

Appendix

On Method and Methodology

As might have been clear to readers in the social sciences, designing the research for this book was not a simple and straightforward process. And in many ways I do not think I could have designed the final version it ended up taking—that this project is even designable. This was partially because I was researching a dynamic and shifting social ground: How can any proposal predict what is to come in the following years? (This turned out to be exceptionally true in my case.) I had only a loose sense of what to expect. The inability to properly and tightly design this research was also partially due to the fact that there was barely any literature on queer politics in Turkey at the time. I imagined my curiosities to be shaped by a state structure and a history marked by Westernization, so I tried to prepare for the field by reading feminist literature on Turkey and perusing the online publications and videos of queer activist groups. The queer studies literature I had access to was mostly US-based and therefore almost inevitably US-centric. Even as it greatly informed my thinking, I could not locate my research very easily in queer studies literature or think of a gap to fill as we are told to do in classic research design classes. Looking back, I understand the un-designability of this project to be a blessing and one that is rarely mentioned in design courses. Formulating why I had a difficult time fitting this project in the literature ended up becoming the very framework of this book.

When I arrived in Istanbul in June 2008 for fieldwork, I initially selected Lambdaistanbul as an obvious location to observe queer politics. At the time studying activism or resistance was not very popular in queer studies. In 2007, the year before I started my research, both Joseph Massad's *Desiring Arabs* and Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* were published, and they included provoking and important critiques of queer activism. While it certainly is not these two authors' doing that their work became so paradigmatic and shaped years of queer approaches to activism and social change, this scholarship heavily informed how to understand LGBT activism, especially in the Middle East. I found Lambdaistanbul's political positions to be fairly different from the suggestions of the literature on homonormative or homonationalist queer organizing. The organization could have provided a conventional site from which to respond to the existing, if slim, literature on queer activism. It was physically, if not temporally, bounded with a clear sense of what events to observe and which subjects to interview and would have yielded a more conventional ethnography of how politics was experienced at and conducted by one queer activist organization. But that is not how political discourse or affect works. As I encountered political overflows from Lambdaistanbul, I decided to trace them. I traveled the political discourse of sexual politics wherever it led, which took me to various sites, some physical, some discursive, some both.

Approximately a month after I arrived in Istanbul, Ahmet Yıldız was murdered. This incident brought subjects to the premises of Lambdaistanbul who otherwise did not attend its meetings, protests, or events. This was the first time I encountered members of the bear subculture in Istanbul, and I was interested in the ways in which this story was unfolding, exposing, among other things, some disjunctures between Lambda activists and the bears (though these groups did sometimes overlap socially). In addition to attending Lambdaistanbul's biweekly coordination meetings and protests, parties, and special meetings organized by the group, I was introduced to some of the members of the bear community by friends at Lambdaistanbul. I interviewed several bears and went several times to a pub owned and managed by one of the founding members of Anadolu Ayıları (Anatolian Bears). As the Ahmet Yıldız story unfolded in the news and then disappeared from the daily mainstream agenda, the actions taken for him transnationally and the continuing lawsuit made it clear that this was an excellent example of how complex the travel of outness and honor killings was and how the state, family, religion, and law intersected under neoliberal Islam. The movie *Zenne*, inspired by Ahmet's story, was released in 2011. I interviewed a group of bears

one evening about their thoughts about the movie as well as four people who had worked on or consulted for the movie in some capacity. While I initially thought about writing more extensively about the film, it ultimately made it only briefly to the conclusion.

