

Political Masculinities: Gender, Power, and Change in Turkey

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Politics plays a crucial role in the construction of masculinities. This article examines the workings of political masculinities in Turkey in two categories: conventional party-related political masculinities and the emergence of a cosmopolitan masculinity. This article contributes to, and moves beyond, existing debates on hegemonic masculinity by bringing in political actors and traditions in the lives of ordinary men that are affected by leaders and discourses. We contend that there is a correlation between hegemonic masculinity and political masculinities as they connect and work upon relationality, justification, and persuasion in gender relations, the legitimation of patriarchy, and hierarchical masculinities.

Introduction

Male politicians and the identifications, symbols, and languages they incorporate have a complicated relation with masculinities in divergent contexts (Greenberg 2006; Messerschmidt 2010; Messner 2007; Sperling 2014). Turkey has recently been described as an “angry” (Oktem 2011), “military” (Altınay 2006), “divided” (Howe 2004), “neoliberalizing” (Cosar and Ozdemir 2012), “governmentalized” (Erol et al. 2016), and “deeply patriarchal” (Ozyegin 2015, 3) nation. It is also one of the places in which politics plays a crucial role in the construction of masculinities. Scholars have argued that embodied local and national masculinities are deeply connected with certain political leaders, affiliations, and effects (Ozbay 2013; Sancar 2009; Sertoglu 2015). The emphasis on the impact of politics over social life, culture, and subjectivities in Turkey has been bolstered by the increasingly authoritarian, interventionist, and populist tendencies of President Tayyip Erdogan (Arat 2017; Cagaptay 2017). Erdogan’s influence goes beyond his run-of-the-mill comments about religion and politics and extends into his way of “doing masculinity,” which has intense repercussions on hegemonic masculinity as it is related with legitimation, consent, and hierarchy in gender relations.

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In this article, we examine the workings of political masculinities in Turkey in the two main categories that our interviewees have established: (i) conventional political identities and the party-related masculinities within the fixed order of four major political traditions, and (ii) the possibility of the emergence of a new, more cosmopolitan masculinity that is based on contested standpoints about diversity, neoliberalism, and violence that crisscross loyalty to the parties.

This article contributes to, and moves beyond, existing debates on hegemonic masculinity by bringing in the issues surrounding the effects of political actors' and traditions' in the lives of ordinary men in a context where gendered hegemony and power relations have a tendency to morph into top-down infliction and where different organs of the state take part in rearranging gender relations and ways of doing masculinity. The Turkish case is a critical one for studying the intersection of masculinities and politics as it provides an opportunity to simultaneously observe the dynamics of authoritarianism, cultural imposition, and a resisting diversity among men. We analyze Turkey as an example of how the boundaries and strength of hegemonic masculinity, relating to national political contradictions and agitations, are experienced and embodied.

Rethinking Hegemonic Masculinities

The hegemonic masculinity framework is the paradigmatic approach in masculinity studies (Kimmel, Connell, and Hearn 2005; Pascoe and Bridges 2015). By referring to this framework, we do not mean to single out a particular group of men (such as political leaders) as examples or bearers of it; instead, we engage with the view that takes hegemonic masculinity as a mode of relation and a pattern of practice that is structured and embedded in complex gender dynamics (Connell 1995; Messerschmidt 2016). Hence, hegemonic masculinity does not refer to a specific form of embodiment, stylization, or character traits. As Messerschmidt notes, "hegemonic masculinity was originally formulated to conceptualize how patriarchal relations are legitimated throughout society" (2016, 19). In this original formulation, Connell asserted that, "At any given time one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy" (1995, 77). Relationality (in the form of women's consent and collaboration as well as non-hegemonic masculinities' assent) and the process of cultural legitimation (the rationale, logic, or explanation for the acceptance of gender inequality and male supremacy) are crucial in the formation of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 2016). Hegemonic masculinity emerges and operates as a discursive pattern and social action within gender

hegemony as a response to prevailing, or possible, problems of patriarchy. Gender hegemony justifies and secures women's and non-hegemonic (resisting or alternative) masculinities' deliberate subjugation to a contextually ascendant hegemonic masculinity, which is specified through intersection of class, race, ethnicity, and religion.

We argue that it is critical to understand how certain patterns of masculine practice can become hegemonic by persuading women (and also men who enact different masculinities) and creating consent through cultural legitimation. The connection between hegemonic relations of power and the dynamic political structure(s) of the nation is significant in this picture. There is a correlation between hegemonic masculinity and political masculinities as they connect and work upon relationality, justification, and persuasion in gender relations, the legitimation of patriarchy, and the stratification of masculinities.

We offer the term "political masculinities" to refer to the socio-affective ties established through political traditions and discourses between ordinary men and the party leaderships. Political masculinities entail the ways in which men are affected by and recalibrate their masculine selves according to the aspirations and fears rooted in certain political leaders, movements, positions, and discourses. In this sense, hegemonic masculinity is not the same thing as political masculinity which is a configuration through which men interact with political leaders and ideals and, as a result, reform their gender identity. However, these two are synchronous, sometimes overlapping and mutually constitutive. In certain contexts, political masculinity may help promulgate specifics of hegemonic masculinity, and vice versa.¹

We define these masculinities as political and not, for example, as ideological, because they fuse two different but intimately related political spheres: The organized national party framework alongside magnetic leadership with ideological orientations, and a gender politics based on assumed or questioned differences between women and men as well as power inequalities among men. Hence, what kind of a man one becomes concerns both his affiliations with the broader worldview and more specific partisanship, and at the same time, his perspective and practices about gender norms and inequities. How does a political identity (or, alignment) constitute a gendered subject by alluding to a number of discourses including those about family, the state, and sexuality? How are processes of doing gender inscribed in particular political environments to define political masculinities? Political masculinities are not static, ahistorical, or immobile; on the contrary, they are active, dynamic, and reflexive as they depend on political maneuvers of the leaders and parties as well as one's own gender ideology and biography. Moreover, they are relational. They are not imagined or accomplished independently. A political masculinity is performed vis-à-vis the masculinities of multiple political others that always seek disproving and superiority.

