense of frustration among elites at local state

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 141.
\textsuperscript{145} Öztürkmen, “Folklore and Nationalism in Turkey,” 112.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 154-55.
\textsuperscript{147} Karaömerlioğlu, “The Village Institutes Experience in Turkey,” 72.
institutions and the lack of a cohesive plan to bring about Turkification and create national loyalty among the Kurds, who came to resent state intrusion on their daily lives and formed multiple revolts. This was further exacerbated by some local officials’ ill treatment of the Kurds, who they disdained for being ignorant, fanatical, and a source of political opposition. Aslan argues that the totalizing nationalist transformation of the countryside which the Kemalist regime sought in reality undermined state power there, most crucially in the failure to establish a means to communicate with and gather information on local populations through Turkish language education. This rendered some People’s Houses in Kurdish areas useless, or even reappropriated by villagers as coffeehouses, ultimately leaving the Kemalist aim of transforming Kurdish and other peasant “hearts and minds” unfulfilled which was instead substituted with oppressive coercion.

The nationalization phase of folklore, of which And’s work is initially a part, involving cultural research and the collection of folklore, especially by the People’s Houses, prevailed until the 1950s when Turkish national identity had become reified. As Öztürkmen states, “once a constructed and imagined national genre, folk dance later became a live form of artistic expression whose ‘nationalness’ came from its own nature.” In particular, dance was the most enduring and successful genre of Turkish folklore that emerged from the People’s Houses where it was constructed to ritually perform the national imaginary during national days and celebrations. According to Shay, select regional dances were eventually coopted and reinvented by the state to perform a standardized image of the “traditional” folk culture of the Turkish nation for both national and international audiences, while at the same time subverting any

149 Ibid., 86.
150 Ibid., 81-83.
151 Öztürkmen, “Folklore and Nationalism in Turkey,” 264.
origins or influences perceived to be non-Turkish. State-sponsored folk dance companies were formed in the 1950s, performing carefully choreographed dances with uniformly costumed dancers that were not an authentic representation of the village, but rather an invented tradition of Kemalist social engineering.\textsuperscript{152} The major change was the repeated use of similar geometric floor patterns and costuming across different dance genres, making them indistinguishable and lumping separate traditions into a single repertoire of national folk dance.\textsuperscript{153} The mostly urban choreographers and dancers had no experience or knowledge of the dances and their meanings in their original rural contexts.\textsuperscript{154} Additionally, participation in folk dance groups was, and is still, viewed as a “healthy and proper environment” in which young men and women can socialize,\textsuperscript{155} thereby encouraging the heterosocial element of modern society within moral bounds. The popularity of ballroom dance among Westernizing Republican elites\textsuperscript{156} and organization of dance parties, among many other mixed gender activities, by the People’s Houses were other, earlier ways in which heterosociality, as well as pairing of the heteronormative male-female companionate couple, was not only encouraged, but also became a precedent for future expectations of dance performance.

In the state-run folk dance companies, the wealth of urban dance traditions was rarely adopted. Shay argues that this is because of their association with the Ottoman political order in Istanbul.\textsuperscript{157} If one considers, like And, \textit{köçek} dancing to be an urban phenomenon, then one could further argue that \textit{köçek} dances were never employed in the Kemalist nation-building

\textsuperscript{152} Shay, \textit{Choreographic Politics}, 222, 216.
\textsuperscript{154} Shay, \textit{Choreographic Politics}, 214.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{157} Shay, \textit{Choreographic Politics}, 211.
project and became marginalized in modern Turkish society because they had historically been popular among Ottoman elites in Istanbul. However, the köçek, who clearly was also a persistent feature of peasant culture, and the plurality of male sexuality he represented also posed a challenge to heteronormative modernization implementing a binary of female and male gender and sexuality. The aforementioned censoring of the People’s House journal article, like And’s censorship of his sources on köçeks, to omit a reference to same-sex desire in an Anatolian minstrel ballad is indicative of this. As representatives of the nation, folk dancers had to perform “order rather than chaos, grace and refinement rather than over-excitement,”158 which was the opposite of what köcek dancing portrayed. For these additional reasons, köçek dancing had to be marginalized by the Kemalist national imaginary as it was embodied in the countryside, which was paradoxically both the base of national identity, yet still a vast, peripheral zone in its imagining.

Furthermore, the köçek represented a threat to the “politicomo-moral pedagogy” of Kemalist elites described by Tütüncü, which aimed at penetrating and controlling every aspect of individuals’ lives in the effort to create “strong Turks” and therefore a strong nation.159 The authoritarian character of the Kemalist regime and its reforms, and the difficulties of implementing them, led to an emphasis on maintaining social order, particularly by attempting to enforce the homogenization of society through coercion, and wresting control from an Ottoman legacy of decadence.160 Butler has discussed how the artificial notion of a stabilized gendered body is produced through disciplinary constructs of heterosexual coherence and reproduction that conceal discontinuities between sexuality and gender that expose the norm as regulatory,

158 Öztürkmen, “Folklore and Nationalism in Turkey,” 277.
159 Tütüncü, 3-4.
160 Ibid., 49.
rather than descriptive or expressive.\textsuperscript{161} She relates this to Mary Douglas’s concept of pollution that is effected by a person whose body and its functions, symbolic of a bounded system like the nation-state, transgress sexual norms and its naturalized definition, and therefore hegemonic social constructs. Douglas argues that social systems are most vulnerable at their margins, which are therefore regarded as dangerous and those who inhabit them must be regulated or punished. In the Turkish context, it was particularly the peasant body that symbolized the nation and required disciplining to create a naturalized coherence of heterosexual norms in the peripheral countryside where state power was the most vulnerable. The body of the peasantry was viewed as sick, weak, and living in a state of filth and disorder caused by Ottoman neglect.\textsuperscript{162} In order to purify the heart of Turkishness, Tütüncü states that the national pedagogy attempted to engage the peasantry through, “physical education, including hygienic and civility rules so that peasants would have a proper body, and second, a sentimental education for eradicating the gap between the republican elite and peasants, so that the peasants would passionately attach themselves to Turkishness, and thus a homogenous nation would be achieved.”\textsuperscript{163} She elaborates Republican ideas of national morality by citing a guidebook, \textit{Moral Rules for Young Generation: Nine Rules of a Good Turk} (1934), which gives self-control, including that of emotion and desire, as the first virtue followed by self-confidence, self-improvement, sportsmanship, duty, and cooperation.\textsuperscript{164}