Also fairly early on in my research, I frequently heard about the women-only Kadınca club, especially from the lesbian and bisexual activists of Lambda. Because I was interested in queer politics, I was especially intrigued by the activists' complaints that the queer women who frequented the club were apolitical. When I saw a listing online that the club was looking for waitstaff, I wrote to the owner of the club, explaining my research and the reason for my interest in potentially writing about it. They were sympathetic to my interest, and I worked at the club on Friday and Saturday nights, usually from 10 P.M. until 5 A.M., for five weeks, as those were the only nights the club was open and I was in my last weeks of field research. (In my follow-up trips, I attended the club as a client numerous times.) As the club had a connected coed café downstairs, I made a habit of arriving a couple of hours earlier than opening time and hanging out downstairs with the owner, workers, their friends, and some of the clients who frequented the club every weekend. I also interviewed the owner, the workers at the time, and a number of clients. It is an ethnographer's methodological habit to ask, "What is this a case of?" when we encounter a social phenomenon. Over the years I gave many answers to this question about the Kadınca club, some of which have since been published: The club is a space that complicates the notion of commercial space, as it is a site where affective economies work differently from what the literature imagines and where subjects understand themselves to be the others of politics. I kept coming back to questioning who is the subject of politics and ended up telling this last version of the Kadınca story in conjunction with the Gezi protests to show how two different political imaginaries exclude, or hail, apolitical subjects.

In the first couple months after entering the field, I found out from a very close friend who had been a Lambdaistanbul volunteer for two years that a large group of trans women who had been organizing within the association had recently left the group to start their own group. At the time they were organized under Istanbul LGBTQTT (currently, Istanbul LGBTQTI+). I had also known of Pembe Hayat (Pink Life), which was organizing trans women in Ankara, and that, too, consisted of transfeminine subjects who had found it difficult operating within larger LGBTQ organizations. Ultimately I decided to spend time with and interview Pembe Hayat activists. I made this choice mostly because at the time they were more established and active than Istan-

bul LGBTT, and perhaps due to the smaller size of Ankara, they seemed more able to reach a larger group of trans women and organize them. Not limiting my research to Istanbul has also meant that the claims I make about urban redevelopment, sexuality, and the transformation of public space are not limited to one metropolitan site but point to important shifts in urban spaces in neoliberal Turkey. One of the activists of Lambdaistanbul at the beginning of my fieldwork, who became a good friend and who knew the Pembe Hayat activists well, accompanied me on several trips to Ankara. Each time I stayed at the home of Esra, one of the Pembe Hayat activists, which gave me a chance to experience their daily life in addition to interviews.

Finally, “Subjects of Rights and Subjects of Cruelty” is the only chapter that features almost no ethnographic detail. It traces the unfolding of headscarf rights versus LGBT rights debates in Turkey that were particularly intense with the declaration of Selma Aliye Kavaf (then head of the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs) that homosexuality is an illness that should be cured. This rich and complex discursive site of public debates ensued mostly in newspaper columns, news pieces, and on TV shows. LGBT activists themselves were not invited to actively participate in these debates. Nevertheless, my knowledge of some of the queer activists’ political positions regarding the AKP and the headscarf issue in 2008 informs my readings of these debates and the ensuing loss of potential solidarities. When I found out that there had been an in-person meeting between some Lambda activists and headscarf activists (the only one I am aware of) a few months *prior* to my fieldwork, I was nonetheless able to interview one activist about the meeting and obtain the meeting notes.

I spent an initial nine months in the field during 2008 and 2009 and then returned to the field for two months each in 2010, 2012, and 2014. I ended up interviewing a total of sixty-five people: this number includes Lambdaistanbul activists, Pembe Hayat activists, and a few trans women activists in Istanbul; managers and clients of the Kadınca club; and members of the bear community and a few others who were involved in Ahmet’s case, such as his boyfriend at the time of his murder and Ümmühan Darama, the primary witness in the case. My interviewees also included one member of LISTAG, the Lambdaistanbul family group. For a while I thought I would write a chapter about this organization but ultimately did not include it in the research. No interview lasted less than an hour and a half, and a number of interviews were spread out over two sessions, lasting well over five hours. All of the interviews were conducted in Turkish, and all of the translations in the book are mine. All of the subjects’ names have been changed, save for

Ümmühan Darama, since she was a public figure in the news, and Ahmet Yıldız, since he was deceased.

All in all, the archive of *Queer in Translation* features ethnography, interviews, and content analyses of news and social media. This form of mixed methods was the only way I was able to trace discourses as keenly as possible without stopping at the door of some physical field and to tell the stories in the book in ways that I can only hope do justice to their complexity.