Political masculinity at the collective level appears in three forms: (i) imitating the leader's masculinity and following his path of doing gender; (ii)

following the local community and political organization's culture and traditions on a more interpersonal and interactional level as a member; and (iii) internalizing or challenging media stereotypes about certain gendered social actions. Individuals or groups of men can incorporate more doctrinaire or flexible approaches through the process of figuring out their relations with political masculinities. Our analysis below about the four conventional, party-related political masculinities and cosmopolitan masculinity includes these three aspects at different instances of the reproduction and subversion of political masculinities in Turkey.

Our primary focus here is on the questions of how men identify themselves and construct their masculinities through a process in political forms, through the kind of gendered stories they tell to convince themselves and others about being a specific type of man based on the existing "social fragmentation and differentiation" in Turkey (Kandiyoti 2002, 1), and through how these gendered scripts change via destabilizations, transformations, and "crisis tendencies" (Connell 1995) in the nation-state. These identifications, stories, and shifts that enable men to establish, or revise, hegemonic masculinity as a pattern of power relation with women and other men are in accord with political leaders and cultures as well as the legitimation channels these may provide.

In their refinement of the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) underlined the outcomes of neoliberal globalization in the field of masculinities in the non-Western countries. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon geographies, where hegemonic masculinities are under constant scrutiny and re-theorization, the Turkish experience underscores the need to study the unstable and diverse political traditions' and organizations' direct impact on hegemonic and non-hegemonic forms of masculinities as well as political Islam's intense influence on reshaping gender relations against a secular, modern, Western ideology. The state appears here more of an active agent in the processes of formation and transformation of hegemonic masculinities than an impartial actor. These additional dimensions to the discussion of hegemonic masculinity can be expanded to questions around women's acceptance and reproduction of it and to the relations between different forms of masculinities by, for example, competition, otherization, or abjection (Messerschmidt 2016, 29).

Messerschmidt states, "The emphasis on hegemony and thus legitimation underscores the achievement of hegemonic masculinity through cultural influence and discursive persuasion, encouraging consent and compliance—rather than direct control and commands—to unequal gender relations" (2016, 50). What happens when a charismatic leader, or the state, with "direct control and command," dictates and prescribes one form of masculinity as a part of gender hegemony? Messerschmidt's conceptualization of "dominant" and "dominating" masculinities provides an insightful answer: while dominant masculinity is the "most celebrated, common, or current form of masculinity" in a context, dominating masculinity "involve[s] commanding and

controlling specific interactions and exercising power and control over people and events” (2016, 54). [Beasley \(2008\)](#) untangles that the most popular and culturally exalted form of doing masculinity (the dominant masculinity) in a society may actually do little to legitimate women’s subordination and the discrimination against alternative masculinities, while a legitimating and relational (thus, hegemonic) masculinity can be rendered invisible and insignificant (also, [Messerschmidt 2016](#), 31). Therefore, it is consequential to unravel different formations and functions of masculinities and how these are appropriated and given meaning in gender hegemony.

Hegemonic masculinity is always a fragile and dynamic constellation of a set of discursive acts and practices that has room for adaptation, redefinition, and change. Williams puts that “a lived hegemony is always a process” (1977, 112). In the same vein, Messner stresses that “when symbolically deployed by an exemplar,” like Erdogan in Turkey, “hegemonic masculinity is never an entirely stable, secure, finished product; rather, it is always shifting with changes in the social context. Hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic to the extent that it succeeds, at least temporarily, in serving as a symbolic nexus around which a significant level of public consent coalesces. But as with all moments of hegemony, this consent is situational, always potentially unstable, existing in a dynamic tension with opposition” (2007, 462). New situations inform and unfold new capacities for social action and discursive shifts. “Always open to challenge when contested, hegemonic masculinities often inspire new strategies in gender relations and result in new configurations of hegemonic masculinity” ([Messerschmidt 2016](#), 22). Unstable political cultures and changing leader cults enable contested developments and possibilities for change. Consequently, political masculinities and hegemonic masculinities are not only related with each other but they also dynamically co-constitute and transform each other.

In addition to the hegemonic, dominant, dominating, and political masculinities, this article deals extensively with the modernist and Islamist hegemonic (and as simultaneously political) masculinities and their transformation in time. In the following, we present background information on Turkey and the changing gender hegemonies in the history of the country in order to reckon with these concepts.

The Context

Turkey was established after the collapse of Ottoman Empire as a modernizing republic with secular bases in 1923. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was the founder and the first president of the new country. Turkey has been a democracy with competing political parties and regular elections since 1946. However, its democratic history was interrupted by coups d’état and military interventions in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997 ([Kasaba 2013](#)). The last coup attempt took place and failed in 2016. The political Islamist Erdogan has been

the leader of Turkey for more than fifteen years. He became the mayor of Istanbul in 1994, imprisoned and released in 1999, became Prime Minister in 2003, and President in 2014.

The Modernist Gender Hegemony

The wide-ranging processes of modernization, secularization, and Westernization informed the gender hegemony in the early republican Turkey. The founders of the new regime recognized women and men as equal in the public sphere, legal matters, and citizenship. Suffrage for women was introduced in 1934. These were the main legal and social boundaries of the rigid “state feminism.” Yet, the delimiting effects of the state feminism on women’s movement ascertained the unequal gender relations between women and men by silencing women’s advocacy and making them complicit to the gender ideals of the regime (Sirman 1989; Tekeli 1995). The Civil Law officially recognized men as the “head of the family” and sanctioned men’s superiority over women until the legal reforms in 2001. On the other hand, middle-class, educated, and unveiled (secular) Turkish women participated in the realization of the modernist gender hegemony either by becoming professionals (Oncu 1981) or by turning themselves into enlightened housewives and conscious mothers of the nation (Navaro 2000). Lower-class, uneducated, religious, or Kurdish women did not fit this ideal and thus failed to engender the “emphasized femininity” (Connell 1995) for this gender hegemony. Simply, just like any other urging modernizing project, the early republican gender hegemony was far from being all-inclusive and it triggered power inequalities and social disenfranchisement for diverse groups of women, who were not the subjects but always the objects of modernization in Turkey.