Victorian-style ideas on sexual health and morals, emphasizing sexual reproduction by companionate couples, as Gandhi has illustrated equated same-sex practices with the colonized Other as an unnatural vice, were also introduced through advice and pedagogical literature with

\textsuperscript{161} Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 130-36.
\textsuperscript{162} Tütüncü, 83-87.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 86-87.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 141-42.
the purpose of regulating society and ensuring the future of generations of strong Turks. Tütüncü states that, “sexual lust is also a national resource which should not be wasted carelessly, because this would lead to sexual infertility and population scarcity.” Sport and other physical activities, including dance, were considered effective ways of regulating sexual desire in young people and therefore promoting the health of a civilized nation. Sexual desire and activity were welcomed as long as they were sanctioned by a harmonious marriage, which was viewed as a “buttress against sexual decadence and social disorder” and the foremost goal of life as a means to fulfilling the duty of producing a strong Republican generation. According to Tütüncü, sex and marriage advice writer Daniş Remzi Korok emphasized the need to reorient Turkish society’s unnatural path of dirty habits derived from old morality and norms towards Western ideas of regulated, educated sexuality and family life. The family embodied the nation as a collective of citizen-children. According to one local bureaucrat, “‘Each household is a child of the state…If there is no family, can there be a nation? If there is no nation, can there be a state?’”

From Tütüncü’s analysis, it is clear that Kemalist elites were attempting to create oppositional sexualities stigmatizing those of the old, Ottoman/Eastern sotadic zone in an effort to promote a new, Turkish/Westernized discourse of heteronormativity, the latter of which they sought to introduce in the countryside through manipulation of the peasant body and thereby national life. This further explains the exclusion of the köçek from representation in national folk dance and his marginalization in the countryside, as well as indicates how new imaginations of

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165 Ibid., 178-79.
166 Ibid., 185.
167 Öztürkmen, “Modern Dance ‘Alla Turca,’” 45.
168 Tütüncü, 194.
169 Ibid., 201, 204.
170 Aslan, 75-76.
masculinity were being shaped. While the authoritarian Kemalist regime was attempting to control society and maintain order, the young male object of desire, represented by the köçek, embodied a period of untamed, seductive sexuality set in a world of male fantasy, which became seen as a threat to public order in the early nineteenth century. Kandiyoti asserts that, “we have to entertain the possibility that defining responsible social adulthood in terms of monogamous heterosexuality may not only have been a matter of proscribing co-wives, concubines, and child brides but may also have been about taming other, unruly forms of male sexuality.” ¹⁷¹ The perceived sickness and disorder of the peasantry very likely did include male homoerotic desire and same-sex practices viewed as a relic of Ottoman sexual decadence and corrupt morality which could be homogenized into a vision of a Westernized, heteronormative society through discipline by physical activities like sports and dance. Sexuality, including same-sex desire, could be regulated in this way until marriage, at which point heteroeros could serve as a masquerade for homoerotic desires, according to Najmabadi’s view. Same-sex practices and representations of desire had to be suppressed in the Republican era as heteronormative companionate marriage and sexuality were viewed as essential to the production of future generations of Turks, and thus the survival of the Turkish nation. As Tütüncü notes, control of sexuality became equated with control of national life. ¹⁷² This can be extended to control of the male dancing body as an embodiment and performer of sexuality.

In the Republican era, dance was transformed into an activity which served to regulate sexual desire and promote health of the body and nation through physical activity. It also served to facilitate heterosocial and heterosexual imaginings of a modern, secular society by pairing

¹⁷² Tütüncü, 198.
men and women together in public.¹⁷³ State invention of “traditional” Turkish folk dance was, in part, an attempt to control the perceived disorder of the peasantry, embodied sexually by the köçek who was cast into the margins of the national imaginary. The images provided by And in his book, *A Pictorial History of Turkish Dancing*, indicate how representations of masculinity and male sexuality were transformed in the Turkish Republic. Approximately the first half of images is from the Ottoman era, mostly depicting religious dancing and professional young female and male dancers. Köçeks were often represented in Ottoman miniature paintings, particularly from the surnames, from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.¹⁷⁴ These are set in contrast with the second half of images, which consists mostly of photographs of folk dances and some ballet performances. This is another way And attempts to distinguish what he perceives to be old, urban Ottoman dance and sexual mores from national Turkish dance and modern sexuality as it was to be embodied by the rural population.

It is unclear as to when many of the photographs are dated and in what contexts the dances shown are being performed. However, the types of folk dances depicted are generally those adapted into the national folk dance repertoire, including the *bar*, *halay*, and *horon* where dancers are linked together, dances involving the carrying of scarves, weapons, or spoons, and couple’s dances.¹⁷⁵ Some of the photographs appear to be staged, costumed performances. At least two indicate government sponsorship, with one including a sign representing a tourism initiative and another with a sign of a local Halk Eğitim Merkezi (People’s Education Center). Many of the photographs display the repetition of geometric formations Öztürkmen indicated as a major shift towards uniformity. The symmetry and geometry of the dances portray a controlled

¹⁷⁴ Öztürkmen, “Modern Dance ‘Alla Turca,’” 41.
¹⁷⁵ Shay, *Choreographic Politics*, 212.
and refined image of masculinity paired with strength and agility. Photographs of couples and mixed chain dancing are also used to portray the image of heterosociality and companionate pairing of heterosexual men and women. The extent to which the invented tradition of Turkish folk dance fed back on and transformed the evolution of the original regional dances is unclear, but it is likely to have had a significant impact given different trends in the repertoire, continued interest in collecting dances after the 1950s, in part based on marketability and profit, and the widespread popularity of competitive amateur and professional folk dancing in contemporary Turkey.

Thus far, I have presented the young male object of desire embodied by the köçek as an ambivalent figure reproducing the ambiguity of modern Turkish masculinity and male sexuality through performance. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the young male beloved became identified as a shameful, threatening figure by Ottoman elites. The processes of Westernization and modernization that began in the late Ottoman Empire were continued through the Republican era by the Kemalist regime, attempting to construct a new, Turkish society by implementing top-down reforms including a moral pedagogy targeting the peasantry as the strength of the nation. Kandiyoti has argued that focusing on Westernizing, heteronormative family reforms, “conceals from view a more hidden preoccupation with local forms that were destined to become marginal or deviant and, in due course, like the veiled boys, wither away.”176 It was in the Kemalist national imaginary of the countryside that the young male beloved was marginalized, yet has still not withered away entirely. The following chapter intends to shed light on how effectively homoeroticism was pushed to the very margins of a rural zone already constructed as peripheral.

176 Kandiyoti, “Gendering the Modern,” 117.
As has been demonstrated, the transformation of the countryside was largely symbolic, rather than achieved or truly desired by urban elites. In addition to representing the rhetorical “real Turk,” the peasantry was also constructed as an internal enemy who resembles what Gandhi has identified as the conflation of the deviant “homosexual” and the backwards “savage” in Victorian discourses of sexuality. The lack of state power of the Kemalist regime itself undermined in its failed effort to transform peasants’ lives strongly supports the notion that homoeroticism and same-sex practices were never controlled or destroyed. In fact, rural Anatolia was where the köçek persisted the longest after having been banished initially from urban profession in Istanbul under the scrutiny of Ottoman elites. As demonstrated by Orga’s account from the 1930s, the specter of the young male object of desire continued to simmer under the façade of heteronormative modernity and would occasionally burst forth and threaten it by provoking both feelings of fear and desire, to use Karayanni’s terms. His account represents not only the gap between urban intellectuals and the peasantry, but a transformative process that would never come to full fruition.

In his inability to be erased, the köçek is maintained marginally within the national imaginary as a specter of discontinuity, which represents Butler’s argument that non-normative exclusions within a heteronormative regime of power serve to indicate what it is not, yet also expose it by revealing its boundaries and make it vulnerable to critique and subversion. In the scholarship that provides evidence for the Kemalist regime’s attempt to control and regulate sexuality to produce a healthy nation, homoeroticism and male same-sex practices seem to never be explicitly addressed. Rather, according to Butler, such discontinuities between heteronormative concepts of gender, sex, and desire must be concealed, as Kandiyoti has indicated, or perhaps masqueraded in Najmabadi’s view, to naturalize the binary and produce it
as hegemonic. Discursively naming non-normative sexuality would reify it as an Other that state power could not easily dominate and thus it was unspeakable in official discourse for Kemalist intellectuals, who instead may have intended for it to wither away in due time with the overall transformation of rural mores. Then again, while And excludes the sexual references in his Ottoman sources, he constructs köçek dancing as a “degraded profession” of feminized, or effeminate, minority Others, pointedly non-Turk, and characterized by Europeans’ perception of the dance’s lasciviousness. He implicitly acknowledges same-sex practices in his attempt to distance them from Turkishness and, likewise, Ottoman influence and Islam from Anatolian peasant traditions. In either case, the köçek became a marginal figure and the lack of the state during the critical nation-building era to exercise the regulatory power necessary for transformation calls into question the extent to which discursive productions of heteronormative gender and sexuality were ever internalized by the population.
CHAPTER THREE

THE KÖÇEK AND THE KEMALIST LEGACY IN POST-COUP TURKEY

This chapter addresses contemporary köçek dancing and how the performer’s identity has evolved from the professional, urban dancer and young, beautiful object of male desire to a rural, lower class entertainer stigmatized for his occupation’s Ottoman origins and whose perceived effeminacy threatens national integrity. As mentioned earlier, the tendency of Turkish scholars like And to associate Ottoman performers with foreignness also links notions of backwards same-sex practices with feminized outsiders, like in the case of the Ottoman dandy, whose threatening ambiguity derived from his association with feminized concepts of both the West and the young male object of desire. I will argue that contemporary anxiety over the ambiguous image of gender and sexuality that köçek dancing performs similarly reflects the influence of what Gandhi has identified as the conflation of the “homosexual” and “savage” in Victorian era discourse relating to the penetrable Oriental Other, but in this case the feminized, or effeminate, Other has been constructed as anyone perceived to not be belonging to the masculinized Turkish national identity. The nationalist trope of a dual enemy presence constantly threatening the nation consists of foreigners, particularly Europeans, on one hand and the peasantry on the other, the latter being paradoxically constructed as an internal enemy impeding modernization as well as the source of pure Turkishness. The köçek’s stigmatized, queered identity is reinscribed by the performer’s rural, lower class status and thus predisposition for effeminacy and pathological afflictions like same-sex practices caused by centuries of Ottoman neglect of the Turkish peasant. However, as a specter of discontinuity, the köçek dancer exposes the naturalized binaries of heteronormativity and further opens them, and Turkish modernity, to critical inquiry.
The 2006 film *Beynelmilel* (The International)\(^{177}\) sheds light on how notions of masculinity and male sexuality were repetitively reimagined and constituted through performance in post-1950s Turkey and at the same time critiques the efficacy of state power beyond coercion and the legacy of Westernizing Kemalist reforms in rural Anatolia. *Beynelmilel* takes place after the 1980 military coup which ushered in years of moral conservatism, severe restrictions on freedom of expression, and the arrest and disappearance of thousands of people suspected of political opposition. The plot is sympathetic to the leftist movement of the 1970s and its battle with fascist right-wing groups, which the coup abruptly suppressed. It centers around a group of wedding musicians, accustomed to playing folk music, in the small southeastern town of Adıyaman who are forced by local junta officials to form a concert band and perform Western-style marches in an upcoming military parade. This echoes an account of the People’s House in Hakkari attempting to teach national marches to peasants and improve their rhythm by making them listen to music on the radio.\(^{178}\) The lead musician’s daughter is influenced by her leftist love interest’s political views and helps him record a copy of the communist anthem “The Internationale” to play in protest at the event. Ironically, her father hears it and thinks it sounds like a suitable piece to play for the military officials, although it is one of the songs that has been banned by the junta. When the group performs it, chaos erupts and the daughter’s friend is shot and killed.