The image of Ataturk has emblemized the modernist-secularist hegemonic masculinity and the seemingly gender-egalitarian social order (Kasaba 2013). Although Ataturk’s political party, the CHP (The Republican People’s Party), did not govern the country uninterruptedly and consecutive right-wing governments also pursued and managed the desire to modernize (and later, to globalize), this modernist hegemonic masculinity was associated with the CHP and condemned in the social imaginary as “European,” “elitist,” and “disconnected from people.” In this sense, the rise of the Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party) in 2002 signaled a transition in many social and political fields, including the gender hegemony.

The Islamist Gender Hegemony

Although the political Islamists assert that their version of the gender order locates women and men “separate but equal” places in society, their discursive approaches and practices assign women and men at hierarchically different positions (Cindoglu and Unal 2017). The cultural legitimation for gender inequality is maintained by religious interpretations in which women and men

were perceived as unequal. Accordingly, women belonged to home and were supposed to support men in the public sphere. A woman, thus, cannot be an independent person or a full citizen (Cengiz-Sayan 2016). Erdogan says that the two sexes are not equal and women have the duty of “mothering” alongside their “delicate nature,” (*The Guardian* 2014). Moreover, a woman should don a headscarf in order to protect her chastity, family honor, and her appropriately Muslim identity (Ozyegin 2015). Islamist women approve these circumstances because they feel these ought to be the gender roles for an Islamic life or this is the way they can protect themselves from the commodification and sexualization of the female body in Western capitalism (Gole 1997). In this sense, Islamist women contribute to an “emphasized femininity” that positions them as secondary to their husbands and restricts their access to the public sphere. This Islamist gender hegemony gradually replaced the modernist gender hegemony. While the CHP and Ataturk used to symbolize the modernist hegemonic masculinity, it gradually evolved into AKP’s Islamism and Erdogan’s masculinity.

Erdogan locates himself and his comrades as the “downtrodden” and even the “negroes of the nation” (Ferguson 2013) that had been assaulted by the modern classes and the secular state organs before his reign had begun. This political psychological positioning enables him and his followers to perform in “stubborn, aggressive, uncompromising, and domineering” ways—the “patriarchal authoritarian masculinity” (Korkman and Aciksoz 2013). In this sense, the anger of white American men that “comes from feeling entitled, but also feeling disempowered” (Kimmel 2013, 284) translates to a similar contradiction in the Islamist² hegemonic masculinity: A patriarchal and authoritarian gender configuration that seeks entitlement, superiority, privilege, and revenge while it rejects dealing with cultural institutions and denigrates the existing social norms and values. As it tries harder, this form of masculinity endangers its hegemonic status (that is supposed to be based on consent) and falls into the realm of impingement and coerciveness.

We maintain that Erdogan signifies the current Islamist hegemonic masculinity in Turkey. He demonstrates a power to persuade his followers, redefine their identity, and maintain consent while intimidating and oppressing his opponents using the violent and ideological apparatuses of the state (Cagaptay 2017). His actions represent an ideological identity and leadership position for his party, but beyond that they offer a way to hierarchize masculinities (both similar to and different than his) and a legitimating narrative for women’s inferiority in gender relations. “Erdogan’s authoritarianism” (Beesley 2017; Oktem and Akkoyunlu 2017; Ozbudun 2014) in the political field presents at the same time a gender hegemony based on a highly masculinized public sphere, Islamized and nationalized (as anti-Western and anti-modern) cultural domain, “conservative” family-oriented policies, and the sex-segregated social life (Cindoglu and Unal 2017). The cultural validity of this narrative is guaranteed by insistent references to Islam and a reimaged

set of national and transhistorical (“Neo-Ottoman”) invented traditions, which are iterated by Erdogan and disseminated by state institutions and official channels of propaganda. As Connell puts, “Hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power” (1995, 77).

The hegemonic, dominant, and dominating masculinities (Messerschmidt 2016) amalgamate within the Islamist AKP masculinity. It simultaneously produces a justifying cultural narrative for male supremacy with reference to religious teachings alongside women’s willful engagement, becomes the most popular and celebrated one as the AKP achieves an electoral majority and transforms the cultural sphere, ordering what is thinkable, doable, and sayable within the boundaries of acceptability. While the modernist masculinity used to be accepted as hegemonic for decades, it was not always the dominant or the dominating masculinity in Turkey. In the last fifteen years, gender hegemony is reformulated under political Islamism to generate a concomitantly hegemonic, dominant, and dominating masculinity. In this setting, the persisting diversity in masculinities and their public displays are translated as resistant. They become more challenging and compelling than being categorized as simply non-hegemonic.

Maybe the question is whether it is possible to talk about “hegemonic” masculinity alongside other forms of masculinities under an authoritarian political regime and its violent repercussions. How can we theorize the formation of hegemonic masculinity that is consolidated by the state, religion, and political discourses when democratic standards falter and illiberal forms of government emerge (Oktem and Akkoyunlu 2017; Ozbudun 2014)?

After the methodological explanations, we present the conventional political masculinities, and then, we recount the possibility of a new hegemonic masculinity as a response to the challenges that the current Islamist one encounters.

Methods

Data for this article come from two larger research projects that aim to explore the multifaceted intersection of politics, culture, and masculinities in Turkey between 2013 and 2015.³ The first part of the research includes twenty interviews with men (aged 18–29 years) who do not have official ties with political parties and two focus groups with five participants. In 2016, we conducted interviews with six more men and four follow-up interviews. The second research includes participant observation at various political meetings and local party offices at Besiktas and Sisli districts of Istanbul as well as twenty-five interviews with politically engaged and partisan men, between the ages of twenty-two and fifty-three years. For the interviews, we combined “snowball” sampling (to reach out to participants) and “maximum-variation” sampling (to vary respondents’) techniques (Palys 2008). All interviews are semi-structured, tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized.