In the opening scene of *Beynelmilel*, the musicians are caught operating a clandestine, mobile night club in the back of a truck and performing for several male audience members with a köçek who, unlike the beardless young male beloved of the past, wears a full mustache along

\(^{177}\) *Beynelmilel* (The International), directed by Muharrem Gülmez and Sırrı Süreyya Önder, 2006, film.
\(^{178}\) Aslan, 79.
with his ornamented red skirt and silken blouse. This situation leads to the local commander’s
decision to give them a more suitable purpose as a marching band, although they cannot even
read the sheet music or play the instruments that they are shown, nor are they promised a salary.
The commander asks one musician if he is not ashamed for making boys dance and threatens to
make him dance in public wearing the köçek’s costume. He protests saying the male audience
members were touching and fondling the boy, but defends his own intentions by saying the
musicians were just trying to help him learn a trade to earn money. The musicians are also
instructed to turn a former People’s House into a legitimate nightclub for the officers and their
wives, to the chagrin of the daughter’s leftist friend, which is an affront to leftist nostalgia for the
revolutionary spirit of the People’s Houses during the nation-building era, however ineffective
they may have been. Two of the musicians enter the defunct People’s House which still contains
remnants of the cultural education conducted there, including a library, theatrical stage, and a
poster of a print by Picasso, whose name is unfamiliar to the men. When the daughter asks her
father’s friend if he is not ashamed for turning a People’s House into a nightclub, her father slaps
her and later explains how difficult it has been to make a living as a wedding musician. He
states, “we are wedding performers, they have the wedding, we have the misery…all your
‘people’ have ever done is slap me since I was born.” He reveals that as a boy he and his father
would dance in women’s costumes at weddings and were often “appetizers for drunks.”

_Beynelmilel_ demonstrates how the köçek evolved in Turkey after the nation-building era
as a performer belonging to a marginalized lower class of entertainers who work for little pay as
dancers and musicians to survive while still maintaining a homoerotic allure for male audiences,
albeit it publicly shameful and performed in a secretive space like an illicit nightclub. This
portrayal of the köçek’s stigmatized occupation and its association with homoeroticism is
supported by Berna Kurt’s ethnographic study\textsuperscript{179} of contemporary \textit{köçek} dancers and musicians from the small city of Sinop in the western Black Sea region, where the \textit{köçek} seems to have survived the strongest for reasons that are not entirely clear. She posits that after being banned in nineteenth century Istanbul, \textit{köçek} dancing became over time a localized rural tradition in certain parts of Anatolia and associated with past homosexuality and male prostitution. Kurt indicates that the number of dancers is decreasing with a rise in homophobic attitudes towards them and even ostracism from friends and family. The \textit{köçek} is viewed as a degenerate figure because the dancer’s movements, including abdominal undulations, throwing the hips, shaking shoulders, and using finger cymbals, connote a feminine eroticism, not dissimilar from that of belly dancing. While Kurt’s work is important to understanding the state of contemporary \textit{köçek} dancing and advocates against its homophobic stigmatization, it should be noted that she does not carefully consider its historicity beyond European accounts and tends to view it as discontinuous with the Ottoman context in which she erroneously paints \textit{köçeks} as substitutes for female performers due to the restrictions of homosociality. It is evident that this, accompanied by the fact that she acknowledges her field interviews in Sinop depended on family relationships there, has prevented her from exploring questions of contemporary same-sex practices and desire, undermining her advocacy of reimagining heteronormative constructs of gender.

Kurt finds perceptions that working as a \textit{köçek} is a hopefully temporary occupation not suitable or respectable for a man because the dancer wears a long, ornamented skirt and has origins connected to the “pederasty” of the Ottoman past. In a segment on \textit{köçek} dancing, a

television reporter claimed that Atatürk rescued Turkish children from the fear of such perversions and that the standard bar, halay, and zeybek folk dances are the dances of a man, not the köçek tradition. A former köçek describes how he started dancing accompanied by his musician father to earn a living. He felt ashamed because he thought people looked at him as embodying a gender between a man and a woman, so he became a musician in order to acquire a better reputation. Kurt indicates that köçek dancing is often an occupation passed from father to son. Another former dancer states that he started when he was 12 or 13 years old and continued until he did his military service. Afterwards, he also became a musician playing the davul and zurna, which typically lead the köçek performance. It is considered ideal for a köçek to dance only as long as he is still near the age of adolescence, not only because he is more agile, but so that he may be seen as a proper, strong heterosexual man when he has matured and marries, although there are some who dance into middle age. Despite being increasingly stigmatized figures, köçeks are still hired to perform at weddings and even earn extra money from televised competitions. Kurt states that köçek performances are currently restricted in Sinop because of “noise pollution” and as far back as the 1960s have occasionally been banned in the media, which is now actually demonstrating more interest in the tradition.

Kurt’s findings on the necessary evil of working as a köçek for a living are paralleled by Karin Van Nieuwkerk’s work on the ambivalence of female wedding performers in Egypt, who are stigmatized as dishonorable for publicly exhibiting their inherently sexual bodies, but those who employ them are free from any guilt or shame as they happily consume the spectacle as entertainment and a marker of personal prestige. However, male entertainers are not viewed this way because it is their proper role to earn money and have primarily “productive” bodies.

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that are not sensual, even when they dance. The köçek’s body is sexualized and shameful because of the dancer’s perceived effeminacy and degenerate manhood. However, as a specter of discontinuity between heteronormative sex, gender, and desire, the köçek is a much more ambivalent figure who embodies and performs a liminal identity between these binary constructs. Similarly, the ideally adolescent performer’s age represents a transformative phase of incomplete, ambiguous masculinity into proper heterosexual manhood sanctioned by military service and marriage, which produces older dancers as even more transgressive of social norms. Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between the typical contexts in which the köçek performs, one being wedding receptions and the other more subterranean settings like a nightclub. As Nieuwkerk describes their meanings in the Egyptian context, “whereas weddings are joyful celebrations and can be defined as the context of happiness, nightclubs are considered the domain of greediness, excitement, and sexuality,” the latter in which female entertainers arouse “‘lasciviousness and bad intentions’” in their audience.\(^{181}\) As discussed in Beynelmilel, the köçek can conjure homoeroticism at a wedding reception (separated into male and female parties) beyond the confines of the secretive space of a nightclub and enable it to paradoxically permeate, but not pollute, the spatiotemporal zone epitomizing heterosexual companionate coupling.

As in Turkey, the nineteenth century Orientalist exoticization of female dancers in Egypt equating them with prostitutes caused belly dancing to lose esteem in national preference of respectable genres like folk dance and ballet.\(^{182}\) Furthermore, Nieuwkerk stresses how Egyptian women singers and dancers also struggle with their lower class status and condemnation by the middle and upper classes. The situation of female belly dancers in contemporary Istanbul offers

\(^{181}\) Ibid., 129, 180.
\(^{182}\) Ibid., 21-22, 180.
a possible glimpse as to how köçek dancing may evolve. Öykü Potuoğlu-Cook locates belly dancing as a popular trend of the “neo-Ottomania”\(^{183}\) culture industry, which is based on contradictory, self-Orientalizing interpretations and commodification of an Ottoman heritage for consumption by both secular and conservative elites. She demonstrates that while the neo-Ottoman cultural craze is driven by a nostalgia for a cosmopolitan past, it is in fact pursued at the expense of minority communities and the lower class, whose marginalization it maintains or even furthers. Belly dancing has become a culturally “authentic” trend consumed by elite secular women who, because of their upper class status and privilege reinforced by its praxis, are immune from the stigmatization experienced by the lower class, traditionally Rom women who belly dance to earn a meager living. Despite debate over whether the Ottoman past should be imagined as exotic or a Golden Age of Islam, Potuoğlu-Cook indicates that belly dance has been excluded historically in both secular and Islamist official national imaginaries, which respectively perceive it either as an inferior Arab tradition or dishonorable and immoral. Given the increased media interest in köçek dancing noted by Kurt, one wonders whether or not it might be subsumed by neo-Ottomania as an exotic spectacle of the past. While attention on the köçek certainly presents a critical entryway to problematize categories of identity and reveals other possibilities of performance, the case of belly dancers, most of whom must still bear “multi-tiered marginalization as ethnic, sexualized, and lower-class bodies,”\(^{184}\) does not bode well for the contestation or subversion of oppressive social norms.

There are numerous YouTube videos of köçek performances, the majority being from cities and towns in the western Black Sea region. They portray dancers ranging in age from their cities and towns in the western Black Sea region. They portray dancers ranging in age from their

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teens through forties, and even old age. The performances generally take place outdoors at wedding receptions with two or more dancers for audiences that include women and children, but some are for male parties only. While the audiences and performers are joyful, there is still an air of reservation in accordance with social etiquette that also gives the dance a more folkloric quality. The dancers and audience do not interact much except for when a köçek may move closer to a male audience member to solicit a tip, which is placed in the köçek’s mouth or on the ground for the köçek to bend over backwards and pick up with his teeth.

However, there are also instances when male audience members dance with the köçeks, an especially exuberant example being part of a celebration of young men before leaving to complete their military service. This is one of several videos in which a particular köçek team of two young brothers performs. They wear patches of the Turkish flag on their costumes to display their loyalty to the nation as well as demonstrate that they too are proud national subjects, despite the discriminatory view of their occupation. One is a particularly skilled and confident dancer who, in one instance, is so bold as to sit on a male audience member’s knee while still performing with his upper body in an almost coquettish manner, which quite amuses the man who obliges him with a tip. Most of the YouTube videos do not have many comments, but two that do indicate varying perceptions of köçek dancers that further reveal the complexities of the performers’ controversial social status. While they are not intended to be representative of any sample population, I have categorized the comments (author’s

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185 YouTube, “Kardeşler Orkestrası Hacımusa Asker Eğlencesi” (Brothers Orchestra Hacımusa Soldiers’ Entertainment), uploaded February 13, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5ikflRGmHM.
translation)\textsuperscript{187} as follows: köçek dancing is an undesirable occupation, but necessary to survive, along with taking an opportunity for business promotion; praise for the dancers’ performance and challenging derogatory accusations, including calling attention to the historicity of the tradition; and homophobic queering of the köçek’s identity and accusations of unmanliness and communal dishonor.

Clearly there is a continuum of perspectives on köçek dancing and they are not only aimed at condemning the performers for having a dishonorable occupation. As revealing as they may be in several ways, the mediating aspect and anonymity facilitated by the internet does not indicate how social attitudes may be performed differently in everyday life, nor can we know the backgrounds of the commenters. However, like female Egyptian wedding entertainers and Turkish belly dancers, it is evident that the driving force underlying the köçeks’ stigmatization is their lower class status that leads them to work in an occupation generally viewed, also by the köçeks themselves, as low paying, unmanly, and undesirable. In part for this reason, they should not be considered a “third” gender or sex like other ambiguous performers such as the xanith in Oman\textsuperscript{188} or khawal in Egypt have been. In accordance with Butler, gender ambiguous subjects represent neither a third gender category outside of naturalized heteronormative binary constructs nor a transcendence of them, but rather their “internal subversion” that problematizes categories of identity and reveals other possibilities of performance.\textsuperscript{189}

\textsuperscript{187} See the Appendix for these comments.
\textsuperscript{189} Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 127-28, 141.
The historical circumstances of the köçek resemble more closely, although not identically, those of the khawal than the xanith. Wilson Chacko Jacob traces the evolution of the khawal’s public social signification as, “first, from slave and servant…to male performer in drag by the nineteenth century, then to ‘faggot,’ as the term is derogatorily used in Egypt today.” He describes the khawal as a cross-dressing male wedding performer and a form of deviance so “monstrous” it was rarely explicitly named in discourses on sexuality in 1930s Egypt, similar to the Kemalist implication of homoeroticism in vague terms of sexual decadence, disorder, and sickness pertaining to the peasantry. One Egyptian writer who did address homosexuality argued that the law need not be concerned with those suffering from pathological same-sex desire as long as they did not “spread their disease.” This may also help explain why homoeroticism and same-sex practices were not explicitly constructed as a discursive Other of the Kemalist regime, as addressed in the previous chapter, which could not in any case wield the juridical power to effectively discipline subjects into heteronormative praxis, nor would it adapt its elitist, Westernizing ideology to the realities of a symbolic peasantry, whose genuine mobility was viewed as a threat. Instead they were, as Butler would argue, concealed, but maintained marginally and embodied by spectral figures like the khawal or köçek in service of imagining hegemonic heteronormative binaries.