In order to have a more balanced view, we approached men from four political viewpoints as we explicate below. Our interlocutors are from Turkish and Kurdish ethnic origins, having diverse class backgrounds and sexual identifications, and all abled-bodied. Excepting one Jewish participant, they were all Muslim (from Sunni and Alevi sects); some were explicitly pious and practicing, others were just “officially Muslim” but “irreligious.”

Our primary agenda in the research process was to understand the link between political-partisan positions and masculine gender identities. We consistently asked our respondents about their opinions on the political leaders’ masculinities, to what extent they drew from and were inspired by the politicians’ attitudes and actions, their relations with women, their approach to gender equality and sexual justice, and their evaluation of other political/masculine identities. We were curious to see how the political traditions and the party leaders’ convictions were translated to the social situations that take place in our interviewees’ lives and how they interpret political discourses and adapt them to their own realities in order to “make sense” as gendered beings.

For the data analysis, we gathered the findings (transcriptions and field notes) together and grouped them into four—as men’s narratives and our observations are lined up with the parties. After scrutinizing the findings and discussing possibilities, we formed a fifth pile that consists of the traces of “somehow political but not party-affiliated” masculinities. Our goal throughout this process was to capture the similarities and differences that men revealed in their thoughts, actions, and the way they talk about themselves reflexively to construct and react to forms of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities.

In what follows, we recount the two main viewpoints shared by the majority of our interviewees about political masculinities in Turkey: first, we elaborate the four-fold, conventional masculinities, and then we present the signs of an emergent cosmopolitan masculinity that offers new viewpoints and openings for men’s gender identities on a political level.

Findings

In the electoral structure, there are four major political parties in Turkey: the current hegemony (the Islamist AKP), the previous hegemony (the modernizing-secularist CHP), the Turkish ultra-nationalists (MHP), and the Kurdish political movement’s HDP. According to the results of the elections in late 2015, AKP and CHP are supported by 75 percent of voters, and combined these four parties represent nearly the entire voting population.

The Islamist AKP Supporters

Cihat (26, computer technician) identified himself as “Erdoganist” (*Erdoganci*): he voted for the AKP but said he is not a party militant. He grew

his moustache because, he told us, it makes him “more of man, like the President”:

I believe Erdogan has deep knowledge about the world and he tries to warn us to keep us from doing wrong. [He says] “Do not smoke, do not drink alcohol, get married early, be good fathers and teach your children the principles of Islam.” He insists on saying what he believes that was right. I respect this.

When we asked about women, Cihat said he endeavored to avoid sexual or intimate relations because he was afraid that he could not desist from bodily desires and needs and would commit sin eventually. When he is ready, he will have an “arranged marriage” with a woman that his family would approve of. He said he preferred to marry a headscarved (veiled) woman but an uncovered (yet still modest) woman could also be his spouse if his family thinks that she is the right person. For Cihat, a veil signifies “a woman’s devotion to a man and her removal from social ambitions.” He spoke more strictly about his reproductive agenda. He believed, following Erdogan’s reiteration, that “a man should father at least three children.” Accordingly, his future wife’s basic concern ought to be mothering and childrearing, and her career should start and end at home.

We witnessed that men in this group have stronger commitment and attachment to Erdogan than the party. What Erdogan says and does has a greater capacity to reshape these men’s conception of masculinity and their actions than the ideological doctrine, official discourses, or the party program. This is significant regarding the formation of the Islamist hegemonic masculinity and constitution of the legitimacy and relationality. Although fifteen years in the office might have caused Erdogan to change his views and tone about virtually all topics, many times in self-contradictory ways, he has been relatively coherent in two interrelated points: references to a political Islamism and a conservative family- and reproduction-oriented lifestyle that denies gender equality in intimate and socio-economic lives. Our AKP supporter interviewees told us that they most avidly try their best not to separate themselves from these principles.

Like Cihat, men in this group were inclined to have a homosocial universe of politics: in business and public affairs in which women are dependent on and controlled by men at the “back stage,” motherhood and childbearing are in women’s destiny by biology and faith, and presumptuous and impulsive manners are acceptable in social situations as they come with what an interviewee termed “the culture of being a man in this society.” According to our respondents, Erdogan himself is the typical example of this universe. We kept hearing from men that “even he cries sometimes.” Such a public display of affect and passion, which normally seems contradictory to the traditional conceptions of masculinity can become legible and tolerable. In other words,

Erdogan reconfigures the contemporary modes of doing and saying things in relation to women and “other” men that gradually form hegemonic masculinity with approval of his followers.

Bilal (30, shop owner) was also an Erdoganist. His wife did not work and donned a scarf. He defined himself as a “practical and smart” person: he and his wife had a “well-functioning division of labor at home. [She] works at home and [he] outside to earn money.” Sometimes he helps her at home and sometimes she helps him at their shop. Bilal said that his wife and he were equals. “Too much freedom would harm the family and the state. Everybody should know their place.” Bilal understood many of his leisure activities as “natural and normal” outcomes of being a man, such as hanging out at the local coffee shop, betting on horse races and soccer leagues, and having weekly games at the neighborhood soccer field. He said he did not have contradicting views with Erdogan’s, however he changed his ideas and bodily conduct when Erdogan did in the past. For example, he avoided shaking women’s hands before, but after he saw that the President did that he started shaking hands with women in formal social gatherings. Erdogan appears in Bilal’s life, as in many others’, not only as a political figure but also as a powerful, honorable, and heroic role model and a moral teacher who determines the contours of hegemonic masculinity. They relate with women and other(-ized) men and justify their superior self-perception by making references to Erdogan.