Köçeks generally fall somewhere in the middle on the spectrum between male entertainers who are simply trying to earn a living and female entertainers who may as well be prostitutes for shamefully exhibiting their bodies to earn money. Unable to ever make claims to their own identity under the pressures of modernity and the rise of homophobia, the dancers’ failure to fade away is punished by the social queering of their identity, as the YouTube

190 Jacob, 184.
191 Ibid., 178-79.
comments illustrate. Butler asserts that discursive queering produces a subject as such through repetitive, performative acts of naming and thereby shaming the subject for embodying a “pathologized sexuality.” This aims to regulate and reinscribe the hegemonic imagining of heteronormative categories when faced with their apparent transgression and produces a guilty, degenerate masculine subject that the dancers internalize, which is reinforced by their lower class status and social immobility. In their study of the variation of gay identities in Turkey, Tarik Bereket and Barry Adam discuss the common expectation that in male same-sex relations the passive partner should exhibit feminine qualities, while the active partner is viewed as entirely masculine. Sometimes there is no perceived difference between being with an effeminate man versus a woman. The authors indicate that femininity and masculinity also depend on class status stating, “men from lower social classes tend to be associated with effeminacy, while men from more middle and higher social classes separate themselves from any kind of linkage with ‘sissiness’ even though they may ‘briefly’ perform in such ways.” They suggest that men with more privilege and power feel they are entitled to embody and perform masculinity as their “natural right.”

This notion is also tied to hypermasculinity among Mediterranean men that Unni Wikan argues considers the repeated performance of sexual acts primarily as the accumulation of social esteem, which can only bring such honor if the partners are women, or likewise, effeminate men. Kandiyoti supports Najmabadi’s idea of the perceived necessity to masquerade homoerotic desire as heteroerotic using the case of transsexual (travesti) prostitutes in Istanbul, whose

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194 Ibid., 145.
195 Wikan, 182.
femininity supports their middle class customers’ public image as hypermasculine men, no matter what form their desires may take. 196 “Real” transsexuals look down on those men who they view as dressing like women and engaging in sex work just for the money, which sometimes they intend to take back to their villages and use to get married. Similarly, a man who identifies as gay can be driven to travesti prostitution out of economic necessity. 197 The queering of the köçek’s identity is also situated in and compounded by these intersecting discourses of class privilege, sexuality, and masculinity.

As a rural, lower class, and ambiguous performer, the köçek can thus be considered more naturally “prone” to effeminacy and imperfect masculinity. The public exhibition of the dancer’s feminized, and therefore sexualized, body is even more shameful than a woman’s or even a very feminine travesti’s in respect to its outward ambivalence, which is perceived as pathologically degenerate and polluted and thus a potential source of communal contamination. In her discussion of Mary Douglas’s idea of the body as a bounded system akin to the nation-state, Butler states that the definitive, but permeable, boundary between the outer and inner body is also analogous to the fear of pollution of hegemonic constructs of race and sexuality by their Others, who have been expelled from such fantasies. 198 This returns to the Kemalist construction of the peasantry as a manifestation of Gandhi’s notion of the conflated “homosexual” and “savage” into one half of a dual enemy presence within and outside of the civilizational collective, a common trope used in discourses of national identity to this day. 199 As a result, the

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197 Ibid., 282.
homosexual Other becomes accused of anti-national sentiment and therefore unmanliness as well. This view was manifested by Kemalists with the conflation of homoeroticism as an affliction of the backward, Ottoman past and the East as a spatiotemporal sotadic zone into which the West is also later incorporated as evident in homophobic nationalist discourse.

In her 2013 ethnography examining the changing discursive landscape of national identity in contemporary Turkey, Jenny White examines the tensions and commonalities between different groups in a society becoming both increasingly conservative and liberal, yet finds that all classes speak similarly of the nation in terms of community. The main issues she discusses are, “the physicality of Turkish national identity with its emphasis on blood, purity, boundaries, and honor—and the cultural work that underlies them; the gendered nature of nationalism; its sharply contested profile; the link between being Turkish and being Muslim; a substratum of militarism, hostility, suspicion, and authoritarianism; and a heightened discourse of fear and the polarization of society.”

According to orthodox Kemalism, national unity is invested in racial unity and the purity of Turkish blood, which in turn has created a familial sense of the national community, defined by a fear of contamination by outsiders, that must be protected by a masculinized state and military, which White terms the “Republic of Fear.” Social survival depends on belonging to a group, whose boundaries must not transgressed, with a collective logic underiding individualism, so that the “individual has become the nation.” This results in a myriad of contradictory behaviors and discourses. Individuals who deviate from the norm are viewed as “dishonorable, impure, non-Turkish, and a threat to the morals and unity of

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200 Ibid., 3.
201 Ibid., 3, 54.
202 Ibid., 103.
society.” The splintering of national identity driven by the weakening of the Kemalist project in recent years has led to a heightened fear where community membership, and thus existential survival, is, “accompanied by an increased search for enemies and monitoring of members’ conceptual purity,” contributing to shrinking attention paid towards the middle ground.

As previously demonstrated, the peasantry was a conflicted symbol for Kemalist elites in the nation-building era when it was discursively produced as simultaneously embodying the source of pure Turkishness and backwardness and chaos, the latter of which included male homoeroticism and same-sex practices. This conflicted view of the rural population still rings true in contemporary Turkey as the gap between the peasantry and urban intellectuals was never closed, not only because of a lack of state power and rigid, elitist ideology, but also because genuine peasant mobility was considered a political threat. This is evident in the privilege of the middle and upper classes, and their contradictory nostalgia for a multicultural past, over the marginalized lower classes in contemporary Turkish society. As Gandhi has demonstrated in the West, the Kemalist elites also developed an Orientalist view of the Islamic East, in their case represented by the Ottoman Empire and embodied by the religiosity, decadence, and sickness of the peasantry, as an inferior, primitive, and feminine, or effeminate, Other in need of discipline and reform. Additionally, Kemalist elites, in their Westernizing, nation-building efforts, constructed the West, particularly Europe, as a second threatening Other.

Westernization meant a secular lifestyle for the elite and a façade for the rest of the country, but national identity at its core was imagined as Sunni Muslim and Turkish into which all other identities had to be assimilated. Otherwise, they were marginalized in or violently cast out of collective memory to purify the national body. Thus, the Orientalist gaze of the West was

203 Ibid., 16.
204 Ibid., 6-7.
returned in the form of a nationalist Occidentalism. Elif Shafak argues that in novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “Western civilization was symbolized by a woman—young, attractive, a potential seducer. Just as the West was feminized, Westernization too implied some sort of feminization. If a Turkish woman became too Westernized she would accordingly become too feminized, meaning too fixated upon beauty and carnal desires….And if a Turkish man were to become too westernized he would lose his masculinity.”205 The fear of nationally destructive hyper-feminization by way of hyper-Westernization Shafak describes, which was also discussed in regards to the Ottoman dandy who embodied both the West and young male beloved, can be applied later on in the twentieth century and extended to the result of too much interaction with any type of feminized, foreign Otherness outside of the Muslim Turkish, and elitist, national identity.

This is focused on characterizing Western, especially European, women as hyper-feminized and exoticized and men as effeminate, or “soft.” As a result, the two conflated “homosexual” and “savage” feminized enemy Others embodied by the Anatolian peasantry and Europe are in turn collapsed into each other driven by elitist entitlement to a masculinized Turkish national identity, regardless of whether or not it is categorized as “secular” or “Islamic.” The term yabancı, literally meaning “one who is of the wild/wilderness,” can refer to anything or anyone that is foreign, strange, and outside in respect to the national imaginary and is frequently reiterated to perform and police its boundaries. It is commonly used to refer to those perceived as distinct from the Turkish cultural milieu in some way, particularly potential Westerners/non-Muslims, and subsumes all other nationalities into a broad space of uncivilized Otherness that threatens to contaminate and ruin the bodily integrity of the national community. As Orga

paradoxically characterizes the Turk, “he rejects every stranger as a potential enemy, although he is unfailingly courteous to foreigners.”

The third set of accusatory and derogatory YouTube comments characterize the köçek as a potentially polluting body endangering the microcosms of the national collective, which is generally embodied by the family, village, neighborhood, or town. The first comment, “Ok, but now we are not in the Ottoman period!! Besides, is time important? Ottoman or Republican period, what difference does it make? These roles are unsuitable for a man,” indicates a naturalized concept of masculinity that the köçek violates. The second, “If there was a faggot Olympics, being from Bartin [a small city near Zonguldak], we would be the world champion. They do not do us justice. I hate Bartin. I’m from Bartin, but I am glad I was not born there. Turkey’s disgrace,” expresses that the local köçek tradition degrades the reputation and integrity of the town the commenter lives in and therefore also the nation. By distinguishing between living there and being born there, he or she implies that the köçek’s degenerate pathology is a contagion bred into the blood of the community, thus corrupting its nature and the masculinity of its men. The last two comments relate the köçek to Europe in both a positive and negative light:

“There is the stomach of Europe, you disgrace us. Turks dancing dressed as women are like Europeans…” – User Asnida Aida

“The Scots in Europe wear skirts and play musical instruments. They are seen as natural, great. So what are remarks saying that Europe comes here as a modern parasite supposed to mean?” – User Ekrem Korkmaz

The third commenter refers to the köçek’s undulating stomach and costume as an embodiment of effeminate European masculinity and national dishonor. The fourth views Europe as exemplary in the case of Scotland where wearing a kilt in accordance with a

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206 Orga, The Land and People of Turkey, 7.
traditional performance is not a degenerate act, but a source of national pride. Although, it would be very difficult for köçek dancing to overcome its clear and purposeful exclusion from the national folkdance tradition and stigmatization as a lower class occupation. He also alludes to perceptions that Europe is parasitically invading the national body, which can refer to the view that a pathological homosexuality and the increasing visibility of diverse queer identities is a national, Turkish blood-sucking scourge spread from origins in the West. Following Gandhi again, “homosexuality must have been introduced from without, from the foreign land or by the foreign people with whose name it is associated.” Therefore, the köçek is not only accused of unmanliness, but the subversion of the nation as well. Paradoxically, displacing the blame for homosexuality on European influence also serves to facilitate concealed same-sex practices as no fault of the Turkish men who engage in them. The nationalist discourse of the YouTube comments performatively produces and attempts to regulate the köçek’s sick and disordered body, which, as a rural, lower class body, left vulnerable by the Kemalist regime to fester, could never successfully reproduce generations of healthy, devoted citizen-children for guidance by the paternalistic state, embodied by Atatürk. Therefore, the state can only attempt to discipline its more unruly and threatening subjects and make examples out of them through coercion.

White argues that Turkish national identity has been masculinized and to which this study has demonstrated middle and upper class men are more privileged. Men commonly define their rigid national identity by employing the sayings “We are all soldiers” and “Turks are born soldiers.” She notes that the experience of compulsory military service, notoriously harsh, but a vital entry into manhood, creates among men lifelong bonds “forged under duress.”

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207 Gandhi, 53.
208 White, 23.
209 Ibid., 78.
Building on White’s argument that women—while they may be citizens or mothers of martyrs—are prevented from becoming or feeling like national subjects, in part since they cannot do military service, it is clear that effeminate men, as the figure of the köçek has been conceived, and especially those of the lower class, are also excluded. At the same time, national boundaries are associated with sexual purity embodied by, as Najmabadi has indicated in Iran, a beloved and motherly feminized vatan (homeland) that the Turkish man, as a soldier, must guard. The penetration of the boundaries of either the nation or feminine human body by outsiders thus results in dishonor, or shame. More than carrying the Western contagion of homosexuality, the köçek, as a lower class male more prone to effeminacy, also embodies a threatening vulnerability to its penetrative transmission and is punished, rather than protected, out of the fear of national disintegration. Other such unruly male bodies are similarly shamed and punished by the state when, for instance, homosexual men attempt to avoid the harassment of military service by supplying the requisite photographic evidence of their “‘psycho-sexual deviation,’” essentially pornography, to a medical board and are also subject to invasive physical inspections. Transsexuals have been forced to strip for police, despite providing all the correct paperwork, to receive their new identity cards and were often brutalized in police custody after the 1980 coup with some even being exiled from Istanbul to Eskişehir.

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210 Ibid., 19-20.
211 Kandiyoti, “Pink Card Blues,” 283.
212 Ibid., 283, 286.
CONCLUSION

The case of the effeminate and flamboyant, yet immensely popular and loved singer Zeki Müren is often cited as a seemingly puzzling exception to the taboo on public displays of queerness, although he was briefly exiled from Turkey after the 1980 coup. Müren, whose sartorial style and appearance have been likened to Liberace’s, is renowned for his talented performance of Turkish classical music. The height of his career spanned the 1970s through 1980s. Martin Stokes, in his book *The Republic of Love*, understands popular nostalgia for Müren as respect for his embodiment of sincerity, civility, and Republican virtues during times of political corruption and turmoil.²¹³ Moreover, he exemplifies the ideal citizen-child devoted and loyal to the motherly *vatan* and paternalistic state, leaving his fortune to a veterans’ foundation and never shaming them with an open discussion of his queer identity, the type of love that shades into White’s “Republic of Fear.” Through an analysis of the *köçek* figure, this thesis has explored the tensions and ties between the Turkish state and its subjects, who carry the burden of embodying the nation, and therefore upholding its boundaries, in multiple ways whether it is with their own physical bodies or as members of their families and communities.