We witnessed many instances that informed our understanding about men who support the AKP in ways that made us think there might be a gap between how they talk about an idealized Muslim womanhood and how they feel and act about specific women in their lives. As they gave frequent references to Erdogan—such as his statement of the Prophet Muhammad’s words, “heaven lies under the feet of mothers,” or “violence against women is a crime against humanity”—which seemingly extol women, we came to realize that this discursive approach did not exactly match their self-entitled attitude that limits and governs women’s lives and bodies and naturalizes male power and superiority. In other words, being a man means having a clear advantage over women and the naturalization of gender difference. This justification for this power inequality lies in the ambiguous and ever-shifting combination of biology, “tradition,” and the politics of a specific reading of Islam, advocated by Erdogan.

The Secularist CHP Supporters⁴

This group of men do not take the current CHP leader (Kemal Kilicdaroglu) as a model in remaking their masculine selves. They talk about the party and the current leadership in quite critical ways. Although Ataturk still functions as their ideological beacon on a number of issues, including scientific education and secularism, it is not easy to straightforwardly claim that they imitate Ataturk’s masculinity. There are different reasons for this, as

Abidin (31, psychologist) explained, “He is a magnificent ideal. But, he does not live now, in the Internet age. [In the past] Everything was vague: His marriages, family life, and his body. We do not know much beyond the official portrayal. . . . Also, he was a soldier. Soldiers cannot lead lifestyles today.”

Ataturk’s masculinity might not be easily accessible and specific subjects about his performance of manhood remain obscure, but the general terms of his legacy is still significant for these men (as well as women) of this worldview. His focus on gender equality and women’s participation in social life still regulates the masculinities of his twenty-first century apostles. A modern sense of state-led gender equality and women’s full citizenship and public visibility are the backbones of the legitimizing dynamic of this hegemonic masculinity. However, later critiques of Turkish modernization and state feminism have demonstrated that women’s experiences during this term were not uniform and not always positive. The puritan ideal of the “republican family” and state feminism that silenced women’s social movements have been rigorously examined by feminist scholars (Arat 2000; Ozbay 1999; Sirman 1989).

Tugrul (23, student) is a fervent admirer of Ataturk both in his political activities (volunteering for the CHP, chairing the Students’ Ataturk Club at college) and on his social media accounts where he shares photographs of Ataturk. He said, “He is my model. I am an Ataturkist man. When I am in a situation, the first thing I think is ‘how would he deal with this.’” When it comes to women, he continued, “I believe in equality between women and men with all my heart. This is what Ataturk did.” Tugrul said he follows Ataturk’s footsteps not only in the public sphere but also in his sexual relations with women: “I will marry one day with a woman who thinks similarly. She will work outside and I will be active at home as well: a participant, present father. We will be a modern family.” For us, Tugrul’s affective devotion to Ataturk and the idea of modernity that Ataturk comes to represent was exceptional. Nevertheless, the leader’s impact on this group of men’s configuration of masculinity, sometimes in more tacit ways, is fairly common.

Among the men of the CHP, some are more critical and “revisionist” in terms of gender relations, underlining the need to “update” the principles superimposed by Ataturk and redefine this hegemonic masculinity. Serkan (22, student) is an example of this approach: “Back then, the issue was whether women and men should be equal or should women work outside. We are now a century ahead. . . . We have new questions. We need to answer questions about abortion, rape, husbands’ violence, honor killings, lesbianism, cosmetic surgeries, and even orgasm. Ataturk’s doctrine cannot answer [these] because in his time these issues were not there. He did not think or talk about them.”

We argue that Serkan’s opinions seem coherent with the perception that in the Islamizing environment of Turkey the modernist hegemonic masculinity lost ground and persuasive power in explaining hierarchical differences between women and men. In this sense, revising the modernist hegemonic

masculinity based on universal principles of gendered justice and sexual citizenship can enable it to ascend again as the hegemonic form of masculinity to answer the questions that contemporary patriarchy (and heteronormativity) would encounter to the advantage of the “Ataturkist” men.

The Ultranationalist MHP Supporters

The Nationalist Action Party (MHP) is the largest institution of Turkish nationalists with prominent religious notes. The MHP is organically related to the nationwide extremist youth organization the Grey Wolves (*Ulku Ocaklari*). Both are largely (if not exclusively) male-dominated places that promote excluding women and a unique construction of masculinity that is interwoven with paramilitary state institutions. MHP masculinity has been historically seen as in an integral relation with, or a voluntary expansion of, these state units in order to “protect the state” or to fight against “separatist terrorists and traitors” (Can and Bora 2004). In addition to its rigid performative homosociality, men of the MHP are straightforward about their accentuated homophobia and transphobia (Selek 2001) and their ardent hostility toward expressions of the Kurdish and Armenian identities. An ultranationalist Turkish masculinity and the gender culture it contributes could have never been hegemonic at the national scale, but—following Connell and Messerschmidt (2005)—it has been hegemonic between the local and regional levels and adds another layer to the complexity of hegemonic masculinities in society.

The nationalist MHP masculinity, like the Islamist AKP, positions women differently than men in society. Our respondent Kaan (40, teacher) says the AKP was “denationalizing Turkey” by promoting the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam in Anatolia, where the flexible, more tolerant “Turkish Islam” had burgeoned “a thousand years ago.” This essentialist construction of “Turkish culture” which is rooted in Central Asia, Kaan argues, respects women and gives them rights and responsibilities not necessarily less than men’s. Hence, although the current ultranationalist Turkish masculinity cannot be deemed as hegemonic as it denies relationality and legitimation, there is indeed an almost unremembered narrative that explains men’s moderate dominance over women.

Our interviewee Alperen (32, lawyer) used to identify himself as a Turkish nationalist and hang out at the local meeting place of the Grey Wolves when he was younger. He said he adjusted his views from nationalism to “capitalist” Islamism in the last several years. In this process of self-transformation, he comprehended the importance of discursive persuasion and the construction of consent in hegemony:

I still think that it is good for young men to come together and talk and listen to others in which there is no woman around. . . . At college, I started to notice that it is not good to hit men on the street for

wearing shorts, earrings, beards, tattoos, or holding their girlfriends' hands. It was more important to convince them not to do these. That's how I turned toward AKP. Violence is not priority here, persuasion is.

On the other hand, Atakan (45, bank clerk) cast light on how the leader (*basbug*) is crucial in defining ultranationalist manhood in Turkey:

The leader (*basbug*) is more meaningful for us here [at MHP]. We expect him to be a real man. [He should be] talking about his military successes, marrying more than once, fathering a number of children. A manly, tough man. We follow him: we do what he does, say what he says. [The leader] is not any man, no joking about it. We see him as semi-sacred after Allah.

Atakan's and our other Turkish nationalist interviewees' comments manifest that this masculinity cannot become hegemonic because it does not consider relationality in gender relations, look for women's consent, and provide a narrative to justify gendered differences through the prism of power. Instead, this form might constitute an example of what Messerschmidt (2016) calls "dominating" masculinity with exercising control and physical power, and without agreement, self-criticism, or maneuvering.

The HDP Supporters from the Kurdish Political Movement

Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in Turkey (Gambetti and Jondergen 2015). Ethnic difference enables other masculinities to form a block and disregard internal contradictions when Turkish and Kurdish masculinities conflict. This imagined divide between the Turkish and the racialized Kurdish masculinities is misleading, given the fact that both groups are large, diverse, and full of multifarious approaches to gender relations. There are Kurds who support the AKP and adopt a more pious lifestyle as well as Turks who vote for the HDP and embrace its multicultural and democratizing claims.

After the interviews with urban Kurdish men, it became clear to us that there was a pattern in organizing their political masculinity. Selahattin Demirtas was the, now imprisoned, co-chairperson of the HDP.⁵ He was the party's candidate in the 2014 presidential elections. During the campaign he received public attention from Turks and Kurds alike, became the face of the "new Kurdish man" and got 9.8 percent of votes. Onur (32, teacher) talked about this new representation of Kurdish masculinity:

Before [Demirtas] there were only two models of Kurdish men shown [on the media] to Turks: [Abdullah] Ocalan as a terrorist leader and Ibrahim Tatlisles as the macho Kurdish singer. Most people did not know us. [They] thought that Kurds are extremely backwards, ignorant, patriarchal. We were worse than animals. Demirtas is a new

model. He is an educated, modern lawyer, but he also reclaims his Kurdishness, married with a modern woman he respects a lot. They showed us this new model. [Turkish] People started to understand that Kurdish men could be like him.

Ali (22) is a college student. After underlining the importance of Demirtas' candidacy as a Kurdish man to run the country, he elucidated how the politician inspired him: "Educated, urban, modern, and middle class. And, at the same time [he is] Kurdish, with the beautiful family. He plays musical instruments and writes poem. A sensitive man with emotions. But, he never gives up fighting. He defends the struggle of Kurds against the state. They can arrest him or kill him one day. I think I can be the next one. He gave me hope."

Some Kurdish men are from the Alevi sect of Islam. The religious diversity in addition to ethnic lines requires an intersectional lens in understanding masculinities in Turkey. Men who construct their subjectivities through intersectionality employ such an approach to identify themselves and take up a majoritarian, democratic stand:

I am Alevite and Kurdish at the same time. I have multiple identities. Only homosexuality is left for me [to become a case of perfect minority]. I wanted to support all minority groups and fight with them. That was my main motivation to be engaged [politically]. (Hasan, 25, student)

In addition to their ethnic and religious diversity, some HDP men that we have interviewed were inclined toward feminist interrogations and toward adopting pro-feminist standpoints as a result of their direct observation of gendered violence or the expansion of their subaltern positions as in the case of Mert (23, student):

I used to read basic stuff about feminism. I always questioned my sexuality. One day I was reading a newspaper, there was news about a rape case. I was talking to my mother. She said, "You know I was raped when I was young." It is not easy to overcome these kinds of stories. It was very traumatic for me. I stopped watching pornography; I forced myself not to masturbate. I started to call myself "asexual." I just wanted to politicize myself not in a sexist, macho, homophobic organization. At that time, the most "gender-equal" political party was HDP. That is how I started being involved in it.

As in the case of Turkish ultranationalists, Kurdish men in Turkey cannot generate a model of hegemonic masculinity at the national scale due to the racialized ethnic differences. Yet, they produce hegemonic masculinity that is effective at local and regional levels through which they change the way they

legitimize hierarchical relations within patriarchy, define a “new” Kurdish manhood, and otherize Turkish masculinities.

The Park and the Coup: Toward a Cosmopolitan Masculinity?

As an uncomplicated answer to our question on what kind of masculinities they experience through political affiliations and idealized leaders, most of our respondents referred to the mainstream party masculinities. This approach to the entanglement of politics and masculinity is quite widespread and meaningful as it matches with the everyday realities and prevailing social differences in the country. The representational political system that is based on the four major parties has been stabilized since the early 2000s.

However, as we continued talking to men about gender and politics, three further themes stood out and made us hesitate to easily categorize their predictions and choices. The processual formation of political masculinities lets us to unthink particular tectonic shifts, or undertows, beyond the virtually static structure of parties, as well as masculinities and gender hierarchies. The three issues that preoccupy men most, and encourage them to relocate their masculinities in a more self-reflexive and flexible way, are their standpoints about social diversity, neoliberalism, and violence. It is not possible to portray a direct typology or generalization regarding these subjects. Rather, we claim that these issues may have the potential to affect men’s gender identities and redraw the boundaries between different political masculinities in place of strict party-related explanations for gendered stratification.

Two historical events with grave consequences for the political and socio-cultural life of the nation disambiguated and gave prominence to these three issues: the Gezi Resistance of 2013 and the failed coup d’état of 2016.

When the government declared a project to reconstruct former Ottoman barracks at the Gezi Park in Taksim Square, Istanbul, and started cutting trees, a small “occupation” began. It rapidly triggered a wave of strong anti-government protests in many cities—attuned to the spirit of the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movements. After encountering such unforeseeable insurgency and broad support from different segments of society, the government pulled out of the project and left the park space as it was (Erol et al. 2016; Yildirim and Navaro 2013).