One historically embedded question still remains lurking in the shadows regarding the unruly body of the *köçek*, however. Clearly the *köçek*’s identity has evolved from the professional, urban dancer and young, beautiful object of male desire to a rural, lower class entertainer stigmatized for such origins whose perceived effeminacy threatens national integrity. Nevertheless, this modern transformation remains incomplete like so many reform efforts of the Kemalist regime; the *köçek* still retains a homoerotic allure for male audiences. The sexual

availability of contemporary köçek dancers has only been hinted at, and denied, in Kurt’s ethnographic study and suggested by Beynemilel. The public advertisement of a feminized and sexualized dancing body is equated with prostitution in the case of female belly dancers, which may very well also characterize the contemporary köçek, so what is the legacy of the actual practice that drove the dance form’s popularity in the Ottoman Empire? One last excerpt from Irfan Orga may help further provide a clue:

Among the Yürük tribes, prostitutes are rare, and those there are are themselves usually the bastard daughters of prostitutes. I was told there were none on Karadağ, Osman looking faintly shocked that I should ask such a question. However, the fact that I had asked obviously worried him for the same day he came to me, and after a lot of ambiguous remarks, came out into the open with the offer of a young boy who would be willing to oblige me if I ever felt life was too hard to bear. Hikmet, who was with me, gladly offered to take my place at once, and strode off jauntily with Osman to an assignation which had been prepared for me.²¹⁴

Orga continuously reveals that the notion of the beautiful, young male object of desire had not disappeared in the lives of Republican era Turkey’s new national subjects, whether they were urban elites like Orga or rural Anatolian peasants, although it seems to have been more engrained among the latter. It would be interesting to know more about how Orga interpreted the proposition presented to him. His refusal to speak of it in any more detail indicates it might cause further conflict for him. He consistently attempts to draw a boundary between himself and his desires that may or may not have ever been so transgressed. Nicholas Kontovas has suggested that male prostitution went “underground” in the nineteenth century with some köçeks even becoming “transwomen” after their profession was banned.²¹⁵ Certainly, male same-sex desire and practices are commonly masqueraded as heteroeros between hypermasculine men and

²¹⁴ Orga, The Caravan Moves On, 139.
feminized partners in contemporary Turkey, but what of the more ambivalent masculinity of the adolescent youths and older, mustache-wearing men who work as köçek dancers? Stephen O. Murray has pointed to the works of one particular Ottoman poet that express desire for bearded men, rather than the predominant ideal of the young beardless beloved.216 Such pluralities of sexuality exist today just as they have in other times and places, which, when compared, help to reveal one another against hegemonic discourse.

This thesis has attempted to reevaluate and expand the history of köçek dancing in Turkey in terms of the nation’s own internal dynamics and the central role conflicts of gender and sexuality play in them. In her discussion of the hermaphrodite Herculine, Butler concludes that Herculine embodies the law to the extent that s/he is, “an enacted testimony to the law’s uncanny capacity to produce only those rebellions that it can guarantee will—out of fidelity—defeat themselves and those subjects who, utterly subjected, have no choice but to reiterate the law of their genesis.”217 However, when the Turkish state has often not been able to effectively wield such power, köçek dancing continues to surface from exclusion to disrupt the rigid boundaries of national identity, thereby exposing its naturalized binaries and further opening them, and Turkish modernity, to critical inquiry.

217 Butler, Gender Trouble, 106.
APPENDIX

Köçek dancing is an undesirable occupation, but necessary to survive, along with taking an opportunity for business promotion:

“THAT MAN DOES NOT DANCE FOR ENJOYMENT, HE DANCES TO BRING HOME THE BREAD!!” – User Volkan Ciftci

“This man should not do this work, but respect for earning a living!!!” – User xkarayusufx

“FOR YOUR WEDDING RECEPTIONS, ENGAGEMENTS, HENNA NIGHTS, BRIDAL PARADES, CIRCUMCISION RECEPTIONS, CULTURE ORGANIZATIONS, WE GO EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD WITH OUR DAVUL, ZURNA, AND KÖÇEK TEAM. DETAILS AND IMAGES. KOZMOPOLIK.COM 7/24 INFORMATION SUPPORT LINE: 0532-XXXXXXX OUR RESPECTS” – User Duran Keskin

Praise for the dancers’ performance and challenging derogatory accusations, including calling attention to the historicity of the tradition:

“In the köçek tradition of the Ottoman period and imperial court dancing males wore women’s costumes and were accompanied by musicians. There was no derogatory connotation of effeminate homosexuality. Because simple-minded people are uninterested in history they do not know this.” – User Ajda Can

“Those who say this is gay, etc. and I am ashamed of my manhood, how much of a man are you? You don’t know anything about köçeks.” – User Ekrem Korkmaz

“I think they dance really well…bravo brothers…to the negative commenters, I hope allah gives them some intellect…ignorance is difficult!” – User selinesila

“Wow, I felt like I was at a wedding” – User 67meix

Homophobic queering of the köçek’s identity and accusations of unmanliness and communal dishonor:

In reply to Ajda Can: “Ok, but now we are not in the Ottoman period!! Besides, is time important? Ottoman or Republican period, what difference does it make? These roles are unsuitable for a man.” – User Firat Deniz

“If there was a faggot Olympics, being from Bartin [a small city near Zonguldak], we would be the world champion. They do not do us justice. I hate Bartin. I’m from Bartin, but I am glad I was not born there. Turkey’s disgrace…” – User Patlicankizartma
“There is the stomach of Europe, you disgrace us. Turks dancing dressed as women are like Europeans…” – User Asnida Aida

“The Scots in Europe wear skirts and play musical instruments. They are seen as natural, great. So what are remarks saying that Europe comes here as a modern parasite supposed to mean?” – User Ekrem Korkmaz
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