In the summer of 2016, a small part of the Turkish army, under the influence of Fetullah Gulen, a religious cleric and community leader living in the United States, attempted a military coup to take over control of the Turkish government. Citizens, encouraged by the President, actively resisted. The coup attempt failed in several hours. While the army became disorganized and demoralized with a number of soldiers involved being caught, beaten, and killed, many civilians were also wounded or killed (Altinordu 2017).

We argue that during, and immediately after, the Gezi Resistance a previously unrecognized form of an alternative masculinity became more

noticeable and enticing. This model exceeded the dual structure of modernist and Islamist hegemonic masculinities. Although commentators and journalists were quick to identify it simply as “new,” (for example, [Sonmez 2013](#)) we frame it as a form of “cosmopolitan masculinity,” following Plummer’s (2015, 2) take on cosmopolitanism: as we face “the challenge of grasping human vulnerabilities and asking how we can live with the diversities of our genders and sexualities and their tangled, emotional, biographical bodies; how we can build some common cosmopolitan values that will enable us to connect such diversity . . . and how we can start to build up cosmopolitan institutions.” We observed and heard similar questions from our informants with a particular emphasis on rethinking masculinity in a reflexive fashion. Our understanding of cosmopolitan masculinity also benefits from Messerschmidt’s conceptualization of “positive” masculinities, which “legitimate an egalitarian relationship between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities” (2016, 34). Cosmopolitan masculinity unfolds through transnational contingencies and flows but it has particular local contours and historical references. A new means to challenge hegemonic masculinity and reproduce it in a new form materializes as cosmopolitan masculinity transpires. What makes cosmopolitan masculinity unique—and slightly different from positive masculinities of Messerschmidt—is its more holistic attitude toward embracing social differences and taking an active stance against forms of social injustice, including but not limited to anti-neoliberalism and non-violence. In addition to its unconditional commitment to gender equality and sexual diversity, these features constitute cosmopolitan masculinity as a major challenge (or, an interface) to the two competing hegemonic masculinities in Turkey (the Islamist and the modernist-secularist).

The men, who act and speak in the way that we call cosmopolitan masculinity, used to present themselves as “apolitical” and “indifferent to social issues” and did not affiliate with the existing forms of hegemonic masculinity. They approached these two models and their “grand narratives”—of secularist modernity and Islamism—with sharp humor, criticism, and disbelief ([Ozbay 2016](#)). Their cosmopolitan masculinity not only rests on gender equality but also taking different cultural and lifestyle choices seriously. The speech acts and bodily performances of the men at Gezi Park were significantly more welcoming to difference and pluralism in ethnic, religious, and sexual terms. Most importantly, cosmopolitan masculinity differs from the other two hegemonic models in that it listens to women (including feminist critics) and creates social, physical, and discursive spaces for women, mostly by men’s voluntary withdrawal and self-silencing. Men’s (and women’s) inclusive approach toward LGBT groups in the occupation and later during the Pride March completed the sketch of cosmopolitan masculinity ([Zengin 2013](#)).

What Barkin (27, in business) said was a typical example of these inclinations: “You know there are two main poles in Turkey. One side calls themselves as the ‘soldiers of Ataturk’, and the other as the ‘soldiers of Erdogan’.

Honestly, I am nobody's soldier. What I want, instead, is a modern country in which everybody can live freely, with respect and tolerance." Tamer (21, student) added, "I did not come across with these women [feminists] and gays before [Gezi]. I learnt a lot from them and they made me think about my actions. I even participated the Gay Pride event. Now, I know that feminists are not monsters. I am still your hetero football guy, but I have changed." Distance from the discourses of the two models of hegemonic masculinity and openness for diversity, inclusivity, and tolerance are the most evident characteristics of cosmopolitan masculinity. It situates a new man that learnt to perceive women as "unquestionably equal partners in life" and the otherized men (for example, vegans or ecologists) as "not inferior," our interviewee Osman (30, medical doctor) said.

Beyond gender/sexual equality, there are two other major features of cosmopolitan masculinity: namely, troubling positions about neoliberalism and violence. The composing of various urban Commons and the exuding of the antitrust and anti-money dispositions marked the Gezi resistance as anti-neoliberal. However, sociologists have addressed "neoliberal masculinity" as a part of the new gender hegemony among men in Turkey (Ozbay 2013; Ozyegin 2015). We argue that cosmopolitan masculinity to a certain extent displays an anti-neoliberal, less individualistic and competitive, more community-oriented and solidarity-based attributes. However, it is difficult to determine how exactly these displays will turn into reality and be incorporated by men because neoliberalism continues to be the governing logic, not only of societies and economies but also of self-making processes and gender identities in many parts of the world. Such a confusion between cultivating the neoliberal self or positioning as anti-neoliberal surfaced in some of the interviews, as, for example, in Tugrul's account, "I want to be rich and I want to be very successful; but I hate companies. I am against capitalism." Also, in Cihat's words, "Islam forbids worldly ambitions. But I am investing in the Stock Market. Is not it gambling? I know it is a sin, but the system works this way and I am in it although I am unhappy with capitalism." An anti-neoliberal utterance is expected to perform cosmopolitan masculinity but our participants felt strongly that they needed to get wealthier in the milieu of precarization; as Burak notes, "I sympathize with [the group of] anti-capitalist Muslims, although I don't even identify as Muslim. I dislike the corporate culture. But I feel the necessity to secure myself financially because we live in an ambiguous world in which you mean nothing if you don't have money. But I don't compete with other workers. It is against my character and worldview." Cosmopolitan masculinity offers a liminal position in terms of implicitly accepting some neoliberal values and rejecting others through an ongoing process of negotiation.

An anti-violent standpoint also shapes cosmopolitan masculinity. Some respondents have noted that their views about violence have changed and differentiated from the hegemonic configuration(s) since the Gezi resistance and

the attempted coup. They search for formulations for an “anti-violent, peaceful, and more pacifist” (Emiroglu 2013) way of being and living as men. The Gezi resistance was marked by police violence whereas the insurgents were vigilant in their anti-violent discourse and practices. While the police and the supporters of the government were personified by violent, aggressive, and impulsive acts, those men of cosmopolitan masculinity opted for humor, gentleness, clean language, and non-violence. These men are “no one’s soldiers” either politically or practically as Barkin declares above.

Public displays of violence were also at the center of the failed coup. After a night of national panic and terror, there were images of caught, undressed, tied, beaten, tortured, lynched, and killed bodies of the dissident soldiers on the media the next morning. This happened for the first time in the country’s history of coups and military interventions. Civilians, mostly, but probably not exclusively Erdogan’s supporters, attacked the soldiers. For the men who were implicated in the making of the cosmopolitan masculinity it was not a hard choice to leave the symbolic and real battlefield to the committed Islamists, to refrain from violence, and to reject participating in “someone else’s war.” As Canberk (28, finance analyst) said, “At the moment I understood that there was a military intervention and the President invited people to the streets to fight against it, I closed the windows and pulled the shutters down. I did not want to be a part of that struggle. It was not my fight; it was theirs. I declined to be a part of mass violence.”

Our interlocutor Tugrul articulated this point through a shift toward a post-militarist moment of masculinity in Turkey, “We used to stop criticizing and show some respect when it comes to the Turkish Army. . . . But this [coup] has changed the image of our soldiers. First, we understood that they could be beaten and taken down. Our army was not that strong or undefeatable. Then, we saw that our nation does not admire or respect our very army any more. Like in the saying, ‘each Turk is born as a soldier’. Well, not any more. [It is] the end of an era.” Tugrul’s insightful analysis about the affective position of the military forces, which was a social taboo in Turkey until the late 2000s (Altınay 2006), signals a breakthrough in the conceptualization of masculinity as deeply intertwined with violence, aggressiveness, and militarism. It shows a possibility to develop alternative masculinities that relate differently with, or negate forms of, institutional and interpersonal violence as an indispensable element of being a man.

Given the Gezi resistance and the failed coup, the intersection of political masculinity with the existing modes of hegemonic masculinity at the national scale (modernist and Islamist) and at some local levels (Turkish ultranationalist, Kurdish) are challenged by men who define themselves as “political otherwise”—meaning that they have an ideological orientation about how the world should be like without engaging in established parties. Cosmopolitan masculinity ascends as a confrontation to the hegemonic models of political masculinity in Turkey. More research is required to comprehend if

cosmopolitan masculinity can generate a legitimating and convincing narrative for women's subordination and a hierarchy among different masculinities in order to produce consent in the future. Its pro-diversity, gender egalitarian, non-violent, and anti-neoliberal characteristics would definitely have transformative effects in the existing gender relations. Right now, we contend that men with political dispositions and men from neutral backgrounds come together in an uncoordinated manner to oppose certain aspects of the current hegemonic masculinities and reformulate their gender identity with what we call here cosmopolitan values.

Concluding Remarks

This article aims to bring political masculinities and their interrelation with hegemonic masculinities in Turkey to the fore. Most of the men we talked to seem to have attachment and commitment to the four major political parties, the lifestyles and worldviews these organizations represent, or the forms of masculinities these institutions engender, endorse, and implement. Despite this persisting connection, a potentially reshuffling impact on the interplay of politics and masculinities took place following the two recent, wide-reaching events of the Gezi Park occupation and the coup attempt. Beyond the avowedly steady and inflexible party-related masculinities, our interviewees noted hints of the emergence of what we call here cosmopolitan masculinity as a potential challenge to the hegemonic masculinities of the Islamist and the modernist-secularist political legacies.

The cultural scenarios that produce hegemonic masculinities via legitimizing differences between women and men, women's persuasion for their secondary place in the gender hierarchy, and the marginalization of non-hegemonic masculinities, have the potential to be destabilized as a consequence of the shifts in national and regional politics. New circumstances trigger new dynamics in heteronormative patriarchy and thus require new answers in order to satisfy people as gendered beings. As Connell and Messerschmidt maintain, "a pattern of practice (i.e., a version of masculinity) that provided . . . a solution in past conditions but not in new conditions is open to challenge—in fact is certain to be challenged" (2005, 853). The emergent triangulation between the Islamist, the modernist, and the dawning cosmopolitan ways of doing masculinity, as separate but interrelated models, has a greater capacity to represent men's political and cultural orientations as well as offering legitimating cultural logics for gender hierarchies between women and men and among multiple masculinities. The interviews enabled us to anticipate that the contours of a new hegemonic masculinity would unfold within the national gender order, as it will be redefined and mobilized after the settlement of ongoing multiple crisis tendencies (Connell 1995). The not yet fully explicated consequences of the recent transformations will inevitably

echo in future analyses of masculinities in Turkey and inspire gender theorists to examine the effects of political conditions of authoritarian and oppressive tendencies in the formation of hegemonic and alternative masculinities.

Notes

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1. We do not analyze public political figures, their agendas, or rhetoric. Therefore, “the politics of masculinities” (i.e., men’s activism for gender equality, see [Messner 1997](#); [Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz 2015](#)) or “masculinity in international politics” ([Hooper 2000](#)) are not part of our definition of political masculinities.

2. “Islamist masculinity” and “Muslim masculinities” can be framed separately: while the former is constructed as a prototype based on radical movements, the latter category reflects the multiplicity of real men’s gender identities ([Gerami 2005](#), 451).

3. “Women and politics” has been a popular topic since the first generation of feminist social scientists in Turkey ([Abadan-Unat 1981](#); [Tekeli 1995](#)).

4. The modernist-secularist masculinity was strongly criticized by feminist scholars (see [Arat 2000](#); [Sirman 1989](#); [Tekeli 1995](#)). In order to contribute to this critical legacy, we prioritize here its currently non-hegemonic status against the Islamist masculinity and the possibility of change regarding these men’s reflexive and reformist stances regarding Ataturk’s discursive acts.

5. The HDP is the only political party that is simultaneously led by co-chairpersons from both genders.

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